

## Reflection for Sixth Sunday of Easter. Acts 17:22-31

King Charles addressed the American Congress recently with a master class in diplomacy. His Majesty was able, by using suitable language and humour, to chide them, pointing out their shortcomings and failings. So successful was he in doing this that they even gave him a standing ovation. One imagines that there must have been considerable thought and effort to put together this speech, combined with excellent delivery. There is a similarity with Paul's message to the people of Athens, except that he probably had no prior preparation. Athens was, and still is, a bustling busy port; an important trading centre in the Mediterranean and, as such, would have been home to a very cosmopolitan population. A population who were ready to talk, discuss, and even to argue. They were interested in new philosophies, new religions, new anything. They were open, ready to discuss and debate. It is to this community that Paul stands on the Areopagus to share the Good News. Paul starts cautiously, with compliments. He has noticed, he says, that they are a deeply religious people. Paul goes on to say that they seem to be prepared to worship almost anything and put up altars to nothing in particular, just in case. His audience may wonder what is coming next; is that a compliment? Or does it in fact contain a hint of criticism? Throughout his discourse Paul has this subtle blend a flattery and criticism first complementing them on the array of altars they have set up, then telling them that altars are useless or agreeing with them that all people share a common humanity and derived from God. He tells them that God is the creator, the maker of all things and so cannot be worshipped through images made by human hands. Then telling them they are not perfect and will have to repent and be judged. Paul talks of the altar he has seen to an unknown God. He then suggests that the God whom they worship as unknown is known. It is this God that he is there to proclaim to them as creator and saviour of the world. Paul then introduces Jesus, now in Christ the full blaze of the knowledge and revelation has been revealed. The days of excuses are past because now the truth has come. The proof of Christ has come with the Resurrection, so no longer an unknown God, but a risen Christ who comes for us.

This image of an unknown God may have been a part of Athens but for us today God remains unknown for many. It could be that the concept of God even is unknown to some. Paul goes with great courage into difficult places to share the Good News which he does with remarkable success. The word spreads far and wide very quickly in the early days. The challenge for us is to continue to share the Good News however we can. The Good News is not one of terror and gloom, but joy and celebration. God loved us so much that he sent His only Son to die for us. Alleluia!

*God our Father, whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life; may we thirst for you, the spring of life and source of goodness, through Him who is alive and reigns now and for ever.*

Andrew Macwilliam