

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> December 2020.**

**St John**

**10 Parish Mass (live streamed)**

A friend of mine moved to his first parish.

It was a tin mining community in Cornwall.

And like all new vicars, especially young ones, he wanted to make some changes.

One of the things he decided to do was to revamp the evening service.

In this service there would be lots of modern hymns,

I know this to be the case because I attended one and I was given a tambourine at the door.

The only time I have ever played a tambourine in church.

But the most innovative idea was that members of the congregation would give an address.

They would be invited to talk about their faith and what they believed.

However, the idea which seemed good did not last very long.

Why not? You may be thinking.

The reason was that my friend found that although they did not realise it, some of the people had heretical ideas.

My friend, who was a bit naïve, said, "I never realised it but people have picked up all sorts of strange ideas which are not what the bible or the church teaches"

And a lot of these misconceptions concerned the Trinity, especially the relation between God the Father and Jesus.

Heresies were common in the early church.

These heresies particularly concerned the person of Jesus.

Who exactly was he?

That is what followers of the way reflected on after his death.

There were some who argued that Jesus was a holy godly man, but was not divine.

He was not part of the godhead.

He was man not God.

This of course is a view widely held by the population today.

Many people think Jesus was an inspired holy man, but was not God.

The opposite heresy was that Jesus was God in disguise.

He looked like a human, acted like a human, but he was God in a human shell.

A bit like those science fiction films where people look like humans but are not.

There were many variations of these heresies.

For example that Jesus was in some way adopted by God after his birth. Some said this adoption took place at Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan.

Today is the feast day of St John.

John the follower of Jesus, the beloved apostle, the writer of the fourth Gospel and three New Testament letters.

And one of the reasons that John wrote his Gospel and letters was to counter these heresies about Jesus.

John at the start of his Gospel describes Jesus as the word, the way God communicates with us.

He says, "The word was with God and the word was God."

So he quickly establishes that Jesus was divine.

But then he goes on to say. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth"

So John is stating that the spirit of God became flesh.

He is strongly making the point right at the start of the Gospel that Jesus was God and man, spirit and flesh.

We see the spiritual side of Jesus in the Gospel.

He prays to his Father.

He teaches us to pray through the Lord's Prayer.

But he also concerned himself with his fellow human beings.

He mixed with and cared for those on the fringes of society.

And this is a balance we should have.

Developing our spiritual side through prayer and the sacraments, but caring for our fellow human beings.

Getting involved in the world and its problems.

John writes. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods but sees a brother or sister in need but refuses help?"

So John is adamant that Jesus is God and man, spirit and flesh.

If we had not been celebrating John, we would have been celebrating the feast of the Holy Family.

John's Gospel gives us a theological explanation of Jesus being God and man.

St Luke makes the same point through a story, the story of the holy family.

In this story the angel greets Mary tells her she is to bear a child and says, "He will be great and named the son of the most high."

Later the angel says to the shepherds,

I bring you great news of great joy for all the people, to you is born this day in the city of David a saviour who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

So in the story we have the angels, the messengers of God announcing that this is a son of God.

Stressing the divine nature of Jesus.

But Luke then gives us the down to earth side of the story, concentrating on the Holy Family where Jesus is born of Mary in a cattle shed and laid in a manger, a feeding trough.

He is a human baby in the stable with his mother and stepfather.

He was born one of us.

Someone who can identify with humanity.

So the message of John and the message of Luke come together.

Jesus is divine, the Son of God.

Jesus was a human baby, just like we were.

Spirit and flesh are united.

God and man are united.

John says:

“No one has ever seen God. It is Jesus, the only son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

This is the message of the Christmas season given to us by St John who we honour today.