

29th Sunday (B)

17th October 2021

'To give His life as a ransom for many'

Is 53: *by His sufferings shall my servant justify many*

Ps 32: *The Lord*

looks on those who revere Him ... to rescue their souls from death

Heb 4: *a high priest ... who has been tempted in every way that we ...*

Mk 10: 35–45: *anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant*

I happened to receive in the post in the week this latest [CTS](#) pamphlet, *Reading the News Without Losing Your Faith*. It's a brief reflection on the challenge to a positive view of the world that comes when so much news seems to be 'bad news.' Since we believe in a good God — He who has created this beautiful world in all its wonder — it can be hard to process the harsh, sinful, unjust things that happen when people are cruel to each other. When the news is terrible — wars, killings, corruption, injustices, prejudices — it can knock our sense of the goodness of humanity. But in fact, a deep, lively, trusting faith in Christ — holding to Him in all things — always provides a lifeline in that struggle. Jesus Himself exercised His earthly ministry in the midst of tensions and cruelties, and taught His disciples to do the same: with His gift of peace and hope, not blown off course or unbalanced spiritually or caught out emotionally by the events of life.

I was mindful of this as I heard just before Mass on Friday evening the news of the death in his regular constituency surgery of the veteran Essex MP, Sir David Amess — a man, by all accounts, respected by MPs across the political spectrum, and who has served as an MP for almost 40 yrs without particularly seeking promotion and ministerial office; always close to the people he was elected to serve. Yes, of course there is the shock of that brutal attack; inexplicable, you might think, as a MP goes about his duties, making himself available for anyone in need of advice or support. In fact, only 9 MPs have ever been killed in office in the past 200 yrs, but that doesn't diminish our sadness at the horror of Friday's killing. Nevertheless, one can see in someone's dying, even brutally, in the line of duty, a sense of sacrifice, a sense of a life offered positively, generously, given up in service for a good cause. Sir David died at 69 doing what he loved doing, serving his constituents, and setting us all a great example of giving one's life in unremitting service. I'm not in the business of *canonizing* Sir David, but I think that we

can honour him as a truly good exemplar of what a life of public service can look like.

Today, Sir David would have been at Mass, in his parish in Leigh-on-Sea. A devout, practising, Catholic, he would have heard like us those Gospel words of Our Lord — words from the lips of Jesus as He admonished the brothers James & John for their misguided request for preferment: “*Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man Himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” It is poignant to think that those are the sacred words he would have heard, had he not been killed. For he seems not just to have *heard* those words but to have *lived* them. Isn’t that the very effect the Gospel should have on each of us: “*Not just listening and then forgetting, but actively putting it into practice*”? (James 1:25). So, let’s hear those words again. No doubt Jesus had to repeat them often to His apostles, who could be slow on the uptake. For us to hear them a 3rd time this

morning / evening, would be no bad thing! This time, let’s *pray* them. That is, let the Holy Spirit transmit their sacred meaning right in to your innermost heart ... “*Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man Himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” These are not just words to hear and then forget, but words that Our Lord *wants* you to put in to practice. As you go about your studies here, what *service* is He calling you to, here? What *life of service* is He calling you to beyond your university degree? Last week we had a wonderful Volunteering Fair after morning Mass. If you missed it, or passed it by, why not have a re-think, and consider seriously, in prayer, what work of volunteering service you could do, right now, this year? It’s not too late — you can speak to (or [e-mail](#)) Sr Carolyn; you can take a Volunteering Handbook (chapel lobby) or take a look [online on the website](#). Now, as a student, it’s good to learn to give. If you get into the habit of generously offering

some time in service now, then almost certainly you will set yourself up for a lifetime of doing the same. Allow the Lord to work through you, inspiring you to put others first: “anyone who wants to be great amongst you must become servant to all.”

Reflecting on Sir David’s life of public service as a Catholic MP also gives me a chance to speak of another topic of current importance. As a Catholic, Sir David was prominent in his pro-life stance. He campaigned consistently for policies that were protective of the life of the unborn child, and the life of the frail elderly. He voted against the liberalization of abortion, and against the repeated threat of legalizing euthanasia. He was renowned, too, for speaking up for persecuted minorities. It is a strange coincidence, then, that his death should occur in this period of the [novena of prayer](#) against the threat of so-called ‘assisted dying.’ Sir David’s life, offered in service, and taken violently from him, in the course of those duties, is the very antithesis of asking another to help one get rid of one’s life, howsoever challenged one’s life may be. The

proposed legislation is to be debated on Friday in the House of Lords (not the Commons), and thankfully the Government has strongly indicated that it will not offer this Bill any support. Even so, [as our Bishops know well](#), any sense that Parliament is broadly behind this Bill is a deadly threat for the future, for repeated attempts to introduce legislation to legalize the deliberate killing of frail, sick, and elderly patients. And therefore this Bill is to be opposed with great vigour, by prayer and action. We can be certain that, had this debate and vote been in the Commons this Friday, Sir David would have been there opposing the Bill. At the end of Mass today, we will continue the Novena which we commenced on Thursday in union with other Catholics across the country, and which invokes the powerful intercession of that great defender of life, Pope St John Paul II. His feastday on Friday coincides providentially with the day on which the Bill will be debated in Parliament. Copies of the Novena are also available in the chapel lobby, or easily [found online](#), so I do urge you to keep praying about this, particularly as we

draw nearer to Friday, that the Lords who speak in the debate, and those who vote in the division, are inspired to hold firm to the safeguards to life that are afforded by the illegality of euthanasia. Personally, I'm also writing to a variety of Lords who are down to contribute to the debate, to urge them to vote against it. Most have not replied, one has replied positively, one has replied bluntly and negatively. But I will continue, as it's incumbent on us to defend the goodness of life as God has given it to us, and to resist the threats that periodically are made to the safety and security of the terminally ill, frail elderly, and those who might lack mental capacity. Additionally we must defend the medical profession — and our future doctors amongst you, too — from misguidedly being used as a means of dealing death, rather than healing and promoting life within the span that God naturally gives us. If anyone wants to do a holy work of service, and join me in this [‘ministry’ of e-mailing](#) the Lords, then just ask me: I can easily help you to get going on that. *“There are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord.”*

Finally, it came to me that a fitting tribute today to our deceased brother in Christ, a gifted and devoted public servant, Sir David Amess, would be to pray with real fervour this famous prayer of St Ignatius:

*Teach me, good Lord, to serve You as You deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for any reward
save that of knowing that I do Your holy Will.*