

## PENTECOST 17

Jesus said of the centurion, "I tell you this, not even in Israel have I found faith like this". Luke 7:10.

Living by faith can make you look like a fool. When I was a young and naive student, I worked on a building site as a tea boy in my vacation - the job entailed making tea for the workers - and doing odd labouring jobs myself. I gave 10 shillings to a local lad to get me some cigarettes - they warned me against such a trusting act - but I had faith in that young boy - I could see from his demeanor that he was trustworthy and true - I never saw him again.

The centurion in our Gospel today is described as a man of faith. He had soldiers under him - probably one hundred. He told Jesus, "I say to one man: Go; and he goes; to another Come here, and he comes - to my servant; Do this and he does it". Here was a man of faith - someone who knew how to delegate authority and to trust people. Jesus not only commended him - Jesus was astonished at him and, turning round, said to the crowd - who were Israelites, since the story is set in Capernaum - "I tell you that not even in Israel have I found such faith".

Jesus was a man who was known to have authority. It was said of him that he spoke as one who had authority, and not as the scribes who were forever speaking in the name of others. Clearly the centurion had appreciated this, and was

therefore confident that if Jesus spoke the word, his servant who was sick and near death, would be healed.

We live in a faithless and unbelieving world. Words like faith and trust are treated with cynicism. Like the labourers on the building site - people are inclined to think that faith and trust are signs of weakness of mind. "I wouldn't trust him further than I could throw him" we say. We are told to lock our doors and not to welcome strangers. We live in fear of being mugged or even worse if we venture out alone. Yet our chances of being robbed or mugged are considerably less than our chances of suffering a serious accident in the home. So according to the statistics we are safer outside than we are in our homes. But I am not advocating that we should cast all caution to the winds. I am suggesting that that it is better to err on the side of friendliness and hospitality rather than lose faith in human nature altogether.

But of course living by faith and trust goes a lot further than that. In our Baptism service we ask the parents and Godparents - "Do you believe and trust in Him" - God the Father who made the world, God the Son who redeems mankind, and God the Holy Spirit who gives life to the people of God". The reply, "I believe and trust in Him" is the sign and seal of the Christian faith. The congregation joins in affirmation of this as they proclaim "This is the faith of the Church. This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit". This may seem naive to many people - even foolish - but it is the only way of living which makes sense. To worship other

Gods is futile. The God of wealth - doesn't bring happiness - the God of the Horoscopes doesn't bring happiness - the God of the National Lottery doesn't bring happiness. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the true and living God to whom we can take all our deepest needs because - He loves us. We can turn to him in faith and trust and say "I am not worthy to have you under my roof; but speak the word only, and my soul shall be healed".

**AMEN**