

“Now is the Son of Man glorified.”

Jn 13:31

Today, in Rome, the pontificate of our Holy Father Pope Leo will be formally inaugurated. As Christ’s Vicar here on earth his job is to stand as ‘a sign which shall be contradicted,’ as Simeon told Christ’s Mother that Christ Himself would be (Lk 2:34). It is not accidental that a pope wears white. His robes represent to the world the innocence of Christ, the Lamb of God, whether the individual pope himself is a saint or not. As he stands on the balcony, or as he mixes with ordinary people on the street, the person of the pope is easy to spot. He stands out from the crowd; and though he is both a priest and a bishop he stands out even from the other priests and bishops who gather around him. He represents the light of the world that is set on a mountain to shine before men (Mt 5:14-16). And as the representative of the One who is Himself the Light of the World (Jn 8:12), the Pope’s task is to shine a light into all the hidden recesses and corners of a world lost in the darkness of sin. And the light that the pope must carry is the light of Truth.

However, just as we put on sunglasses on dazzlingly sunny days, or find relief from too much glare by stepping into the shade on a brilliant summer’s day, so, too, the world tends to hide from the light of Truth. It is less challenging to look down and into the shadows than it is to look up and into the light. It demands less of us to look away. Were we to accept the brightness of God’s Truth shining into our minds we might discover that we needed to change something about ourselves, and bring ourselves into conformity with what the light revealed.

Ss Paul and Barnabas, in today’s First Reading, warn that it is ‘through many tribulations [that] we must enter the kingdom of God.’ Being a follower of Christ places

demands upon us, and if our lives as disciples are easy then we are probably not, in fact, following Him at all. But why should it be like this? Why must entering the kingdom of God necessarily involve hardships and tribulations? The answer is simply that God's kingdom on the one hand, and the kingdoms of the earth on the other, have completely different values and priorities. Everything in the world is turned upside down compared to how things are in God's kingdom and compared to how things were intended by God to be in this world also.

To be a follower of Christ necessarily means living in such a way that our very lives contradict the values and priorities of the society in which we live. If we are content to think and say and do as everyone else thinks and says and does then we have – to all practical intents and purposes – stopped following Christ and joined the world instead.

If we cannot see what is wrong with putting old and ill people to death just because they are old and ill, then we have stopped living in the light of Christ's Truth. If we cannot see what is wrong with treating other people with scorn and contempt just because they are different from ourselves, then we have stopped living in the light of God's Goodness. If we cannot see what is wrong with putting a family gathering or a holiday, a football match or our work above the duty of worshipping God on a Sunday, then we have stopped living in the light of Christ's Beauty.

In today's Gospel passage we hear some of the most astonishing words of Our Lord. The line in John's Gospel immediately before today's passage tells us that Judas left the Upper Room, 'and it was night.' Yet it is at precisely this moment, when betrayal is at hand, when darkness has fallen, and when His Passion is about to begin with His Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, that Our Lord says, '*Now* is the son of Man glorified' (emphasis added). This is the hour of God's glory, when Christ humbles Himself and becomes obedient to the will of the Father, even to the point of suffering and death (Phil 2:8). How is the world to make sense of this? As St Paul says elsewhere, the Cross is a stumbling block, simple and

unaccountable folly (1 Cor 1:23). But we know what the world cannot recognize, cannot possibly comprehend, that it is in the submission of the Son of God to the Father that victory over sin and death comes forth.

As Pope Leo said in his first sermon, ‘it is not easy to preach the Gospel and bear witness to its truth, where believers are mocked, opposed, despised or at best tolerated and pitied... [And this] lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life, the neglect of mercy, appalling violations of human dignity, the crisis of the family and so many other wounds that afflict our society.’ (Sermon to the College on Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel, Friday, 9th May 2025).

The Pope exhorted that where Christ is reduced to a mere charismatic leader or superman we must shout, with St Peter, all the louder, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ You are the Sign of Contradiction. You, and You alone, are the One who can bring to the world the light of Truth, and Goodness, and Beauty.

You alone can give us hope.