

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Over the last seven or so days many of us have been watching some of the Commonwealth Games from Birmingham. When elite sportsmen and women gather and compete there is a lot of talk about hope. Every competitor has fulfilled one of their hopes by being chosen to represent their country. Now they hope that they will perform to the best of their ability and even well enough to be rewarded with a medal. We share their hopes of success. But hope is no empty virtue. For a sports person it is built upon years of hard work and single-minded dedication to their sport. But even before that, the hope of an elite sports person is built upon knowing that they have been especially gifted to be very good at their sport. Knowing their gifts can bring with it a responsibility to use them well.

Something of that comes through in our gospel today. We have just heard Jesus remind us of the responsibilities that we have when we are called to act in his name. "When a man has had a great deal given him, a great deal will be demanded of him; when a man has a great deal given him on trust, even more will be expected of him." Those words come at the end of a gospel that began with Jesus telling us that we have no need to be afraid, for our Father God has given us the kingdom. He wants us to have the freedom to put our

treasure where our heart is, in our union with the God who loves us.

But Jesus goes on to warn us that we need to be people who are ready and open to let God into our lives in whatever way God wants to come to us. Jesus warns us that we need to be like servants who serve honestly and generously. And Jesus will fulfil the hope of all those who do that. He uses a very beautiful image of the master putting on an apron, sitting the servants down and waiting on them. It is an image that reminds us of what Jesus himself does at the last supper. Jesus sets the pattern for all who are called to any kind of leadership in the Church.

But the message of today's gospel is not just for those in leadership. Each one of us within the Church is called to be a servant of others. It is of course much harder to do this without good leadership and the loving support of those around us. Today we are beginning to celebrate vocations awareness week in our Church. We are remembering with thanks that it is God's call to service that enables us to live out our vocations whatever they may be. It is God's call for me to be a priest that empowers me to live that vocation and to be a sign of his love for others. It is God's call for you to be married or single that empowers you to love in the way that God A littlewants you to love. You too are a sign of God's love

for others. Together we make the reign of God present in our world. Together we continue the work of Jesus today and tomorrow.

Pope Francis has often reminded us that each of us has a vocation from God. In his message to us this year he writes, “Michelangelo Buonarroti is said to have maintained that every block of stone contains a statue within it, and it is up to the sculptor to uncover it. If that is true of an artist, how much more is it true of God! In the young woman of Nazareth he saw the Mother of God. In Simon the fisherman he saw Peter, the rock on which he would build his Church. In the publican Levi he recognized the apostle and evangelist Matthew, and in Saul, a harsh persecutor of Christians, he saw Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles. God’s loving gaze always meets us, touches us, sets us free and transforms us, making us into new persons.

That is what happens in every vocation: we are met by the gaze of God, who calls us. Vocation, like holiness, is not an extraordinary experience reserved for a few. Just as there is a “holiness of the saints next door” so too there is a vocation for everyone, for God’s gaze and call is directed to every person.”

A little later in his message Pope Francis writes about how we are called to exercise our individual vocations.

“As Christians, we do not only receive a vocation individually; we are also *called together*. We are like the tiles of a mosaic. Each is lovely in itself, but only when they are put together do they form a picture. Each of us shines like a star in the heart of God and in the firmament of the universe. At the same time, though, we are called to form constellations that can guide and light up the path of humanity, beginning with the places in which we live. This is the mystery of the Church: a celebration of differences, a sign and instrument of all that humanity is called to be. For this reason, the Church must become increasingly synodal: capable of walking together, united in harmonious diversity, where everyone can actively participate and where everyone has something to contribute.”

We might keep that in mind as we watch the team events of the Commonwealth Games. As we delight in watching the Commonwealth athletes use their gifts as sports men and women, we can think of the ways that we have been gifted as people of faith sharing in the mission of Jesus. We can ask Jesus to help us to use those gifts well.