

The God Who Speaks

12: New Life, New Hope

Opening Prayer and Welcome

God our loving Father,
You made us your children in baptism.
Pour out on us the gifts of your Holy Spirit.
Help us as a parish to know the paths we must follow
so as to build up your kingdom.
Teach us to grow in faith,
to encourage one another with words of hope,
and to care for your family with love.
Let us bear witness to the Good News,
and be faithful followers of your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Introduction to the Theme

At the risk of becoming a bit philosophical, here is a question: What is Time?

We assume, perhaps, that science knows what time is - not least because it is measured in ever greater detail: our mobile phones measure time in thousandths of a second; GPS atomic clocks measure it in *billionths* of a second!

But the question of *what time is* has never been answered. And it is a very old question.

We tend to think that time moves in a line from the past, through the present, and into the future: Jesus Christ was born, lived and died, about two thousand years ago in the past.

And yet the Church, throughout every year, talks about him as *right here, right now* - not as someone in the past, but as someone who is **always present to us**.

We don't know what time is and there are many scientific theories about whether it is linear, or circular, or even something else: as if everything in time is either connected or even occurring at the same time. What we do know is that, as human beings, we can only experience time in one way: from the past into the future - although, practically speaking, in fact, we can only experience one thing: the present moment.

So when we speak of God as *present*, what we are saying is that *we can meet and experience God*. Because the present is all we can truly know.

Scripture Reading

Revelation 22:1-21 (NRSVACE)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any

more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.'

'See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!'

And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.'

'See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises falsehood.

'It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.'

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'

And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.'

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.'

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Discussion

This is how the Bible ends - in the mysterious words attributed to John the Apostle.

The Book of Revelation has never been an easy read and it is surprising to realise that it was probably written not very long after the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and possibly even before the gospel of John: it is such a different kind of text.

*You may find it helpful to sit with the text in silence for a little while. Then, in a spirit of helping one another, you could share your thoughts and discuss with one another what you notice in this text from the Bible. **Listen to one another** because God also speaks through our sisters and brothers in Christ, and through us.*

You can use the following to help you, or explore other thoughts that come to mind:

What do you feel as you read this text?

Which words particularly stand out for you? What do you understand them to mean?

Which images seem familiar to you, and which seem strange?

A quiet reflection

Close your eyes and remain in quiet for a little while. Ask yourself if you can feel God's Presence right now. Or perhaps you can think back to something that happened today, or yesterday, that - on reflection - says to you that God is near, perhaps that God has spoken to you. Or it could be in a memory that comes to mind, where you can say, perhaps, that God was close?

We are reminded in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews that 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8): the Christ event is not something that happened two thousand years ago, but something *right here, right now*.

In the same way, *hope* for a Christian, isn't something tied to the future but is *right here, right now* - because we do not base our hope in something, but in someone.

From beginning to end, for the Christian - as for the Jewish people - the message of the Bible, God's *WORD* for us, is personal: the name of God revealed to Moses in the burning bush is 'I AM' - a name which can't be translated; a name held to be so holy that it could only be written down by its initials: Y H W H.

There is only one fully human response and it echoes God's name: "Here I am" or "I am here" is the simple response to God which echoes again and again throughout the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testaments: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Tobias, King David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Mary, Ananias, Paul, Christ.
And the saints, from the earliest centuries to today; those remembered and those forgotten.

And you, and me, and each and all of us.

Scripture Reading

Matthew 28:16-20 (JB)

Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

Discussion

This is how the gospel of Matthew ends: with a statement ('All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'), a command ('Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations...'), and a promise ('I am with you always; yes, to the end of time').

The author is **summing up** his gospel in these words: for him this is the core of the Christian message and vocation.

*You may find it helpful to sit with the text in silence for a little while. Then, in a spirit of helping one another, you could share your thoughts and discuss with one another what you notice in this text from the Bible. **Listen to one another** because God also speaks through our sisters and brothers in Christ, and through us.*

You can use the following to help you, or explore other thoughts that come to mind:

*How would you, in your own words, sum up the Christian message and vocation?
Jesus commands, 'Go, make disciples'. What does that mean, practically speaking, in your life?
What is your vocation, do you think?*

The Church Teaches

‘To respond to our vocation, we need to foster and develop all that we are. This has nothing to do with inventing ourselves or creating ourselves out of nothing. It has to do with finding our true selves in the light of God and letting our lives flourish and bear fruit. “In God’s plan, every man and woman is meant to seek self-fulfilment, for every human life is called to some task by God” [Pope Saint Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 26 March 1967].’

(Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 257, 25 March 2019)

‘Jesus is walking in our midst, as he did in Galilee. He walks through our streets, and he quietly stops and looks into our eyes. His call is attractive and intriguing. Yet today the stress and quick pace of a world constantly bombarding us with stimuli can leave no room for that interior silence in which we can perceive Jesus’ gaze and hear his call. In the meantime, many attractively packaged offers will come your way. They may seem appealing and exciting, although in time they will only leave you feeling empty, weary and alone. Don’t let this happen to you, because the maelstrom of this world can drive you to take a route without real meaning, without direction, without clear goals, and thus thwart many of your efforts. It is better to seek out that calm and quiet that enable you to reflect, pray, look more clearly at the world around you, and then, with Jesus, come to recognise the vocation that is yours in this world.’

(Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 277, 25 March 2019)

*Read these extracts again and sit with them for a short while in silence.
Then feel free to share with one another the thoughts that come to your heart.*

Closing Prayer

We thank you, Gracious Father, for this time of reflection.
We ask you to give us a fresh understanding of your Presence in our lives.
Strengthen us, we pray, in our faith
Help us to be present to each moment
So that we may see You and hear Your Voice
Everywhere and in all things and all people.
Give us hearts and minds that seek the face of Jesus,
And help us, through the power of the Holy Spirit,
To be always grateful for your blessings,
For the gracious gift of Your Presence.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ
In the unity of your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Reading suggestions

Pope Francis, *The Joy of Discipleship*, Loyola Press, 2016. This is a lovely collection of extracts from Pope Francis’ speeches and sermons.

If you would like to read the Bible for yourself, there are many good translations including the New Jerusalem Bible, and the New Revised Standard Version (Catholic edition). There are also resources online if you would like to plan your reading, or would like to learn more.