

There are any number of stories relating to the disciples after the death of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles tell us some details of the the activities of the disciples as a group immediately after the Resurrection up to the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then, apart from brief mentions of visits made by Paul to the Church in Jerusalem and the dispute he had with Peter over table fellowship with Gentiles we hear very little. There are traditions of Thomas going as far as India. Tradition has it that only one of the disciples died in his bed and that was the Apostle John who's name has been associated with the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, the three letters of John and the book Revelation.

I have often reflected on the traditional story of his death. He was the last surviving disciple, the last living link with the historical Jesus. As he lay dying his followers asked him what would be his last word to the Church. The old man simply said, 'Little children, love one another.' Looking for something a little more profound, they asked again. The old man smiled and repeated, 'Little children, love one another.' There is, in those words, a profound truth that cuts to the heart of Christian witness.

We stand at the end of the liturgical year. Over these last twelve months we have been reflecting on the mystery of the Incarnation, God among us in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. We have followed the story of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob; the story of the slavery, Passover and Exodus. There have been stories of judgement and redemption, failure and forgiveness. At each stage in the liturgical year in liturgy, in readings, in hymns and psalms, in silence and reflection we set our own lives, our hopes and fears, our joy, our regrets all in the context of our faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ. In our Lectionary this last Sunday before Advent comes under the heading of ‘Christ the King’. So how do we understand the Kingship of Christ, the authority of Christ. The Gospels tell us of a lawyer who came up to Jesus and asked what were the core requirements of the Law. Jesus replied ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself.

Love your neighbour as yourself. Little children, love one another.

What we are talking about here is a faith that moves beyond a self centred individualism, that shifts the focus away from self and towards God, towards my neighbour.

In his recent address to Dublin Diocesan Synod, our Archbishop spoke, in words that prefigured President Higgins at his Inauguration, of the need for a ‘constructive society’, a society that embodies fundamental Christian values of neighbourhood, of integrity, that has a concern for those on the margins of our society. Both the President and the Archbishop spoke of the values that had failed us a society, that have left us fundamentally wounded. In the course of his invitation to President Higgins to make his Inaugural Address, the Taoiseach spoke of wounds healing from the margins.

Our Gospel reading today presents a powerful image of this healing from the margins. In the parable the righteous are commended for their concern for those who were sick, who were hungry, who were naked, who were in prison. They were to discover, as were those who ignored them, that they encountered and served Christ in those on the margins, those whom so many ignored.

In our Old Testament Lesson, in a devastating critique of the society of his time, Ezekiel speaks of a society that has lost its way, that has lost its vision of serving, of feeding, of protecting the weak and the vulnerable. Instead the vulnerable have been pushed to one side as the rich and the powerful have focussed instead on their own self interest.

In the Service of Baptism, after the child has been baptised, the congregation welcome the child into the fellowship of the Church

**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 therefore receive and welcome you as a member with us of the Body of Christ. These are words of welcome and of inclusion that should characterise not just our attitude to the child, not just our relationships with each other in this Parish but our attitude to all. As we seek to build the constructive society, the inclusive society that both our Archbishop and President have spoken about, perhaps the most valuable insight that we as Christians can offer to society at large is that we are all made in God's image, that we are all children of the one heavenly Father; that the value of each person rests not on where they live, not on what they wear, what they own; that each of us, in all our imperfection, reveals something of God in this broken and hurting world. That can be the beginning of a constructive, inclusive society in which Christ, the wounded healer, is truly King.