



Fr Michael says:

A Light shines in the darkness

The well-known text from Isaiah predicts the future liberation of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, destroyed by Assyria in 722BC, the territories mentioned became the Galilee which because of its situation was the source of a great mix of nations, criss-crossing the important trade routes which pass through the area. It was seen as a place of darkness because of this. As the Gospel proclaims, Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of this liberation. The powerful call for unity that Paul makes to the Church in Corinth is a key factor in ensuring that the light once shared will build it up!

We have all experienced the effects of power cuts or failing and being caught out, having to stumble around trying to find a candle or torch and how much better we feel when we have light back with us: this is what Jesus offers us as we journey in faith and life, “through the valleys of darkness” as Psalm 23 puts it.

Mother Teresa went to visit a man she had discovered, who was totally isolated, in dire poverty, living in darkness and untidiness. She started to clean the flat up, which did not make him too happy, but she carried on, eventually she discovers a fine oil lamp, all neglected, which she polishes. “Why not light it” she says to him. “Why should I – no one comes to see me.” “Will you light it if I send sisters to visit you?” “Yes, if I hear a human voice, I will light it!” Two Sisters came to see him regularly, things began to improve for him, and eventually he felt he could manage on his own, but asked the Sisters for a favour. “Will you tell the first Sister who came to see me that the light she lit in my life is still burning?”

We don’t always like the light either, it can be a threat to our comfort and propensities – they would be shown up! This darkness can be physical or spiritual. Eventually it becomes a friend, offering comfort and hope, to allow our lives to be turned around. The poor man of our story was brought to life by the light brought by the Sisters.

We are in the same situation, to appreciate the light we need to be aware of our darkness and want to escape it. We want – and need to change! Very often it is in the time of crisis and trouble that we do this, this is why Jesus says: “Repent, the Kingdom of God is near!” at the start of his preaching.

We all have areas of darkness which need banishing: fear, illness, sin, loneliness. We need to be disturbed, so that we can start to grow again! Each of us is a source of light, but are we responding? Do we convey it to those around us?

“Lord, make me an instrument of your love! Where the darkness of loneliness reigns, let me bring the light of friendship. Where bitterness reigns, the light of forgiveness. Where hurt reigns, the light of healing. Discord – the light of harmony; sadness, the light of joy; doubt, the light of faith; despair, the light of hope; hatred, the light of love. Amen!” (Adaptation of the Prayer of St Francis)



Fr Jean-Marie says:

Theme: Week of prayer for Christian unity

Yesterday with the celebration of the conversion of St Paul, we concluded the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** which began on Saturday January 18. The theme for the Week was based on Paul's question in today's second reading: 'Is Christ divided?' Or 'Has Christ been parcelled out?' As you know, there are many groups of people who claim to be Christians. The World Christian Encyclopedia (Oxford) estimated at least 33,000 **Denominations** in 2001. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (USA) estimated 43,000 in 2012. These numbers keep rising every year. It is estimated that there will be 55,000 different denominations by 2025.

All these numbers are not a sign of unity but of disunity. The mushrooming of Christian denominations leads us to a reflection on Paul's question, "Has Christ been divided?" In faith we respond, "No!" Saint Paul denounced divisions in the Corinthian community when people were split into parties claiming to belong to one or another apostle. Some were for Peter, others for Apollo, and others still for Paul and others to Christ. Paul appealed to them to make up their differences and to heal these rifts. The Christian community is to be united in a fellowship of faith, and such a fellowship allows for no divisions. Paul told the Corinthians that the Apostles are not the Masters of the Church, they are just servants; they are not the saviours, there is only one Saviour: Jesus Christ.

It is a shame that Christianity is so much divided. This becomes very evident when, for example in one town, sometimes around the same central town square, there are churches of different Christian denominations. Their leaders and people are often not on speaking terms with one another, call one another heretics or schismatics, and even doubt whether the Lord will save those belonging to the other churches. All this looks is confusing to people who are honestly seeking Christ!

Paul's message is relevant for us today. In this week we want to emphasise that the Body of Christ is not divided, even if we, as Christians, are. We are reminded that in Christ we are one and that in all aspects of our Christian living we should seek to discover that unity which Jesus intended for his followers and which is God's gift to us. We want to promote a way in which we can value and receive the gifts of others even now in the midst of our divisions. There are many values that we can consider to be values of the gospel, even in non-Christian religions.

May Jesus' prayer help us to make his wish become a reality, "that all may be one."