

A question of why ?

1 5 11

Almighty God,

You have given your only Son to die for our sins

and to rise again for our justification:

grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness

that we may always serve you

in pureness of living and truth,

My text today is John 20 verses 30 and 31: 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name.'

Last Sunday was great ! Easter Day was the climax of Lent; six weeks preparing for the big day; Ash Wednesday; our Lent Bible Studies, 'Finding God through . . .', followed by the Bring and Share Lunch; Palm Sunday; Maundy Thursday; Good Friday with the Meditation on the Cross according to St Matthew. Then, finally, the day itself: a packed church, a procession in and out, glorious singing and over 100 folk making their Easter communion. It was a wonderful experience and it was good to be here to worship God in thought and word and deed.

And now today – Low Sunday – the beginning of the rest of the year. I can't help but feel the contrast between last week's excitement and the relative calm of a

regular, ordinary Sunday. And this sense of anti-climax is embodied in the very name we used to give to today, Low Sunday.

But in the natural rhythms of life are concealed this important truth: that God can be accessed in the ordinary. It is true that he is present in our great moments: Christmas; Easter; Ascension; Pentecost; in a baptism; in a wedding; at a funeral. But God can be found in the ordinary moments of our life: for example, coming into the still silence of our church during the week to drink in the scent of the flowers; to feel the sense of the presence of God; to pray and perhaps to light a candle.

One tenet of our belief is that God is present everywhere. He is not only present in the big moments like a royal wedding in Westminster Abbey but it is possible to sense his presence in the mundane when we're in the shops, on the beach, in the garden. And that essentially is the big difference between Atheists and peoples of faith – the former have their eyes closed and their ears shut to the possibility of seeing or hearing God whereas a believer is attuned to discerning God in what they do and see.

Why the difference ? The reason may be found in today's text: 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name.' Christians are people who have heard the Word of God and have responded positively to what they have heard; an atheist hears the same but

rejects what he hears because it does not make sense to him – it is essentially nonsense !

Today's gospel is the well-known account of Doubting Thomas. Thomas was not an atheist in the sense that he did not believe in God. His doubt was more a disbelief that Jesus could have risen from the dead. His pragmatism was challenged in a way that convinced him of the truth. He clearly and logically set down the criteria for a test of faith and these were met unequivocally. He saw Jesus for himself and he was able to touch and be touched by his friend. Having experienced the actual presence of the Risen Lord Jesus, he could articulate the faith we all share as Christians: 'My Lord and my God' (20 v28)

So let me conclude by reaffirming how much I loved last Sunday here in St Barts – it was very special to me and was worship at its best. But let me also make this simple but important point: that God is present in the everyday things of life and we don't have to be doing something extraordinary to feel close to him: we simply have to have our eyes wide open and to be ready to listen to him. The difference between a believer and atheist is that we have responded to the gospel, that what the evangelists intended to do in writing down the truth as they witnessed it has had its intended effect on us, that for us 'Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing in him as such we may have life in his name.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

1st May 2011

H: Sermon 23: A question of why

