

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : 8:00am *Holy Communion*,
3rd Sunday after Trinity, July 2, 2017

Today's readings remind us that as Christians, we are no longer slaves to sin but are freed to be people of righteousness. That is easy to say but harder to put into practice, because of course for many the journey through life is a constant battle – a battle between good and evil, between light and darkness. It is interesting that Paul talks of sin earning death, which implies hard and wearying work. And that is probably an accurate image for sin can so quickly drain us of energy and wears us down. But in stark contrast living a righteous life as good as we can is not onerous but is freeing and liberating.

In today's very short Gospel passage we are reminded that anyone responding to one of God's people is responding to God. In other words our behaviour as freed slaves, if we want to put it like that, will be obvious to those around us, since we will inevitably be behaving differently. For people do look at us and want to see the difference that professing to be a Christians makes to our lives. Yet there is an unfairness here between priest and people.

Today in Cathedrals throughout the country, men and women are being made deacon and ordained priest. A highly symbolic gesture is that they will be clothed with a stole – for the deacon, the stole is put over the shoulder and for a priest the stole is taken from the shoulder and placed round the neck. There are many theories as to the ancestry of the stole. More popular is the theory that the stole originated from a kind of liturgical napkin, a reminder of the napkin used by Christ in washing the feet of his disciples, and is a fitting symbol of the yoke of Christ, the yoke of service.

But – but – for all of us here this morning, whether priest or people, it is by the invisible sign of the Cross marked on our foreheads at our baptism that we are singled out. By that signing of the Cross whenever our baptism was, God has changed us for he wants us to be open in our love and worship of him and relaxed in our attitude towards others. By our baptism we have, in the words of Paul, 'put ourselves at the disposal of God' whether we know it or not. Yet if

we can do that, then we will be more ready to speak of God as much by our actions as by any words we may speak.

For me I have always been very aware that my clerical collar marks me out as a Christian. But for you who are not so clothed, what marks you out?