

Epitaph
Thank you – I'm sorry.

23 10 16

Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy scriptures
to be written for our learning:
help us to hear them,
to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and ever hold fast
the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our text today may be found in the opening verse of Psalm 84:

'How dear to me is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts'

Do you ever think about death ? Does the thought of dying ever from time to time preoccupy your mind ? Your vicar, Father Richard, told in me in early September that, from the start of this year till the end of August, he had conducted some 67 funerals – that's something like nearly two funerals every week. It is an exceptional workload and evidence of his care and pastoral heart but it is also a reminder to us that we are all necessarily mortal and that understandably we all must die. Next Sunday, in Dinard, we will be celebrating All Saints' Day two days early and, on the following Thursday, we will mark All Souls'

Day a day late, so it seems appropriate on this, the Last Sunday in Trinity, that we remember the simple fact that die we must and that, as Christians, we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

So, given death is a fact of life, what would you like to be your epitaph ? According to my Collins English Dictionary, an epitaph has three meanings: a commemorative inscription on someone's tombstone or monument; a speech in commemoration of a dead person; or a final judgement on a person or thing. So what would you like to be written about you ? What might sum you up in a nutshell ? We'll let me share with you the four words I like to leave behind – **Thank you - I'm sorry. Thank you** for the gift of life. **Thank you** for the chance of having lived. **I'm sorry** for the many times, for the many ways I've fallen short. **I'm sorry** for screwing up, making a mess of things big time.

In Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, part of which we've heard read today, Paul senses that his time is drawing to a close and he sums up his life in three succinct sentences:

- ✓ I have fought the good fight.
- ✓ I have finished the race
- ✓ I have kept the faith

They feel to me like an epitaph to a life well spent in the service of God by bringing the word of God to others. Three key facts:

- 1 Paul has been engaged in a spiritual struggle – a fight, the good fight, to bring that which is right and true, authentic, to Jew and Gentile alike.

- 2 Paul has completed what he set out to do – a race, more a marathon than a sprint with a clear goal in sight: to share the vision of a God who loves us enough to be incarnate in his Son, Jesus Christ, and to be alongside us, inspiring and informing us in the person of his Holy Spirit.
- 3 Paul has kept the faith by being true to the faith by what he said and did, by what he taught and wrote, by how he lived his life.

It is a powerful example to us and, in today's gospel, Luke gives us a picture of authentic faith like that of Paul: a Pharisee and a Tax Collector at prayer in the Temple: the one boastful and proud; the other humble and repentant. One is full of spiritual pride; the other aware of his short-comings. No prizes for guessing who stands well with God.

So let me leave you with this positive thought which is our text today:

'How dear to me is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts'

We all must die but by fighting the fight, running the race, keeping the faith, we will be granted a place in that heavenly dwelling place which is the home, the house of the Lord of hosts.

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

Preached at the Parish Eucharist

St Barnabas's, Old Heath

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