

From the Fathers

'Let us remember one another in concord and unanimity. Let us on both sides [of death] always pray for one another. Let us relieve burdens and afflictions by mutual love, that if one of us, by the swiftness of divine condescension, shall go hence first, our love may continue in the presence of the Lord, and our prayers for our brethren and sisters not cease in the presence of the Father's mercy.' From 'Letter 56', Cyprian of Carthage c. 200-258, bishop, theologian

O Sing Unto the Lord

First published in 1906 and subsequently included in many hymn books, 'O God of earth and altar' was written by the English poet G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936). The hymn is a powerful call for the moral regeneration of our country, calling to mind the Old Testament Prophecies and Psalms. It is, however, free from biblical references, although the language used by Chesterton is deliberately archaic, perhaps to illustrate a contrast between the values of old and current ills. The hymn is densely written, using figurative language: drawing attention to the political and social evils within society, including materialism ('walls of gold'), class distinction ('swords of scorn'), and corruption. The third verse uses the medieval concept of the three estates, prince (rulers), priest (clergy) and thrall ('slaves' or, in this case, workers) to pray for the unity of our nation ('a living tether'). The final lines are a vision of a nation rising in anger at itself ('in ire and exaltation'), imbued with a living faith, and wielding 'a single sword' to right social evils. Although in a similar vein to Parry's Jerusalem, this is a far more direct expression of the relationship between life as a Christian and political and social justice. It was sung at the reburial in Leicester Cathedral in March 2015 of King Richard III, whose body was discovered after five hundred years, as an appropriate call to national rededication. The hymn is most frequently set to *King's Lynn*, an English folk tune collected by Vaughan Williams and first included in *The English Hymnal*.

Collect

Almighty and merciful God, by whose gift your faithful offer you right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray, that we may hasten without stumbling to receive the things you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

5th November 2023

Fourth Sunday before Advent

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time



In today's Gospel the Lord Jesus speaks of the pride of the Pharisees. They do not 'practice what they preach'; they enjoy too much the acclaim of the populace for their piety and strict law-observance. Yet, the Lord also recognises that they 'sit in the seat of Moses'. By this phrase he means they speak with authority and interpret the Law of God given to Moses rightly. This gives us a significant insight into the relationship between the Lord and the Pharisees. The Gospels are awash with clashes and controversies concerning the Pharisees. They often oppose the Lord's ministry. What we are being given here in an insight into the family dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees. It is clear that the Lord is very close to those whom he also criticises. Indeed, he may well have been a Pharisee at one time in his earlier life. But clearly a point of departure has been reached by the failure of the Pharisees to 'practice what they preach'. They stressed strict and particular observance of the Law of Moses. Indeed, what they promoted was the kind of Law observance required of the priestly order. But in this worthy desire to see manifested the holiness of all Israel, they had failed to manifest the interior life of the Law. Law observance had indeed its outward expression, but the Law also requires a transformation of heart, of mind, outlook. It demanded a total orientation toward God (of which the externals of holiness are a necessary sign). The Pharisees fell short in the cultivation of humility. Christ calls us to this very thing. He summons us to integrate Law with Living. Holiness is precisely that - 'whole-ness' - meaning an integration of faith with life, living with believing, acting with willing.

Today's Gospel: St. Matthew 23:1-12