

Homily for 4th Sunday of Easter 2018

Many years ago in another parish one weekend a homeless man arrived on the church doorstep. There was little I could do as the local support groups were unavailable at the time. So I rang an emergency number provided by the government. I discovered that the emergency help provided was simply a phone referral to agencies on the ground. So helpfully I was given a number to ring. To my surprise it was my own phone number! It highlights the reality that no matter how much money governments provide for social welfare in the end so much of what happens in communities depends on generous volunteers who meet face to face with people in need.

There are many homeless people living in the nooks and crannies of buildings around Nambour. We have our own share as one or two sleep on the side verandah. They are permitted to do so as long as they vacate the premises by 6am. The Lutheran church has had to prohibit sleeping on their grounds as the people were causing difficulty for neighbours. Some of them can look pretty scary especially in the dark. And some do cause problems of abuse of people and damage to property. The police are left to deal with them and move them on.

Whether it is homeless on our streets or refugees from afar we face the same issues. There is a need to protect people and property and at the same time to offer help to those in need. This presumes that we believe in the dignity of each person and our common humanity.

Jesus is called the Good Shepherd not just because he is morally good. He is that. But he is good because he goes out of his way to do things that many shepherds would not do. In Jesus' case that went to the extent of laying down his life for his sheep. This parable comes right after the account in John's Gospel of the cure of the beggar man who was born blind. After his cure the man was still rejected by the powers that be. So Jesus sought him out. The man came to faith in Jesus. It is an example of the way that Jesus the good shepherd seeks out the lost.

Jesus did not try to solve all humanities problems. As he said, you always have the poor with you. But at the heart of everything he said and did was the conviction of the worth and dignity of each person. He responded to people from that conviction. Peter faced a similar situation as we hear in the first reading. He cured a cripple in the name of Jesus and yet was taken to task for it by those who saw it as upsetting the right order of things.

The beggars and lepers of Jesus' day were no doubt as untidy and smelly and as inconvenient as anyone living on the streets today. They can make us uncomfortable and afraid. And so they should. They are a timely remind us of the humility of God who entered into our lives in Jesus, who emptied himself to become like us in all things. We may not be able to get every homeless person off the streets. We may not be able to accept every refugee that wants to come here. But we can like Jesus, offer them the respect and dignity that is theirs.

A few times I have mentioned the notion that we are often a mystery to ourselves and each other. Here it is again in John's first letter today. "You are already the children of God but what you are to be in the future has not yet been revealed." How strange. What we are is yet to be revealed to us. And we though we knew ourselves! I believe this is the case because Jesus is inviting us to share in the divine life of the Trinity. Our destiny is to live with the life of God now and into the future as God's children. To know God is to know ourselves. "All we know is that when who we are is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is." The life he wants to share with us is the very life he shares with the Father. This life is love itself made manifest in us even now by the Holy Spirit.

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