

Easter 5 and VE75 Weekend

Acts of the Apostles 6.1-7, 1 Peter 2.4-9, John 14.1-12

Homily – *Communal Life without limits.*

“there are many rooms in my Father’s house”

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We have of course been participating in the VE75 events in various ways this weekend and the resonances between the war years and now have never been far away. Many direct comparisons have been made and the fight against the pandemic has been describe in terms of battle and war.

I am not going to say too much about it in this address for this afternoon we will have at 1500 a great service of commemoration and thanksgiving. However, I have been prompted to dwell on the ideas of space and confinement. Living on the front line or in a mess deck on ship, as our brave service folk did for many years was very confining, but focussed social and life forming in its intensity – some hardened veterans would even speak of the closeness of relationships formed in the midst of fear and suffering as being a form of love. And rightly so.

Away from the front line civilians were often drawn into similar scenes. “Is there room?” was a question that must have been uttered by thousands as they crammed into underground stations, by families as they sought safety in the cramped Anderson shelter in the next door garden, by troops being rescued by the little boats from Dunkirk, by survivors of torpedoed ships making a life-raft. No doubt the desire was always to say yes even if occasionally the answer was a poignant no or not yet.

Conditions were cramped smelly and tough. But we have heard many stories of spirits being high and fears quelled.

Jesus has told the disciples he will suffer, be betrayed and die and now perhaps to lift their spirits and quell their fears he says – “do not worry.” He is going to prepare a place. The translation is famously difficult – mansions, rooms, place. The Greek meaning of abiding and abode is more than a physical space or image.

He is speaking of heaven. It is a reading often associated with funerals and hope in the midst of despair. He is speaking of a place with God not confining and cramped but liberating not where they is social distancing but the closest communion within infinite room. The “house” that Jesus speaks of is not like the temple but bigger. It is not so much a place of where you will be but who you will be with. God in Christ.

In answer to Thomas Jesus says “ I am the way the truth and life no one can come to the father except through me.” It is a statement that jars with non Christians and even some Christians – they may say they object to the arrogance and the exclusivism of

this “way”. Orthodox Christians must not fear and reject it but understand it. By holding on fast to the uniqueness of Christ and his way we are not shutting the door to the shelter or pulling up the ladder to a metaphorical life-raft to those in need. We are not saying there is no truth in other faiths or indeed non-faiths. We are saying that whatever truth is to be found is Christ like. The future place he speaks of also becomes one that is very near and present.

We must always remember we do not commend ourselves or even the church – we commend Jesus Christ whom we seek to serve; in through and with others. There should be no lording and arrogance but a dying to self and genuine humility in service. The uniqueness of Christ dwells in who he is and is shown in what he does. It is shown in the washing of disciples’ feet, laying down his life for his sheep, weeping at the tomb of a friend, healing and accepting those whom society has rejected because of their gender, race, faith or perceived lack of it. He shows that his way is not just **a** way. It is **the** way and of course early Christians were called followers of the way. Whatever is shared or good in other faiths (and indeed non-faith) may be understood in this light. Look at Jesus and see God. It is a gaze that fulfils the purpose of Israel and lightens the world.

At his birth there was no room for Jesus in a cramped and ordinary inn. But by following his way there is room for each and every one of us, at each and every stage of our life to abide with God. It is a place without confine and yet with the closest of communion with God and his saints – all of us. It is a place of being without limits of space and time; of perfect knowing and perfect love. It is a place of freedom won at great cost by God in Christ himself. We give thanks for freedoms won at this time at great cost, not just for our sake but for the sake of others. We as Christians can never see and respond in any other light than he who is the way the truth and life. AMEN.

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