



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Wednesday Eucharist with Prayer for Healing

Readings: 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

Psalm 125:1-5

John 17:11-19

16th September 2020

St Cyprian

It feels like we are living through unprecedented times but of course we're not. Many Christians have lived through plagues and pandemics, and had to find ways their faith could sustain and inform that experience. Last week we remembered Charles Lowder, priest to the London poor during a Cholera epidemic. Today we remember both Edward Pusey, who served in the same way, and St Cyprian, a third century bishop who was so involved in recording and responding to a plague between 249-262 AD in Rome that it was thereafter called the Plague of Cyprian.

St Cyprian, rather remarkably, was chosen as Bishop of Carthage two years after his baptism, against his will. Not only did he have plague to contend with but also terrible persecution of Christians, who were forced to sacrifice to Roman Gods and to recant their faith on pain of torture and death.

Thousands of Christians rejected their faith, and Cyprian had to show wisdom in his dealings with them when the persecutions were over, tempering justice with mercy. Less problematic was the steadfastness of the Christians of the time towards the plague - many were reported running towards the suffering eager to nurse them.

Cyprian urged them to help everyone regardless of belief; and the steadfastness of the Christians during that time won popular support for the church and strengthened Cyprian's position as Bishop.

Today's readings might have been written for all of those godly men and for us. Paul encourages us in the midst of trouble. 'We see no answer to our problems, but never despair, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body'. Indeed, we are all walking around these days

under a sense of threat, but as Christians we also hold a treasure for the world. We may feel weak, weary, distracted, but Paul says that we are earthenware jars holding gold, diamonds, rubies, pearls; the treasure of the kingdom of God that needs to spill out to those around us.

I end with some words written by St Cyprian to his friend Donatus, soon after he was baptised. He writes in the context of Roman society - a world even more brutal, dysfunctional, corrupt than ours. And yet, he has found the pearl of great price.

“It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world.

But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life.

They are despised and persecuted, but they care not.

They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world.

These people, Donatus, are Christians. . . and I am one of them.”