

COR Newsletter – 01 April 2009

Dear all,

Last Sunday

The **fifth Sunday of Lent** we were given Hebrews and John who both address the question, "What exactly did Jesus achieve on the cross?". Hebrews especially led us into unfamiliar territory for modern people, of blood sacrifice and the role of the High Priest for the Jewish people in the model presented by the author of this pivotal letter. Our reference point for the morning came from Jeremiah, leading to the haunting questions, "What is the content of the new covenant" and "Have we been any better at keeping our end of this new covenant than the Jews ever were?", and "Just how is God's law written on our hearts?". It seems that if we are to answer the latter question with reference to the manner of Jesus' death we come to the conclusion that the way God wants to have his law written on our hearts can be found somewhere in the example of "sacrificial love" or "loving sacrifice" of Jesus. It appears that it is within this paradigm that God wishes to communicate with us, to get his essence etched into our souls, that might lead to us to being a Godly people in a non-coercive way.

and afterwards..

We held our early Annual General Meeting. Thank you to all who stayed behind, and thank you to those who have offered themselves as officers of the church to guide the COR through the next year.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday

I am in **Sofia** for the very last time and Holy Communion there will be at 9am.

In **Bucharest** there will be a service of **Morning prayer at 10am** with **Sunday school** and our monthly **Produce sale**.

Unfortunately the performance of **Matthew's passion** on Sunday evening has now had to be **cancelled** because the orchestra could not raise the financial backing.

Looking ahead

Maundy Thursday 9th April. There is a Eucharist at 7pm in the evening. This marks the institution of the communion service based on the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples.

Good Friday. 10th April. The Church will be open and there will be a short devotion at 3pm - the time when Jesus died

Easter Sunday. 12th April. Holy Communion at 10am with Sunday school.

Thought for the day

Someone told me not long ago that after many years of being in Romania, they were now an expert in Grey. The old divisions of Good guy/bad guy that it was thought could be easily and readily applied to various people and institutions after more careful analysis and immersion in this country meant that those simple and convenient categories actually could no longer be so easily applied.

The ambiguities of life and the compromised decisions we make was also brought home to me after seeing a brilliant and gritty film called "Gone baby gone" on HBO. (If you are averse to bad language I'd give it a miss). What is right and what is wrong melds and merges throughout this story of the abduction of a little girl that turns out not to be as straightforward as it first appears. The mixed motivations that drive

people to make certain decisions are laid bare here in this story set in an area of Boston that you won't see in any tourist brochures. The final decision taken by the lead character to take the child back to her drug addict uncaring mother from whom the child was abducted and thus landing the abductees- (a loving couple - the former police chief who had lost his own child to a random murderer) in prison leaves us where we started - wondering just what is right and what is wrong.

A lot of life is like that. Even in the very big questions like "Is it wrong to kill someone?" which seems at first sight so obvious isn't quite so straightforward. If we say yes it is always wrong in all circumstances, then we could never ever sanction a war. In fact, using that logic we should have just rolled over in the face of the Nazis in WW2 rather than risk killing anyone. Even if our country was attacked we couldn't defend it if we held that view as absolute. The church of England is not a pacifist church like the Quakers for example. It supports our troops in various parts of the world, and provides chaplains to the servicemen who will inevitably kill people. An absolutist approach would say that every soldier who ever killed someone in a war is a murderer - which surely is not right. Or is it?

Very briefly our attitude to warfare has always been, yes it is wrong to kill, except when it is judged the lesser of two evils, (though in reality we always go with the decisions made by the Government on our behalf.) Another example might be; If the daughter of Herr Fritzl who raped and kept her prisoner for all those years had managed to escape and killed him, would you have blamed her? Would you have had her tried as a murderer? Is it wrong for a Sudanese man to steal to feed his starving family in Darfur? Examples abound. Those are extreme ones but they serve to illustrate a wider truth that it seems to me that there is very rarely in this world an absolute right and an absolute wrong. We are all found wanting when making judgements and just have to make them as best we can, living with the consequences. We make these decisions in the full knowledge that we are flawed, as individuals, as societies, and as churches. I suppose this is what lies behind the injunction "Judge not, lest ye be judged". How can we judge when we never know the full story? And even if we did, would we even then make a wise judgement?

In the midst of this seeming chaos and ambiguity, we believe in a God who is unambiguously good, whose law is perfect. A perfect judge who knows each of us intimately, each hair of our head, knows why we did this and not that, why we said this thing and not something else. God knows our limitations, our tendencies to selfishness, our vices - the good and bad that lurks within each one of us. So could we allow him to guide us a little better or does our innate tendency to self sufficiency stop us from doing so?

In prayer, perhaps one of the most important things we can ask for is wisdom because wisdom is of God.

Note: For budding theologians the word Logos that is translated as the "word" as in "The word was made flesh" in John's famous prologue can also be understood as Wisdom.

Solomon knew how important wisdom is, and God commended him for it. Wisdom to make the best choice, to choose between two apparent evils, to know when it is better to give way or make a stand, to speak up or remain silent. Our guiding principles, gleaned from the Bible are justice, mercy, patience, sacrifice and certainly forgiveness and loving service to name but some. Applying these and any other principles must surely be accompanied by prayer bearing in mind the specific circumstances.

Christians make much of being guided by the Spirit of God Himself, but discerning exactly what this guiding Spirit might be telling us but can be quite low down on our

agendas perhaps because asking for help is still seen subconsciously as betraying weakness. Asking God to help us and guide us in all these mind boggling dilemmas that life throws at us is never time wasted. We will still have the decisions to make, and we will still have to live with the consequences, but we will at least have the peace of mind that comes from having first genuinely sought God's help and counsel.

I was spoilt for choice when searching for a **prayer for wisdom**. It is subject that has always exercised the Christian soul.

I have picked two. One very short and to the point by *Amy Carmichael*, the other from a Christian classic from the 14th Century called *The cloud of unknowing*.

*Holy Spirit, think through me till your ideas are my ideas
Amen.*

*You are wisdom, uncreated and eternal,
the supreme first cause, above all being,
sovereign Godhead, sovereign goodness,
watching unseen the God-inspired wisdom of Christian people.
Raise us we pray, that we may totally respond
to the supreme, unknown, ultimate, and splendid height
of your words, mysterious and inspired.
There all God's secret matters lie covered and hidden
under darkness both profound and brilliant, silent and wise.
You make what is ultimate and beyond brightness
secretly to shine in all that is most dark.
In your way, ever unseen and intangible,
you fill to the full with most beautiful splendour
those souls who close their eyes that they may see.
And I, please, with love that goes on before mind
to all that is beyond mind,
seek to gain such for myself through this prayer.
Amen*

Love and peace

Martin