

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, why are you here in Church this morning? Were you forced to come? Do you feel obliged to be here? Why are you here in Church?

“We hold these truths to be self-evident,” says the famous words of the eighteenth-century American *Declaration of Independence*, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These are interesting words because in our world, in both the eighteenth-century and today, they are not “self-evident” – some are rich and some are poor, some are highly educated and some not, some are born into loving and nurturing families but not all are. We only have to look around us to see that we are not all equal, we are not all treated the same. The wealth or poverty of our parents is a strong indicator, and it seems to be becoming stronger, of our own wealth or poverty.

Yet we know, we feel it in our bones, this should not be so, that this is not an eternal reality. And it is in and through the Church where we can challenge our society to improve, to reach towards the ideals to which the authors of the *Declaration of Independence* referred yet have not achieved. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Galatians in the reading we heard a few moments ago, makes clear what the instincts of all human hearts understand: whatever our wealth, whatever our family, whatever our social status, whatever our sex, whatever any category which the world tries to use to divide and separate us, we are—each one of us—equal before God. This is not *because* of our baptism, “only baptised Christians have achieved this equality but no one else,” but our baptism *reveals* it and *proclaims* it. The Apostle explains this in much more beautiful language than I can, he says:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

This is the Good News of the Gospel—whatever you may be you are equal with all others before God: rich or poor, bishop or laity, man or woman, each has the potential to be truly a child of God, through belief in his name.

Let us then, dear brothers and sisters, live this. Our world desires to divide by categories whereas we should unite. We do not ignore our differences, they are not meaningless, but we can invite all to belief in God and to become equal heirs of him.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, the Sermon on the Mount—chapters five, six and seven of St Matthew's Gospel—serves as one of the best summaries we have of the entire Gospel. I strongly encourage you, read them and reread them: it will not take you very long to read these chapters. In them we hear what it is to be a Christian, a follower of the Way as we are called in the Book of Acts. Read the Sermon on the Mount and you will read complete and

utter madness—at least, madness as the world would understand. Our world praises the rich, tries to emulate the successful, panders to the powerful, admires the strong; our world is as corrupt and as far from the ideals we try to teach our children, from all men being created equal, as can be. The words of the Lord are madness to the world.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound,” says the Lord in today’s reading taken from the Sermon on the Mount, “your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” And these words are words to us—in a world full of ideas and images, what do we place before ourselves to look upon, do we look upon light or darkness, good or evil: for the choice is stark according to the Lord, it is one way or the other. Ours is, in this sense, a totalitarian Faith, it is *all* or *nothing*. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” The Lord speaks, through his beloved disciple John, to those who try to live both in this world and in the world to come, saying,

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

It is cold or hot, *all* or *nothing*: “You cannot serve God and mammon.”

I started today’s homily by asking, “why are you here in Church this morning?” It may be that you have had little choice in coming, that you were compelled by parents, by husband or wife, by brother or sister, by children, by heritage, by upbringing, by expectation. It may be that you struggled against this force, or that you have just accepted it but as soon as the force weakens you will prevail against it. *On the other hand*, it may be that your heart’s desire is to be closer to the Lord, that your joy is to receive his Word through the readings—particularly the Gospel—and hymns, through Communion. Ultimately each of us needs to decide for ourself: will we serve God or mammon? Will you spend your life chasing money and possessions which leads to death, or will you chase the one thing needful which leads to life? Only you can decide.

The Gospel is madness according to the world, elsewhere from today’s readings the Apostle Paul describes, “For the word of the cross,” that is the Gospel, the Christian way of living, “is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

I urge you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, take on this Gospel and make it your own. It is madness to the world yet transformative to us. Decide! Choose between God and mammon, between life and death and let that decision inform *all* you do.

The Lord goes on in today’s Gospel reading, he tells each of us how, were we to put our trust in him we will have all we need for our path towards life. He promises,

[D]o not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your

heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

The Gospel is a hard way, a way of ridicule and of madness, and we cannot journey along this way by our own power. Elsewhere, the disciples asked the Lord “Who then can be saved?” The Lord did not reply, “you can, so long as you try!” but pointed that this can only be achieved, can only be accomplished, with the help of God: “With men this is impossible,” Christ tells them, “but with God, all things are possible.”

Talk with those whom you trust – with the clergy and with each other – and find the truth of who Christ is. And then live that truth. Ask questions. Ask lots of questions. Do not live a lukewarm faith but one filled with all your life.

I invite you, I ask you, I implore you, come to Christ! Let him into your hearts so that your entire life may be filled with his love and that your presence here in Church may lead you to a more intimate communion with him and, therefore, with his saints. Read and reread the Sermon on the Mount, and the rest of the Gospels, to discover Christ: his preaching is complete madness according to the world’s standards yet it is the only way to life.

That we may come to knowledge of the Father and become heirs of the promise through his beloved Son by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit and may serve him fully and always. Amen.