

Peace Sunday (Pax Christi) 17th January 2021

(This Scripture Reflection was prepared by Fr Rob Esdaile for Pax Christi).

WHAT DO YOU WANT? 'WHERE DO YOU LIVE?' 'COME AND SEE!'
So begins (as we read in our Gospel Reading) the relationship of Andrew and the other disciple with the one who was to become their Master and Teacher, the one who was already their Messiah and Lord. So begins the life of faith in each of us. Yet the questions do not look like they are questions about faith at all. *'Where do you live?'* is the sort of thing any of us might say as an ice-breaker the first time we meet someone. *'What do you want?'* is, by contrast, a question that life asks us: a question about the meaning of our existence, our aims and plans, our hopes and dreams. And, although there are plenty of voices constantly telling us what we should want (in order to be good consumers, good citizens and good company), *'What do you want?'* is a question which ultimately we have to answer for ourselves, if we wish to live as mature and responsible human beings. What do we want post-Covid-19? Can we dream big? Can we hope large? Can we 'build back better'? **Christian faith says that the answer to our deepest desires (including the answer to our desires for our society) is to be found in Christ Jesus. The Word was made flesh; he dwelt among us (John 1.14); and in that way the sacred became secular, the divine became human. That's what we celebrated (with all the limitations imposed by Covid-19) just a few weeks ago at Christmas. As a consequence, if (like the first disciples) we find ourselves asking Jesus: 'Where do you live?' the answer is: 'With you!' Wherever humanity is; especially wherever struggling, hurting, broken humanity is. Ask yourself: 'What do I want?' I guess your response will centre on those most basic things: food, shelter, warmth, security, a sense of belonging. What does anyone want? The assurance that they matter; that they are not alone; that they will not be abandoned; that they are respected for who they are and not for their utility or their achievements; that there is hope; freedom from anxiety and the freedom to live in peace. Yet there are so many who lack hope, who have been robbed of self-respect, who live in isolation, who are overlooked and disregarded. Not only individuals but our culture and our planet all stand in need of healing.**

P POPE FRANCIS, ON THIS PEACE SUNDAY, asks us to affirm this truth: that *'a culture of care is the path to peace'*. In the face of what he famously called *'the globalisation of indifference'* back in 2013 during his first pastoral visit outside Rome, to the refugee camps of Lampedusa, we need to reaffirm the truth that Christ lives where we are; that we shall meet him in the hungry and the thirsty, the naked and the sick and the imprisoned – in other words, in people who may look far from 'Christ-like' (which is how he promised he would meet us in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats – Mt 25.31-46). Only by acts of care will we recognise him. Only by lives of service shall we meet him – crucified, yes; but also risen, the source of new life. Only by going out to the places where he went, among the sinners and tax-collectors, the lepers and outcasts, with Christ-like actions of compassion, shall we truly hear his voice: the voice that spoke the Beatitudes; the voice that commanded us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us; the voice that refused to hate his own persecutors and thus broke the endless cycle of violence: *'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!'* (Lk 23.34).

A CULTURE OF CARE does not stop at nice words and the gentle mopping of fevered brows, important though these be. A culture of care refuses to treat another human being as a disposable means to an end. A culture of care refuses to harden our hearts, reducing our opponents to caricatures who may be hated with impunity: even when estranged, they remain our brothers and sisters. A culture of care refuses to accept that warfare (or the preparation for warfare – disturbingly, Britain is now the second largest arms exporter in the world) is an ethically acceptable response to the undoubted injustices in our world. Pope Francis has put it plainly: *'We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits ... Never again war!'* (Fratelli Tutti n. 258) What do we want? Food and shelter, warmth and belonging, for all God's children. Where does Christ live? Right there in our struggles, our wounds and our hopes, and in the groaning of our planet under our onslaught on its natural resources. *'Come and see!'* says Jesus. Let us follow him. Let us dedicate ourselves to working together to build a world in which all belong, none are excluded and the rights of each and every person are respected. Together, let us build a culture of care.