

Patronal Festival Evensong, 11 June 2019

The Bishop of Southwark, The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun

President Trump has gone home, the Earth is still rotating around the Sun and today is the glorious Feast of Saint Barnabas. I am glad that the President of the United States of America was received respectfully in this country on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the D-Day Landings when our fate as a nation hung in the balance and without massive support from our cousins across the Atlantic we would have remained in peril. I am also glad that he was able to learn at first-hand lessons in dignified statecraft from Her Majesty the Queen who has rather better form and longer experience than her esteemed visitor.

It is a very great pleasure to be with you to keep the Feast of your admirable Patron. I am grateful to you for your welcome, and to your Warden for inviting me - I have had the pleasure of knowing Fr Kevin for a long time, since we served together in Stepney. We are here in pretty much the Ultima Thule of the Diocese of Southwark – or whatever the Southern equivalent of Ultima Thule is. South of here lies a region which we know only from myth and unreliable travellers' tales, which I gather is called the Diocese of Chichester!

At the Parochial level this remote fastness is committed, as you know, to the care of the Revd Kathryn Percival, Vicar of the United Benefice of Lingfield and Dormansland, and Area Dean of Tandridge. I am very glad Kathryn is present this afternoon – having foregone the DAC in order to be here – the better part of valour. I know that Kathryn has an active and sincere care for the College, as indeed for all those here in the southern marches of the Diocese. It is in such extreme outposts of civilisation, just as in the desert monasteries of Egypt, that great wisdom is treasured up, and peace is sought and found.

Thus, it is always good to be here, but particularly so on this festival day. Today is the day on which Church tradition teaches us that St Barnabas met his death. He first appears in Acts 4: Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4: 36-7) and we can take it that this is the same Barnabas who then reappears in Chapter 9, as the Sub-Warden has read. Thus we know that "Son of Encouragement" was not a name conferred on him by optimistic parents - but when nicknamed by his friends, we can be confident he was a truly encouraging companion - and this is borne out in the role he goes on to play.

Barnabas has the courage to befriend St Paul when the other disciples are afraid of their former persecutor. In Galatians, Paul refers to Barnabas as his companion on first coming to Jerusalem (Gal: 2.1), though later he writes that even Barnabas was led astray (Gal 2:13) which may say as much about Paul as about Barnabas. When refugees from persecution settle in Antioch and the Church there grows, it is Barnabas who is first sent from Jerusalem to encourage the new believers. He makes the journey to Tarsus and brings Paul to Antioch.

Then in the famous dramatic scene in the Church at Antioch the Holy Spirit sets the two of them apart for missionary work.

They take aid from Antioch to Jerusalem. They travel widely testifying in synagogues and elsewhere. In Lystra they are taken for gods and they reply 'We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news... – but it is noticeable that the people who want to deify them call Paul, Hermes because he is the chief speaker (Acts 14:12-15). It is Paul and Barnabas who carry the letter of the Jerusalem Council to Antioch.

At length, they fall out, because Barnabas wants to keep Mark with them, but Paul cannot forgive Mark's weakness in deserting him during an earlier missionary journey. In Hollywood terms St Barnabas is a strong nominee for Best Supporting Actor. And what do we often notice about those who do win the less prestigious Oscar than the Best Actor award? My observation is that they are often the better actors. In 2015, the Best Actor award went to Leonardo DiCaprio, who is very much the 21st century equivalent of a *matinée* idol. The Best Supporting Actor award went to a man with a strong Southwark connection, Mark Rylance, the celebrated Shakespearean actor and first Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe. Let us celebrate the solid, servant hearted virtues of St Barnabas, faithful companion, happy to play a supporting role, serving where he is called, not sparing himself, looking always for the good of others. These virtues call for great skill and courage. And they are vital to cultivate in this year of grace 2019. They are the antidote to the culture of celebrity. They are also virtues which can secure those who possess them from anxiety and stress. Preeminently they are virtues one hopes to see in Anglican Clergy. Of course, the Church of England is not immune to infection by the culture of the wider world in which we are set, and rightly so, for if we are to speak in a language 'understood' of the people', we must be thoroughly incarnational. As we live up to this calling, we have much to offer; but we must be alert to the dangers too.

The Parish is the glory of the Church of England precisely because it is not glorious in any worldly sense. Parish Ministry is a true outworking of the fundamental virtue of love which, as St Paul assures us, does not envy... does not boast, ...is not proud (1 Cor: 1.4) All else must depend upon this. Everything that goes on in Bishops' Houses, or Diocesan Offices or for that matter in the National Church Institutions, every report that is written, every presentation that is made, needs to work to the flourishing of Parishes, or Ecclesial Communities such as this one. The Parish is and I pray will remain the beating heart of the Church. It is in the Parish that the Church of England lives. It is in the Parish that we fight the good fight, in the Parish that we are who we are. For a Parish you need two things: a Cure of Souls, and a Curate - I extend this to include Chaplains of Colleges, Hospitals, Prisons and Schools. As well as being Chief Shepherd and Leader in Mission, as Chief Pastor, my primary concern is the well-being of Clergy and the flourishing of all God's people.

Thus, very good work is going forward, under the care of the Archdeacon of Croydon, to ensure that our Clergy are enabled to live the good lives that God demands. Institutions

such as this one, with their reassuring promise of rest and care when the responsibilities of Parish Ministry are over. My ambition is no less and no more than that every Clerk in Holy Orders from the Thames to the further reaches of Lingfield and Dormansland would be, as St Paul says, filled with all joy and peace as we trust in God, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, may we be free, inspired by the memory of the Patron of this College, true daughters and sons of encouragement, pursuing all that makes for peace and builds up our common life, the Lord being our helper.