

6th Sunday of Easter 2020

A painting by the twentieth century English artist, Stanley Spencer, represents Our Lord carrying his Cross, not on the streets of Jerusalem, but down the main street of Spencer's home village of Cookham (You can view the painting by Googling "Stanley Spencer - Christ carrying the Cross"). The painting depicts women leaning out of windows chatting, carpenters and bricklayers and others getting on with their everyday work, while Jesus, with his Cross, walks down that Cookham street hardly noticed. The reaction was probably much the same in Jerusalem on the first Good Friday. Today, Jesus continues to walk the streets and roads of the world, often unnoticed.

We may be tempted to think that if people could really see Jesus, and hear him, as did the apostles, and witness the miracles he worked, it would make such a difference – faith would come so much easier. However, the evidence of the Gospels is that Jesus' physical presence in Palestine two thousand years ago didn't make much of a difference; the majority of people found him puzzling; some thought he was dangerous; others that he was mad; even some of his closest friends betrayed him and denied knowing him. If that was the situation then, it is unlikely that his physical presence would make much of a difference today.

Yet, we know that Christian men and women of every generation have claimed to see Jesus, to hear him and to know him as a living person - are not you and I numbered among those who make such a claim? Of course, this does not imply a vision of Our Lord's physical presence, but rather a true understanding of who he is, an understanding of the things he taught, and the motivation to live according to his example - *"love one another as I have loved you"*. In other words the spirit of Jesus lives on in the hearts of his faithful followers. But this spirit is more than just an inspirational influence.

Throughout his earthly life Jesus had been at his disciples' side, and he told them, *"I will not leave you orphans"*. He promised to give them his spirit, his own breath, his very life, This "spirit" he calls "another Advocate", a helper, a comforter, a counsellor, *"to be with (them) forever"* This is the "Holy Spirit", who continued the work of Jesus through the apostles, and continues to do so through Church, and through you and me.

This is prayerfully and beautifully expressed in the Third Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass in these words: *“Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”*

The Holy Spirit enables us to become one with Christ in a number of ways. One of these ways is by enabling us to be faithful to the everyday things that build up the bonds of relationships within our families, in the work place, and in the community. Remember the words spoken about the early Christians: “See these Christians how they love one another”? The Holy Spirit makes visible the love of Jesus by energising our loving care for one another, and especially by our care for the disadvantaged. Haven't we been so very aware of this in these testing weeks of coronavirus?

The Holy Spirit also enables us to have the strength to face the next moment when we are in the midst of a crisis. For example, when a loved one dies, and we don't know how to face another day, but we do, and come through. Perhaps, in this moment we might think of those who have died recently, buried without the consolation of the Church's funeral rites, and their relatives deprived of the support of family and friends. When life is in turmoil, the Holy Spirit gently, bit by bit, carries us through. Jesus promised, *“I will not leave you orphans”!*

A further aspect of this Spirit “helper” that Jesus sends us is this: the followers of Jesus are enabled to do remarkable things. Think of those persecuted for their faith but who remain true to Jesus Christ in spite of their suffering; or the young parents who refuse to contemplate abortion when they are given the news that all is not well with their expected baby; or the person who forgives after monumental betrayal. There are living saints all around us, within our families, our circle of friends and acquaintances, a fact that we should often reflect on and draw inspiration from. In one way or another Jesus continues to walk among us!

There is an old German proverb which goes, *“The hand does not reach out for what the heart does not long for.”* The human heart is the centre of passion, conviction and love. St Peter exhorts, *“Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts.”* Pope Francis comments on those words this way, “What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known?” (EG 264) May the Holy Spirit of Jesus penetrate

to the very depths of our hearts and fill us with an intense desire to be his faithful witnesses in a world that , “*neither knows nor sees him.*”

*"Lord Jesus,
turn our hearts to you,
kindle in them the fire of your Holy Spirit,
so that we may be steadfast in faith
and unwearied in good works." Amen*