

## 19th after Trinity 2017 - 8am Parish Church

*You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self  
.....and to clothe yourselves with the new self.*

Now that Fr Leonard is no longer with us, you may not be aware that *Strictly Come Dancing* is currently in full swing! His love of this show was well known because he often referred to it! And it was a love that Leonard and I shared.

I can't speak for him, but for me part of the **attraction** of this show is seeing how, over the weeks of the competition, the guest celebrities discover a *new self* within them that they never knew was there.

Gradually, over several weeks of **expert tuition** from professional dancing partners, the celebrities are not only **clothed** with wonderful costumes, hair and make-up, but also become *clothed with a new self*, a new *dancing self*. Many of the celebrities speak of how this **new self has changed their lives**.

Discovering a new self within us is of course very exciting, and these days there are a myriad self-help books which want to tell us how to do it. They all seem to suggest, however, that the development of this new self is entirely **within our own power**.

I think the celebrities on *Strictly Come Dancing* might disagree. They all regularly point to their wonderful professional partners, saying that they **could do nothing without them**.

Our first reading from **Ephesians** at first sounds a bit like a **self-help guide**. In order to *clothe ourselves with a new self*, we have to put away falsehood, speak truth to our neighbours, never let the sun go down on our anger. We mustn't steal, or let any evil word come out of our mouths, and so on.

This could give the impression that, so long as we make all these adjustments to our behaviour, we can develop this *new self* by ourselves, without any help, just as the self-help guides tell us. But, on a closer look, that is not what Paul wants to say.

Certainly, we have a part to play. If we are to *clothe ourselves with a new self*, then we have to put away the old self in the shape of our former way of life, our former bad habits. We have to learn new steps in the dance of life. But importantly there are also indications within the passage that this *new self* is not of our own making.

The celebrities of *Strictly Come Dancing* know that they could not learn to dance without their professional partners who teach them. We cannot learn to clothe ourselves with a new self without the guidance of our Teacher. But there is more to it than just His moral guidance.

The *new self*, we hear, comes about through *renewal in the spirit of our minds*. It is *created* (the text says, not made) *according to the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness*.

To be *renewed in the spirit* we must surely be open to the Spirit. To be *created according to the likeness of God* we see in Jesus Christ, we must submit ourselves to God, willing to be formed into his likeness. This has the power to change our lives for ever, just as the life of the paralytic man was changed for ever.

But how do we do that, apart from trying to emulate the perfect behaviour of Jesus, as nearly as we can? There is a further clue in our passage. As Ephesians says, we have been **marked with a seal** for the day of **redemption**. I suggest we may understand this to refer to our **baptism**.

In baptism we are baptised both into the **death** of Christ, being buried with him as we pass through the waters of death, and into the **new life** of Christ. We rise with him from the waters of baptism to **new life in him**. We are sealed with the mark of the cross in oil on our foreheads; that is, with the mark of **forgiveness**, the mark of **redemption**.

As the words of the baptism service put it: *We are **clothed with Christ**, dying to sin that we may live his risen life.* We put off the old self and become *clothed with a new self*; not through our own power, or our own improved behaviour, but in the power of the Spirit, the power of the Cross; in the power of him who was himself **clothed with a new self** on Easter morning.

That power should fill us with awe, like those who witnessed the **release from sin** experienced by the paralytic man in our Gospel reading. Like him, we too are released from the effects of sin by Jesus Christ - through the healing waters of baptism. So let us,

like those crowds, glorify God for what he has done for us in his Son.

*And let us pray the Baptism Collect:*

*Heavenly Father, by the power of your Holy Spirit, you give to your faithful people new life in the waters of baptism. Guide and strengthen us by the same Spirit, that we who are born again may serve you in faith and love and grow to the full stature of your Son, Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit now and for ever. Amen.*