

## Reading and homily for Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity 2020



By Andrew Carr, Reader, St Edmund & St Alban Dartford

**Reading:** Romans 12:1-8

click on the following link for the reading:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12%3A1-8+&version=NRSVA>

### Homily

Today is the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity. This short passage begins the second half of Paul's letter changing its focus from the theological to the practical – essentially how now to behave as Christians.

The image above is from the film *The Matrix* (1999). The hands belong to the 'mentor' (played by actor Lawrence Fishburne) offering the 'hero' (actor Keanu Reeves) a choice: choose the blue pill and continue with your everyday life largely oblivious to what is actually going on in the world (that all people are slaves) or take the red pill and discover the truth and break free of the slavery.

As Christians we choose the red pill rather than the blue...

God calls us to offer ourselves as *living sacrifices* – which we say at every Sunday service – setting aside our own desires to follow Him out of gratitude that our sins are forgiven and that He is with us always. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed hearts and minds living to serve Him and others.

As Christians, God calls us in verse 2 "not conform any longer to the pattern of this world..." – that is to be in the world but not of it. Our choice is not to conform but to be counter-cultural. As one theologian put it:

*'Christians are called to be counter-cultural – not in all respects, as though every single aspect of human society and culture were automatically and completely bad, but at least in being prepared to challenge those parts where the present ages shouts, or perhaps whispers seductively, that it would be easier and better to do things that way, while the age to come, begun in Jesus, insists that belonging to the new creation means that we must live His way instead.'*

The key not to conform must be by being (continuing with verse 2): "...transformed by the renewing of your mind...". It is possible to avoid "the pattern of the world" and yet still be prone to pride, envy, selfishness, arrogance... Only when we allow the Holy Spirit to renew and redirect our minds are we truly transformed into the living sacrifices God calls us to be. Are we willing to do that?

Galatians 5:19-25 (NRSV) summarises this thus:

*"Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."*

I'm preaching to myself as much as anyone else in both the prior paragraph and the Biblical quote.

Healthy self-esteem is important because some of us think too little of ourselves; equally, some of us think too much... The key to an honest and accurate view of ourselves is knowing and understanding our new identity in Christ Jesus. Again I'm preaching to myself here as much as anyone else... as I tend to believe that I think too little of myself. Please correct and pray for me if you think I think too much of myself...

God gives us gifts so that we can build His church. To use them effectively, we need to realise that all gifts and abilities ultimately come from God. We must understand that not everyone has the same gifts and to dedicate those we do have to God's service and to serve others. Some are natural leaders, some are born teachers, some are naturally open, sympathetic, empathetic, others gifted at making refreshments for socials...

It's also a matter of grace (as Paul says in verse 6); grace of, and from, God that enhances abilities and inclinations people already have: also new gifts can emerge as God's Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers, as are referenced in the passage. Are we asking God for these ourselves or about these? Are we praying that our churches will be blessed with these gifts so that we can grow?

The bit at the end of verse 8 was interesting: '...the compassionate, in cheerfulness.' As I wasn't immediately sure what that meant, I looked again for theologian-insight and found good-natured disagreement over the precise meaning (thanks guys and girls...), but in essence we:

**'are to do everything cheerfully with a smile and with warmth.'**

I have been in other church situations where encountering anyone with a smile and/or warmth was the exception... so let's not be like that. Until we meet again, keep safe, keep well, keep praying.

**AMEN**