

PENTECOST 6a

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption'. Ephesians 4.

In the Gospel there is a well known story of Jesus healing the blind beggar Bartimaeus. When Jesus addressed the blind man and asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?", Bartimaeus replied, "I want my sight back". That was a truly courageous thing to ask. His blindness was his only means of earning a living - he was a blind beggar. There were many of them in those days. They relied on the charity of others for their livelihood. To be able to see meant that their old way of life would completely change. They would have to learn a trade - they would no longer be able to live on charity. "I want my sight back" - these are courageous words.

The author of the letter to the Ephesians speaks of a blindness of another kind. This is a moral blindness which he describes as being "darkened in their understanding". This moral blindness is more difficult to heal than the physical blindness of Bartimaeus. It is the futility of mind which refuses to acknowledge that change is necessary. According to St. Paul, the only way of recovering moral sight is to "Put off your old nature and be renewed in the spirit of your mind". The writer goes on to stress the urgency of the need for renewal of the mind and says, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" - which is our ultimate day of judgement.

These are not popular words - these are not easy words - yet they are the basis of the Christian belief in judgement. We believe as Christians that there comes a time when every individual person will stand before the judgement seat to account for his or her life - when the person's whole life will come under scrutiny. In our creed which we repeat week by week, we proclaim this doctrine - "he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead". Jesus - born of the Virgin Mary in a stable - Jesus who preached and practised forgiveness - Jesus who is the friend of sinners - this same Jesus will come to be our Judge.

What will it be like - our judgement? Will we have to pass an examination? Will we have to fill in an application form for a place in heaven? Will our political allegiance be a factor? Will our standard of living count for or against us?

Well of course in a sense this kind of speculation is pointless. There is a limit to which we can compare our ideas of judgement to God's wisdom. As Job said

"Where can wisdom be found? And where is the source of understanding? No man knows the way to it; it is not found in the land of living men".

But nevertheless Jesus did in his earthly life give us the benefit of his teaching, and after his death he sent the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth and understanding. So, as Christians we ought to 'put away all bitterness and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ

has forgiven you.' What wonderful instruction – what an excellent summary it is of Christian living. In St. Matthew's Gospel Jesus says;

"I tell you this: there is not a thoughtless word that comes from a man's lips, but he will have to account for it on the day of judgement". Not a thoughtless word - psychologists say that a man does not reveal his true self to others except in his thoughtless words - the things we say when we are "off guard" - like when we hit a thumb instead of the nail. The things we say and think when we are alone - these reflect our true selves. We all to some extent 'act a part' when in the company of others. We present to the world, or try to, the kind of person we think we ought to be - and this prevents our true selves to be revealed. Jesus points out that it is the thoughtless word which reveals our true nature.

But not only does he tell us something about human nature in this saying, he tells us something fundamentally important about judgement.

The day of judgement is that time when we come face to face with God - 'from whom no secrets are hid'. Hence we also come face to face with our true selves. That person which we have revealed, only in part to those whom we love most dearly, is revealed to Jesus - the lover of our souls. The day of judgement is that time - that experience - in which Jesus says "I know you - completely". It is a day of great joy and it is a day of great shame also. Joy because we will know that in

spite of our failures - in spite of our sins - Jesus is our Saviour and friend. Shame because we see ourselves in the light - against a backdrop of utter perfection. It is said that only the most holy people realise the seriousness of sin. When we experience a sense of shame in the presence of truly saintly people, it is but a foretaste of the day of judgement.

Well, so what. What effect does this have on me now? Well, I believe that God has given us this life - which is a dying life - in order to prepare us for the heavenly life - which is eternal life. And as Jesus taught that the Kingdom of Heaven begins here in this life - so also does the judgement begin here. This is the call to repentance which Jesus proclaims. This is the assurance of forgiveness which we experience after the confession of our sins.

By God's grace we can run to meet our judge. We can welcome him now, not waiting for death, and allow the fire of his love to begin now the process of cleansing of the souls which he has redeemed by his precious blood in this blessed sacrament in which we now share.

AMEN