

Lent 2 2021 28th February

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Genesis 17 vv 1-6 p16 Romans 4 vv 13-25 p1131
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Mark 8 vv 31-38 p1012

A **LMIGHTY** God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A **LMIGHTY** and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

My mother used to say that she was disappointed in school science lessons. When the pupils were allowed into the laboratory to perform experiments, the teacher told them what experiments to do and how they should go about doing them. They weren't really experiments in the sense of trying out something new and perhaps finding out something which nobody knew before, thereby adding to the vast store of human knowledge. The teacher knew what results to expect and the conclusions that ought to be inferred from them. Indeed, if the pupils had read up the textbook in advance, they too knew what to expect. They weren't really carrying out experiments to expand humanity's understanding of the world. What they were really doing was performing demonstrations of particular truths about the world uncovered by previous generations. They were also improving their laboratory skills which would have been useful if any of them had taken up Science as a profession.

Now, you might be thinking that it was just as well that the pupils weren't turned loose in the laboratory and allowed to devise and carry out their own experiments. They might have poisoned themselves or blown up the school. What is more, to be honest, given the amount of scientific progress the human race has already achieved, it is quite unlikely that teenagers messing about with the sort of reagents and apparatus to be found in a school laboratory would discover anything new. They might make discoveries new to themselves, but they would be unlikely to learn anything not already well understood by the scientific community.

You might also point out that the teacher could not be sure of the results the pupils would achieve even if she did give them precise directions about how they should carry out their experiments. School laboratories every day produce extraordinary results. The Laws of Science are apparently broken time after time in Year 10 Chemistry. The teacher will describe these results as experimental errors and pupils who make too many of them will get low marks for their practicals. And yet the teacher is making an act of faith here. She believes that nature is uniform, that the laws of Science are unbreakable and that therefore any deviation from the predicted result must be an error. If the pupil records that the 2 oz weight fell to the earth faster than the 1 oz, the pupil must have made an error in her measurement of time. The force of gravity is always the same and, allowing for any wind

resistance, all objects fall to the earth with the same degree of acceleration. That is the law and the laws of Science cannot be broken. But how do we know that? The fact that the Laws of Science appear to be broken so often in school laboratories surely ought to make us wonder whether the Laws of Science really are immutable. There is no proof that the Laws of Science never change. But we have faith that they are completely reliable, faith boosted by the fact that fully trained and experienced scientists obtain much more consistent results than those at the beginning of their training. Year 10 pupils may very well often come up with results which are not consistent with established scientific theory, but, when these simple experiments are repeated by people who know what they are doing, the results achieved amply demonstrate that these established theories are dependable. When the teacher carries out the experiment timing the fall of two weights, allowing for wind resistance, they will both cover the distance in the same time. Ultimately, however, it is an act of faith to base our entire understanding of the universe on the assumption that scientific laws are unbreakable. It is an assumption which ultimately derives from faith in God. God is the Creator of all things. God is wise. God is absolutely dependable. It makes sense to have faith in Him. The Laws of Science are in fact the Laws of God and that is the reason why they are reliable. We are made in the image of God and that is why, even though our understanding is infinitely more limited than His, we can come to some understanding of the universe which He has made.

Forget about school for a moment and school experiments which are really demonstrations of what we already know. Let's go to the cutting edge of scientific enquiry, the front line where brilliant minds are at work, genuinely exploring what human beings have not previously known or understood. How do they decide which experiments to carry out? If you were wanting to know more about viruses or vaccines, how would you know what might be promising lines of enquiry? Or space exploration? Or how to produce steel without burning coal? Or how subatomic particles account for mass and energy? How do you know in which experiments to invest your time, effort and, quite often, large sums of money? You don't just try things at random anymore that my mother was allowed to try things at random in the school laboratory. What you do is to use your imagination, an imagination informed both by what is already known and by faith that, in the end, the world makes sense. Existing scientific knowledge forms patterns. These patterns don't only help us to understand what we already know; they help us to predict the future. What works today suggests what conceivably will work in the future. Human imagination soars to a belief in the possibility of understanding the world because God is faithful. He is the Creator of everything that there is. God is wise. God is utterly dependable. It is our faith in the intelligibility of things which has inspired the science which has given us everything from steam engines to vaccines. We have faith that the world makes sense because it is created by an Intelligence Which, while infinitely greater than our own intelligence, is an Intelligence which we can at least begin to comprehend, through His grace in revealing Himself to us.

It is faith in the same faithful God which enables to trust His promises to Noah to preserve the natural order, to Abraham to redeem the whole creation, through Jesus to save us for eternal life. It is in this faith that we take up our cross and follow Jesus through all the perils and temptations of this life to the eternal home which He has prepared for all those who love Him.