

Sermon - Easter 3A

The Text: 1 Peter 1:17-23

There seems to be a lot of confusion today about what a Christian is. I hear people say on the radio: "I'm interested in spirituality, rather than religion." Spirituality becomes a vague term, encompassing the weird and exotic practices of the New Age Movement. This movement has an inward focus. It concentrates on a person's inner spiritual potential, as an escape from the hassles and pressures of daily life. True Christian spirituality is a "Spirituality of the Cross". It is other-centred in its focus. It focuses on giving us resources to minister to the suffering, the sad and the distressed people around us.

Christian spirituality isn't primarily about deeply moving spiritual feelings or awesome emotions. It focuses on what Christ does for us, and what Christ offers us in his Word and Sacraments, for all that we are and all that we do. Faith in Christ helps our hearts find their true home in Jesus and His Word. "Those who love me will keep my Word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them (John 14:23)." People in our society want more from life than they're getting. New Age spirituality offers intimacy with "the divine". Spiritual intimacy is like any other everyday intimacy – it's a part of life's fabric. It is often elusive, happening when we least of all expect it. None can be in a heightened state of emotion for long.

By praying about everyday activities like work, shopping, spending time with family and friends, and our hobbies, we discover God amid these activities too. When St. Peter refers to "calling on God as our Father", he is calling on us to live according to the Lord's Prayer. We pray the Lord's Prayer in grateful acknowledgement of how much we depend on God's gift of forgiveness and for all the good things of daily life. "Daily bread" includes clothing, food, government, peace, health, good friends, helpful neighbours, good people to work with, good and honest community leaders etc. Since "one does not live by bread alone", daily bread also includes Christ, the Bread of Life, who comes to us through the bread and wine in Holy Communion. In Holy Communion, Christ offers us life in all its fullness and richness, the abundant life, life so good because it's a foretaste of eternal life.

Meditation is a key element in spirituality. Christian meditation focuses on the petitions of the Lord's Prayer for there's no higher prayer we can pray. We

stop after each petition to apply it to a current problem we have, or to pray for someone with that problem, like temptations we face, or someone we find hard to forgive. In meditation, we find that God wants to be with us more than we want to be with him. The more time we spend in meditation on Scripture and in song, the more we will want to do so.

Being a Christian in today's world doesn't mean we have to bring God into every conversation. It is rather realising that God is in our midst, using our words of kindness and encouragement to minister to the other person, or using the person's words of encouragement and comfort to minister to us. Christ became what we are, in order to make us what he is. "I am to become a Christ to my neighbour and be for her or him what Christ is for me (Luther)." Christ provides the pattern for how we live each day as Christians, and gives us the power to live Christlike lives. St. Peter says: "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps." Christ gives us an example that's both human and divine, so that to be like Christ is to be like God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ shares his glorious title "Christ" with us in Baptism. Christians are those who have been christened, become Christ's property, and are anointed with the sign of Christ. Christ claims us as his own. When we're christened, the blessings of Christ's death and resurrection become ours. Being a Christian means growing in appreciation of all the blessings given us in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. There God promises to bestow his grace on us and treat us better than we deserve. Ever since our own baptism, all of us have fared better than we deserve. No wonder we love to sing in praise of God's "Amazing Grace".

What grows in us the longer we live isn't our goodness, but our faith in and gratitude for Christ's goodness and loving kindness to us. Being a Christian is a matter of "becoming what we are." Jesus has made us "the salt of the earth". We are to act accordingly. Jesus says: "You are the light of the world." We're to let our light shine amid the darkness and confusion around us. In Antioch where Christ's followers were first called "Christians", they bore the name proudly in public. The term "Christian" means "to do business in Christ's name". The Christians there let their light shine in their everyday businesses.

What about us? If we were arrested for being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict us? Wherever we go, whatever we do, we needn't be ashamed to be Christians, because Jesus is proud to call us his sisters and brothers (Hebrews 2:11a). He assures us that what we do as Christians matters, it matters eternally. Standing up for Jesus as Hymn 206

urges us, is like letting a lion out of a cage. Our Lord has sent each of us into the world with a special act of love to bestow and a unique message of comfort and encouragement to deliver.

A man called Sydney Harris accompanied a friend to a newsstand. Harris noted that the man selling newspapers was openly sullen and cantankerous. He also noticed that his friend was kind and cordial in his dealing with this man. As he walked away with his friend, Harris asked, "Is that fellow always so mean?"

The friend replied, "Yes, unfortunately he is."

Harris persisted: "And are you always so nice to him?"

"Yes, of course", answered his friend.

"Why?" Harris asked.

"Because", finally his friend explained, "I don't want him or anyone else to decide how I am going to act."

Acting as Christians involves the most basic gestures of human kindness, like greeting those who don't greet us. Jesus challenges us: "If you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?" We Christians live by Christ's double standard. If I want to change things around me, I expect more of myself than I do of others!

Not all of us have great talents, but we can all do small things with great love. "We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19)." He has shown us that love through his own Son, who was lifted high on the Cross. Amen.