



Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Allie Joseph



Sunday 23 August 2020

READINGS

Exodus 1:8 - 2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12: 1-8; Matthew 16: 13-20

The Church Under Construction

Today we celebrate Theological education Sunday and I thought I should start with a question about school; have you ever been in class and the teacher asked a question that only you knew the correct answer to? That is what happens in this Sunday's gospel reading. Jesus is taking a break from his busy schedule and goes to the region of Caesarea Philippi, a place where he is not well known and he asks his apostles the question: Who do people say the son of man is.

The son of man is a term that we get from the prophet Daniel, Jesus uses this title to refer to himself on many occasions in the New Testament.

Peter gets the answer right, he says that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. At this Jesus says that He will build the church on Peter and He bestows upon the Church the keys of heaven and the promise that the Church will prevail.

I would like to start the sermon here. With the image of building under construction, like us, the sons, and daughters of God it is also being build by Jesus under according to the building plan of God the Father.

What I know about building is dangerous even though I was once privileged to be shown by a master builder how to lay bricks in one of the building projects I was a part of. I have an eleven-year-old friend, named Rodney. He knows all about Lego and even tried to make me watch a Lego movie with him, something that I could not do, for obvious reasons. But what is interesting about Lego, besides, it being expensive, is that you use the blocks and the little accessories to construct the image on the diagram and the box. Every block fit and has its place.

Jesus is also building the church, on the foundations of Peter and the Apostles, into the image and the model that God always has in mind. This construction is never finished. One of my favourite churches, the Church of the Holy family in Barcelona has been under construction for almost 130 years and is still being built. People from all over the world come to see this spectacular marvel of vision and genius. Just like that we too are being built into the image God has envisioned for us. We too are not finished products because God's love is constantly showing us new ways in which we can grow.

This construction happens in the Church every day, I know that looking at the Church from the outside there are many things that we do not understand. But what is always true is that it is the work of God being done by people like you and me. Like this online church service, it has many small parts, videos, subtitles, images, music and all kinds of other things that I will probably never will understand, but through the grace of God and hard work it comes together.

Truthfully I still need to learn a lot about the Anglican Church but as a Catholic I have had the privilege to see how the church works from the outside and I have been part of the inner workings of the church, something that I will be forever grateful. I saw three popes weighed down with the burden of leadership and giving direction to millions.

Today I want to highlight something that is often overlooked in the gospel passage. We hear how Jesus tries to evoke a response from His apostles about who people were saying He was, but more than that, Jesus was challenging His followers to come up with a personal response of who they think He was.

Let us look at the apostle who got the answer right. Peter, the fisherman from Galilee, the man who was going to renounce Jesus three times and who himself declared that he was a sinful man. Jesus is building His Church on Peter. Peter who stood up and acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the anointed Son of the Living God.

Jesus builds the church on the confession/ declaration of a man like any other man. This tells us more about God than ever before, God chooses the humble and lowly, if they are willing to proclaim their faith in God. God calls us to become part of His big construction project.

We all fall into the trap of overcomplicating Christian witness, we relegate it to those who study theology and who are in ministry, we excuse ourselves and look to others, meanwhile God is looking to use us too, there is a place for us too. In the great construction of God's church. It is through each and every one of our Christian witness that the church is built to reflect the presence of God here on earth. Remember that Christian witness is borne out of a personal relationship, personal encounter with God. Yes we need to read scripture but we need to be open to God revealing the truths about Jesus to us too.

The church in the world is at a very important place in its own history. As I said it before, the church is by no means perfect, but it is being made into the image God has in mind for us. We need to find our place and give our own witness.

When I was appointed as the chaplain to the Catholic Higher education in Monaco I asked the Archbishop what he wanted with this ministry he is imparting on me and he said; I want the young people to have an experience of God. My French was not perfect, but I told him that he is setting me up for failure but we both understood that that is what the church is all about.