Trinity 12, 2020. Self-Dedication.

In the +Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Self-dedication … to dedicate oneself to a something … typically a cause, a plan, a belief, a hobby, a sport … all sorts of things … but in this context, we’re talking about dedicating ourselves to God, and in doing so, open ourselves up to being one … first one with ourselves … and then one with God, however you perceive Him to be. Cos if you’re not at one-ness with yourself, gimme a call and let’s chat.

Or have a deeper think on the last prayer I’ll say today, just after our Recessional Hymn. Yep … after. You all know it … but it’s so good. So stick around.

Noah Strom from the LCC Community in Minneapolis had this to say a while back:

*Self-dedication ... How can we be dedicated to ourselves? What must we do to promote self-healing, self-expression, self-motivation, self-dedication? How can we be entire unto ourselves?*

*Certain people and certain things or situations can bring us back to the centre of our being. Looking into a lover’s eyes, experiencing a mountain vista, floating over massive ocean waves, enjoying a piece of music, celebrating a religious service, and giving ourselves to others are examples of ways in which the true identity of ourselves can be brought to light.*

*Too often our world is one of thoughts, of conjectures. Too infrequently our world is one of peace, of simplicity. When we seek the things that make us happy, we are really seeking the things that make us real, that make us more like God.*

That makes us more like God. Thanks Noah. As Michelangelo painted … with God’s finger **all but** touching us, not touching … but close … and we say … thee … finger of God’s hand … we own … cos it’s showing us that we’re getting there. We have a way to go … but we’re getting there. We own the outcome … we just have to complete the journey. This is why we clergy whether in Religious or Holy Orders, dedicate ourselves to a life separate to those of others, and why we as priests have taken on this “sweet but heavy burden” which is represented by the stole we wear, which reflects the yoke the oxen wear.

Last week, Vicki and I went to PAX … Progressive Anglican Christians at St Thomas Anglican Church in Toowong, Brisbane … and a couple of weeks ago, I read to you Adi Gibb’s collective on Easter, Ascension and Pentecost … cos this was the first time they’d all been able to attend Mass as a group. Thanks COVID. We love their company, and it’s always a spirited chat, this time led by their Rector, Fr Tom Sullivan, who had a look at the underlying subject of self-dedication … and that’s this … Did Jesus establish a Priesthood ? He’s a priest, I’m a priest. Not in exactly the same line of Christianity, but not very distant either.

If we read the Gospels and then Acts, we’ll find that Jesus said … I’ll not leave you alone … no … I’ll send you the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and he will lead you into all things.

John 16 v 13 is a good example of this line of thinking. And then when the Holy Spirit arrived, he sat on their heads, as tongues of flame which these days, we record by way of the Bishop’s mitre … the pointy hat a bishop wears … cos it’s shaped like a flame, the flame of the Holy Spirit. And the Twelve Apostles were the ones to get the tongues of fire … which these days, we understand as the beginning of the Apostolic Succession … in which each bishop can trace his lineage right back to one of those Apostles who laid hands on others. It’s awesome to see this extraordinary lineage, actually written out in front of you.

So that was Dedication 101 sorted out fairly simply … or was it ?

I think not, cos the Jews would not have been where they were when Christ arrived to show them … remind them … of what a life of dedication of oneself to God means. Remember how Jesus overthrew the money changers tables … that had been set up IN the Temple ? The system … the anointed church elders of the Jewish system had wandered far and wide … and had drifted away from self-dedication. They no longer stood for anything of value. They’d lost their sense of self-dedication …

So let’s go right back to the beginning to see how this system of self-dedication unfolded over some four thousand years. Let’s go back to Genesis. Yep … that far back … and any of you who’ve had hands laid on will know these words … for they are widely used, still today … for in Genesis 14, v 18-20 we read … “And did King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was Priest of God Most High”

That was the first recorded use of bread and wine in the Jewish or later Christian texts … and it wouldn’t have been the first cos the Egyptians had been doing a similar thing for a few thousand years beforehand … but it was **our** first. You know that TV ad for insane fishing … it wasn’t the biggest fish … but it was MY fish. Our first Eucharist. And what was Salem anyway ? JERU … Salem was with them back then, being named for the god Shalem, the original tutelary deity of that developing Bronze Age city.

And he, Melchizedek was priest of God most High … remember this … King and Priest. He was El Elyon. And we know this EL bit today … kept alive in names like Daniel and Michael. Michael … the accepted leader of the Angelic hosts. But then in Psalm 110 v 4 comes what we as priests have had said over us …

***You … You are a priest forever, according to the Order of Melchizedek.***

And in so doing, we priests are set aside, set aside to do the work of a priest. For some of us, it’s not just a calling, a vocation … but also a career insofar as we’re involved with a church that pays its clergy. Thankfully, some do, sadly most, like mine, can’t. All that does is reduce our capacity somewhat to serve … it does not diminish our selfless approach to the work we have been entrusted to do … which as Christ Himself said … go and preach the Gospel to all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, beginning at … where was it ??? beginning right here in Jerusalem. Matthew 28:19.

So now the new Bishops … those anointed by the Apostles … had two things to do … Baptise in the name of the Lord, with a formula laid down for all the ages … and to preach the Gospel … the first of which would not be written for another 35 yrs. Whoops.

Did that dissuade our first Bishops ? Our Apostles ? Thankfully … no. They took on their challenge … with gusto … even with imminent death in mind … so selfless was their dedication. That’s self-dedication … on steroids.

So how did we get to this ? Think back to Christmas … for Joseph was of the House of David. What’d he have to do with all this ? We need to go back to 2nd Samuel 6 then 8. Yep … that far back. I’ll skip much of Tom’s research … and cut to the chase … David returned to bless his household, he danced before the Lord with all his might, so David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting and trumpeting. And now the important bit, cos David is both King and Priest, entering Salem … Jerusalem … to establish a new priesthood, or more correctly, to re-establish the Priesthood of Melchizedek.

This King and Priest thing is unique … cos even then, they had a separation … and this is why David is such a huge figure … he was both King, and Priest. This is why Jesus had to be born of David’s line. The fact that his line ran more strongly in Mary than in Joseph is actually not important, even if you’re a woman ! So think … how did they name Jesus ? King … of the Jews … but also as a priest in his own right. INRI.

So for us priests, we have a life of dedication … self, or as best we can, self-less dedication. When we’re all ordained, we all have these words said over us by the Bishop … the direct spiritual descendant of the Apostles … and the Bishop says:

*Send down the Holy Spirit upon this thy servant, whom we set apart by the laying on of hands, for the office and work of a priest in your church.*

And these words are universally used in the Sacramental denominations of Christianity.

So by accepting that these words will be said over the ordinand, it speaks volumes that this person has chosen a life defined by thousands of years of spiritual history, for we’ve chosen it ourselves … for ourselves.

This … is self-dedication. Would you please stand.

And now, to +God the Father, God the Son and God the holy Spirit, be ascribed as is justly due, all manner of honour, might, majesty, power and dominion, now henceforth and forever more.

Amen.