

UNTEACHABLE

God never meant us to experience the retribution, but to win salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, alive or dead, we should still be united to him. So, give encouragement to each other and strengthening one another, as you do already.

Thessalonians 5:9

The Old Testament readings recently seem to be a mixture of warnings and encouragement. In Deuteronomy, we read about the difficulties Moses had trying to lead the chosen people and keep them faithful but they continued to rebel against him and to turn away from the one true God. They lost faith and trust in God and failed to understand and appreciate what they had and the wonders that God had performed for them. They were dissatisfied and turned to other Gods. Throughout their history they were an unruly people who defied and abused many of the prophets that God sent to guide them. Jesus himself called them a people who were unteachable. They suffered many misfortunes but it was not God's punishment, rather it was that God's power and guidance could not penetrate their lack of faith.

One of the great prophets, Elijah, was escaping from Jezebel who wanted to kill him. He had a long journey to Horeb and before long he was so exhausted, he wanted to lay down and die. He prayed that God would let him die for he could not go on. He fell asleep and was awakened by an angel who gave him food and drink to strengthen him for the journey. Elijah then got up and walked for forty days to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Like the people in the desert, I think our world has lost its way and its faith in God. There is so much evil all around us. I think I must have lived a very sheltered life or perhaps I have been blinkered and failed to see what was happening around me. There are so many bad things happening in the world today which, for most of my life, I could never have imagined; child grooming and abuse; people trafficking and the victims forced into slavery and prostitution; violence and hatred between, not only nations but also religions that worship the same God. There is so much greed and selfishness in the world yet most people at heart are good and generous but because there is something lacking in their lives, they turn to material things. They worship the gods of money, power, wealth and self-satisfaction. They feed the physical but neglect the spirit.

Our world, the planet we live on, is facing disaster. The scientists tell us that the point of no return is fast approaching. Surely it is time for all nations to put aside their differences and work together to save the planet. Surely all religions should do the same and pray together that God will save us. It is not God's fault that the world is facing such disaster. The scientists have proved that what is happening is our fault, it is because of what we have done. Only God can put it right. We must turn to him with sincere and contrite hearts and pray that he will listen.

May God bless us all

Eternal God in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase your mercy in us so that in difficult moments we might not despair, not become despondent, but with greater confidence, submit ourselves to your holy will, which is love and mercy itself. (Chaplet of the Divine Mercy)

OUR LADY OF SORROWS

Simeon said to Mary; this child is destined to be a sign which men will reject; he is set for the fall and the rising of many in Israel; and your own soul a sword shall Pierce.

I sat in church in my usual seat. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the altar and I quietly tried to become aware of Jesus' presence. My usual place is below a window which gives me more natural light and makes it easier to read my prayer book but I was not reading nor even saying prayers. I was just listening. My eyes were drawn upwards to look at the window. It is a beautiful stained-glass depiction of Mary and St. John. They are walking away from Calvary and St. John is supporting Mary who looks so stressed and overwhelmed with sorrow, she seems hardly able to stand upright.

They had stood for hours at the foot of the cross where Jesus hung in agony, his life slowly ebbing away. Before he died, he turned to Mary and said, "Behold your son" and to John, "behold your mother". Mary must have been truly heartbroken, not because Jesus had died for, she knew who he really was, the Son of God, but because of the cruel way the soldiers had tortured and humiliated him. He hadn't deserved this. He had never spoken against Caesar. In fact, Jesus had saved the life of one of the Roman centurions' family. Even Pilate could find no fault in him, but the mob, encouraged by the religious leaders, demanded his crucifixion. Jesus had done nothing but good. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, made the deaf hear and the lame walk and cast out evil spirits. She had always known that this day would come but could not have imagined how terrible it would be. Simeon had predicted that a sword would pierce her soul but this was like a thousand swords. Her beautiful son taken away from her in such a horrific way. How could she bear it?

John was the youngest of the twelve but also the bravest, He did not deny Jesus nor did he run away and hide. He had the courage to stand there at the foot of the cross with Mary and the other women. He was not afraid to be seen as a disciple of Jesus. He found it hard to understand what was happening but he trusted Jesus for hadn't he told them that his enemies would have him put to death but this was so hard, he loved Jesus so much. What were they going to do now, he and his brothers? How were they going to carry on without Jesus? Jesus had said he would be with them until the end time but how could this be? When Jesus died, the world went dark, the thunder shook and the lightning struck the temple. Was this the end of the world?

Dear Saint John, you were so brave and courageous, so faithful and strong, help us to be like you. Help us to stand firm and upright in the face of our difficulties.

