

Sisters of Jesus Way



Easter 08

Our dear friends,

May the joy of the risen Christ be with you. His presence brings peace. May the loveliness of spring be more beautiful because Jesus walks with you.

Our “summer” programme is early this year; two of our most popular weekends are in May. The first will be what we loosely call our teaching weekend because we have more emphasis on looking at scripture, and most importantly of all applying it to our own lives. Instead of Pentecost, this year we have chosen the Ascension as our focus and it will be the weekend following Ascension Day, the day that we remember the exaltation of our Lord Jesus, his coronation in heaven. It is the gathering together of the gospel, the climax of the Lord’s earthly ministry. We catch glimpses of wonderful truths. Ascension has much to say to us as Christians.

Also in May we are holding our walking and praise weekend. There are many beautiful walks here on the Wirral – we pause from time to time to sing and praise God for the blessings of his creation, the hills, the ever-changing sea, the joy of the birds weaving through the skies and feeding on the sea-shore, the canopy of spring-time green in the woods before the dustiness of summer. There will almost certainly be a walk again to Hilbre Island, always appealing but especially so in May with the mauve-pink thrift in bloom and perhaps, a glimpse of the seals sunning themselves on the sandbank. We are so blessed and it is good to praise and thank the heavenly Father, the Creator. On a practical note – this weekend does involve walking and therefore is only for the reasonably fit! A list of requirements, strong shoes etc will be sent to you when you book in.

Our third weekend is in July and as another newsletter will not be going out before then we will mention it now. Many of us appreciate a quiet weekend with time to sit, to listen to what the Lord is saying, to stop and be unhurried. We will guide the weekend through.

The dates for all these weekends are in the accompanying leaflet. Please don’t be nervous about coming on your own. Often it is better - make new friends and meet in a special way the best Friend of all, Jesus. Of course you are welcome here all the other days between special weekends! You are also welcome to bring a small group from your church.

There are two words that we use many times in our community but which are often considered old-fashioned. They are “sin” and “repentance”. We occasionally try to find more familiar words like “faults” or “wrong attitudes” instead of using the word “sin”. Whatever word we use, our concern is for Christians, and this applies to all of us sometimes, who have no word for sin because the reality or the seriousness of the condition is not being faced.

We often lack joy, peace and patience, as well as humility and gentleness. We are all called to be saints, to be loving and kind. Sometimes we are the opposite. Jesus spoke about freedom but we feel bound. There is no way that all this can change without a confrontation with or a realisation of the sin in our lives and that we all need to be (to use another old-fashioned, unpopular word) “saved” not once in a spectacular conversion but each day.

Right in the middle of that word sin is the letter “I”. That is where we have to begin and incidentally end, as we are not called to be the judge of any other person. This means starting to be real. Have you ever wondered why Jesus seemed to relate more easily to the partygoers, the prostitutes and the despised tax collectors? It could not be argued that they were more morally good, on the contrary they were far from it but they were real, there was no pretend goodness, either consciously or unconsciously.

The difficulty with pretend goodness is that we become so used to acting the part, we don't realise ourselves that is what we are doing. We put ourselves into the Christian mould as we perceive it but our hearts are not right. We are like a dog that being told to lie down, does it but whose whole attitude is saying, "I may be lying down outwardly but inwardly I am still standing up!" Jesus emphasised that there must be no mismatch between our hearts and our outward attitudes. It is not only doing the right thing but also doing it in the right way with the right motives from a loving heart.

Being real is being honest about what our hearts are saying even when we find it hard to admit. We are on safer ground spiritually admitting, "I can't stand those people!" than surrounding them with a pseudo-love and pretending to ourselves that this is the kind of loving that Jesus spoke about. Sweetness that doesn't quite ring true often covers hostility. We are on safer ground admitting we are afraid than by pretending that we are not. We are on a firmer foundation when we listen to the voice within us saying, "I cannot cope any longer" and bring this into the light, telling the heavenly Father how we feel. But many times rather than honestly admitting our inadequacy, we carry on in a situation with increasing resentment or self-pity and then compound the situation by not admitting we now have two other problems, i.e. resentment and self-pity!

Jealousy has a habit of breaking through our carefully guarded words of congratulations or envy through our attempts to look happy when we are overlooked. We can be very spiritual in a fellowship meeting and a different person in a business meeting. There is a mismatch. Who are we? If we were more honest answering that question, the mismatch would not happen or at very least we would realise and admit we had a problem i.e. our behaviour at the business meeting be that at church, at work or a minor spat in our own home. We can be very good at standing on our rights or having the last word. Our worst behaviour is often reserved for our own homes or we hug some hidden, inner addiction to ourselves and subsequently pay the penalty in a double life. Perhaps, our spirituality at the fellowship meeting needs looking at also!

And so it carries on, laden down with duty and the occasional or frequent guilt trip we struggle on. Where is the freedom that Jesus promised or the abundant life, joy and peace? The primary problem is not that we cannot stand someone or we are afraid and anxious, resentful, self-pitying or that we cannot cope. It is not even our bad behaviour in our home or a secret addiction. Jesus can help us and save us from all of these things and much else besides. The central problem is that we are not being real and honest.

The following is a quote from BBC News on the Internet (25th March 08) concerning explosive anger. "The solution begins with the person accepting they are the problem, not some-one else. It is a very common trap for people with explosive anger to believe that their rage is caused by some-one else. The problem with this view is that it prevents the anger being solved." This applies to every other sin.

Where do we begin to put all this right? We can begin with the simple prayer, "show me my sin" or "Lord, I am a problem for myself and everyone else, please help me" or a plain "help me, Lord." In the end we all come to the place where we say, "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner."

We can start to listen to the warnings and promptings of the Holy Spirit and seek his light. Then we will realise that when we are honest and say to the Lord, "I can't cope any longer", he comes with his aid. As we admit our need, confess our sin humbly and turn to the Lord to help he comes speedily to our aid. There is no sin or wrong attitude in the human heart from which he cannot save us.

What stops us from being real and honest? It is either pride or we love our sin more than we love the Lord. There is freedom in Christ only when pride begins to tumble down. It is a joy to have a Lord with whom we can be completely honest and real. Only the humble, those willing to admit their need, discover this. This is what the tax collectors, prostitutes and "sinners" discovered in the gospels.

When pretence falls away, as our outward "religious" self breaks into pieces, our fellowship, our oneness in Christ with other believers becomes touched by heaven. We are all sinners but sinners continually being saved and transformed by grace, by the loving Saviour. It is this that unites us. Our love is genuine so others are drawn into the Kingdom because they glimpse Jesus in us. Our lives followed by our words point them to Jesus, the One who is able to save.

If we forfeit this path, we forfeit everything in the Christian life. It was for this that Jesus died and for this Jesus lives. He saves us from our sins. We have a wonderful Saviour.

May this be the reality in all our lives in the coming days.

God bless you,

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