

A Message from Godfrey

It seems strange to be reading this particular gospel reading on a cold Sunday morning in February when we more traditionally associate it with the gospel reading at Midnight Mass of Christmas. John refers to Jesus as the Word or Reason and describes him as the Light of the world. John the Baptist's role is quite clear- he came, as a great prophet, to testify to the light, making it quite clear that he was not the light and we are told that the true light, which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. That light, of course, is Jesus.

Light is very important to us. We take it very much for granted. It is a powerful symbol because of the many positive associations it conveys. Light shows us the way.

Light helps us to find what we have lost when we have mislaid or dropped something. Often it is only when we are able to shine a light on the place that it is found. Light can also reveal what is wrong, it shows up dirt and damage clearly. Think of a doctor or dentist using a small bright light to look in your ear, or down our throat, or at your teeth to see what needs treatment.

Light is important for life and growth.

Light is also important to us as a warning. We can think of the revolving light of a lighthouse, keeping ships away from dangerous rocks and sandbanks; or of the flashing lights on emergency vehicles, or around road works or the warning lights on the dashboard of a broken down car. Light also is a symbol of celebration – fireworks (being used more and more, all the year round, to mark special occasions) and the lights we put up at festivals, especially Christmas, or the candles on birthday cakes.

Because of all these associations we use light to speak of Jesus. John tells us that he is the Light of the World, the true light who illuminates every human being at their birth. In this technological age, we could just as well use an electric light to stand for Jesus but we continue to use candles. Why?

I think it is because, unlike a beam of electric light, the candle flame seems alive. It moves, flickers, changes. It is affected by the atmosphere around it, growing bigger or fading according to the amount of air that is available. In that respect it is like a human being, vulnerable to its environment.

Candles burn on the altar and the most important candle of them all is the paschal or Easter candle which symbolizes the fact that the Risen Jesus is the light of the world.

At the end of a Baptism service the parents are handed a candle, lit from the paschal candle.

"God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and has given us a place with the saints in light. You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life"

To which we all reply

"Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father."

Candles remind us of our human frailty and vulnerability. The sacrament of Holy Baptism reminds us that we are able to enter into a relationship with God that is all embracing.

At baptism we receive that light that John spoke about. At baptism we see "the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

May that light shine always in our lives, particularly in these difficult days.

Thoughts and prayers

Godfrey

