

SERMON FOR BAPTISM OF JASMINE

Well, I hope everyone, who needed to, survived Valentine 's Day!

In the early days, the Church wasn't keen on the Festival held in Rome on February 14th to celebrate the traditional day on which birds began to mate. It got a little bit out of hand – in fact quite a bit out of hand. I'll leave it all to your own imagination!

Anyway, in stepped the bishops, doing a bit of tut-tutting and finger wagging, and declared that instead of all this luvvy-dovey stuff, Christians would be far better off contemplating martyrdom rather than masquerading around the streets of Rome and getting up to no good!

So the bishops made 14th February a day to commemorate Valentine, who had been cruelly put to death for his faith during the persecutions. Hence St. Valentine's Day.

The name stuck, but not the serious side of the day and people soon forgot who Valentine was, and got back to celebrating love. The only martyrs on Valentine's Day are those who forgot to send a card and buy their loved ones some flowers and chocolate – and not from the garage forecourt either. I know of a few near misses for martyrdom this year and in our house it wasn't Ted!

So love and the celebration of love won through.

And it's appropriate on this Sunday after St Valentine's Day that we will baptise Jasmine. For the name Jasmine is full of meaning.

First, there's Princess Jasmine who appears in the story of Aladdin. She is remembered as the brave girl who put convention aside and broke an age-old law that said she should only marry a prince. Instead Jasmine refused and said she would only marry someone she loved – for who he was rather than for his status and riches.

And so, the name Jasmine has always been associated with real love, pure love.

When we hear of Jasmine we most usually think of a pretty fragrant, climbing plant. But originally Jasmine is a Persian name meaning 'Gift of God'.

And how well all these meanings come together in the service of baptism.

God's gift to us is that he loves us and sent Jesus to tell us so. And one of the ways in which God shows his love for us is by being baptised. For, in baptism, he makes us members of his family. And this is especially underlined in infant baptism. Before we can even do or say anything to God, he is reaching out to us in love and acceptance.

As our epistle this morning says, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loves us and sent his Son to redeem us."

We love because God first loved us. God's gift to Jasmine is his love for her, not just for today but for all her life. Unconditional, for all time.

Jasmine - a sweet smelling flower – reminding us of the fragrance of God’s love for her, and for us all.

But then in our epistle John goes on to say, “Since God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

As the sweet-smelling fragrance of a flowering jasmine permeates the air around it, so should our love for others make the world a sweeter place.

And in our Gospel, Jesus did that for the people of Tyre and Sidon as he brought them healing and wholeness.

And he challenges us to do the same.

Like Princess Jasmine who went against the conventions of her day and refused to marry a prince she didn’t love, so the Beatitudes in today’s Gospel turn some of today’s conventions on their head.

Is success to be measured materially and financially and in the comforts we enjoy, or are there, for followers of Jesus, other priorities?

Like serving others rather than being served. Being neighbour centred – in the widest meaning of that word – rather than being self-centred. Being good for others rather than amassing goods for ourselves. Real love or self-love.

In the story of Aladdin, Princess Jasmine chose conviction rather than convention, and in that she sets all of us an example, that we should have the strength and courage to follow in Christ’s unconventional way.

Living a Christian life is not the lovey dovey love of Valentine’s Day. It is love that is gritty, courageous and often unconventional.

As the jasmine plant spreads and climbs so may our love for God and for others become bigger and bigger, and may the fragrance of our care for others sweeten their lives.

And we pray for young Jasmine, God’s gift, as she is baptised this morning that she and her parents John & Helen, big sister Juliette and Godparents Ben & Ellie may know the love and presence of God to guide them and keep them all their days. May their lives and the lives of all us here, who are Jasmine’s parish family, sure true grit and courage as let God’s love be reflected in our lives.

I now ask Jasmine’s parents and godparents to join me at the font. Jasmine is nearly a year old so we may well see some of the grit and determination of her name sake this morning!