

St. Wilfrid's Parish Church Bognor



SERMON NOTES

Fr Ramon Thomas

15 AUGUST 2010

“KNOWING GOD AND MAKING HIM KNOWN”

Sunday 15 August 2010
Blessed Virgin Mary
Luke 1. 46-55

There is a huge importance in the way we read the Scriptures and one of the glories of the Church of England is the emphasis we place upon reading, hearing, and knowing, the Scriptures. Normally therefore, we will have a reading from the Old Testament which acts to set the scene, by way of historical setting or by way of prophetic utterance, or by way of the progressive revelation of the nature of God to his people. All of which validate the fulfilment of the word that we find in the New Testament.

To the Old Testament we add the words of Jesus from a gospel reading (fulfilment of the word) and then we have the Holy Spirit directed application of the words of Jesus by his church, as revealed in the epistles. This is the normal pattern to which we often add a Psalm reflecting on our personal and human involvement with God. Together, we hear God speak to us through his entire word.

Unusually, today, we have two readings from the epistles, the passage from Revelation being taken instead of the Old Testament prophetic word from Isaiah 61. 10-end. This is because the Revelation passage, the vision that it relates, is a vision both from history and a vision into the future. It is as though parts of Revelation could well be placed after the early parts of Genesis.

But by omitting the Isaiah passage we miss out on a key truth about Mary - she knew her Scripture - because her first words in the 'Magnificat' - our Gospel passage - are a direct quotation from the prophetic words of Isaiah 61.10 'I delight greatly in the Lord; my spirit rejoices in my God.' Jesus was nurtured by a mother who delighted in the Lord, whose spirit rejoiced in her God; what a wonderful setting for a child.

Not only did she know the words of Isaiah, the subsequent verses of the Magnificat go on to demonstrate that she had a remarkably expert knowledge of the actions of God, not just in a narrative sense, but also in a very deep theological sense. Her words, for a young maiden of that age reflect both significant education and a mind well trained in understanding of the matters of God. Is this perhaps, unusual?

However, that first verse reveals the most extraordinary quality of Mary, the mother of Jesus our Lord. That quality is one of a 'compliant soul'. Today talk about the soul is rare, which is odd, given that we all have one.

Let me give an illustration as to what I mean. When I was in industry, we looked for a certain quality and used a term to describe the necessary hardness need to rise to the top. The term was 'steel has entered his soul'. It denoted a degree of toughness, that is of the 'world' not the 'toughness, the spiritual toughness that is of the kingdom.

Interestingly, the term itself comes from the words of Simeon spoken to Mary in the Temple at the presentation of Jesus 'and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' Luke 2.35. Even though a sword did pierce her heart as she watched her son die on the Cross, the end result for Mary though was not a worldly business hardness. And why not? Because Mary had a compliant soul, a soul that could only do the bidding of God.

Compliant does not mean being a 'yes' person, a blind follower.

Compliant means having a deep awareness of the rules under which the universe is built and by which the universe operates. Compliant means having sufficient intellect to decide absolutely for oneself that the way of God is the only way. Compliant means receiving immense satisfaction out of knowing that you are doing the will of God. Compliant means being aware of the very heartbeat of God, feeling the pain and joy that God feels as he interacts with his chosen people.

A compliant soul is always recognisable, there is a peacefulness, yet a forcefulness about one's approach to life. There is an inner joy about being in step with God. There is a love for the things and persons loved by God.

A compliant soul, not a tortured soul, is a complete, a fulfilled soul. We often sense a compliant soul in those who are nearing the end of their life - we say that the person has 'one foot in heaven and the other leaving earth'.

A compliant soul is loved by God in an extraordinary way - it is why we have a soul!

Most wonderfully, each of us can develop a compliant soul. We do this by allowing ourselves to be exposed to the life changing influence of Jesus and his word; the empowering and direction of the Holy Spirit and the openness to receiving the love of God the father for each one of us, no matter who we are or what we have done.

Mary's Song, the Magnificat' teaches us much about having a compliant soul - and I commend it too each of you for study and as a model towards encouraging our own souls to become more compliant.