

For I Know Whom I Have Believed – Sexagesima 2017

Genesis 1 v1 – 2v3 p3, Psalm 136, Romans 8 vv 18-25 p1135, Matthew 6 vv 25—34 p971

For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against the day. That's II Timothy 1¹² if any of you didn't recognise it straightaway. Theology is a dirty word. Many Christians regard Theology as something boring and irrelevant. Some suspect that Theology is an assault on the simple faith of ordinary believers. Unbelievers associate Theology with Islamic theocrats who seek to impose a new world order by acts of terrorism and blood-stained jihad.

In reality, Theology is talking about God. It is best understood as faith seeking understanding. Theology is faith seeking understanding. *I know whom I have believed.*

Who is this God to Whom we commit ourselves unreservedly? What is this God Who demands our unconditional obedience, without Whom we cannot live and yet Who gives us everything. Who is this God in Whom we believe?

One of the themes of today's readings is creation. God is the Creator of heaven and earth. He is the Maker of everything that is. Think about that for a moment. You can't think of anything which God didn't make – except for God Himself and God isn't a thing. Science and religion are often represented as being in conflict. Science and religion aren't in conflict. Only stupid people, who can't see the wood for the trees, regard faith and reason as opposites or cannot see that evidence can never conflict with sincere seeking after truth. Looking at the evidence is essential to understanding the universe God has made and to knowing the God Who made it. Science studies the created order and, the more we discover about the world, the greater our sense of awe, a sense of awe which, if we have wisdom, moves us to worship.

I know whom I have believed. I hope that is your experience of faith, your Theology. Given that the One Whom we have believed is the Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth, you and I can surely say with St Paul, *If God be for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8³¹). So when you think about your life and the lives of your loved ones, when you worry, when you pray, you do know whom you have believed. *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

Some people argue that the very existence of this world is proof of the existence of God. I'm not sure that I'd quite go that far. There's none so blind as those who don't want to see and there are people who can't or won't see that this wonderful universe is the Creation of our loving, heavenly Father. There is another question, however, that arises if we use the existence of the world in itself and its wonders as proof of God. Is the God which some philosophers believe must exist in order to explain the existence of everything else that exists the same God Whom Christians know in their hearts? The Creator could be just a marvellous mechanic who has created everything that is but has no personal relationship with His Creation. *I know whom I have believed.* I hope you do too and that is not our experience of God. Our Romans reading teaches us that the Holy Spirit Who moves in our hearts to teach us to know God is also active in the whole of Creation working towards the fulfilment of everything in God.

Continue reading after our Genesis reading, which is a poetic and generic account of how God made everything, culminating in the human race made in His image, and you will come to His personal care for Adam and Eve, setting Adam in a beautiful garden, bringing him the animals for companionship and mutual benefit, making Eve so that the man should not be alone, giving them the freedom to choose to walk with God in the way of life or, should they be so foolish, to choose the way of death. Foolish we were in choosing the path of death, but the risk that we would was the price of our freedom. Yet God does not stop loving us and continues to care for Adam and Eve and for all their descendants.

So Psalm 136 segues effortlessly from praising God as the Creator of everything that is into praising Him for His lordship of human history. The destiny of nations and peoples and individual human beings is in His hands. There is a lot to think about in that the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and their safe arrival in the Promised Land was inextricably linked to the downfall of the Egyptians and the Amorites. Why couldn't God set the Israelites free and give them their home in the Promised Land without harming any Egyptians or Amorites? That's far too much to consider now, but it's all tied up with justice and mercy – the punishment of the wicked, the vindication of the innocent and the restoration of the wicked to righteousness – and it's resolved once and for all on the Cross of Jesus Christ. Suffice to say for now that *He's got the whole world in His hands*. That's what the psalm means. We only see the fulness of God in Christ Jesus and in Him crucified. The love of Jesus interprets the mystery of Creation. The love of Jesus makes manifest God's justice and mercy otherwise concealed from our vision by the sheer beauty of His holiness.

In the Gospel, Jesus brings out the meaning of all this for us individual Christians. We don't have to worry. God is the Creator. God cares for His Creation. He cares especially for us. We don't have to worry or be afraid. I know Whom I have believed. Because we know Whom we have believed, we can afford to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We don't have to worry first about what we shall eat or drink or wear. God knows that we need these things. Our first priority is to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness. Everything else we need will be added to us. In fact Jesus is all we need.

For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against the day. Against the day. Which day? Paul means the day on which we finally enter into our inheritance. Heaven and earth will pass away but God's Word is for ever. There will be a Day of Judgment on which every one of us will have to give account for how we have lived on earth, what we have done with the resources, the talents, the opportunities God has given us. How have we behaved towards God? How have we treated our fellow human beings? Have we been good stewards of God's Creation? We shall be judged by God's perfect law of love. Have we been people of love, loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and our neighbours as ourselves. Did we choose the way of life or the way of death? We shall all be found wanting, but *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against the day*. All these issues of justice and mercy are resolved in the Cross of Jesus Christ. His love interprets the mystery. His love manifests the truth. Because He has done everything for us, we yield our lives to Him in the knowledge that, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says (7²⁵) *He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him*.