

Sunday 18th Nov 2018

2nd Sunday before Advent

Daniel 12 1 – 3, Heb10 v 11 – 25. Mark 13 v 1 – 8

‘Hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.’

On the 14th November each year, the Anglican Church celebrates the consecration of the first Anglican Bishop in North America in 1796 – one Samuel Seabury.

Born in Connecticut in 1729, Samuel graduated from Yale University and was ordained a priest in England and assigned by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) to a church in New Brunswick.

During the American War of Independence, he remained faithful to the British Crown, serving as a chaplain to the British army.

At a secret meeting of the clergy of Connecticut, Samuel was chosen to seek consecration as a bishop, but after a year of fruitless negotiation with the Church of England, he was ordained Bishop by the Scottish Episcopal Church, also a member of the Anglican Communion, on the 14th November 1784.

Returning to America, he held the first Convention of the American Episcopal Church in 1789.

The Scottish Eucharistic rite was accepted for worship and a similar name adopted.

Samuel died on the 25th February 1796.

It is of course part of our tradition, that it is the Bishops through the Apostolic succession who confer upon others the two other orders of ministry – deacon and priest. And it is the Archbishops, together with other bishops who confer the office of Bishop upon another.

Without that conferring by the Scottish Episcopal Church, of the order of Bishop upon Samuel Seabury, the church in America would have remained dependant on the good offices of others, to ordain additional priests for the work in that country.

The office of priest in the Old Testament was of course to offer the sacrifices prescribed in the Book of Leviticus and elsewhere, to a God who was not seen as a loving creator God, as we understand him to be today, through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The need for the priest to continually offer sacrifices was to appease the God in whom they believed.

But this could never end, as the law required the continual offering of sacrifices.

With the coming of Jesus Christ, the one spotless, sinless person, it was through Jesus' death, that our sinfulness has been paid for, for ever. In fact, till as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy Kingdom Come'.

The price for all the sins of the world that have been committed in the past, that are being committed now in the present, and will be

committed in the years to come has been paid in full by the self, sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Yesterday is the past. Tomorrow is the future – but today is the present, and as such it is God’s gift to each one of us here, today! No other sacrifice is required by us of God today for our failings, other than a broken and contrite heart, as we can read in Psalm 51. (v 17) where -

‘The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.’

For some, the understanding of the role of the priest in the Christian Church is still seen as offering the sacrifice at the Lord’s Table each time that the Eucharist is celebrated.

Others see the celebration of the Eucharist as being in obedience to the one who encouraged his followers to do this in ‘memory of me’.

And for many Christian churches, the Holy Communion Service, the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, is not for them the main service offered, as they prefer to emphasise the ministry of the spoken word, where they might also complete their worship with a simple ‘breaking of bread’.

Whatever our own understanding of the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, it is when we meet together for this particular service, that we come together to acknowledge the saving act of Jesus, in offering himself for the sins of the whole world.

But there are also many, who believe in what is called the priesthood of all believers. They are those in the other Christian Churches who do not call their ministers, priests preferring the title of elder, pastor or overseer and include those House churches, formed from like minded Christians, for whom the formal structures of the established churches is not felt to be appropriate or necessary.

As part of the Apostolic Church however, we in the Church of England together with other ‘episcopal’ led churches, claim to maintain an unbroken line from the Apostles themselves, although some would consider that link has been impaired over the years not least by the reformation.

There will of course be those who will claim to speak in the name of the Lord, as we heard in the Gospel reading. Those who might well prey on the vulnerabilities of others in the name of Christianity, and those whose lifestyles and trappings seem to be far removed from the way of life led by the founder of our faith. ‘Telestyle’ Evangelists in America come to mind. And the opulence with which they surround themselves, perhaps makes them closer to the ‘priests’ of the Old Testament.

Jesus in the Gospel reading today warns his hearers – ***‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say – “I am he!” and they will lead many astray.’***

Today the Church of England, by extending priesthood to members of local congregations, and at a later age, seems to me to be nearer to the model of those early churches we read of in the New Testament. Such was the route of my own journey to the priesthood as a Local Ordained Minister in 1993 and as it was for Renos Pitterides, now Rector of St. Martins, East Horsley. It was only through Bishop David Wilcox, then Bishop of Dorking, who recommended me for training and who ordained me priest, that I stand here before you today. It was good to hear from Mike at the Men's' Curry Evening on Friday of Mike's own faith journey, as already shared by him previously with the members of the Mothers' Union last month.

For if the church is to become more effective in the communities in which it has a presence, it will be as we, members of the local community, bear witness to our faith as part of the priesthood of all believers.

As on this day and at other times throughout the world, people gather together to celebrate their faith in Jesus Christ in various ways and traditions, let us pray that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to be proclaimed to the world, by those commissioned by others, and in whatever way they have received that call, that those so called will be strengthened by God's Holy Spirit for that task.

Over these past recent years, when St. Andrew's had a surplus of clergy, I was welcomed by other local churches here in our Deanery in times of their vacancies, to celebrate the Holy Communion and preside at various services on other occasions. I have done so, as the meaning of the word 'Eucharist' reminds me, in thanksgiving for the one, who for us and for our salvation, came down to earth, Jesus Christ.

The one who for my sins, and in the words of the 1662 prayer book service of Holy Communion, became the full, perfect and **sufficient** sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction but not only for me, but also for the sins of the whole world - our great high priest Jesus Christ.

As we heard in our reading from the Letter to the Hebrew's, Jesus

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'by a single offering has perfected for all times those who are sanctified'. (Hebrews 10 v 14)

We are very much blessed in this church by the stained, glass windows. God's advertisements to the people of Cobham! In our War memorial Chapel and featured in our Old Testament reading today, we have a portrayal of Michael, the Archangel, who had a special responsibility for the Nation of Israel.

It is from our reading taken from the Book of Daniel this morning, that we can all be encouraged in our faith journey. For we heard in the final verse of that short reading these words - *'those who are*

wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever’.

In a fortnights time we will mark the beginning of Advent and so together begin our preparations for Christmas.

However, the Gospel of Jesus Christ impels us all to be alert now / today – as the writer of the 1st Letter of Peter (1 Peter 5 v 6) warns us – our adversary the ‘Devil’ prowls around looking for someone to devour!

So let us also, like those who have gone before us and as encouraged today by the writer of our New Testament reading from the Letter to the Hebrews –

‘Hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.’

(Peter G Vickers 18th November 2018)