

### **Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

One of the things that we are now able to do when we are following a sporting competition is to download an app that will keep us up to date with what is happening. If we download the Wimbledon App we not only get the scores, but we get a biography of every player. It will tell us when and where they were born, where they live now, what matches they have won and how much prize money they earned. But when we have read everything that is there and watched all the videos we still do not know much about who the person really is. Coming to know who people are is never very easy.

In today's gospel we meet the people of Nazareth who thought that they knew Jesus well. They had seen him grow up as a child, learn a trade and grow to maturity. They knew who his friends and relations were. But there was so much about him now that they could not understand. Mark tells us that they were astonished when they heard him teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Any lay person had the right to speak at the synagogue, but Jesus spoke with such wisdom and authority that they could understand where all this came from. They asked a string of questions about him. He was too ordinary to be a prophet of God. They could not accept him and the word that he spoke as being from God.

Being ordinary can be a problem for us too. Some of us struggle with the thought that God could be interested in each of us and in everything that we do. Some of us wonder how God could love each of us in a personal way. We don't think that we are important enough. Some of us might struggle to believe that God would choose an ordinary person like ourselves to do extraordinary things for others.

I think St. Paul struggled a bit with that. He became aware that God had gifted him in many different ways and had done great things through him. But today we hear him talk about being given a thorn in the flesh that prevented him from getting too proud. There is a lot of speculation about what that thorn in the flesh may have been. Perhaps it was some physical ailment that he had. More likely it was the constant opposition that he had to endure. Whatever it was, God was not going to take it away. God told him, "My grace is enough for you. My power is at its best in weakness"

Perhaps that is a word that we need to especially hear at this moment as we think about ourselves as Church in this Archdiocese. We have all been asked to share some of the shame of those in the Church who have abused children. We have all felt something of the anger of those who have been hurt in the past. The brokenness of the Church revealed by the Royal Commission needs

healing. Yet even as we are humiliated at this time we can still hear the Lord say to us, “My grace is enough for you. My power is at its best in weakness.”

Perhaps we have experienced the power of God at work in us in our weakness. There might be something about us that we wish wasn't there, and yet because it is there God is able to touch into the lives of other people through us. There is often a special bond between people who have suffered the same serious illness. These people sometimes then become part of a support group to be there for others who face similar challenges to themselves. It is a beautiful way to share God's compassion with others. I suspect that all of us know some people who inspire us by the way that they live with their disabilities. They seem to be able to move their focus away from the things that they cannot do to focus in on the things that they can do.

Being ordinary can be both a strength and a weakness. For some people to hear that Jesus may have had brothers and sisters, helps them to imagine Jesus as being more like you and me. We usually think of those named in today's gospel as being the cousins of Jesus. I suppose it is a bit like the way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders talk about their brothers and sisters. Cousins, sisters or brothers they would have had

some influence upon the way that Jesus was shaped as a human person.

These friends and relations of Jesus found his humanity a stumbling block to come to faith in him as a prophet of God. When we begin to understand the mystery of the incarnation, then we begin to understand how God can use all that He has created to speak to us of who he is.

One of the great joys of taking a holiday is that it gives us an opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds of places that are different from the ordinary things that we experience each day. But we cannot be on holidays all the time. We cannot be always looking at beautiful birds or spectacular coastlines or exotic cities or beautiful temples. One of our senior priests who had just returned from Europe told me the other day that the best part of a holiday for him is returning home. Home is where we encounter God best. Everything around us, no matter how ordinary and unspectacular it may seem to us, can be a means of encountering God. Every act of kindness can help us to experience the kindness of God. Everything that people do in love somehow makes present the God of love who moves them to act. Every time we seek forgiveness from others we are inviting the Lord to heal us. Every word of forgiveness that we offer to others is a word that God speaks through us.