

A Devotion for the week to Sunday 28 of June 2020

This service is written for Stretton Park and McDonald Wing in Maffra, Laurina Lodge in Heyfield and Royal Freemason's in Sale. It is also made available for use in other retirement villages and nursing homes and for those who are interested, for their private use.

INTRODUCTION This week, I have used the work of Rodney Stark, an American professor of sociology and comparative religion to tell us about life in ancient Rome.

Psalm 19 concludes with these words : I have trusted in God's steadfast love, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt generously with me.

HYMN No. 10 - Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the king of creation

You can read the words to yourself, or out loud. If you remember the tune well enough you can sing it yourself. You can, of course sing just the first, or the first and last verses.

Psalm 19 starts in sorrow and discouragement. It says : Have you forgotten me O God? How long will stay hidden from me? How long must I suffer pain in my soul and sorrow in my heart? But then the psalm finishes with those words we read of God's steadfast love, salvation and generosity.

PRAYER

Lord God, sometimes when things go wrong, or when we feel sad or lonely, we think that you have forgotten us. Help us, O God in our human frailty to realise that even when we feel alone the most, you are with us. Help us to hold onto Jesus' promise that He would never leave us or forsake us, that He would be with us to the end of the world. Help bring these promises to our minds and our hearts when we need them, and help us to be assured of your never-failing love and care for us, Amen.

HYMN No. 6 - Jesus lover of my soul

BIBLE READING - Romans, chapter 6, verses 12 to 23

Don't let sin rule your body, you are under grace, so offer yourself to God. What you allow to control you becomes your master. You are set free from sin to promise yourself to righteousness, which leads to holiness. The course of your life should lead you to life.

REFLECTION

St Paul was writing to the Christians in Rome. They were a small group at that time and Paul was urging them to live a very different life, with very different values, to the average citizen of Rome. You would not have enjoyed living in Rome in those days. There were public baths, public toilets and public fountains, but very few houses had baths or a toilet or even water on tap. The crowding for most people was worse than Calcutta in India is today. Most families lived in one room and most streets were lane-ways between the houses, just wide enough for one person to walk past another.

The obvious thing that set Christians apart was that they considered life to be sacred. Disease was common, and when one of the epidemics went through, most Romans would toss the dead and the dying onto the refuse areas, but the Christians nursed their own and their neighbours, so they survived much more often. The Christians cared for all their children but Romans would not care for unwanted babies, particularly girls. In Rome at that time there were about 14 men for every 10 women.

One of the main entertainments was gladiators fighting to the death and condemned criminals being killed in gruesome ways. This was a popular public attraction.

The Romans saw death as entertainment, but Christians saw life as sacred. For a Christian to value life over death in Rome in the first century really set them apart. St Paul's letter to the Romans, his writing was on two levels, the mortal life here and now, and the life of the spirit. One reflects the other. If you value spiritual life, then that will influence the way you live, and you will value earthly life as well. What things make you feel full of life when you think of them? What things inspire you, make you feel good and make you feel that life is really worth the living? What are the things that lift your spirit? These are the creative, life affirming things that God would have you concentrate on. These are the ways God blesses you with life. Think on these things.

HYMN No. 28 - How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear

PRAYER

God our Father, we pray for the people who are working to bring life and joy and creativity, even in places where there is death. We pray for all the doctors and nurses who work to help life to continue, and to ease pain where they can. We thank you for the life that we have experienced. Help us to remember those times of joy and fulfilment that we have experienced, and those times when we have shared joy with another special person. Be with us, we pray, when we spend time with friends and visitors, so that we may be able to share something special and uplifting with them and brighten their day. We pray for our families, that they may be safe, and we pray for ourselves, that we may have peace and confidence in our faith in you, and we pray together:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, For ever and ever, AMEN

HYMN No 9 - Praise my soul, the King of heaven

The BLESSING

May the God of grace, who calls you to his eternal glory fill your life with His life.

And may the blessing of the almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

be upon you and remain with you always, Amen