

Beginning with our student days and continuing on into the present we have placed a number of posters, cards and cuttings around our house, in the loo, the corridors etc that make us stop and think or smile and very often both. There is one that started life in our student days that was finally left behind, rather bedraggled, in Ahoghill. It was a cartoon picture of a caterpillar working its way through a cabbage leaf, with the caption: 'Please be patient – God isn't finished with me yet.'

Today, this sixth Sunday after Trinity, is also St Thomas' Day. I must admit, alongside the figure of Peter, I have always had a particular affection for Thomas. It was Thomas who, in John's account of the teaching in the Upper Room at the last Supper, when Jesus had said, 'You know the way to the place where I am going.' had had the honesty to say 'Lord, we don't know where you are going – so how can we know the way?' Then in our Gospel reading today, as the disciples enthused over their experience of the risen Lord while Thomas had been away, basically had said 'Lads, I would love to be able to share your belief – but I can't'. His was not an easy faith – it was a faith shaped in the midst of uncertainty and at times a deep agony. Early Church tradition would indicate that after the resurrection and the scattering of the Apostles he had travelled on to Parthia and then onto to India, where the Bar Thoma Church, which predates the arrival of western missionaries in India, would claim to have been founded by Thomas.

This morning, as we welcome a child into the fellowship of the Church in Baptism, I just want to pick up a couple of themes from the Epistle and Gospel

set for this St Thomas's Day. First let us look at the portion from the letter to the Ephesians.

That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You *belong* here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone.; *Eph 2:19ff*

You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. Archbishop McAdoo, who ordained me back in 1978, used to talk of the importance of becoming what we are. The Church of God, and us as members of that Church are not a finished work, we are a work in progress. As the writer of the Epistle reminds us, as he goes on to speak of the Church,

God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building.

The Church on earth is a living, growing organism – as the poster reminds me 'Be patient – God hasn't finished with me yet.'

We need to be patient with each other as we each grapple with the faith. In this the disciples provide a great example as they stand by Thomas in his doubting, in his questioning. Think for a moment of John's account of the reaction of the rest of the disciples when Thomas poured cold water on their joy on seeing the Lord. Thomas was not excluded from the group as a disruptive influence. He wasn't relegated to a proverbial 'back row' for unbelievers. John makes quite clear that Thomas remained part of the group, he was with them in the Upper Room the following week, when he had his own experience of the risen Christ. I often say Easter came a week later for Thomas, but the important thing is that it did come. On that day Thomas expressed his own faith and not a second hand faith. The collective and individual faith of the disciples was a work in progress – God hadn't finished with them yet.

Today, as I say, we are welcoming a young child into the fellowship of the Church and we will shortly be moving to the Promises which lie at the heart of the Service of Baptism. As I often say on these occasions these are not questions of people who have arrived, who have got it all sorted, they are questions of people on a journey, people with whom God hasn't finished yet. In the course of the service we as a congregation will be expressing our solidarity, first with the parents and godparents as they make their response of faith on behalf of Adam; then we will welcome him into the fellowship of the Church in this place, as fellow travellers with us on the journey into faith.

We therefore receive and welcome you
as a member with us of the body of Christ,
as a child of the one heavenly Father,
and as an inheritor of the kingdom of God.

We will pray that he will grow in the faith in which he has been baptised, that he will come to confess it when he comes to be confirmed, that he will bear witness to it by a life of service to others.

It is here the picture of Thomas comes to my mind. Thomas was not dragooned into a faith he could not honestly share. He was allowed space to think, to reflect until he came to his own particular experience of the risen Christ. May we as a Church be a place of welcome and inclusion. May we be patient and understanding of one another in our search for faith and meaning in life. May each one of us, in our own time and manner come to our own understanding of the love of God in Christ and find that peace that he alone can give.