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The Fourth Sunday after Easter

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THE FIFTH WORD / A HOUSE FOR THE LORD

THE FIFTH WORD

A Thirst for God

On this fifth Sunday of the Lord's Resurrection – the fourth after Easter – we hear the Father's answer to his Son's Fifth Word from the Cross. "Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was a set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth". The terrible raging thirst of the cross is real enough, in its own way a second cry of dereliction; but in it we see Jesus' resolute determination to fulfill the will of God for our salvation, to do all that God has revealed beforehand by the prophets, "that the scripture might be fulfilled". And thus his thirst which is a sign of his suffering for sake of the kingdom, is also a sign of his desire for God, God's kingdom, and righteousness. "My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God; when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?" In his resurrection, he shares that thirst with us, by the gift of his Spirit, sent into the world to awaken a complacent world to its sin, to display the righteousness of Christ, and to guide a faithful church into all truth revealed in Christ. It is this truth for which we must thirst, and a thirst which can only be slaked by his word, not by the false passions of fallen world. "O sing unto the Lord a new song, alleluia: for the Lord hath done marvelous things, alleluia: in the sigh of the nations he hath showed his righteousness, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia" (Introit. Psalm 98. Cantate domino).

A HOUSE FOR THE LORD

Since Maundy Thursday we have been settling back into the renovated Chapel, while awaiting the final touches to be completed. Inevitably we have discovered a few unexpected problems, none of them insuperable. But in my own observation, and as many of you have told me, the room now has more architectural character, warmth, intimacy, acoustic quality and spaciousness than it had before. As a result, it is better fitted to do what a House of the Lord is meant to do: to teach us and to train us how the Lord dwells among us "full of grace and truth", and how we may dwell in him.

In particular, there are two comple-mentary aspects of this indwelling

which the Chapel is teaching us. Both of them have to do with the Lord's Body, which the Chapel houses.

The first has to do with the Sacrament of the Lord's Body. Since Father Ralston had the aumbry made (the cupboard in the wall next the altar) for the reservation of the Sacrament, and honoured it with a hanging light, it has been the custom of Saint John's clergy to acknowledge the sacrament with a genuflection (kneeling momentarily on the right knee), when entering, leaving, approaching, or crossing in front of the altar and aumbry. It would be fitting if the congregation also learned to reverence the Sacrament in this way, or by a bow. In such matters, of course, there is fine balance to be maintained. Ceremonial acts should never be fussy, nor should we attach exaggerated importance to them – that is majoring in the minors. They are simply courtesies which teach us habits of reverence.

Along with a new awareness of the Sacramental Body, the chapel also teaches us a new awareness of the Ecclesial Body, the faithful assembled in his Name. This arises out of the choir-wise configuration of the pews we have adopted, at least for the time being, and out of the intimate scale of the room. It is easy in a large church to remain isolated, a purely private individual saying his prayers, without much awareness of the unity we have with one another in common prayer. Thrown together as a choir, however, we must learn to sing together, and that means listening to one another, so that our notes and rhythms may blend in a pleasing unity. We shall be singing more in the chapel, now that the acoustic is more favourable to singing; but even when we are speaking we need to be singing – working together, in the work of common prayer, each taking our respective part within the whole. That is a task of learning to be what we are: "very members incorporate of his mystical body". "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:15, 16). GGD

The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar

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