

CIVIC MASS IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD MAYOR OF CARDIFF

ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL

4TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – 1ST FEBRUARY 2015

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Lest we forget, the media will no doubt continually remind us that there are fewer than one hundred days to the General Election. Television debates, opinion polls, party manifestos are all part of the urgency of the political parties to “get the vote out” on election day.

Urgency is the sub text of today's second reading from St. Paul. (1 Cor.7:32-35) He believed that the second coming of Jesus was going to take place within a generation. And so he warns his hearers: *“Don't waste time. Don't be distracted. Be prepared. It's better to remain unmarried because married men and women are torn in two directions. They have to worry about pleasing each other. They have to worry about the world's affairs. There isn't time. This is an urgent warning”.*

Two thousand years later we still say that the second coming will be “at the end of time”. Whether it is in the language of Armageddon or Apocalypse, ‘the end of the world’ as we know it will accompany the Second Coming of Christ. The reality is, of course, that the end of time is now. Once this moment has passed it will never return.

There is urgency about the teaching of Jesus too. The Archbishop of Canterbury reminded us this week that if it was put into practice it would be revolutionary. As we begin following Jesus's ministry through reading Mark's gospel this year, we see Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry (Mark

1:21-28). He went to the synagogue to teach. His teaching made a deep impression on them. Why was that? Because he taught with authority. Unlike other teachers, there was no gap between what he said, what he did and who he was. His teaching was authentic. Elsewhere he describes himself as *"The Way, the Truth and the Life"*. That authority is illustrated in his confrontation with the unclean spirits, the conflict between good and evil. *"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth. Have you come to destroy us?"*. The triumph of good over evil. That is precisely the mission of Jesus and his followers. Jesus had no status. He didn't have an official position. But he didn't just talk about what was good and loving. He didn't just describe the virtues of integrity and truth. He lived by them and died for them in order to teach us how to live and die. This is the meaning of "with authority"

As we welcome the Lord Mayor of Cardiff and her consort to St. David's today we have an opportunity to thank God for those in our community who exercise the true authority which is service. The words of Jesus again: *"I come among you as one who serves"*. Those who serve the diverse community, which is a city like Cardiff, seek to put into practice in different ways the command to *"love your neighbour as yourself"*. We would call the high ideals of public service "gospel values". Civic, political and social life in the city are focussed in one person, the Lord Mayor, because those ideals and values they represent need to be articulated and expressed not just in party manifestoes, not just in words, but in deeds also. The Lord Mayor is given privileged access into the organisations and institutions which have a profound influence on the Common Good. In the 300 or 400 engagements she undertakes in this year of office she experiences at first hand the vast wealth of goodwill and dedication which lies, sometimes hidden, at the heart of our community. She will also know of the isolation, deprivation and alienation of those who live on the margins of our society and the challenges, which face us all.

The motto on the Royal Crest, which stands above the Coat of Arms of the City of Cardiff, says, *"Awake, it is the day"*. That same urgency which we heard drove St. Paul is needed today. It was the same urgency which caused Jesus to

teach “with authority” the truth about God and the truth about human beings too. In the face of those truths the Bible often says: *“Now is the acceptable time”*. The psychotherapist will say “Today is the tomorrow you were worried about yesterday. The theologian will speak of “The Grace of the Present Moment”. My favourite film, *The Dead Poets Society*, says “Seize the Day”. My favourite hymn puts it differently: “Lord for tomorrow and its needs. I do not pray. Keep me my God from stain of sin. Just for today”. In a few moments time the Cathedral Choir will sing it even more beautifully in the motet by William Byrd:

Haec dies fecit Dominus. Exultemus et laetemur in ea. Alleluia.

This day was made by the Lord. Let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia.