

Dear Friends,

Whether you like it or not, dates are important to us. Most will know that I am into history and remember historical dates quite well, though not as well as I once did. I am not thinking about 1066 or 1485, nor yet about 1517 or 1662, but rather more about how dates are significant. Such dates are more noteworthy not because of the event itself but rather more because of what changed with or flowed from the event. Some indeed reflect in a positive way while others more negatively. So we might compare 4.8.1914 (or even 29.7.1914) with 11.11.1918 or similarly 3.9.1939 (or even 1.9.1939) with 2.9.1945 (or 5.8.1945 or 15.8.1945). We could also point to more modern times 22.11.1963 or even 11.9.2001.

However, it's not only on the world stage that dates are significant but sometimes the personal ones are even more poignant. Many of you might be fed up with me talking about 1.12.1975, but I also have to include 15.10.1988, 13.10.1991 and 5.2.1995, if I went further I might also add 1.1.2003 or 27.4.2012. Of course these dates are my personal recollections. They include my coming to faith, my marriage, the birth dates of my children and finally the death of my parents. You will have other similarly significant dates that would be meaningless to anybody else.

So then, it's not the dates themselves but what happened on those days that makes them important. All the dates mentioned above mark events that made an impact on people's lives. Whether these are dates of personal events, happenings or national or international events, we remember the impact of these things and measure their importance to a large degree on the way they affect us. I recently recalled an exercise I was required to do when completing the application form to be considered for the priesthood. I was asked to consider the main events of my life and then relate what these were and how they had influenced me. What I discovered was that not only were these events often the start of something new, but quite often they were the culmination of a period of change in my life.

In many ways it is the same with national and international events. In the dates above, it would not be difficult to recognise the dates for the beginning and end of the two World Wars. While many people recall exactly what they were doing or where they were, when they heard of the assassination of President Kennedy and maybe more so on the day that high-jacked planes flew into the twin towers in New York. Perhaps more difficult to identify, were the dates for the Battle of Hastings and the beginning of the Norman rule of England, the Battle of Bosworth bringing an end to the War of the Roses and the first Tudor king. Then the date when Martin Luther issued his list of complaints about the sale of indulgences, marking the start of the Reformation and finally, the publication of the Book of Common Prayer which became the cornerstone of the Church of England's worship for the following 300 years.

In their own ways, great or small, all of these events had a significant impact on the world. For all of them to some degree we might say, "Life will never be the same again." The pattering of tiny feet or mammoth world events, all impact in a way that cannot be undone, on the lives of us all. Clearly the bigger the event, the greater the significance. I sometimes wonder which event has been most significant throughout history, the invention of the wheel or the taming of fire for which dates are not known. Printing in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, electricity being harnessed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century or maybe something more contemporary such as 17.12.1903 the first flight by a powered aircraft, 6.8.1945 the first atomic bomb, 12.4.1961 the first man into space, or back again to 11.9.2001. We could argue about this forever, but I have a different date in mind.

Once again we do not have a precise date, only that it was a Friday sometime around 30AD and during the Jewish Festival of the Passover. On that day, an innocent man was nailed to a cross of wood and died one of the most painful deaths known to humanity. Very few people knew that He was not an ordinary man, indeed he was the Son of God who had come, exactly like one of us,

leaving behind his heavenly powers so that he could fully share our humanity. However, because he was innocent, because he was pure, he was able to offer his life in payment for all the wrong in the world. All the rubbish of this world is heaped on his shoulders and is swept away by this perfect sacrifice.

In the process he relieves us of our sin, paying the price of our wrong doing and releasing us from bondage. He also defeats all the evil of the world, with Satan mortally wounded (though still a potent enemy to be aware of) he is able to guide us to follow him to heaven. Our relationship with God is restored and we can know and experience God's love. Instead of a barrier, there is an open channel to receive from God his blessings and offer him our praise and adoration.

It is all this that we mark and celebrate on Good Friday. This is the day that lies at the centre of the Christian Faith. Indeed despite the agony Jesus endured, we still call the day "Good" that is because of all the things that we have benefited from through His death. The Cross was horrible, the results fantastic and it enables us to know the freedom and peace that can only come from God. However, we also need to respond, we need to change our way of living in order to fully benefit from the glorious work of the Cross. Perhaps that response could be summed up in this prayer, attributed to St Richard of Chichester.

"Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for all the benefits you have won for us, for all the pains and insults you have borne for us. Most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen"

May the Lord richly bless you.

Robert