

Sunday 12A. 21.6.26

There's a line in the first letter of John which may be helpful here :

*« If we say, « we are without sin » we deceive ourselves »*

If we look at the world today it's obvious that human beings are imperfect, that even those who profess to be Christians often get it wrong, do wrong to others. The biblical story of Adam and Eve is telling us the same in terms of fable, a story to explain how we have within us this mix of good and evil, or better the capacity for good and the capacity for evil, for falling away from good. And the Law eventually makes no difference, indeed it seems to make things worse because many may think they are good and doing good, by keeping the Law but in fact are just as bad as ever, sometimes indeed using the cover of the Law to hide their lack of love – it becomes an exercise instead in power play. It can become an exercise in deceit which the deceivers themselves are blind to – and they need prophets like Jeremiah or Paul to speak truth to their abuse of power. So deeply ingrained in us and in society in general is this blindness to our own sin or capacity for sin, that one can expect to become deeply unpopular, even criminalised, for revealing it – think of the climate protesters now with the full force of the establishment against them. Think also of how the church has treated supposed heretics in the past and been adept at hiding its own abuses . No-one can stand apart from this dynamic, this tussle within each one of us between good and evil – to pretend one is holier than thou, it's intrinsic to our nature and so when accusations fly we need to be continually aware of our own frailty too so that we may have compassion for both victim and victor, those that is who have been in the position of power. Our model for this is always Christ who enters this primal struggle to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, what the Law as exercised by us has failed to do. Something, someone, more is needed who can not only show us but give us a way that puts evil in its place once and for all, a contest still to be fought out in our lives but now with a helper close at hand, a victor even though a victim of sin himself, a victim of our sin that is, that has nailed him to a cross. His innocence through trial and persecution has won for us the possibility of salvation. Yes there is another way, it doesn't abolish the Law but enables its fulfillment. We may feel desperately at odds with ourselves and with others but do not be afraid God has not abandoned us. In Christ we see that God is love – as the first letter of John also says – this is not an easy realisation, it's taken some time to be put so plainly in the NT texts but there it is to give us hope and courage as we continue to battle with both our interior and exterior demons.

We've been given an icon. recently of a mother and child, yes that mother and child : Mary and Jesus, but it's a damaged icon, no, not damaged since it was written or painted

but painted as a damaged icon – the state we were in from our very beginnings but now we can see as overlain, transfigured, transformed by two figures of innocence telling us that that original state doesn't have to last forever, that the mother and child in each of us can be reconciled, that the father and child in each of us can be reconciled, that the mother and father and child that represent all of us in our relations to one another can be reconciled. So, as well as being able to say « *If we say we are without sin we deceive ourselves* » we can also say :

« *if we say we are without love we deceive ourselves* »

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour