Wednesday Healing Mass 20th October 2021  

The Priest Pastor

‘The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour’. Words from our first reading that hint that Ordinary Time is drawing to its close, Advent is around the corner. Life is full of the unexpected event, the unexpected hour. Unexpected good, unexpected delights. And unexpected bad, unexpected disaster. Who expected Covid? We are perhaps recovering from the first shock at that disaster and now dealing with the aftermath.

But our country is reeling from the unexpected shock of the murder of an elected Member of Parliament, David Amess. Committed to his constituents, committed to being accessible and available to everyone. Committed also to his Christian Faith. Responding to this horror, the Father of the House, Peter Bottomley pointed out that MPs are vulnerable in the same way that many others in our society are; mental health workers, clergy, police, health service staff, shop keepers and public transport workers. Those who seek to serve a wide range of people to the best of their ability are always at some form of risk. As Archbishop Justin Welby said in his sermon ‘Sacrifice is the rent paid to liberty by those who represent us. But when the cost is seen so visibly, with such demonic horror, what do we say so that we may comfort the grieving and be resilient in tragedy?’

It is indeed difficult to know what to say. But one thing perhaps we have learned through the unexpected disaster of Covid is that we are more dependent on one another in society than we might realise. As members of our society we are each called to the deeply committed determination to recognise our common humanity. We are family, kindred, that is where the word kind comes from. If the breath from our mouths at one point could simply mean life or death to someone, then we need to address the words of our mouths and the power they have. The hate speeches that influenced that young man in Southend are still online. Hate towards MPs continues through social media. We jump to judge, criticise, belittle those who make
decisions, the complexity of which we cannot know. And is there not something demonic about the extremes that can run to? After all, one of the names for Satan is ‘The Accuser’. There is a world of difference between hate speech and respectful disagreement and robust opposition. The tongue can be used, as Paul spoke of in Romans in our first reading both as an ‘instrument of wickedness’ or an ‘instrument of righteousness’.

I’ll leave the last words to the other Archbishop, Stephen of York, a Southend boy.

‘Hate cannot win. It may score many points. It may land many punches. But it can’t win. In the end it just consumes itself. Love is always stronger. Its always more tenacious. Its patient endurance draws us together. This love is what we see in Jesus Christ. This same vision is held in our democracy. It requires us to listen and to love one another, especially those with whom we differ and disagree, and to attend to each other’s needs and serve the common good.’