

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY; BCP EUCHARIST.

How would we answer if we were asked to consider what it is that we would call Holy? Some of the more obvious answers would include Scripture; we talk about holy writ. We would talk about the Godhead, the Holy Trinity. We would talk about Holy Church, the Holy Sacraments, Holy men and women. I doubt very much that within that list we would think about or even want to add work; the work of our hands. And yet when we stop and think about it our work is what takes up the bulk of the day, it is a huge part of our life.

For many, work is drudgery; it is a means to paying the bills, to accrue a pension in order to retire from work. Work gets in the way of doing the things we want to do with our life, and within this mindset we soon discover that a large part of our lives are wasted in discontent and the idea that in some way it could be seen as Holy is delusional.

When Jesus stood on the shore of the lake of Gennesareth and watched Simon and his fellow fishermen washing their nets He was looking at a commonplace scene that had been repeated day in and day out for generations. It is only when Jesus asks Simon to put back out to sea and lower the nets that we get a sense of the grind and toil and defeat that work often brings and from it the sense of wariness that comes with it. "Master we have toiled all the night", says Simon, "and have taken nothing." But then Simon says something that lifts the whole situation onto a different level; "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." What Simon had been doing daily, the same old routine, the same frustrations; the same occasional good day had now been raised from just a job to a vocation. What he was now doing he was doing at the behest of Jesus.

St Benedict (who is celebrated this weekend in the calendar) has some very sound teaching on the nature of work and how we can raise it from the level of some sort of necessary inconvenience into the arena of what is Holy. In the Prologue to His Rule we are immediately alerted to the potential spiritual nature of work, when we do what we do, but now we do it because Jesus is in the midst of it with us, when St Benedict says, "First of all when you do a good work, you must pray to Him most earnestly to bring it to perfection." And then a little further he says, "Seeking His workman in a multitude of people the Lord

calls out to him and lifts His voice again.” When we are workmen who also happen to long to be God’s workmen, we take the work of human hands and transform it into gifts that sustain us and bless the world around us. For Benedict and the followers of his rule the tediousness of the common daily grind is lifted into the realms of the Holy because he links the world of work with the need to constantly pray. There is a phrase that is associated with Benedictines, *Ora et labora*, work and pray. With this attitude work not only draws us very close to a state of prayer it can become prayer. In the presence of Jesus, Simon’s routine day of fishing was made a holy experience, for he listened for the voice of Jesus and changed the quality of the moment.

AMEN