

TRINITY 7 .22

It is the feast day of St Ignatius of Loyola today, so I'd like to begin with his famous prayer:

'Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Amen.

To this day, the Jesuits still carry something of a radical reputation wanting to marry intellectual and theological exploration with a practical and social gospel – commitment to the poor and marginalised, or those exploited in so many parts of the world today, or imprisoned unjustly, or simply needing their voice and cry for freedom to be heard. Our present Pope Francis is a wonderful example of that Jesuit and monastic tradition which Ignatius began and grew.

There was another anniversary yesterday which, those of you who have the daily prayer 'app' from the Church of England will have remembered and given thanks for – the famous abolitionists: William Wilberforce, Olaudah Equiano, and more locally, Thomas Clarkson. They are all 18th century 'stars' we are very much still talking about today because we have learnt so much from them, not least to look out for modern forms of slavery and human trafficking going on today.

I receive regular information from 'The Clewer Initiative' not only campaigning against what is happening in our own society but trying to change the fate of those working in our

nail bars' and car washes' who are being exploited and many, dangerously so. The same is true in agriculture and construction, much of it hidden or unknown.

With our own Woodbridge and St Mary's history and connection with John Clarkson (and a blue plaque to commemorate him), perhaps we should consider stronger links with our contemporary brothers and sisters praying and working for justice up and down the UK via this urgent initiative; perhaps we should also consider keeping our own Town & Anniversary 'day' to keep alive our commitment to his memory and cause? John died on April 2nd, 1828, and as you know, is buried here.

Our Gospel writer, Dr Luke, is well versed and well known in dramatizing the thin line between life and death, danger and freedom, poverty and riches. Today's excerpt is so typical of alerting us to that dual tension: the riches of earth and the riches of heaven. The image of pulling down barns to create larger ones, to selfishly hoard the rich man's possessions is a parable very much for today when we neglect to marry our Christian inheritance to be generous stewards - with our Christian calling for justice and equality. Each of us has our part to play, to make a difference, 'to toil and not to seek for any reward.'

I may have missed the last ever programme of 'Neighbours' but I did see the opening of The Commonwealth Games to highlight our most culturally mixed and diverse city, which is Birmingham. I felt at times there was a competition going on

to better the opening of the London Olympics and, cynically, I felt at times I needed some sub-titles to explain everything I was watching! That said, the drama unfolding (without words) was predominantly about our industrial past symbolised by the Bull – so much of it unhealthy, cruel, and oppressive – but the Bull is tamed to see a new and colourful world whereby each nation, island, and people are slaves no more; our common ties of humanity, dignity and mutual respect should be honoured, celebrated and enjoyed. These are the treasures which God has given us and they are treasures to be shared and not locked or hidden away.

When I think of our forebears who had to fight so long and hard in Parliament for fundamental human rights, surely it is not too romantic to suggest that our own MPs should carry on that baton? Instead of pulling one another apart about who leaked what or who promoted false gossip through social media, we need to be worried about current issues of trust and truth in the ‘Westminster bubble.’

On the other hand, St Ignatius or, the more eccentric St Francis, St Luke or Pope Francis, are all pointing us and encouraging us to look at the bigger international picture: to make our hearts and actions more generous and less selfish, to ‘give and not to count the cost’, to be willing and faithful servants, but never subservient slaves.

Amen.