

Homily Second Sunday of Epiphany 17 January 2021

The whole people of God of our three churches are back at home and absent from our church buildings for the third period since last March. We are in solidarity with the nation, we are supporting our NHS; but we are sad not to gather and may feel isolated once more. We heard from the psalmist just now:

'My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.'

We are in a secret place again as we stay at home, which may indeed be lonely, even if for some people Zoom calls and the like bridge the gap between our island-homes. Yet this beautifully personal and intimate psalm reminds us that we are never hidden from God; we are never truly alone. And once again, might our prayer be: "Lord, weave in me, in my depths of fear, in the depths of my being, some wondrous work ready for better days."

Eli, his house, the whole house of Israel lived through dark days and better days would come through the boy Samuel, his adult ministry and those whom he would influence. But first it was darkness:

'The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out.'

Actually, words and visions are far from rare at the moment; perhaps we have the opposite problem of being surrounded, engulfed, overwhelmed with news, comment, opinion. God bless the Government trying to steer a way through this! Therefore, maybe the word of God for this time, for us is hard to hear clearly; and harder when we are not together. But, as I left Holy Trinity Church on Thursday, following the eucharist, I acknowledged the faint light signalling the reserved Sacrament. The lamp of God has not yet gone out; in fact, our churches are open for private prayer; which may be one way we continue to hear the voice of God.

Last Sunday we remembered that voice of the Father which spoke to the Son at His Baptism. I was also struck by the image of the heavens torn apart, which was picked up again in today's gospel reading:

'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

We need the angels now. They can sing. They communicate between heaven and earth. With eyes of faith, we may yet glimpse them and with those same eyes, we may see heaven opened. Now, more than ever, may our prayers and praises, cries and supplications, pierce the heavens. Let us say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'

As we prepare to pray, let us listen to these words and music, a little meditation on that voice and those heavens opened:

Above him

The Dove will linger in flight,

As the Light is bathed in water,

The water bathed in light.

And a voice will tear the heavens apart

He alone hears now within his heart:

The Father,

Well-pleased,

Whispering his delight.

("The Beloved": words Thomas Allain; music Richard Allain; choir of Merton College, Oxford; Benjamin Nicholas; Delphian Records)

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