**Morning Praise @ Home Sunday 29 August 2021**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  **Amen.**

### Bible Readings Psalm 15 Mark7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

**Reflection**

Many years ago, a story was told about a church in Denmark, where the worshippers used to bow regularly as they passed a certain part of the wall in the sanctuary of the church. They’d done so for three centuries - bowing to a whitewashed area on the wall. Nobody could remember why.

One day when renovating the church, they removed some of the whitewash on the wall. At the exact spot where the people bowed, they found the image of the Madonna covered by the whitewash.

People had become so accustomed to bowing to the image that, even after it had been covered up for three centuries, people still bowed.

Tradition is a powerful thing.

The Pharisees of Jesus day had learned to substitute tradition, custom, habit for the real thing – the presence of the living God. Mere traditionalism rears its head in many ways, in many times and in many places.

*But it’s not the real thing.*

***True*** Christianity has to do with a relationship with God and not with rules and regulations. And at times - like in any relationship, it can be uncomfortable. Jesus will challenge us and ask questions about ourselves that we don’t want to answer.

In a bit of our Gospel reading that the Lectionary skips over, Jesus picks on one of the Pharisees’ practices.

He said,

“You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’

But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

There was a good reason why God required the Jews to look after their parents. After all in those days there was no old age pension and no social security system to fall back on. Often the parents would pass on their farm to the children in exchange for the children looking after them in old age. That was the deal, but the Pharisees had a crafty way out of it – and it looked so “godly”.

But God isn’t fooled and Jesus called it as it was.

Jesus’ challenge to us is this: If we consider God’s commandments, we can look at them in one of two ways.

1. We can follow them to the letter of the law – and like any good lawyer look for the get out clauses.
That’s what Jesus objected to in the Pharisees.
2. Or we can look at the Spirit of the Law – and see what God really wants and that is the test of our character.

When you discuss good behaviour, you are discussing the quality of a person’s self-control. When you discuss a good heart, you are discussing the quality of the person. Jesus wants his followers to be first and foremost people with good hearts.

We see in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah 33, the relationship God wants to have with his people:

*“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.*

*It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestor when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord.*

*“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord.*

*“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.*

*I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

*No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord.*

*“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

Or put another way, God wants us to live according to his will and to have the character to go with it.

In closing, may I tell you a story I once read.

An elder of a local free Church in Communist Romania was brought before the judge for embezzlement - a crime he hadn’t committed. His defence lawyer started his defence summation by telling the Court of a well-known story about the man that was circulating around the village.

One day, the man had been attacked while he was taking the church collection home to bank the next day and the thieves made off with all the money. Fearing for the eternal souls of the thieves, the elder called after them:

*“You haven’t stolen the church collection, which I have at home, you have only taken my money and I give it to you freely.”*

The Judge stopped the defence lawyer and said: “You don’t seriously believe that nonsense, do you?”

The defence lawyer replied: “No.”

“Then why are you bringing it up in my court” the judge growled.

The defence lawyer replied: “My Lord, if someone had tried to start a rumour like that about you or me, it would never have got off the ground. The very fact that this rumour could even get off the ground is a testimony to my client’s character.”

That’s the same sort of character that Jesus wants his followers to have; a Christian character to go with our Christian profession.

It isn’t easy – but God is more concerned about what’s on the inside of us than on the outside. **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

 **We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ

known in the world? **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Prayers of intercession**

Make clean our hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us that we may seek to serve you in joy and gladness and bring others into the glory of your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

Holy God, make us holy, give us power to resist evil, give us strength to do what is right. We pray for the church working in areas of hatred, where Christians are facing hostility and violence, where to become a Christian is to risk loss and rejection. At this particular time we think of the Christians and all whose lives are in danger in Afghanistan, across Asia and the African continent, from the threat of invading Taliban and other violent forces, who show little or no respect for human life and those of other faiths.

**Holy and supreme one - Hear our prayer.**

Protect, O Lord, all who are working for liberty and freedom, for justice and peace. We pray for all peace-makers and peace-keepers and for all who seek to reconcile divided communities and peoples. We pray for our prime minister and for all world leaders that have the capability and the will to help those stranded and in grave danger, in Afghanistan and other areas of the world, where many lives remain in danger. We pray for the safety of all our armed forces and all those involved in the mass evacuation of Afghanistan. We think of the families of the soldiers and civilians who remain on the front line of the ongoing evacuation and commend them to God’s care and protection. We give thanks for the work already done to save lives.

**Holy and supreme one - Hear our prayer.**

God of love, we pray for all homes where love has grown cold, for all people where life has become a dull routine, for all who are bored or tired of life, for all betrayed by a loved one or friend and for all people whose employment and security have become insecure or disappeared because of Covid-19. Lord, help us to never take anyone for granted and that we may never misuse the power and freedom we have from you.

**Holy and supreme one - Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who have become bankrupt or are in great debt, we remember the world’s poor and all who have nothing to call their own. We remember those who are in genuine need of food banks, in our own country and around the world. We pray for those in need of both mental and physical support, for the broken hearted, the broken spirited, for all who are severely handicapped, for those on life support machines and for all who are ill in hospital and in nursing homes and for all who care for them. Lord, be to them a tower of strength and love.

**Holy and supreme one - Hear our prayer.**

Lord, be with all who mourn at this time. Bless our loved ones departed who are renewed and restored to the fullness of life and are inheritors with the saints in light, may they share with them in the glory that is to come.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be,

that you may live and work to his praise and glory,

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**