

Homily – Sunday 14th January 2018 – 6 pm

I don't know whether you are a fan of social media, but I'm sure we all recognise that it can be both a blessing and a curse. This week I have found that a number of the people I follow on Twitter – and most especially clergy people, I should quickly add – have been tweeting quotes from scripture, prayers of encouragement, or desperation, or petition. More so than usual.

Sometimes I find these words helpful – they remind me to pray, to reconnect. But sometimes – and perhaps it is simply because of the volume in the last week or so – I find myself questioning whether I am just too involved with the world. Moving from one challenging pastoral conversation to another, meetings with other clergy, or grappling with the practicalities of daily life in the parish office, I can find myself wondering whether I am too bogged down in the realities of the world to raise my eyes to the Heavens.

As it happens, once I stop and reflect, I realise that being part of the world is exactly what I'm called to. That the challenges we all face are real and can't be easily assuaged by platitudes. Mostly I don't have the answers – all I have to offer is a willingness to keep on being there, keep on listening, keep on praying and keep on caring. Being in the world, mixed up in its messiness and complication matters.

And yet there is something about this evening's readings that I love because they do actually lift me above those things which concern me. For just a little while in this beautiful, peaceful service of Choral Evensong, these words offer a vision of something above and beyond. I find great inspiration in the words of Isaiah, speaking of an end to violence; of peace and righteousness; of a life centred on God. And what about those wonderful words in Hebrews, speaking of seizing the hope that is set before us?

The challenges of life are ever present. We cannot escape the images in newspapers, online and on our television screens that remind us that the world is *not* at peace; that people *do* go hungry; that there is injustice and pain.

But that is not the whole story. The world is also full of kindness and generosity; warmth and encouragement; stories of hope and possibility.

And our readings this evening remind us of yet another layer. That our faith offers a vision of an eternity which can see beyond the pain and violence that can seem so prevalent, towards a kingdom in which peace and justice reign. Day to day this may feel rather like a pipe dream. But it is the hope that is set before us. And sometimes it is worth taking time to allow ourselves to be lifted above the here and now towards the glory of God's kingdom in order to set our daily challenges into a different kind of perspective.

Amen