

Twenty Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The priests of the Archdiocese are gathering at the Monastery for three days this week. We call our days together, “Companions in Ministry”. This year we are reflecting upon the ministry of preaching. We will be listening to a number of short reflections upon preaching by a cross section of our priests and those presentations will lead into times of prayer and reflection. I have been asked to say something about a time when I became aware that the Word of God was active in the lives of those to whom I preached and then how that affected me. I was thinking that it might be easier for you to talk about that than it will be for me.

I like to think that we listen to the scriptures together. I try to give a bit of a background to the readings that we listen to so that it is a little easier to get inside of them. I ask a few questions that might help us to apply what we hear to how we are trying to live as disciples of Jesus. I leave the rest up to you and to the Word Himself.

When we look at today’s gospel it may be helpful to notice that it follows immediately upon the third prediction of his passion by Jesus. That James and John should then ask Jesus if they could be given places of honour in the heavenly throne room, shows how little they understood Jesus and his mission. Jesus tells them that they do not know what they are asking. And I am

sure that they did not know what they were saying when they said that they were ready to drink the cup of suffering that Jesus was about to drink. Jesus assures them that because of their union with him they will have to face suffering and death as he had to face it.

We are told that the other ten disciples were angry when they heard what James and John had requested from Jesus. Jesus has to draw them close to him again and explain to them that if they took on any leadership in his company, then they would need to be like him. Greatness and leadership could only be exercised by those who were willing to put others before themselves. Jesus himself set the example for them. He had come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus could only be understood in the light of those servant songs found in the Second book of Isaiah. Jesus could only be understood as the suffering servant who gave his life to take away the sins of the people of Israel. We listened to part of one of those servant songs today.

What are the questions that we might ask ourselves to help us to apply what we have heard Jesus say today? Are we people who have learnt what it takes to be a leader after the pattern of Jesus? Do we choose to put others before ourselves? I suspect that everyone who has

fallen in love has chosen to do that. Every parent knows what it is like to live their lives in the loving service of others. Perhaps the questions we might ask ourselves today are more about how we relate to others beyond our family ties. How far do we let God stretch our heart?

Today is Mission Sunday. It is a day when we look again at who we are as Church in relation to others near and far away. Pope Francis has written a statement for this World Mission Day. Because the Synod of Bishops on young people, happening right now, Pope Francis chose to speak especially to young people, and through them to us. He begins by saying, “What leads me to speak to everyone through this conversation with you is the certainty that the Christian faith remains ever young when it is open to the mission that Christ entrusts to us. “Mission revitalizes faith””

He goes on to say, “Dear young people, do not be afraid of Christ and his Church! For there we find the treasure that fills life with joy. I can tell you this from my own experience: thanks to faith, I found the sure foundation of my dreams and the strength to realize them. I have seen great suffering and poverty mar the faces of so many of our brothers and sisters. And yet, for those who stand by Jesus, evil is an incentive to ever greater love. Many men and women, and many young people, have generously sacrificed themselves, even at times to

martyrdom, out of love for the Gospel and service to their brothers and sisters. From the cross of Jesus we learn the divine logic of self-sacrifice (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-25) as a proclamation of the Gospel for the life of the world (cf. Jn 3:16). To be set afire by the love of Christ is to be consumed by that fire, to grow in understanding by its light and to be warmed by its love (cf. 2 Cor 5:14).

In a beautiful way Pope Francis talks about how we all work together to be missionaries. “You too, young friends, by your baptism have become living members of the Church; together we have received the mission to bring the Gospel to everyone. You are at the threshold of life. To grow in the grace of the faith bestowed on us by the Church’s sacraments plunges us into that great stream of witnesses who, generation after generation, enable the wisdom and experience of older persons to become testimony and encouragement for those looking to the future. And the freshness and enthusiasm of the young makes them a source of support and hope for those nearing the end of their journey. In this blend of different stages in life, the mission of the Church bridges the generations; our faith in God and our love of neighbor are a source of profound unity. This transmission of the faith, the heart of the Church’s mission, comes about by the infectiousness of love, where joy and enthusiasm become the expression of a newfound meaning and fulfillment in life.