



8.30am Holy Communion, 3rd Sunday of Lent 2021

In the Early Church, for our great, great, great, great grandparents in the family of Faith, Lent was a season final preparation for those to be baptized at Easter. A couple of years of teaching and initiation would culminate in the life-changing once-in-a-life-time event of Baptism.

Baptism would only happen at Easter in those days. Because in Baptism we are incorporated into Christ and the Paschal Mystery. We die with Him (buried under the water) and we rise with Him, to share in His risen and eternal life. These are the realities of Easter.

In Baptism we meet death, and Christ shares His victory with us. We become children of an unquenchable light, inheritors of heaven, citizens and subjects of a Greater Kingdom. This is the reality that inspires St Paul's passion in today's first Epistle: 'walk as children of light'. We have not earned God's love, we cannot win our way into heaven – all these things have already been showered upon us, we simply need to live an accurate and faithful reflection of them.

The members of the early Church were noticeably different from their pagan contemporaries – as St Paul encouraged. In charity, fellowship, self-sacrifice and martyrdom, in a lack of relying on earthly wealth, in how they spent their time and energy.

These Saints walked the walk, not perfectly (or presumably St Paul would not have written so emphatically), but by God's grace.

They knew that they had *already* died in Baptism. So whatever this life is for, or whenever we will meet death again (be it in a hospital bed or stuck to the front of the Number 18 bus), it is *different* now. Because of what Jesus did, and has done in and for us, life is different. It has a different meaning and purpose and colour. St Paul tells us, that that difference should shine through in us, in who we are and how we live.

And it's not easy. In today's Gospel Jesus speaks of the devil taking possession of us when we don't keep up our energy, when we drift in the spiritual doldrums. Even if in the past we've made good progress in spiritual maturity, well that doesn't mean a great deal if its only in the past. If our sense of baptismal calling and life in Christ is only a memory, or has gone lukewarm, or ceased to have vitality in it – then today's Gospel urges is to strap on a spiritual defibrillator and bring it to life.

As the centuries unfolded, Lent became a time of Spiritual preparation for all Christians, not just those to be Baptized. And all Christians reaffirm our Baptismal calling in the promises and creed recited at the Eucharist on Easter Day. So, in the company of the saints who trod this way before us, who knew its trials (steps forward, and steps backward), and who knew – as we do – the deep truth of our calling and the greatness of our hope, let us keep going forward walking the walk.