

Faith, Hope and Charity – Trinity 16 2012  
 Jeremiah 11<sup>18-20</sup> p770, Ps 54, James 3<sup>13-4<sup>8a</sup></sup> p1215, Mark 9<sup>30-37</sup> p1013

*From whence come wars and fightings among you?* It's a question we may well ask in the light of last week's news, or indeed of the news most weeks. *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* We've had the shooting and killing of two women police officers in Manchester, apparently the culmination of a long running feud between rival gangs in which several people have already been murdered, using guns and grenades. Grenades on the streets of an English city in peacetime! What is the world coming to?

There have also been the killings of young soldiers in Afghanistan, so called green on blue attacks in which men who are or who are disguised as Afghan police officers launch attacks on NATO forces. And the brutal civil war continues in Syria. *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* asks St James. Horrifyingly, James is talking about the Church he is writing to, but the problem he identifies in that Church is that it is living as if the Church were no different from the world. James' Church is living by the wisdom which is *earthly, sensual, devilish*, not the wisdom that *descendeth from above...* *The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.* James' Church has forgotten that *the friendship of the world is enmity with God.*

*From whence come wars and fightings among you?* They arise in the Church James is writing to because that Church is too much like the world. So, it seems to me that it is justifiable to ask the same question of the world, *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* I imagine God looking down from Heaven at the human race throughout human history and all over the world and asking *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* Remember that this is the world which God so loved that He sent His only-begotten Son – a world so far from God that *the friendship of the world is enmity with God* and that yet *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

*From whence come wars and fightings among you?* I am sure that it is legitimate to answer this question for the world in the same terms as James answers it for the Church. Remember James' Church has gone wrong because it has become too much like the world.

James says that people fight because of their desires. People fight to get what they want. And what do people in the world want? What are people prepared to kill for? Or to lie for? Or to cheat for? Or to do a bad turn to a friend or colleague for? Or to be unfaithful for? Or to neglect the needs of other people for? What do people want out of life?

James says that our desires remain unsatisfied because we don't ask God for what we need. If we trusted God to meet our needs, we wouldn't feel the need to assert ourselves at the expense of other people and their well-being. We might ask but we don't receive. And why don't we receive? says James. Because we ask for the wrong things. We ask for the things which we imagine will satisfy our desires and what do people desire? I'll let you answer that

one for yourselves. What do people desire? What do we desire? What do other people desire? And what are people prepared to do to gain their desires? *From whence come wars and fightings among you?*

The answer is that wars and fightings come from the so-called wisdom of this world, basically the belief that you've got to look after number one, to satisfy the insatiable with the unsatisfactory. Conversely, *The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.* This is the wisdom which comes down from God.

This is the wisdom of faith. Wise people are good people. They have good desires. They live for a purpose. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* They trust God to meet their needs. They pray in the knowledge that God knows what we need before we ask Him. They are thus set free to *seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness... All these things shall be added unto you.*

This is the wisdom of hope. If we trust that love really does make the world go round then we believe that lives lived in accordance with God's twin commandments to love Him with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves will be vindicated. The Kingdom of Heaven will come, indeed *the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, or among you* – depending on how you translate the Greek. God is more powerful than the devil. Good is more powerful than evil. Life is more powerful than death. Selflessness beats selfishness every time. So this week's Gospel reading and last week's as well.

It is also the wisdom of charity or love or whatever word we seek to use as an icon of the sacred mystery of God's true nature. St Paul teaches us that *Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* The wisdom which comes from above is made flesh in Jesus Christ. The power of God is declared in that He emptied Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. And He shows the world the Way, the Way of Wisdom, the Way of faith, hope and self-sacrificing love, the Way to glory, the Way of eternal life. *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.*

The answer to the world's problems is Christ, the imitation of Christ, to take up our crosses and to follow Him. This is the path of peace. The Church is called out of the world to be the Body of Christ, to epitomise the divine wisdom. That is why it is so terrible that James' Church had become so little different from the world. The Church's calling is to serve the world by modelling Christ for the world. The Church is called to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world, but she cannot do so by mere words. The Church must become the Word. She must model Christ. She must incarnate *the wisdom that is from above(which) is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness (which) is sown in peace of them that make peace.* This is our calling, to embody the Wisdom of God individually as Christians in our daily lives and corporately as His Church *militant here in earth.*