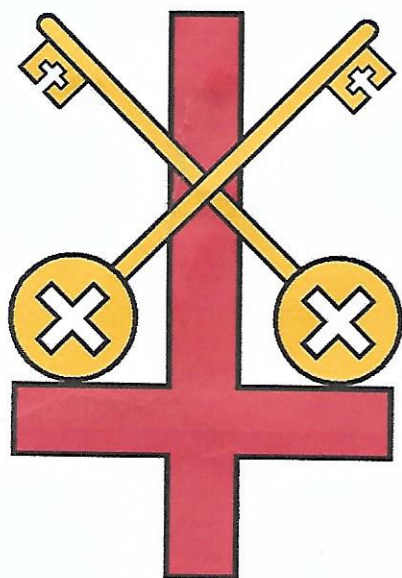


## THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

### The Twenty-fourth Sunday of the Year



Ordinations to the priesthood and the diaconate are traditionally held in the early summer but owing to the coronavirus they have been taking place throughout the country in recent weeks. It struck me that perhaps it is not without coincidence that the readings from the Gospel according to St Matthew which we have been looking at in this weekly letter are passages in which the Apostle Peter plays a not insignificant part.

St John Henry Newman wrote: *'Here below, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to change often.'*

If we think about Peter when we first encounter him in the gospel story he is traditionally described as a humble fisherman. On reflection I am not quite sure about the 'humble' bit. He owns a boat, he has a house big enough to accommodate his sick mother-in-law, and business partners in the lucrative fishing trade on the Sea of Galilee. He is a senior figure – in St John's Gospel, he turns to his fellow apostles after the excitement of the Resurrection appearances and announces that he is going fishing – and the other disciples promptly follow his lead, eager to go back to something 'normal'.

We learn also that Peter has a volatile and emotional side, for all his business acumen as a fisherman. He refuses to have his feet washed by Jesus, he starts cursing and swearing when accused by the serving girl in the house of the High Priest on being Jesus' follower, he prattles on at the transfiguration about building shelters to Moses and Elijah because he does not understand what he has just seen. He impulsively cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant in the Garden of Gethsemane, and he suffers nothing less than a mini breakdown when, as the cock crows, he realises that he has betrayed his Master.

It is a measure of our Lord's own insight into the hearts of human beings that he chose this flawed individual to be his disciple and the leader of his 'little flock' after his Ascension. The intuitive emotional side of Peter's character gave him the insight to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah and to confess his unconditional love for our Lord at the lakeside in Galilee after the Resurrection even though we are told, characteristically, he felt rather hurt at the Lord doubting him. His practical side enabled him to lead the early Church in Jerusalem in organising food banks and services, converting, preaching and healing.

Peter undergoes a complete change from the frightened, confused figure, who collapsed with remorse outside the High Priest's house. From being a confused, impulsive individual, not always reading situations correctly, he becomes clear, decisive, preaching to his opponents in the Temple, refusing to accept their orders to cease the mission given him by Christ to preach the Good News to all nations. Tradition tells us that Peter went to Rome and was martyred in the persecution of Nero.

This is a record of what the Holy Spirit does. If we listen to his voice, he changes lives and changes them often. He energises us so that our obvious failings become our distinct virtues, and leads us into paths of which we could never have dreamed. We should never be afraid of that call to change, even if we do not know where that change will lead us.

Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, who of your divine providence have appointed various orders in your Church: Give your grace, we pray, to all who are called to any office and ministry for your people; and so fill them with the truth of your doctrine and clothe them with holiness of life, that they may faithfully serve before you, to the glory of your great Name and for the benefit of your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.