O Mother of Sorrows, with strength from above you stood by the cross, sharing the suffering of Jesus and with tender care you bore him in your arms, mourning and weeping.

We praise you for your faith, which accepted the life God planned for you. We praise you for your hope, which trusted that God would do great things in you. We praise you for your love in bearing with Jesus the sorrows of his passion.

Holy Mary, may we follow your example and stand by all your children who need comfort and love.

Mother of God, stand by us in our trials and care for us in our many needs. Pray for us now and at the hour of our death

A SPIRITUAL LOOP SYSTEM

Hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. (Romans 5:5-11)

When my children were young, I tried to teach them to be very careful about what they said and did. Often the person to whom you say or do it to or for, may remember it for years to come and it can influence in some small way their way of life. I can still remember things that were said to me years ago. We may never realise what effect our words or actions have on others.

Airwaves are not manmade. They were created by God who created all there is. Man discovered these airwaves and learned to manipulate them to send messages far and wide. Telephones, radio, television and social media are all wonderful inventions which man has learned to use for good purposes but also, there are those who abuse them for their own selfish designs. They have forgotten or ignored the fact that everything we have is given by God and everything we do we are able to do because God gave us the ability and the opportunity to do it. These gifts from God are abused not only by individuals but by businesses, politicians, governments and the media. We are all constantly being manipulated. As Bishop Mark put it in his pastoral letter, "We live in a world of noise and strident voices". We all need to find a time and place for silence, reflection and prayer.

I believe that God is speaking to us all the time. He speaks to us in all that is around us; through the sights and sounds of our natural world; through other people; in what we read and through the media. We cannot always hear above all those other voices and the manmade sounds we create to fill the silence. My hearing is not so good these days so I have hearing aids to help me. When I attend mass, I can connect to the loop system which cuts out the surrounding noise and lets me hear clearly the voice of the minister. It makes such a difference to how I am able to celebrate.

In our daily lives, I think we have to cut out all the surround sound and listen for and recognise the only voice that is true. We have to listen to the only voice that cannot lie, the voice of God the Holy Spirit; to connect to a spiritual loop system which cuts out all the fake news, the false prophets and all the conspiracy theories and lets us hear clearly what God wants us to know. I think that is what Pope Francis is inviting the whole church to do.

May the Holy Spirit guide us and help us to do so.

*Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
Thou my great father, a true child make me;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.*

ADVENT 2021

*Hear the herald voice resounding:
"Christ is near", it seems to say.
"Cast away the dreams of darkness,
Welcome Christ, the light of day.*

We are into a new liturgical year. During the last few weeks of the last liturgical year, the daily readings were long and dour. In the Book of Wisdom, we were told "how naturally stupid men are who have not known God and from the good things that are seen have not been able to discover Him-who-is." In the book of Maccabees, various kings tried to force God's chosen people to abandon Him and worship the gods of the pagans. In the Book of Danial, the king ordered Danial from whom he had previously received wise counselling to be thrown to the lions, however, God sent an angel to protect Danial who remained safe. In the gospel readings, Jesu told us to stay awake, be ready for terrible things will happen but he also tells us not to be afraid and to pray constantly. He reassures us that if we remain faithful to him, we will be protected.

When we look at what is happening in our world today, is it any wonder that we are tempted to think that we are in the end times. Global warming is threatening to ruin our planet; we are still struggling against a vicious virus; wars are still waging; people around the world, even in developed countries, are suffering and dying from disease, famine, drought and homelessness. At the same time are leaders are acting like spoiled and spiteful children while migrants are dying trying to cross the channel to safety. We are indeed living in a difficult age but that is not unique, in every age throughout history there have been terrible things happening. Jesus' promise is still with us. Stay awake, be ready and do not be afraid. If we are faithful, he will be with us always. If the world ends tomorrow or next year or in a thousand years, we know that God will not abandon us.

We are now into Advent and looking forward to celebrating Jesus' first coming when he humbled himself to take on our humanity so that we could share in his divinity. The readings tell us to rejoice, do not be afraid, be glad for God is with us. Whatever kind of Christmas is in store for us I think we should try to make it a very special one, not with tinsel, flashing lights and lots of presents for Jesus has given us the greatest gift, himself. May we always be aware of his presence in our lives and look forward with joy and confidence and without fear to his second coming.

*Wakened by this solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise:
Christ her sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.*

*So, when next he comes with glory,
Shrouding all the earth in fear,
May he then as our defender
On the clouds of heaven appear.*

Jesus lived and died for us so that we might die and live with him forever.