

Sermon for Trinity 10 – Eucharist

Mother Emma

[Readings 1 Kings 19:4-8, Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2, John 6:35, 41-51]

There is a reason why people – and especially those compiling our modern liturgies – speak of our “journey in faith”, our “earthly pilgrimage”.

The Christian faith is indeed a journey, marked at different points by the sacraments, by moments of clarity and inspiration, by doubt, fear and hope. To be born, baptized and confirmed, and then to remain faithful at the same level of commitment to the end of our lives is a gift given to very few, and for some who profess it, it may be an over-simplification of their experiences.

It is far more common, even for those blessed with a Christian upbringing and family, who receive in baptism the sacrament of God’s grace at an early age, to find there are times in our lives when the practice and profession of our Christian faith waxes and wanes in our everyday existence, whether this is due to the temptations and distractions of the world, or to active doubts and questioning.

I would expect that the majority of us here could remember a time when the remembrance of our faith was temporarily superseded by the excitement of student lives, by the investigation of other philosophies and lifestyles, or by the doubts which can creep in following personal tragedy or difficulty. Alongside this short-term shelving of our commitment to our faith, we also forget God’s commitment to us.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus assured us, “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

The prophet Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, found in our first reading that he had reached the end of his tether, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life.” Yet as he slept the miserable sleep of the downcast and despairing, an angel came with food and drink to revive and restore him.

In the context of our readings today, we are encouraged to make the links between this “food of angels” and the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist, the “living Bread of Christ” - a sacrament given to us to provide us regularly with the strength and inspiration to continue in our lives as faithful disciples. The appearance of the angel reminds us of God’s own continued efforts to draw us back to himself, time and time again, and of the eternal promises which he holds out to us.

Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.”

Our Christian faith journey will not always be easy; the path of the Christian is not a fluffy, undemanding way, and in becoming part of the Body of Christ, we are called throughout the Scriptures to remember what this means for our everyday lives and interaction.

Today's reading from the Epistle to the Ephesians urges Christians to reject falsehood, anger, greed, laziness, evil talk – all the habits we can so easily fall into, but which harm, rather than building up the Body of Christ of which we are part. We are called to encourage one another, to be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving and to live in love with one another. This might all sound a bit demanding at certain times of our lives, yet if we live as a community who do these things, we shall experience the true blessing of being the “beloved children” of God.

There may have been several moments in our lives when we have suddenly recognised afresh the joy of following Christ, and wished to share that revelation and inspiration with others.

Angelique, who has asked to make a public Affirmation of Faith before us today, and who will speak to us shortly about her own journey, is seizing the opportunity offered, (though not often taken up), in the Church's liturgy, to recall and re-affirm the baptism and confirmation vows she made as a child.

Baptism and Confirmation are once-only sacraments; they cannot be repeated, but the power of the grace given then can be recalled and celebrated in this way - as you will see, elements of both the baptism and the confirmation liturgies are echoed in what we shall see and hear. If anyone witnessing this service ever feels called to do something similar, please do feel free to speak to Fr Christopher or me at any time.

It is, in any case, a great privilege for those of us gathered here today to be witnesses and to pray for Angelique during this affirmation, which can help us each to recall moments in our own lives when we have turned afresh to our path of faith, declaring to God our own desire to follow him “in newness of life”, as we say in the Confession.

In the course of the liturgy, the congregation is asked to extend to Angelique the invitation, “Walk with us in the life of the Spirit.” After a year in which many have been faced with difficulties and sadness, with doubts and fears, this invitation is extended to each one of us. As a community, emerging, we hope, from the darkness of the past eighteen months, may we once again walk together in the life of the Spirit.

Amen.