

Homily for the 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time 2018

Today's first reading comes from the book of Wisdom, also called the Wisdom of Solomon. This book comes out of the Wisdom tradition of Israel and was written in the city of Alexandria in Egypt around 100 years before the time of Christ. The writer of Wisdom wanted to strengthen the faith of his fellow Jews in Alexandria who were living in the middle of a pagan environment. It was the time when Egypt was ruled by the descendants of Alexander the Great and the several Queen Cleopatras. Some Jews were being seduced by the more fashionable trends and ideas of Greek philosophy and culture. Among other things they had to face the old problem of: why do bad things happen to good people? Why do the wicked and godless prosper while the just person suffers?

It is very ironic in that the Church places this passage in the Liturgy. The Church early on saw this passage as a prediction of Jesus' suffering. "Let us condemn him to a shameful death since he will be looked after – we have his word for it." Yet, was Jesus looked after? He certainly suffered and died. The unbeliever could easily claim that Jesus was abandoned and not looked after. Yet, there is the crunch. All Jesus says about his impending passion implies a faith that the Father's love for him endures beyond death however shameful.

Apparently, Sigmund Freud who looked closely at the deviousness of the human heart and how driven we are said that we cannot love our neighbour as ourselves. And it is true that that command of Jesus is extremely difficult to live out. Jesus himself lived it out but at what a cost! But we have come to know the truth of it. Because we have come to accept the reality that lies behind the commandment, namely, that our neighbour is as worthy of love as ourselves. That is a revelation from God and we see it revealed in the innocence and simplicity of every child.

It is therefore encouraging to see that in our very effort to follow Jesus' commandment we are admitting that our neighbour is worthy of love even if, at that this point in our lives, we are find we are too weak to give that love. That is the tragedy of us human beings.

We delight in the simplicity of a small child. A child just like the one Jesus took and put before the disciples. The disciples were having an argument, petty in the circumstances, about who of them is the greatest. That they were doing so in the face of Jesus just telling them that his future is not looking very good is jaw dropping. Far from arguing about our status over against others the follower of Jesus way is to be a servant of all. There is that word "deacon".

It is so easy to become fatalist when we see so much failure on the part of leaders of government and church. And also when we see the apparent inability of our society to address the many evils that confront us. What is the point of even trying to love our enemy? Why just not think about it and keep to oneself? On the other hand why not just give in to our basest desires or lash out at any evidence of evil we think we see. The option of the mass shooter.

James gives us a bit of a clue. Where do these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Isn't it precisely in the desires fighting inside your own selves? The way of Jesus is very different. The Gospel of Jesus is in my opinion the most realistic approach to this tragic fracture in the human heart. It accepts the limitations imposed by our physical and emotional evolution. It not only accepts them but enables us to grasp the hand of God extended to us across our sin and loss. It is to accept the truth that we do need a Saviour for all our ambitions and achievements.

In continuing to struggle, despite our failures, to live up to the Jesus' great commandment of love we acknowledge the dignity inherent even in our worst enemy, acknowledge that they are worthy of love, and acknowledge our own shortcomings. Jesus saw that struggle in his closest friends. He did not condemn them. He continued to respect them and trust in them. He seems to be saying that the love we are capable of is not perfect, but, it's a beginning! Bad things often happen to good people. But when bad things happen to them good people often do wonderful things!

Fr Graham