

Sunday 7th October 2018
Trinity 19 (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Genesis 2.18-24
NT: Hebrews 1.1-4;2.5-12
G: Mark 10.2-16

As a Roman Catholic child growing up in Lancashire, my preparation for my first Holy Communion had three sources:

The Catechism

The stories of the 40 English Martyrs, some of whom had been local to Chorley.

And a religious textbook with a sickly picture of the child Jesus on the front and the winning title of 'Suffer Little Children'.

Such a trilogy of theology led my young self to consider that being a Christian, and certainly a Catholic was, at best, dry and formidable and, at worst, could end in a very sticky, unacceptable fashion. Suffering and joylessness appeared to be essential if you wanted to be a true follower of Jesus. It is a testament to the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that all these years later I remain a Christian who I hope has grown in her faith.

The phrase 'Suffer Little Children' is an old translation taken from Mark's gospel. Today we heard instead *Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs*. This, we hope, holds a much closer meaning to what Jesus was trying to convey to his disciples that day.

Sadly, it seems not all my brothers and sisters in Christ are familiar with this teaching from Jesus, or at least they chose to ignore it when they did, indeed, make children suffer.

The Church, Anglican and Roman Catholic, has recently had to confess to the sins of too many of its clergy and religious in their abuse of children. Abuse of children in any form is abhorrent but using the authority of the Church as a shield takes it to a new level of evil.

The recent report on child abuse in the Catholic church in the US contained two shocking images which challenge any faith.

The first concerned a group of priests who in effect were a paedophile ring, encouraging and covering for one another in their heinous crimes. They used the gift of a small golden cross on a chain to give to any child who had succumbed quietly to their advances. Thus they marked them out as suitable victims for other priests to abuse. The second is a testimony from one of the abuse survivors who was a little girl at the time that the outrages were committed on her. As a grown woman, she said that the abuse of these priests means that they have closed off God to her forever, she cannot believe and trust in a God who appeared to be at the heart of such exploitation.

These two examples are so appalling because the abusers used the cross, the symbol of Christ's sacrifice for humankind, the symbol of our hope of eternal life, the symbol of God's love for all his people. And then they destroyed all trust, in people, in the Church, in God.

The trust of child is a precious thing, complete and total, unconditional because they have faith in goodness.

Abuse of children in any form is abhorrent but using the authority of the Church as a shield takes it to a new level of evil. *Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*

We as members of Christ's church may not be able to undo the past but we can do all in our power to ensure that such abuse never takes place again. Please do not hesitate to speak out if you have any concerns and pray for those who suffer still.

To quote Edmund Burke *The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.*

This week some of you here were Confirmed and today you will make your first Holy Communion. I'm willing to bet that the instruction you received from Fr Fergus was a great deal more exciting than reciting the Catechism and a lot less bloody than the stories of the martyrs.

You have begun a new phase in your Christian journey, in your relationship with God.

You have been strengthened by the Holy Spirit and will be nourished by the body and blood of the Son so that you might live your life to the glory of the Father.

You, like all of us, have been called to go out and proclaim the good news of God's love, to bring joy and light to those you meet, to walk with those who suffer and to do all in your power to ease that suffering. We take our faith out from this place each week so that it influences all we do in our work and in our homes.

May we never doubt the true meaning of the cross, that we are loved beyond the power of death, that always we are held in that love no matter how difficult life may be at times.

Whatever happens may our trust in God be complete, believing that all things work for the good of those who love him.

I can only remember the first 2 questions and answers from The Catechism

Who made you? God made me.

Why did God make you? God made me to know him, love him and serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next.

Words worth hanging on to as are these words from St Paul:-

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May we never lose sight of that certainty. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose