

1] According to biblical scholars the book of Deuteronomy, traditionally ascribed to Moses, was probably composed during the reign of the reforming King, Josiah in the 7th century BC. With the power of Assyria in decline, the land of Judah became more confident of its identity and freedom. The book presents a renewed expression of the Torah, the Law of Moses, stressing the uniqueness of the God of Israel as being the only God; it emphasises the mystery of Israel's election as God's chosen people, and at its centre lies the covenant between God and Israel.

2] Chapter thirty, towards the end of the book, summarises this relationship as Moses says, *I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.* [Deut.30:19-20]

3] These blessings, these curses of the Old Testament, are for this life, of course. The righteous life, lived according to the commandments, would ensure peace and prosperity, whereas disobedience and apostasy was to choose punishment and death. But this is *only* for Israel and *only* for this life: the Old Testament does not promise eternal life. This is the material life, blessings in this fallen world; it is not the spiritual life or a way into the kingdom of God that we know.

4] I have often encouraged you to study the Old Testament, to read the stories to your children. We should know these books, as we should certainly know the New Testament. For just as the New is the record of the experience and teachings of the apostles, the Church, the New Israel, so the Old prefigures the preaching of the Gospel and the mystery of the kingdom of God. For as the New is prophesied and prefigured in the Old, the Old itself is fulfilled and completed in the New.

5] For example, the holy prophet, Isaiah, who lived in the century before King Josiah, foresaw the ministry of the Messiah: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.* [Is.61:1] And when Christ was asked by the disciples of John the Forerunner whether He were the chosen one, He replies in Matthew's gospel, *Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* [Matt.11: 4-5]

6] In today's gospel Christ is on his way to fulfil this ministry, demonstrating what it is like to be with the Messiah in this life. He has just returned from the region of the Geresenes, as we heard last week, where a demoniac was delivered and told not to follow the Christ on the road, but to proclaim what God had done for him among his own people, where he had been known previously. In the crowd that presses around Him, Jesus is approached by a distraught father, Jairus, a man responsible for the local synagogue building and arranging its services. He pleads for healing for his daughter who is dying before her time; another one of those lives soon to fall short of its potential, to fail before its time.

7] But we have all been there before have we not? Just as we are pressed for time, urgently trying to get something done, trying to arrive before it's too late, something interrupts, something gets in the way; someone delays us! Before Christ arrives at the house a woman in the crowd breaks the commandments of the Old Testament. You can read it for yourself in Leviticus, chapter 15: 25-30. Under the Old Law she is ritually unclean because of her internal haemorrhage, where blood symbolised life, life in this created world. For one defined as untouchable under the covenant with Israel, how could she dare to do this: the impure touching the pure; the unholy approaching the most holy; the profane blending with the sacred? Moreover, delaying Him as He is on His way to save life? She dares because of her faith: that is all. She is supposed to wait until the issue of blood stops before she can be ritually cleansed and rejoin the

chosen people of God. But something greater than the Law is here, indeed, the very author of the Law is here. It is her faith in Christ that overcomes the Law and the order of events: healing, cleansing, reintegration, are blended into one miraculous sign. As the priest says to the candidate who has just been baptised and chrismated: *You are justified. You are illumined. You are sanctified. You are washed: in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

8] As for Jairus' daughter, the twelve year old child, she joins the list of those restored to *this* life, but for a time only, of course: The son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus of Bethany, and Tabitha and Eutychus raised by the apostles. How strange they must have seemed to their contemporaries from now on; people who had been beyond this life, who had been among the dead, waiting since the beginning, yet before the kingdom was opened to all who would seek it; those timeless dead to whom, as the Troparion says, the Baptist, *proclaimed to those in Hades, the God who appeared in the flesh,* and to whom the Christ Himself preached, as St Peter tells us, *made alive by the Spirit, By whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient,* [1Pet.3:19-20]

9] For us who are in Christ we know that the healing of the woman with the issue of blood is a sign, prefiguring our own cleansing through the redemptive blood of Christ; the raising of the daughter of Jairus is a prophecy of our own resurrection, when we went down into death in this world through Baptism and were raised to a new life. For we too are to live among our contemporaries, but not merely restored to *this* life, to follow in the ways of this fallen world; to return to our old ways and old habits. As St Peter again tells it with a colourful illustration, regarding those who backslide or abandon the way of Christ, *A dog returns to his own vomit,* and, *“a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.* [2 Pet.2:22]

10] As ever in the Christian life, the watchword is vigilance. The spiritual fathers and writers remark again and again on the importance of keeping a sober watch upon the movements of the soul and a guard over the very thoughts we entertain. For when we fail in this Christian life - as we surely do, living amidst the noise and

distraction of *this* world - you can bet your life that it is because we have lost our focus; we have allowed our eyes to wander away from Christ and His kingdom .

11] Let us, therefore, mark this story in today's gospel; let us pay heed to what it says concerning what we are, our attention not so much drawn and dazzled by the miracles, as among the pressing crowd, keen to be amazed and entertained *for a while*. Let us, rather, fix our attention upon living as those who have also been raised from the dead, for whom life is more than gaining the whole world, when our treasure is, in fact, hidden in heaven; when, as St Paul tell us in his letter to the Colossians, *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.* [Col. 3:2-4]

12] You see! Without Christ in this life we are like that woman, slowly bleeding to death, cut off from the source of Life; we are that girl, having perished before our time. So, our battle in this life is still against Sin; we who have been raised, living still among dead souls, have now taken up the Cross. For Sin, as Paul tells us, is the sting of death but that separation from the life in God is now ended, as the blessed apostle says, *The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*