

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

*Where do you live?* Some here may say Poole or Bournemouth, others in other villages, towns and cities, still others of you may use your county – perhaps Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire – or country: England, Britain and the United Kingdom are possible answers too. Others still may consider themselves here temporarily, on holiday or working here for a short period of time, and so they may say they live elsewhere. *Where do you live?*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Abram lived in Mesopotamia, was called by God to remain faithful to him, and found his home sojourning – living in tents – in Canaan. By his faith he was given a new name, Abraham, and the Lord promised him a great nation, “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.” By faith in the Lord a covenant, a promise was established. But who are these “descendants of Abraham” to whom the promise is given?

This problem, answered by the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, was widespread. The churches of Galatia – a province in Asia Minor – had divisions, for some were saying that circumcision and the Law of Moses must be applied to all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles. The Apostle Paul wrote his Epistle to them to warn of the dangers of this course. Today’s Epistle reading may sound familiar to you: we read the same on the Sunday after the Elevation of the Holy Cross just over a month ago. “[Y]ou know that a man is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” There is a problem with this translation because the Greek actually reads “through faith *of* Jesus Christ.” We are justified, we are descendants of Abraham and inheritors of his promise, not through a Jewish identity, not through “works of the Law,” but by Christ’s faith. The Apostle develops this: for what if, even in our faith in Christ, “we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin?” If I sin, even in my weak measure of faith, does this mean that Christ helps and endorses sin? St Paul is emphatic, “Certainly not!” he cries out.

Sin is never to be accepted and must always be challenged, fought and defeated. The well-known saying “the ends justify the means” can never be accepted by the Church and can never be used by a Christian. Only *I*, not God and not my neighbour, can be responsible for *my* sin: the Apostle uses a beautiful image to describe this, “But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor.” Not God, *me*. So, the Apostle describes the new-life in Christ, “I have been crucified with Christ,” in baptism and in the ascetical struggle, in sufferings and in love, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me.” God offers to transform *my* life; elsewhere from today’s reading, St Paul also tells the Galatians the famous word “For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.” This transformation of life – *by* Christ, *through* Christ, *in* Christ, *for* Christ, *with* Christ – was transformative in the Apostle and can be, by God’s grace and love, transformative in us.

But, my brothers and sisters, *where do you live?* For in the context of the Gospel this does not mean the location. Whether we live in Jerusalem or Babylon, England or Australia, the Christian life is the same: we are called to holiness, called to be saints. The second century *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* calls, on one level, where a Christian lives insignificant. Its author writes,

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. (2 Cor. 10:3) They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. (Phil. 3:20) They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. (2 Cor. 6:9) They are poor, yet make many rich; (2 Cor. 6:10) they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; (2 Cor. 4:12) they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

On one level, we agree, the *where* we live is unimportant. But for the Christian the *where* is, in truth, vital and the *where* is “*now*.” *Now*, the *present* is the moment in which we live. This is the meaning of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, that it is not the worldly “*where*” which is important but the spiritual “*where*.”

We like to think that the future is real, that the past is real, but these are fantasies. Who among us can change the past? Who among us can be sure of the future? And yet we live so much of our lives within them. We *worry* about the past, we create *stress* about the future, and these two distractions and fantasies take us away from the *present*, take us away from the *now*. The Church, in her love for us, constantly reminds us of the true reality of *now* in her hymns: how often do we hear the word

“today?” “*Today* the Virgin giveth birth”, “*today* is the beginning of our salvation”, “*today* hast thou manifested on Mount Tabor”. We live in the “today” not because we reject the passage of time but because it is only in the “today” and “now” where Christ *lives* and therefore where we too must *live*, it is *today* which gives meaning, gives reality, to all *time*. Notice that when we are with Christ, when we are “in the moment,” as a more contemporary phrase would put it, the demons cannot follow. The demons cannot follow us into the *now* because this is where Christ is.

The Apostle Luke sets before us, then, this account of Christ’s encounter with a demoniac, with one who is possessed, we are told, by many demons. Christ and the disciples journey across the Sea of Galilee to “the country of the Gadarenes.” Here they find the demoniac who does not live in the present: he dwells in both past and future because he lives in the tombs, “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” He is trapped in the fantasy and dust of his past and of his future. The demons hold onto him and try to prevent him from leaving these two fantasies.

Do you live your life holding onto the past which cannot be changed? Do I? Do we worry about what the future holds and try to plan for every eventuality? *Where do you live?*

This man was naked. Naked not in the innocence of the Garden but naked of his glory, naked of his personhood, naked of his calling. And the Lord meets him. The Lord has compassion, he brings him into the *present moment* because a meeting with God is an action that cannot happen in fantasy, cannot happen in the past nor in the future. The demons writhe and cause the man to fall down and cry out “What hast Thou to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beseech Thee, do not torment me.” Demons cannot exist, cannot live, cannot withstand the present.

When we live in the past or the future we bring negative feelings and emotions upon ourselves: hopelessness, anger, worry, stress, depression, anxiety, regret, fear, uncertainty, confusion, ingratitude, vanity and helplessness. When, on the other hand, we move into the present we experience contentment, gratitude, thanksgiving, joy, patience, peace, faith, hope and love. Even our society around us has realised this and tries to replicate – “mindfulness” is a word various kinds of therapies seem to use many times – yet they *miss the mark* since the true *present* is found only in the presence of Christ. Our Christian life is perfected, it is fulfilled, when we are crucified as the Apostle says, in the *present* and in the *now*, together with Christ.

So the demoniac and the demons come into the present and what happens? Two things. Firstly the demons are annihilated; for the sake of the man, the demons could endure the presence – the present! – of Christ but as soon as the man was safe they could endure no longer and, on entering the swine, “the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.” The demons believed they could trick the Lord, choosing the swine over the abyss, “And they begged Jesus not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged Jesus to let them enter these.” But the demons could not endure the person of Christ even from within the pigs, they could not endure the true reality of the *present*. And secondly, the man was able to take up his calling to be a true man, in the image and after the likeness of God, “Then people went out to see what had happened,

and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.”

“Clothed and in his right mind.” For in the present – *in* Christ, *with* Christ, *by* Christ – we return to glory, personhood and our true selves. It is a fearful thing to live in the present, “Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gadarenes asked Jesus to depart from them; for they were seized with great fear.” We too may want Christ to leave us when he shows us our true selves in the *now*. But it is by this that we too may come to ourselves, we too may live our calling not only as “Christians” but also, simply, as human beings. What of the man who had been possessed? “Return to your home, and declare all that God has done for you,” says the Lord and the man responds to this calling, “And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city all that Jesus had done for him.” This is our calling, to leave this Church building after coming into contact with God through Communion and proclaim all that Christ has done for us. Christ challenges us to be truly human, to live in the present, to set aside worries and cares and accept the only true path to happiness.

*Where do you live?* Live today, live now. Be present in the present and the presence of Christ. Let the divine Services and Mysteries of the Church, especially Communion, be your school to learn how to live with Christ in the now.

Draw us, therefore O Lord, into the present moment, that we may live neither yesterday nor tomorrow but today and come to know, through thee, the Father by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.