

St George's Anglican Church Malvern

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost Yr B 25 October 2009

Jer 31.7-9 Psalm 126 Hebrews 7.23-28 Mark 10 46b-52

What an interesting week it has been! The Pope makes an offer to Anglicans who want to leave to join the Church of Rome, not as individuals but as a group. He has promised them special treatment which will allow them to use the Book of Common Prayer with certain adaptations I assume to correct what the Pope must surely consider 'errors' in the book. I suppose the Thirty Nine Articles will have to be edited and reduced in number. They will want to remove the one that says the Bishop of Rome has no jurisdiction among Anglicans. It seems the developments they object to are the ordination of women, admitting adults from protestant churches into full communion by reception and not confirmation; admitting children to communion and the loss of the old more authoritarian ways clergy once got away with. They are also opposed to the inclusive welcome of openly gay people in the life of the Church and to divorce and remarriage.

I don't wish any ill to Anglicans who decide to become Roman Catholics. Quite the contrary, in fact. But I fear that those who move across under these provisions will be very disillusioned because the Rome of their dreams and hopes may well prove harder to live with than they anticipate. Lay people will have their baptism recognised but have to be confirmed again. All the clergy will instantly become lay men and have to be re-ordained. I had one friend, an Anglican priest, who left us and petitioned for almost two decades to be ordained by the Roman Church. When permission finally came he was living the last year or so of his life. It was a great joy to him to be a priest again but it came too late to fulfil his hopes. Yesterday one of the bishops who belongs to a break away group called the Traditional Anglican Church said it was like the children of Israel leaving for the promised land. When I read that I thought, well he must recall they wandered in the wilderness for forty years before they arrived.

I don't think we will see much impact from all this in Australia. Those who broke away when women were ordained might join but they can't take the property which is held in trust for Anglican purposes. There will be English Anglicans who make the break and essentially this is an English issue to which Rome has responded with a Vatican solution – neat, diplomatic and all under their control.

Roman Catholics who have taken seriously the opening of the Church to interaction with modern thought following the Second Vatican Council know they are watching the clock being turned back. One of them said to me, I feel like the disciple on the Emmaus road saying to the stranger who turns out to be Jesus, 'we had hoped. We had hoped for so much more ... but we do not know when our eyes will see it.'

Some of you may be feeling anxious about the future of our Church. I don't mean the parish but the Anglican Church of which the parish is our local expression. Don't be anxious; have confidence in God who calls the Church in existence to continue the work of our salvation begun and already completed in Jesus Christ – though as you have heard me say before we have yet to experience that completion. The Church of God has survived many crises and struggles before. It's ironic that this announcement has been made this year which is the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII coming to the English throne. It was King Henry who for complex reasons of state and his personal needs broke with Rome in the first place.

There has never been a golden age when the gospel was widely accepted and lived. Yes, I know after the Second World War the churches were full for a time but that is the bulge in attendance not the norm. It had a lot to do with the great resurgence of hope and the rebuilding of the social fabric after the years of loss. It was good that it happened. But it wasn't the norm and I don't suppose it ever will be since it never has been. I do think the times we live in provide challenges and opportunities to present the claims of the Christian faith and I believe we can do that effectively and even more effectively yet through St George's.

The Anglican way of being a Christian is tried and tested. It is rich in resources and has deep tap roots into the spiritual tradition; it works as a way to grow in becoming a more loving human being – loving God, loving ourselves and loving our neighbours. God is love, so loving is the closest we can come to behaving like God.

When Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus, Mark tells us the man who had been a beggar followed Jesus 'on the way'. It means he became a disciple of Jesus – ready to learn from Jesus, ready to keep company with Jesus, ready to share with others what Jesus taught.

Now Jesus' way at that stage of his life was the road to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the next town after Jericho, and the Jerusalem crowds greeted Jesus just as they had in Jericho. Before too long they would turn against him, but not just yet. Jesus' way is no safe path without risks. It has no guarantees of success in this world. There is no one size fits all blueprint or straightjacket. Each one of us, in company with Jesus and others must find our way; must work out our salvation, our becoming more like Jesus, in our own unique way as we put our trust in God, made known to us in Jesus.

In every age we the Church are like the blind man, unable to see the way ahead until Jesus opens our eyes. The words in this week's gospel story which I kept coming back to over the last couple of days were 'Take heart, get up, Jesus is calling you'

God has called us – you and I and all those we worship with - to be the parish community in these times. God has called me here to be your Vicar for you and with you, for this time. So, let's take heart. *God* is calling; calling us to live as Christians in the Anglican way. Let's renew our confidence in this way of believing and living. Let's commit today to resource God's Church in this parish for all the many ministries of care and teaching and outreach we carry out in the Anglican way.

Let's take heart together, my sisters and brothers, for what followed for the one who took heart and got up and went to Jesus, was that his eyes were opened and his faith made him well.