

Easter 7 Sun (B)

12<sup>th</sup> May 2024

“One ... Truth ... Joy”

Acts 1: *a witness to the resurrection ... Matthias*

1Jn 4: *we can know that we are living in him because He lets us share His Spirit*

Jn 17: 11–19: *As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world ...*

It's the feast of *St Pancras* today. Not the station nearby, of course, but the *saint*, about whom we know very little other than that he was a teenage martyr in about 300AD in Rome, in one of those waves of persecution against Christians in that era. His burial was in some catacombs just above the city on the Janiculum Hill, where the Carmelite friars now have a basilica named S. Pancrazio. Why did St Pancras end up giving his name to this corner of London? Well, it's because, his being a Roman martyr, when the Benedictine monks with St Augustine were sent from Rome by Pope St Gregory the Great in 597AD, they came with relics, including some of this boy-martyr, St Pancras: they built a first church in Canterbury dedicated to him; and later, when they established a diocese in London, an early site of worship here was also called St Pancras: it's probably where Old St Pancras Church lies today, surrounded by the cemetery on the N. side of St

Pancras station. It's a very beautiful and peaceful spot, and however old it exactly is, there's no doubt it goes back at least to the Anglo-Saxon period. Proving that, once again, our very lives in London are built on *Christian* foundations, and the faith of many valiant lovers and saints of Jesus Christ!

We have another saint to ponder today, too, in the first reading, our ongoing Eastertide excerpts from the *Acts of the Apostles*, those heroic deeds of the early Church as it exploded on to the scene after Pentecost in Jerusalem. *St Matthias* — it's his feastday on Tuesday — was the one chosen, as we heard, to replace Judas Iscariot, and to make up the number of the Twelve Apostles. What is important is the job description of the new Apostle they're looking for; it's quite specific: “*one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.*” Above all, whatever else he can testify to, it

emphasizes, he *has to be* “*a witness to the Resurrection*” — this is the key! This is and always will be the centre-piece of Christian testimony, and indeed of world history: the dark grave of death burst open, with Jesus risen and glorified shedding light on all humanity. Matthias took his allotted place with the Eleven to proclaim this life-changing truth, and in due course, as most of the Apostles, to shed his blood for Jesus Christ, *a witness to the Resurrection* in the ultimate sacrifice of his earthly life, given as an offering with the certain knowledge of eternity in heaven. No wonder we give pride of place, in the Christian calendar, to this Easter season — it will always be the crux of human living ... and dying ... and rising.

Apart from the fact that it's also ‘examtide,’ yet we have a great love, surely, for the beauty of Eastertide! This is, now, already, the *penultimate* Sunday of the Easter season, falling between the great feast of the Ascension of Jesus last Thursday and the great feast of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, next Sunday. Today we are blessed again with powerful and moving passages from the

*Acts of the Apostles* and from the *Gospel of St John*. (Do take home, as I always encourage you, your Mass sheets and return to re-read the Word of God at some point in the coming days.)

Chapter 17 of St John, from which our Gospel text comes, is in its entirety a *prayer*, a prayer offered by Jesus to the Father, sometimes called the ‘High Priestly Prayer.’ Our Lord prays for, and consecrates, His Apostles; and then prays also for those to whom those consecrated Apostles will be sent: the people of the Church to come. Effectively, this is the prayer of ‘ordination’ of the Apostles as the Church’s first ‘bishops.’ We always think of the Last Supper — at which this High Priestly Prayer of Jesus is set, by St John — as the moment of institution of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, of the sacred priesthood. United, then, in the mind of the Son of God at the Last Supper is the Passion & the Resurrection, the Mass, and the Priesthood. Out of this passion of grace’s outpouring from the person of the Son of God on Holy Thursday will, duly, come the greater fire of Pentecost, completing the

consecration of the Church's mission.

Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer seems to have 3 great emphases: that "they be *one*", that they be "in the *truth*", and that "*joy* may be in them." This is His solemn prayer for the 11 Apostles (plus Matthias who will duly be added to their number); but it is also His prayer for those who will come to believe in Him. *One ... Truth ... Joy ...* These are the hallmarks of Jesus's holy people. Aren't we so dearly in need of those gifts — gifts Jesus bestows, gifts of the Spirit He gives? — to be *united*, ... to know and live the *truth* ... to be filled with a deep and lasting *joy*? The world cannot offer these. And the devil sows the very opposite, doesn't he? — seeds of disunity, lies, despair ... But Jesus (His Spirit, His Church, His grace) has the infallible antidote to that: real gifts of *unity, truth & joy* ... We live together, as Christ's one holy people, religiously determined to be *One* family, a sign of the much-needed unity of all mankind. We know that the Son of God, alone of all sources of wisdom in the world, has full access to the *Truth*, and took flesh to share that truth

with us, without confusion or dilution. And then there is *Joy*: a repeated theme of these Last-Supper discourses in John; joy, real, deep, and lasting, penetrating to dissolve even the most stubborn sadness or disappointment that life throws up, "*a joy that no-one can take away from you.*" *Oneness ... Truth ... and Joy* — gifts of Christ our Lord.

As we pray through these sacred days from Ascension to Pentecost let's ask that these great gifts be upon us, focussing our minds and hearts on what is essential for a holy and contented life. The Lord has given us this beautiful world of nature that we should cultivate and care for; and the beautiful world of life-in-the-Spirit that we should care for even more, the world of the Church, which cultivates the *unity* of mankind, teaches us the *truth*, and offers us everlasting *joy*. Listen again to Jesus's prayer for us, and let it echo in your hearts as you prepare for Pentecost: "*keep those You have given Me true to Your Name ... They do not belong to the world ... Protect them from the evil one ... Consecrate them in the truth.*" Amen.