Friday 9.30am Low Mass 27th Week of Ordinary Time 8.x.21

The Prophet Joel clearly sat in a petrol queue for many hours, or perhaps he was on the Brexit trade deal negotiating team? Maybe he served on the staff team of a Church of England Parish Church undergoing renovation?

“Priests, put on sackcloth and lament. Ministers of the altar, wail.
…For the house of our God has been deprived
…Order a fast,
proclaim a solemn assembly;
…Cry out to the Lord,
‘Oh, what a day!’

Perhaps just that last line suffices actually: ‘Oh what a day!’ But of course, it wasn’t drowning in contractors and bills and the endless ‘to do’ list that Joel speaks of. It was the awe-some day of the Lord. The end of the world.
We could sit here and debate all day what that Day might actually be like, sifting amongst the imagery we are given in the Old and New Testaments. We could bash scholars together and throw in poets and painters too. But to my mind, however important it is to do that (and it is), the primary question, in the face of life’s troubles, the dark and stormy realities of our own lives, and in the face of The Day of Judgement itself is ‘what are we to do?’. What are we actually supposed to do now, in response to these things?

The lighthouse beam for us shines out of today’s Gospel. Today’s Gospel is a rich flower bed. There are strands we could run with about demonology in 1st century Jewish life. We could run with the role of Spiritual warfare – Good vs evil – and our place as soldiers of the light. We could think about the manner of Jesus’ rabbinic rhetoric and what that tells us. All valid threads to pull on. But the one I want to pull on today is the primary importance of the Interior Life. That our hearts must not be divided. That our health and salvation, our citizenship of Heaven, is first of all a matter of the Interior Life (from which all other things flow). And this is not a threat. This is gardening. I said today’s Gospel is a rich flower bed with a variety of beautiful flowers (the various messages we could take).
You too, and your soul (your interior life), is a beautiful garden. And Jesus is (not mistakenly, this time) the gardener. We kneel next to Him and learn from Him as He tends the garden of the soul. Tugging out weeds, digging in manure, pruning where necessary, and helping blooms to flourish.

The interior life is as about as unfashionable as it gets nowadays. It can’t be measured. It can’t be sold or bought. It can’t be made a means of doing anything or making anything. It is simply what it is. And the adventure of prayer, of relationship between us as creatures and our creator, our hope of life forever with God, and our ability to ever love and be loved – all live in this garden. It is the most important reality in our lives, and at the same time utterly ‘useless’ and evasive.

But today’s Gospel helps us to see, that living the interior life, nurturing our interior life of being ‘hidden with Christ in God’, of our hearts finding that the only real place they are alive is hidden in the Heart of Jesus, and that our interior life is more real than anything we ever do out here, is the best way of spending our days on earth, and the only sensible thing to do in the face of life’s darknesses and troubles, and the end of the world (whenever that is). These realities are only really met, when our interior life is the place in which we live.
This week is the perfect week for this interpretation of today’s readings. On Monday we celebrated St Francis of Assisi, a holy fool whose ludicrous poverty has inspired millions, because it came from his interior life. Tuesday: ‘In te confido’ ‘Jesus I trust in you’ the modern Polish St Faustina whose Divine Mercy visions are shining beacons of the interior life. Wednesday’s St Bruno whose reforms cleared away the barnacles of wealth and society and status and freed men and women to pursue the adventure of the interior life. And Our Lady of the Rosary yesterday, surely a bastion of simple often hidden, powerful world-changing prayer. This week’s feasts are a bouquet of sanctity, inspiring us to seek Christ and the only life worth living (that which He gives) were He is waiting to be found, in the garden of your soul.