

Message to All Saints' 10. 1. 2021.

Dear All,

Here we are again! I don't suppose many of us envisaged that we should once more be in lockdown at the beginning of this New Year, mainly due to the new variant of the virus. It is proving even more deadly than the first wave in March, owing to its capability to transmit much faster than the original wave of Covid.

Once again, our church is closed, and in varying degrees, people are all suffering the effects of isolation, and the cessation of many normal activities. I think we were all hoping that the worst was over and that this year would bring happier times, especially as the promise of the new vaccines held out such hope for a brighter future.

There is still hope, but it seems that for so many there are darker days to be endured before we reach the sunlit uplands.

The two church lectionary readings set for today are Genesis Chapter 1, verses 1-5 and Mark 1, verses 4-11.

The genesis Reading is the account of the Creation, with the emphasis on God's creation of Light.

The second reading ties in with the feast of the Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus. I shall return to the subject of light later on, but first a few words about the baptism of Jesus.

It is safe to assume that for some people the Baptism of Jesus is a contradiction to our understanding that Jesus was born without sin. He was a pure soul.

In the Eastern Church the Feast of the Epiphany is perhaps the most important date in their liturgical year. The coming of the Magi is a subsidiary celebration to the Epiphany Jesus Himself experienced, at His baptism in the river Jordan. This was surely the climactic revelation of Jesus's life. It was the moment of decision.

For some thirty years Jesus had been waiting for the signal that His momentous mission was to begin. Jesus realised that with the call of His cousin John to baptism, the time for His Ministry had finally arrived. And it was at this moment, standing humbly in the waters of the river Jordan, that Jesus received the revelation from the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Father was heard in a voice saying 'Thou art my beloved Son: in whom I am well pleased.' And the Holy Spirit appeared, hovering above Jesus' head, in the form of a dove, which often symbolizes peace. Jesus knew then that it was His vocation to reveal the beauty and the truth and love of his Father. It was, and is, His mission to rescue the world from the folly of humanity's wrong choices.

Maybe some of you have felt a calling to work for God in some way. It does not need to be a call to high office

There is so much valuable work to be accomplished in small, often seemingly mundane ways, but they provide an invaluable service to others.

St. Philip Neri said: “Cast yourself into the arms of God, and be very sure that if he wants anything of you, he will fit you for the work and give you the strength to carry it out.”

To return to Light: we all find comfort in light; during dark times the effect of sunlight can give us hope and help to alleviate our blackest mood.

It is no coincidence that Jesus called Himself the Light of the world. In St John’s Gospel (ch 8, v.12) He said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

Someone said, “There is not enough darkness in the whole world to put out the light of one small candle.” And I am sure most of us know the quotation from a poem by Minnie Louise Haskins, which King George 6th used in his Christmas Day broadcast in 1939, three months after Britain and France had declared war on Germany.

“I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.” And he replied, “Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

I don't know if any of you have come across a remarkable man called Henry Thomas Hamblin?

He was a very successful business man who became a mystic and founded the Hamblin Trust in Chichester.

It seems very apt at this time to quote his following words:

“What is true of the individual is true of nations; and what is true of nations is also true of the world. Before a great step forward, and before a great influx of Light, there is always a time of travail and darkness....the man or woman of faith and understanding looks upon it as a stage of experience which has to be worked through, and as a prelude to something infinitely glorious which is about to be born.”

That surely could not be more relevant to our situation today? I felt that passage was so apt in the present circumstances; but having read it to two separate members of my family, I received two completely different reactions. The first was completely sympathetic to the intended meaning, as it expressed her own understanding of such cataclysmic circumstances, and so often, the reason for them. The second reaction was diametrically opposed to the positive sentiment engendered by the passage, reading it as intimating that a great punishment has to be inflicted before the good times can once more be enjoyed.

In my mind that is not the author's intention, because having read his books, I am certain that he does not believe in a punitive or vengeful God. It is perhaps a subject that deserves more time than we can allow now. Maybe it can be tackled in a later message !

I should like to offer you some wise words from the author Victor Hugo:

“Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones. And when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake.”

I wish you all many blessings in the months to come, and to end, a prayer:

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth.
Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.
Let us dream together, to build one world
of peace and justice for all. Amen.