Dear friends,

I really enjoy preaching when the raw material excites me. Coming to more fully comprehend the parable of the turning of water into wine transformed my understanding of the Bible, how it’s written and what it means, so preaching on it is always a pleasure.

It also helped that the first reading at the ecumenical service in the evening was the “Three visitors to Abraham” - another favourite. I have only one icon on my desk and that is the three visitors by Rublev, probably the most famous Icon in the Western world, which expresses the complexity and mysterious nature of God.

Anyway, after a hellish week with a chesty cough and no heating or hot water for a time, everything is heading in the right direction – thank the Lord!

Sunday 28th January – 4th of Epiphany

Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at both services at St. Peter’s, and I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael’s at 9.30am and 11am respectively.

**Deuteronomy 18: 15 – 20.** This is about authority. After Moses, who is going to lead the Israelites speaking the authentic words of God? God promises to raise up a prophet, but it is unclear whether it a single prophet or a succession of prophets. Implicit is the fear that they can’t know if a prophet is real or not except in hindsight. Cut to the New Testament, and John the Baptist was asked if he was “the prophet” and Christians have naturally seen Jesus as the supreme embodiment of the Prophet who spoke “with authority”.

**Revelation 12: 1-5a.** One of the strangest bits of Revelation this morning which can leave all so-called experts flailing to interpret succinctly. In Protestant theology the woman in heaven is the embodiment of Jerusalem “the mother of us all” (Galatians 4: 26) and about the birth of the Messianic community. If you are of a more catholic bent, the woman is Mary, the “Queen of heaven” and a universal mother and particularly the mother of the church and the child is Jesus. You pays your money and takes your choice.

**Mark 1: 28-28.** Many contemporary Christians believe that miraculous events, if ever witnessed first-hand would produce immediate and unwavering faith. The writers of the gospels knew different. Miracles demonstrate power but power can come from a variety of sources, both good and evil. The miracles (this is the first one in Mark’s gospel) provoke the questions, who is this man and where does he get his power? Jesus is introduced as speaking with “authority” unlike the scribes. Now the scribes were recognised as being very learned and respected people so how does Jesus exceed them? From a faith perspective one can only say that the scribes interpret what they hear and read from God but Jesus speaks as if he was God himself.

Thought for Today

The week of Prayer for Christian Unity leads me inevitably to reminisce about my Halcyon days in Bucharest many years ago. It is easy I know to look back through rose-tinted spectacles, but everything was so new to me and so exotic and being the Apokrisarios (Special representative) of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox church added a certain “je ne sais quoi” to proceedings. I said much the same thing to the Methodist and Baptist representatives here on Sunday evening. My first ever Eucharist I served as deacon was not Anglican but a Roman Catholic Mass in Cernavoda. Fr. Solomon telling me (through interpreters) that Anglicans are “Just Catholics without the Pope”. I also recall being refused communion in a Baptist congregation in the same city because I was not a “repentant Christian” – that was me told (Less said-soonest mended)! Much later when a priest in Bucharest I had to know the difference between Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics, German Lutherans and Hungarian Lutherans, Romanian Orthodox and the Russian and Armenian varieties. Oddly enough it was the Anglican church that started “churches together” in Bucharest – this pin prick in church terms compared to the mighty beasts of Catholicism and Orthodoxy but we certainly punched well above our weight. Cut to Budleigh Salterton in 2024 and the situation is vastly different but exactly the same opportunities and problems exist. I deal with other denominations here exactly as I did then. We are all first and foremost children of God – that is my starting point. Then I identify as a Catholic Christian and only then as an Anglican. It is all about having theological and denominational perspective.

The Prayer for Today is from the Coventry Cathedral chapel of Unity

**Father we pray for your church throughout the world,**

**That it may share to the full in the work of your Son,**

**Revealing you to men and reconciling men to you and to one another.**

**That Christians may learn to love one another and their neighbours as**

**You have loved us.**

**That your church may more and more reflect the unity that is your will and your gift.**

**We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Love and peace,

Martin