

Year A

1 Peter 1:17-23

One of the most poignant scenes in the second of the famous *Godfather* films, probably the finest sequel ever made, is when the boy Vito Corleone arrived in New York by ship from Sicily. He was alone without any family help. He did not speak the language and he was unsure who would step in to help him. His story has a modern feel to it as thousands of children have set off in recent years, fleeing terrible trauma in their homeland to find refuge in a foreign

land. They are refugees. Peter did not use that word for the Christians he was addressing in his first epistle but he used a very similar word. He used the term 'exiles' in the opening sentence of his letter and in verse 17 here in our passage today he referred to 'the time of your exile'.

I wonder how many Lossie locals we have here this morning? What does it mean to be called a Lossie local? Do you have to be born and bred here or can you appear later on? Are you a local after forty years living here? If not, then there may not be too many Lossie

locals about! Many of you will have arrived here after years lived elsewhere. Some of you will have been on the move for most or all of your working lives, especially if you have been associated with the armed services. If you have moved about then you will be aware of some of the challenges of those in exile. When you arrived you maybe didn't know anyone else. You didn't know the lay of the land very well. You may have had problems with the language: yes, even in Lossiemouth there are incomers who have had problems with the local patter. In church, you may not have known the hymns

or you may have been thrown by the local way of doing things. All of that can be very disorientating. Peter described this scenario of exile as the expected background to the life of the Church. This is the way it is for those following the counter-cultural teaching of Jesus Christ. We cannot expect to fit in with the wider culture; to be accepted and received and still remain faithful to Jesus Christ. We will be in danger of compromising, of annexing the more difficult elements of our faith and as a result we will lose our distinctiveness and our voice. We cannot allow the quiet pull of a comfortable

existence to take us away from our radical calling.

Some years ago, musicians noted that message boys in a certain part of London all whistled out of tune as they went about their work. It was talked about and someone suggested that it was because the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune. Something had gone wrong with the chimes and they were discordant. The boys did not know there was anything wrong with the peals, and quite unconsciously they had copied their pitch.

So we tend to copy the people with whom we associate; we borrow thoughts from the books we read and the programs to which we listen, almost without knowing it. God has given us His Son who is the absolute pitch of life and living. If we learn to sing by him, we shall easily detect the false in all of the music of the world.

Therefore we must continue to be people of the exile. We are living under the rule of Jesus Christ and not the rule of the kingdoms of this world. Now whilst that can be recognised and spoken of, it is a different

matter altogether to be able to live in the place of exile without succumbing to the desire to just give up and seek a more comfortable place. In the Gospel reading today Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple were on the road to Emmaus. They were reeling from the events of recent days when the one they were looking to as the Redeemer of Israel was cruelly killed and there were strange rumours about, regarding his rising from the dead. These two were experiencing their first taste of what exile was like. They felt cut adrift, unsure what to believe and facing the prospect of much more

uncertainty to come. They were very disturbed when they met with the stranger on the road and they did not receive any kind of instant solution to their distress. The stranger was intriguing and maybe startled them by his directness but it was not until later that they received comfort from him; his special grace from a meal shared together. No, the presence of the stranger highlighted that sense of exile that was beginning to grow in them.

The Christian life must always be lived in relationship: it's a point I will make repeatedly to you in my sermons because it

is essential to our understanding of who we are in Christ. It is a check to the rampant individualism that can characterise some forms of Christianity from the reclusive hermits of old to the highly personalised understandings of salvation. We are called to live together in witness to Jesus Christ. Both the passage from 1 Peter and the Gospel reading today bring that point home in different ways. Peter stated that we must “love one another deeply from the heart”. That is the natural imperative of the new relationship we have in Jesus Christ who ransomed us from the ways of the world.

There has been much debate over the years regarding the concept of ransom in relation to Christ's work. It's a difficult metaphor and it is not always clear in Scripture from whom we have been ransomed and for what purpose. It is morally objectionable that God would pay a ransom to Satan for our liberation and yet God paying himself a ransom through the life of his Son is not without its problems. Peter stated that we were ransomed from futile ways and it seems from this passage that he conceives of the purchasing of our wills in return for the blood sacrifice of Christ. That we are being

called to relate in a new way of mutual love and support as a result of this transaction. All of this is, of course, difficult but it is firmed up for us in the outcome of the Gospel story on the road to Emmaus. The stranger, who was of course, Jesus, was about to walk on and leave the two men. They persuaded him to stay and at the meal they shared, in language heavy with sacramental meaning, he took the bread, blessed it and broke it and at that point they recognised him. Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. It was in fellowship with one another that the

presence of the resurrected Jesus was experienced. We continue that shared meal in the church every time we meet to celebrate the sacrament. The resurrected and ascended Jesus is present with us through the means of grace; the bread and the wine. He has promised his presence and he is always faithful in that. He breaks into our exile and brings us a taste of our ultimate home. And conversely, in so doing, he reminds us that in the meantime we live in exile! Having tasted of Christ we are all the more aware of the challenge we have, to live as exiles, refugees in the world. But with

him that calling is possible for us; without him we would be all at sea.

We must not miss opportunities to share together. We do not receive the Sacrament often enough. I am sure of that and so the times when we do experience it together are especially significant. We must leave the Lord's table with the desire to live his way in our place of exile. We must be resolved to live in service to one another. As we do so we challenge the way of the world and invite people to consider living a different way. A way which is a foretaste of the banquet of the

end of age which is our destiny. May God
bless us as we journey on. Amen.