

Homily 6th Sunday of Easter 2026

'Our God is a God of Surprises' (G. Hughes, SJ)

Have you ever found yourself the subject of the unexpected, surprised to find yourself perhaps in a place you never thought you would be? As a Scot, born and bred eleven miles south of Glasgow, I never ever thought that God would lead me to teach in the South of England, nor that I would eventually retire and settle in Dorset on the south coast! Yet when I look back, I can see God guiding and helping me make decisions which changed the course of my life. Jobs in The Convent of Jesus and Mary in North London, St Peter's in Guildford, Sacred Heart High School in Hammersmith and St Michael's Catholic High School in Watford were the places in which I was called to carry out my God given mission, a mission entrusted to no other person. Ministering now in the parish of Holy Redeemer, Highcliffe and amongst the Irish travelling community with The Margaret Clitherow Trust is where God wants me to be and, with divine help and guidance, I now continue to carry out his mission.

In today's First Reading Philip finds himself in a place he never expected to be. God guides him to Samaria. The Samaritans were the least of the least of the sons and daughters of Abraham. They were hated by mainstream Jews as they had abandoned Yahweh and embraced Assyrian deities. Many intermarried with Assyrians, who conquered the region in 722 BC, and so lost their Jewish 'purity'. They were considered 'illegitimate sons and daughters of Abraham.' As Philip preached to this unlikeliest of groups, many came to believe, and miracles and wonders occurred among them. The Apostles in Jerusalem, hearing of Philip's evangelical work in Samaria, sent Peter and John to endorse his ministry. The two Apostles baptised the people and laid hands on them invoking The Holy Spirit. This was a surprising and totally unexpected direction for the fledgling Church.

In today's Second Reading from St Peter, Early Church Christians are urged, perhaps also unexpectedly, considering the persecution they were under, to respond to abuse, 'with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.' Helped and guided by God through The Holy Spirit these early Christians were uncompromising in their proclamation of Jesus' life, death and resurrection even to the point of martyrdom.

In The Farewell Discourses of St John's Gospel today, Jesus states, 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. In that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.' Like last Sunday's homily, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, acting together as one, guiding and helping The Apostles in their eventual God given mission.

Not only were The Apostles and Early Church helped and guided by God but we today, if we open our eyes, ears and hearts, are also guided and helped, often in unexpected and surprising ways, by The Godhead. It is through prayer, reflection and attention to 'the signs of the times' God's will is made clear to us. Prayer is the 'offering of the mind and heart to God' whilst being open to demands of his Word and the often unexpected and surprising stirrings of The Holy Spirit. At times, the life direction we are asked to take by God is a difficult one, 'a road less travelled' but in the words of the poet Robert Frost 'that makes all the difference'. What unexpected course might God be asking you to take? What surprising direction will your life take if you abandon yourself to God's holy will in prayer? How stunningly beautiful is that!