

# **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

## **Call to worship**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray:

God of love, light a flame of love in our hearts to you, a flame of love to our families and friends, a flame of love to our neighbours, a flame of love to our enemies.

Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary, light a flame of love in our hearts to all, from the lowliest thing that lives, to the Name that is highest of all. Amen

## **Confession**

God of life, grant us your forgiveness. We have been heedless in our thoughts, cruel in our words, shameful in our actions. Forgive us Lord for every time we have been indifferent to a world made sad by disease; for every time we passed on the other side when we saw our neighbour in need; for every time we wandered from the way you taught us. God of life, grant us forgiveness.

(Silence)

## **Assurance of Pardon**

O God, your heart is full of mercy. May we hear and trust your words to each of us, when we hear you say the words: "Your sins are forgiven". May we forgive each other and forgive ourselves. Thanks be to God. Amen

God of the new day and God of love, you created us and you have redeemed us. As you scatter the mist from the hills, banish the deeds of darkness from the sons and daughters of your light. Help us to know and believe that, as children of your love, we are free to begin again; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **The Lord's prayer**

At the Saviour's command and formed by His divine teaching we pray together:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen**

**Hymn: Before the throne of God above**

### **New Testament Reading:**

#### **Acts of the Apostles 2:51-60**

(St. Stephen is speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem): "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become His betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it."

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look" he said "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

### **Reflection**

How far would you go to defend your convictions? Would you raise your hand against those who offend your beliefs, your ways of life and your culture? The Jews who stoned Stephen would say that they were obeying the Law given to them. But the Law

that they claim to protect also says that you must love your neighbour. Therefore, were they obeying God? Does God need you or me to defend Him? Certainly not. God is big enough to take all the different opinions and beliefs and can hear all our thoughts and still love us. How remarkable! The problem is that, as Calvin pointed out once again, the human nature is corrupted. God forgives, humans don't. God loves you just the way you are. Humans love you as long as you agree with them and fit within their social and cultural understanding, otherwise they de-humanise you and "eliminate" you from their circle, clan or group.

As humans we find it very difficult to listen to criticism, especially when it is about our beliefs. As Christians, we must surrender our pride and listen every day to the Holy Spirit pointing to us all our flaws and mistakes so that we can change our nature and obey the Lord. As Christians, we are all called to surrender to God's will. This is because we believe that God knows better than us what is best for us.

Stephen was the first martyr of the Church. He spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem as a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He called the Jews to repentance, showing them their error. Why did he do that? Well, I am sure that he did not fancy getting stoned by the citizens of Jerusalem that day. He did it for love of them. Stephen was not trying to win an argument over philosophical questions. He was trying to open their eyes to see what he could see. He faced violence and responded with love. He was judged worthy of death and he prayed God to forgive his enemies.

What can we learn from Stephen today? Well, we can clearly see that instead of arguing back or fighting back with his opponents, Stephen "turns the other cheek". He does not walk away from the truth, no matter the cost. Even if it is going to cost him his own life. You can see some overtones of Psalm 23 here. Of course, this is the extreme sacrifice and I hope that most of you would not need witness to Jesus the same way as Stephen. However, the calling here is that we must abandon our personal pride and stick with the truth no matter what. It is clear that in this world, being a witness of Jesus is going to cost us. When you choose God over all other things, when God is the King of your heart then you will find that the world is going to reject you, even hate you because of your faith. But it all depends where your heart is. If the Lord is the King of your heart, then you will not need the world to find joy and freedom, because you have received the grace of God. In Him you will find all the joy and

freedom that your soul will need. It is the Lord who opens our eyes. In Christ we are free. In Christ we live life to the full.

Amen

### **Hymn: In Christ Alone**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Let us pray:

Almighty God, we pray for those locked in circumstances beyond their control, restrained by illness, oppressors, or poverty and seeing no end to their captivity. May they discover hope buried in deepest suffering; through Jesus Christ, who shared the weakness and despair of human life, yet gave even death a new outcome and brought resurrection from a closed tomb.

We pray for the Church, set in a world to show how people belong together. Grant that, as we feel for the rejection and isolation of others, we may meet Christ in them and bear witness to His transforming love.

We pray for the communities of the world, for people under stress and unable to deal with their difficulties. May they know how each of them is loved and valued by you.

We remember those now hidden from us but at home with you. We give thanks especially for those who have built up our trust in you, and by their faith, have drawn us into the life of Christ who died in weakness and reigns in glory.

Amen

### **Hymn: Days of Elijah**

### **Benediction:**

The blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you always. Amen

Rev. Bruno Boldrini