

Readings: *Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23; Psalm 94(95):1,28,9; Colossians 3:1-5,9-11; Luke 12:13-21.*

Today we hear the last of the readings from Paul's letter to the Colossians.

The three we have heard over earlier Sundays have dealt with matters of theology – the beliefs that Christians should hold in their minds and hearts.

Verse 5 of today's reading marks the link between these matters of belief and the conduct which must follow from them. This is a pattern in several of Paul's letters in which the link is marked by the Greek word usually translated '*therefore*' (see, for example, Romans 12:1 & Philippians 2:12).

In the Jerusalem Bible translation this word is represented by the phrase '*That is why*'.

Paul knows and teaches that right Christian belief must lead to right Christian conduct.

The first part of today's reading is also one of the alternative readings for the mass of Easter Day.

In it, Paul summarises what he has written earlier about the new life Christians enjoy through their baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ – *Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand...because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God.*

He then goes on to set out the moral implications of having that *true life*, which is contrasted with a life bound to merely earthly things. He begins with a striking metaphor – Christians must *kill everything that belongs to earthly life*. The literal translation of the Greek is 'kill the members which are on the earth', but it is clear that this is not to be taken literally. It must mean something like 'kill off the earthly use of your members'. This is then expanded with a list of sins of the body – fornication and so on. But Paul is concerned with much more than 'sins of the flesh'. Christians must also kill off *greed* (which is the same as idolatry) and *telling lies*.

In a further allusion to Baptism Paul then writes *You have stripped off your old behaviour with your old self*: in the verses which follow our reading he calls on the Colossians to clothe themselves with virtues and over all to *put on love*.

Among the implications of this 'reclipping in Christ' is the abolition of all distinctions of race and status, as well as between Jew and Gentile – because *there is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything*.