

Our front article this month is written by Reverend Jack Hemsworth
Priest in Charge at our Mission Partnership church, St. Andrew's.



Dragons' in the 21st Century

I am writing this on a bright and sunny day in April, to be precise, 23rd April, St. George's Day. During the last day or two, I have been speaking to children about St. George, which is not easy, because not much is known about him. In some ways, George is a bit like Robin Hood or King Arthur, you know a little fact, and quite a lot of myth. Just try to convince a seven year old of the existence of dragons! It is thought that the "factual" George was the son of a Roman Imperial Officer and that he, himself, became a soldier and served in Persia (now Iran). There is another tradition that George came to Britain at a time when Christians were being persecuted and reputedly left his military service to campaign on behalf of his fellow Christians. His pleading for an end to the persecution of Christians led to his martyrdom.

So what are the "dragons" of 2015? Christians in many parts of the world, face persecution every bit as severe in terms of violence and ethnic cleansing as the days of the worst of the Roman Emperors. It comes home to us, in the Manchester Diocese, in a very real way, when we hear about the suffering of our Christian brothers and sisters in our Link Diocese of Lahore. The world faces a genuine prospect that in some nations and regions, there will be a complete absence of any visible Christian presence.

As we look out of our windows just now, and see our British Springtime in all its blossoming glory, it is so easy to think "what has all this got to do with me?" It all seems so far away from us and fades to the back of our minds with all our other preoccupations in every day life. What can we do about situations that are so distant, we might ask? What we can do is pray for our fellow Christians in all parts of the world, but especially for those who are suffering so badly for their faith. In practical terms we can donate as generously as we can, to the Christian Aid Appeal this month, or to Save the Children, or other Aid agencies. Pray for these agencies where many of their workers are, like George, facing these "21st Century Dragons". Pray also, for those who are responsible for the persecution, that their hearts may be turned from hatred and violence towards their fellow human beings. Pray for a better understanding and mutual respect for people of other faiths, for compassion and tolerance between the whole of humankind.

There is another "Dragon", somewhat more difficult to spot, and which is in our own Nation. Whereas in the U.K., Christians are not subject to the persecution by violent means, our faith faces challenges of its own. In many places of employment, Christians find that they are strongly discouraged from wearing any outward sign of their faith. There have been well documented occasions in the media, where Christians have been suspended from their employment for wearing a cross. People have faced disciplinary action for speaking about their faith in the workplace. Archbishop Justin, Bishop David and Church Leaders in other denominations are faced with criticism when they speak out against any kind of injustice. At the same time, our Leaders are criticised when they don't speak out.

The Reading set by the Lectionary for Morning Prayer, today (23rd April) was from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul describes the Gospel armour (echoes of George the Dragon slayer?) and concludes by praying he might proclaim the Gospel boldly . The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek to those who strike us.

Those messages then, are how we should face our "Dragons" with love for all, as taught by Jesus and to proclaim it boldly like Paul.

Yours in Christ,

Father Jack