

Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, St. Mary's Wimbledon, Sunday 29th May, 2016, 1st Sunday after Trinity.

"*To know God better and to make God better know*" is the Mission Statement of Ottery St Mary Parish Church which I visited on my way home from holiday. How do we deepen our faith and how do we share that faith with other people? In the letter to the Hebrews Chapter 11: 1, we read:

"... Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen..."

Our Gospel passage today tells us of the faith in Jesus of a Roman Centurion whose slave was ill and close to death. The Centurion's humility is reflected in his words to Jesus,

... "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am unworthy to have you come under my roof..."

A version of these words is used as an invitation to communion in many churches today:

... "I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed..."

The Centurion had such faith in Jesus that he sent another message by his friends to Jesus say *"... Speak the word only and let my servant be healed..."*

The slave is healed.

Jesus is astounded by the Centurion's faith and remarks *"... I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith..."*

During the course of my holiday I visited many different places of worship, small churches or chapels and also Truro Cathedral. In these places of course the record of witness to the Christian faith was visible.

But I also visited a number of stately homes and Gardens which have their own story to tell of joys and sorrows, life and death and faith in the future.

One such place was Cotehele on the River Tame with its beautiful gardens. But Cotehele was a sad reminder of the sacrifices made in war with the death of Piers Richard aged 26, the heir presumptive. With the decline in the family fortunes in 1947 Cotehele was transferred to the National Trust via the Treasury. Now the beauty of this place is shared with thousands of people and the history of the Edgcumbe family with their joys and sorrows too.

Other stately homes I visited were Lanhydrock House near Bodmin in Cornwall and Stourhead in Somerset. The Agare-Roberts family of Lanhydrock were not immune from tragedy either as their son Tommy died following their battle of Loos in 1915. Again this house was donated to the National Trust in 1953. Once again we can share in the families joys and sorrows as we visit the house and gardens.

Stourhead in Somerset was described as "a living work of art" when it first opened 250 years ago. This world-famous landscape garden surrounds a glistening lake, to quote the National Trust Handbook. Again the family were not immune to tragedy as Harry Hoare was shot in 1917 at the Battle of El Mughan in Palestine. Stourhead has been under the

management of the National Trust since 1946 and this enables thousands of people to appreciate the beauty of the place.

Another Garden I visited which was quite different was the Lost Gardens of Heligan. 100 years ago Heligan Gardens changed dramatically from a vibrant Edwardian Garden at the peak of its development, both technically and horticulturally to a shadow of its former glory; tended by a third of its workforce for essential duties only... and increasingly peopled by ghosts.

In 1914 there were 23 men on the payroll of outdoor staff but by the end of 1917 only 8 men. Again many of these men died during the First World War. In the 1990's Garden restoration began in the name of Jack Tremain's outdoor staff who gave their lives in the 1st World War.

Why am I telling you about these stately homes and Gardens? Does it seem as if I am giving publicity to the National Trust?

It occurred to me as I visited these beautiful houses and gardens that money did not prevent families and the staff they employed from suffering extreme hardship and death. Wealth did not prevent sons being killed in battle. Parents mourned their sons, wives or fiancés mourned for their men who would not return.

But all these families had the faith to carry on despite their sorrows and heartache. Some families may have had a deep religious faith that kept them going; others may have had faith in the future and were determined to keep going despite the tragic losses they had experienced. Those who came after those who died were determined that there would be a memorial to their lives.

It is our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ that keeps us going and strengthens us in times of darkness. We may not know how we are going to face the future but we are not on our own. St Paul in his Letter to the Galatians is very clear from whom he receives his strength and authority. We read in Galatians 1:11 – 12;

"...For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the Gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ..."

We especially receive strength from our Lord Jesus Christ in this Sacrament of Holy Communion when Jesus is made present with us in the bread and wine.

Let us pray that as we go out into the world this week we might follow the mission statement of Ottery St Mary Parish; "... To know God better and to make God better known..." Amen.