

Third Sunday of Easter - Homily

I wonder how many of you watched the funeral of Prince Philip yesterday afternoon. It was I thought very beautiful in its simplicity and in the way that the Duke had faced his death and planned his funeral. It felt very much like a family funeral: all be it watched by so many around the world. I hope that it did bring comfort to other families who have had to hold family funerals in this time of pandemic, we have all had to obey the rules because we are all vulnerable.

In our readings today we hear vividly of the power of Jesus resurrection. But it is not without some confusion and fear. For those who stand in the upper room hearing from the disciples, hot foot from the Emmaus Road with news of their encounter with Jesus, they are terrified when Jesus comes and stands with them. Not surprisingly, for despite witnessing the signs that Jesus performed during his lifetime, this is just overwhelming and it takes some time and convincing for Jesus to calm them. When they are calmer and more receptive he speaks to them, as he did to those walking to Emmaus, opening their minds to the scriptures, as if to say it's really ok this is how it was all planned, believe. Believe and be witnesses.

So we see Peter and John witnessing in Jerusalem. They have just healed a man crippled from birth and they are explaining to the crowd how this can be. Their faith is enlivened by the power of the Holy Spirit that they received at Pentecost.

They have seen the risen Jesus, they have received the Spirit and they believe. They call others to 'Repent ...and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.' Peter knows about sin – he fled and denied Jesus, he needed forgiveness.

How does this work for us today? We believe, we are touched by God's grace, we make mistakes and the offer of forgiveness is there for us. This can be a difficult idea to take on – the notion of sin and guilt have put many people off religion, and in many cases rightly. But it's not about thinking that we are the pits and punishing ourselves but about knowing ourselves to be fallible and in need of help. And knowing ourselves and being honest with ourselves is a healthy attitude. When we address our weaknesses we become stronger for it. This is the new life that Christ gives us, lives enliven by the Spirit and witnessing to God's love. In our weakness is our strength through God's grace.

One of the things that particularly struck me about yesterday's funeral was the Duke's request to have the naval **call to action** played by the buglers after the last post. The last post, of course is played for those service personnel who have died and gone to their final rest. Some commentators suggested that the **call to action** was an encouragement for his family – to get on with it. I wondered whether it was also an insight into Prince Philip's faith – for him in the light of Christ resurrection life goes on in a new and different way – Alleluia! Action Stations.