

LIVING BY FAITH AND LIVING BY LOVE!
Two sides of one coin – Christian Life!

We are two weeks away from our feast of Reconciliation and Thanksgiving. We all want to celebrate that day with all our hearts. We must all pray that God have mercy on us and bless us. We all passionately seek to 'move on' as a Church as God wants. The feast of Reconciliation and Thanksgiving and the Fellowship meal is a real "Godsend." I'm absolutely convinced that it is God's way of challenging us to renewal, revival and an exciting period of growth.

But, like all good things that happen, they challenge us to look at ourselves and see what all this means for us as individual disciples of Christ as well as the Body of Christ. It might look odd, but I have realised that although we look like a united, cohesive fellowship, we probably are not. We do have some skeletons in our cupboard; some demons that need to be exorcised. Actually, we may even be divided in our hearts. The time is now, to face up to it and to deal with it. As a Church Family, we must already cleanse our hearts and our minds and begin the process of reconciliation already so that we can be capable of welcoming all those who will join us on January 24th. That is why I am dealing with this theme today.

One of the things that is causing a certain unease within our fellowship is the issue of "living by faith". I for one, along with my wife, read about it in the Parish Profile before we came here. We were delighted to know that St Michael's is such a Church and we thought that is how all Churches should be. And that is one of the things that attracted us to come here. However, we wouldn't like anyone to follow it blindly as an idol nor carry it as if like a heavy yoke remembering the words of Jesus: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Jesus)

So, that is the problem. All initiatives need to be reviewed and renewed if they have to survive. *It is time we look at "living by faith" with new eyes and new perceptions in Christ Jesus.* Because, over the years, in these last 20 years or so, people have joined the Church who may not really understand all that it means.

Jesus himself has taught us that "a tree is known by its fruits". (Matthew 12.33) Considering our last 20 years, what are the fruits that we see at St Michael's? Have we grown as a Church? Have we reached out to people outside with the love of Christ or have we put off some people in some ways? What about the numbers in our fellowship that has dwindled? Have we reached out into the community in ways that enable us to share the "good news" of Jesus? Do we really believe in the words of Jesus: "Seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be yours as well" (Matthew 6.33 and Luke 12.31) "A tree is known by its fruits!" (Matthew 12.33) It is good to reflect on the words of Jesus.

The second problem is that there are others in the church who tithe and who give generously to Church but who also feel that they would like to do more, that they have other talents and gifts that they would like to use to further God's work in this Church. These people do not find any contradiction to living by faith and at the same time furthering God's work in other ways.

Both those in our fellowship who see "living by faith" in a rather radical way as well as those who see "living by faith" in a less radical way passionately love God and love St Michael's.

So shouldn't we respect each other since there is sincerity on both sides although the interpretation is less uniform? Aren't we all brothers and sisters to each other in our fellowship and don't we owe the same degree of respect and love for each other although we are different. What about 1 Corinthians, 12 where Paul eloquently speaks about the gifts of each one and where he compares the Church to a human body where each member is different and plays a different part but we all are one Body in Christ? So shouldn't our acceptance of each other in Christ take precedence over all other considerations? And shouldn't the Church exist as much for those outside as for those inside?

The Church of Jesus Christ is a big home and has a space for everyone, no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, no matter how or what you believe. Isn't the Church a living community of persons who are different but who love and respect each other than being a club, a sect or a cult? Isn't Jesus Christ who became one of us "Emmanuel", "God with us", as we celebrated a couple of weeks ago, came alongside every human being and not just a few. That is the exciting hope that we have. We must, therefore, have "the mind of Christ." (Saint Paul) and find an answer in him for all our problems. "For those who love God all things work together unto good." (Romans 8.28) And isn't it time we think much more of the wider Church beyond our walls?

That is why I want to tell you, this morning: Let us "live by faith." But let us also and above all "live by love". *That is what Christianity is all about – love of God and love of neighbour.* Let us also remember that living by faith is about making "God" "the absolute option" for your life. It is about giving God what he deserves – our lives and our hearts. *It is about having the heart of God, namely having a heart of compassion, a heart of love, a heart of forgiveness and reconciliation.* It is having the heart of God who provides the rain both for the righteous as well as the wicked and the light of the sun both for the good as well as for the bad.
(cf. Matthew 5. 45)

So, today, I would like to say that "living by faith" is one side of the coin; the other side of the coin is "living by love" for which we must strive for basing ourselves on the Word of God:

- (1) "All things work together unto good for those who love God." (Romans 8.28)
- (2) "God is love. Anyone who lives in love lives in God and God lives in him."
(1John 4.16)
- (3) "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'"
(Galatians 5.14)
- (4) "Whatever you do to the least of these my brethren, you do it to me."
(Matthew 25.40)
- (5) "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."
(1 Corinthians 13.13)

Love must over-ride all considerations. If we must "live by faith" at the cost of love, then we are not Christians and true disciples of Christ. It is "love" that characterises a true disciple of Christ while faith is something very personal! What made the primitive community of the Acts of the Apostles grow was because they were of "one heart and one soul" (cf. Acts 4.32) In fact, people who saw them exclaimed to each other, "How they love one another!"

It is "love" that will take us forward into the future. And as Teilhard de Chardin says, "*love is the greatest force in the world, more powerful than all the destructive powers of atom bombs put together!*" It is love that took Christ to the cross, shed his blood for us and brought us salvation! And in the words of a famous philosopher, "at the end of our lives we shall be judged on love." We must "live by faith", but above all, as a Church, we must also "live by love" both in our fellowship and beyond it. We must, above all, "bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Ephesians 6.2)

Let us belong to each other as in a family where each of us is different and do and believe different things but we all belong to one family joined by the bond of love. And may this unity of "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4.32), mutual respect and mutual acceptance in our fellowship enable us to reach out to our brothers and sisters in the community with the "Good News of Jesus", the good news of hope, healing and joy that we all need so much today!

And I pray with the words of Jesus: "Father, may they be one as we are one that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17.21) Let me conclude reading the beautiful passage that I referred to already Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13:

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

(9TH JANUARY, 2011, ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS, EASTBOURNE)

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