

Sunday 4th August 2024; Trinity 10 and patronal Benefice
HC service for St Oswald, Oswaldkirk

Some of you will realise that this week in my household there has been some research into dog pedigrees concerning our latest arrival. Something I hadn't appreciated before is when you study a pedigree you start to notice that certain characteristics seem to carry forward from one generation to another, be it a physical type or a particular characteristic and these are the things you look for when considering a puppy from that pedigree. It is like considerations given to breeding a winning racehorse or a champion breed in competitions.

It is similar with people when you look through family trees and you look back and think, 'ah yes, so, and so had the same nose as so and so back then, or he or she behaves in a particular way that grand ma or grandpa did. It is fascinating to map these similarities as they emerge throughout the generations, sometimes lying dormant for a while then appearing in a certain individual.

In terms of faith, it is interesting in this context to consider a couple of lines from our Scripture readings today. Firstly, St Paul to the Ephesians, "There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one lord one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

And from our Gospel today, "They said to him, 'what must we do to perform the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"

Your belief, your very faith in Jesus Christ is a work not of our your own but is a work of *God*. This point, confirmed in many other places in the Scriptures, helps us to

understand that we are entirely dependent on the sovereign Lord God for our salvation. Our salvation is not of any work of our own doing, nor of our own ability, but rather it is a work of God. Jesus says what we need to do is just believe in Him!

However, it is a sad reflection on the practise of faith, and I have seen it manifest in many people, in an attitude and misunderstanding that first and foremost our faith is something we somehow create, is about what we do, how we do it, and often how we impose it on other people. That is not for us to determine or judge because God is at work in all people and all things, as He is constantly at work in you and me. Our faith is a gift from the work of God and our response should be simply whether we believe in Jesus.

Today as we celebrate another patronal festival we reconnect to St Oswald, and the so called 'dark ages.' Especially, in this area, with its ingrained heritage of Christian spirituality, I wonder whether many of us can trace lineage back to those times, maybe St Oswald himself. Thinking of all this we come to a quote from Bede regarding King Oswald of Northumbria, "*As soon as he became King, Oswald greatly wished that all people whom he ruled should be imbued with the grace of the Christian faith...*" The word here to pick up on is 'imbued' which means in late Middle English to 'saturate' from the French 'imbu' and Latin 'imbutus', which means to moisten. It means to literally soften and fill someone or something with an idea, a quality, or a feeling.

Perhaps then King Oswald by wishing his people to be imbued, as Bede puts it, was allowing what Jesus refers to as the 'work of God', that God, by His Spirit imbues everything with Himself, including us. What we are

required to do is to believe, accept and follow Jesus Christ, to have the faith and courage to allow God to work through us to achieve great things in the same way Oswald following his vision of St Columba, was inspired to lift the wooden cross and pray at the Battle of Heavenfield and achieve a miraculous victory.

We are all imbued with this work of God for the reason Paul describes, that is above all and through all and in all, to live for the one hope of our calling and to achieve victory as St Oswald did for God over the darkness in the world.

Thanks be to God.