Reflection for 27th September 2020

It is often the case in life that we encounter setbacks which affect us far more than we may have at first expected. Thankfully I am a great believer in the process of thought that engages with any setback in a positive and creative way. For in so doing what at first may appear as a hindrance or as an obstacle to growth and development can eventually become the means through which our original intentions can actually be realized.

I can remember a particular PCC meeting a good few years ago when we were facing a potential split in the way in which the council wanted to move forward. We engaged in conversation and dialogue and after listening to everyone’s views instead of just then voting with everyone still fuming about their differences and approaches we tried together to see how our differences could actually be resolved in a positive and creative way. This of course took some time and a period of reflection but when the PCC gathered together again we did so not with competing views but with only views from everyone which were creative and forward looking.

A key point in any meeting of individuals is for every one of them to be reminded that we do not meet together to voice our own opinions and to try to get our own way, on the contrary we meet together to see how best we can as a group of people move things forward in our parishes in order that we together will grow closer to the Lord our God. The reading from Philippians really sets the tone for us to explore the reality of this together. We are reminded to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility regard others as better than ourselves and to be of the same mind in the Lord. St Paul goes on to say later in this Epistle that we should therefore rejoice in the Lord always!

This is a directive to challenge us in every encounter we have with another in the name of the Lord, for there should always be an element of rejoicing because we come together as God’s people in order to seek to promote a common vision and a common hope in Jesus. So how are we encouraged in our relationships with others in the Church? Well the key to our engagement is through our acts of gentleness, there is no place for harsh words, arguments, and the alienation of others, nor is there any room for superiority, for we are reminded that whatever positions we hold in the church we do so in trust, not for the furtherance of ourselves but only for the future of the Church which we serve.

Setbacks of course do occur, people refuse to move and sadly are blinkered in one direction which prevents them from growing and becoming more like Jesus. We become so wrapped up with who we are and what we ourselves believe to be true that we can often fail to recognize the pleading of Jesus in our midst. We worry at times about obeying the rules, about holding on securely to what we are comfortable with and yet Paul reminds us that in the Lord Jesus we are to make no place for the worries and concerns of the world. All that we should be concerned with is seeking to proclaim and to promote the will of God before and toward others.

How are we helped to do this, simply through the medium of prayer, prayer is recognized as being an essential element in our relationship with God, but the very essence of the nature of prayer is often forgotten or simply at times set to one side. We are encouraged to make our requests to God, yes! But we are not given the right to assume that we have the answers. Only God knows all the secrets of our hearts, only God has the answers, it is our responsibility to pose the question and then to listen in our hearts for the answer, and respond to it positively and creatively whether it is what we wanted to hear or not. As Christians we are always supported and encouraged in this by listening not to our own preferences, whims and fancies but to seek out the answers of life through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Scripture and the Churches Tradition help us as we seek to make decisions and choices in our lives but these must all be tempered through the wisdom of reason. All relationships including our relationship with God are based on reasoning, without it we are lost.

Reasoning, reconciliation, recognition of the value of others and a response through the medium of gentleness is what we are called to seek to achieve as we offer up our prayers and listen to God through the voice of the people.

St Paul carefully reminds us that if we bond together as one body before God, if we set aside our differences and the setbacks which befall us in life, then we will receive in return the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. And it is this that will guard our hearts and our minds keeping them firmly in place within the Lord Jesus. This is why we should follow the principle of seeking to make conflict, differences of view and process, and all the setbacks we encounter in life, things which can and will have a positive outcome. Our challenge is to maintain gentleness with each other, for as long as we are centered together on what is best for the Church of God in this place then differences will be forgotten, harsh words forgiven, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will truly guard our hearts and minds and keep us firmly rooted in the Lord Jesus. May the God of peace be with you and help you to rejoice in the Lord always. Amen.

Reverend Clive