

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



Exploring the 'Agnus Dei'

Dear Friends,

As we come towards, and experience, Passiontide and Easter, let us seek to recognise afresh the wonder of God's saving love in Jesus. Taking the time to follow through the events of Holy Week and Easter is key to re-affirming and re-energising our faith in the Lamb of God who died for us, like those who enter the way of faith through Lenten preparation leading to Baptism to New Life in Christ at Easter.

The Holy Eucharist includes a beautiful section immediately before sharing in communion called the Agnus Dei. The words "*O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us/ grant us peace*" are always said or sung, sometimes in Latin, as the last request before coming forward to receive the bread and wine which speak of taking to ourselves the wonder of Christ's sacrifice.

"*Lamb of God*" refers to Jesus, and of course, it is not a literal description – as with many other religious words and phrases. It speaks of a man from the Jewish tradition of faith who is among us to lay his life down for others, a willing sacrifice sent by God. The Temple worship included animal sacrifices, which frankly does not sound very appealing, but it was seen as a way of recognising that sin is very serious, moving us away from God's ways, and the taking of an animal's life was seen as removing the sins of the person offering the sacrifice. It was also offering part of one's possessions to God in gratitude and love, which is also an important aspect of worship and devotion. Jesus is understood to be the

Lamb who is a willing sacrifice because of our human need of forgiveness.

The "*taking away the sin of the world*" is the acceptance that Jesus has dealt with our sinful human state once and for all. We see Jesus as the sinless one who comes into this sinful world to save us. He did it for us, out of divine love. Our sins are laid on him as he goes to the cross, a victim of our sinful allowing of injustice and violence, and his death is a sacrifice which has changed the relationship between God and humans. Like the lambs, he takes the punishment for sin which should be ours and we are forgiven. We are, of course, often good at recognising the sins of the world, placed before us daily in the news and often encountered in local situations, but that sin is present in our own lives, and it was for us that he died.

"*Have mercy on us*" is – or should be - a cry from the heart. Once we realise our own flawed human nature, which we share with all other people, we know that we cannot stand before God in our own strength and be self-confident about how we live. We know that we can do much that is pleasing to God and we are not called to despise ourselves or others, but we must ask for mercy from our own failings which are part of our human condition. And the wonderful truth is that we are given mercy, loved and accepted, through Jesus coming among us as a sacrifice to deal with our sin.

"*Grant us peace*", the Agnus Dei concludes. Divine mercy brings us peace, a deep peace which speaks of the washing away of our sinfulness and a way of life in harmony with God. The world is not a peaceful place, however hard we try, nor is it loving. All too often we fail despite

our technological advances and improvement philosophies. Peace comes from the knowledge of the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin. There is a form of peace in the death of Jesus, that his sacrifice is complete, there is no more pain. The cross is the place where the ultimate and final sacrifice is made. Yet true peace comes from knowing that Jesus was raised by God to new life on Easter Day, and that as sin has been forgiven, we have the glory of eternal life in God's presence. Peace is about feeling secure in God's eternal love, and day by day we can return to rejoice in that wonderful truth and to know that peace which – among all the world's tragedies and uncertainties – has been won for us by Jesus, the Lamb of God.

I wish you a valuable Lent and a Joyful Easter

Love, Jo

Thy Kingdom Come 30th May – 9th June

Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement, which invites Christians around the world to pray between Ascension and Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus Christ.

What started out as an invitation from the Archbishops' of Canterbury and York in 2016 to the Church of England has grown into an international and ecumenical call to prayer.

The hope is that:

- people will commit to pray with God's world-wide family – as a church, individually or as a family;
- churches will hold prayer events, such as 24-7 prayer, prayer stations and prayer walks, across the UK and in other parts of the world;
- people will be empowered through prayer by the Holy Spirit, finding new confidence to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

More information on Thy Kingdom Come:
www.thykingdomcome.global/



Thy Kingdom Come Beacon Celebration 2019 Sunday 9th June 2019 – 6.30pm at St Albans Cathedral

Come and join Christians from across the region at the Thy Kingdom Come Beacon Celebration 2019 to worship and pray together that people will come to know Jesus Christ. All are welcome.

Bishop Alan will welcome everyone to the Cathedral and a group from across the churches have been meeting to plan this special event. The programme is still being finalised but special guests include:

- Rev. Dr Paul Goodliff, General Secretary for Churches Together in England
- His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London,
- Bishop Paul MacAleenen, Roman Catholic Bishop of Westminster
- Rev. Abigail Thompson, Sub Dean of St Albans Cathedral
- With music from Soul Survivor

More information on Diocesan events:
www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/thy-kingdom-come/

and for Churches Together at
www.ctherts.org.uk/events/thy-kingdom-come