

St Peter's, Ealing

Sunday 22nd October 2017

Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity – Baptism of Olivia Isabel Eleanor Poots

St Paul is always keen to encourage new Christians and the Christians in Thessalonica are probably very new. This letter was probably written by Paul, a few months after his initial visit around 50-51 AD. It is thought to be the earliest surviving Christian text and therefore is very precious. Paul is writing to new converts, encouraging them in the way of the faith. He does this by reminding them of what he taught them; that they were chosen by God, blessed by the Holy Spirit having received the gospel and called to be imitators of Christ, becoming examples of the faith to others. Paul witnesses to the fact that the faithfulness of the Thessalonians is being reported throughout the region. Their example of faithful living, love and service has become known and through it others are hearing of the good news of Jesus.

This is simple yet powerful stuff, written not twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul is exhorting these new Christians, who have rejected the idols they had been following, and were now experiencing persecution, to be faithful and truthful to the word they have received. The faith into which they have been baptised.

These words of Paul are also written for us. His exhortation to the Thessalonians is for all Christians. His words come down to us through the centuries clearly and simply. We are encouraged through our baptism, through our reception of the good news of Jesus Christ to be imitators of the Lord. To live as examples of the gospel that others may see in us the love of God and the fact that we are chosen. We might ask how we can do this? Jesus replies, by giving to God that which belongs to God. And what belongs to God? We do, we belong to God as he has chosen us and set us aside. The gospel is ours, the gospel that exhorts us to love one another as Christ loves us, wholly and unconditionally. Giving everything and withholding nothing.

Phew! Suddenly this becomes a whole huge new, impossible ball game; except for one thing, we don't have to do this alone. Again, returning to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians where Paul reminds them and all his readers that we can only do this in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Olivia is brought to baptism this is the life we baptise her into. She is rather young to grasp this admittedly. But this is the commission given her. Her parents and her church have a duty to teach her and help her to understand this commission. To know that she is chosen by God, she is called by God to the life of faith. That in her life of faith she is to be an example of the gospel, she is to live the good news of Jesus. This seems onerous but it should be joyful. Done in the power of the Holy Spirit, guided and supported by God she and all of us are to live this life.

This is why we baptise in the Parish Mass. We, Olivia's brothers and sisters in the Lord, are already travelling along this road of faith. We have the responsibility to help and encourage her, to support her sister Sophia and her parents in their duty to help Olivia grow in the faith. Baptism is not something we do just because it is nice and pretty. We acknowledge today that we, along with Olivia are chosen by God. We are chosen and have responded positively to his call upon our lives. As this is ours so we must help Olivia and all who are baptised to travel that same road, to know and love the Lord Jesus who is our Saviour.

And if you are not sure, if you are unclear, if you feel less chosen, use this time, this service to rededicate yourselves to Jesus, to our Lord and Saviour. Take this time to reaffirm your chosen status and choose the Lord for your own so that you too may live the gospel of God, the good news of salvation, in the power of the Holy Spirit, renewed in the love of God.