

26th Sunday (A)

27th September 2020

‘Humility and Sanity’

Ezek 18: *What the Lord does is unjust? Is it not what you do that is unjust?* Ps 24: Remember Your mercy, Lord. Phil 2: *He emptied Himself ... even to accepting death, death on a Cross* Mt 21:28–32: *“think better of it and believe in him”*

Over recent Sundays, we have heard and reflected on a series of important texts in St Matthew’s Gospel, including St Peter’s Profession of Faith in Jesus being “the Son of the living God” (ch. 16) and some key parables unique to Matthew including the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (ch. 18) and the parable of the Vineyard Workers (‘parable of the Eleventh Hour,’ ch. 20). Each and every one of these texts helps us to appreciate that it is only in our Petrine faith in the Son of God that we can really find the mercy we need, and find the grace to be merciful ourselves. We will continue to be hearing from later chapters of St Matthew in what remains of this ‘year A’ between now and the end of November — these first weeks of the new academic year (for some of you, your first year at university ... *welcome!*).

But I’d sort-of like to take a ‘week off,’ this Sunday, from considering primarily the Gospel text, and focus

instead on the 2nd Reading, that beautiful passage from St Paul to the Philippians; words probably very familiar to us ... we hear them every year on Palm Sunday as we enter into Holy Week and the Passion of the Lord.

He emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross

... These are words of an early Christian hymn, we think, that St Paul incorporated into his letter, praising Jesus for the incredible humility He showed as He came from heaven and took flesh on earth amongst us. The key word is *kenosis*, His ‘emptying Himself.’ He divested Himself of heavenly glory, humbly and willingly stooping down to us. This example of humility is placed before us so that we, as Christians, can imitate it. If even God has let Himself be humbled like this, reducing Himself from His heavenly glory to be enclosed in the form of a man; and then letting Himself be taken for a criminal and executed on a Cross ... if He is willing to do that for us, then we surely should be able to manage a bit of humility ourselves.

St Paul spells it out:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit; but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Is it not a huge task, as a Christian, to actually take it seriously, to grow more and more like this, more and more like Christ? — to have this mindset of *selflessness* as opposed to selfishness. It's so easy to slip back into ways of treating ourselves, putting our ease before anyone else's. Yet, God calls to us again and again through His Word — through His Church, through His Spirit, through the Scriptures, *through this Mass* — to measure up our lives to the great commandments, “*love the Lord your God; love your neighbour.*”

You are young, ... but you are not too young to make this commitment to a life-long humility that puts Jesus, and for His sake puts others, before yourselves. We saw on Friday night, the *Stade de France* packed full of young people there in Paris to be with the Pope at prayer: 80,000 of them; all the tickets for it snapped up in a mere

30 mins. Figures coming out of France show a 3-fold rise in adult baptisms in recent years, much of it driven by a post-Covid return towards faith in Christ by young adults. Here, too, in Westminster, we have seen big increases in those entering the Church this year; my Confirmation numbers were bigger this past May than in previous years; I have more starting this week in RCIA than in any of my 5 years at Newman House. The Spirit is at work amongst you, the time is ripe to respond. You are not too young to take this Gospel call seriously; you are not too young to accept that Jesus comes first, and consciously and willingly to live humbly for Him and for others, and *not* first for yourselves!

You have come to university to learn: to learn for enjoyment; to learn for employment, for careers, for an income; to learn at the school of life, too, the skills of getting on with people, finding friends, enjoying being human, finding love. Whilst you are at university, you must also learn at the *school of eternal life*, or else the rest will vaporize in meaninglessness — this Chaplaincy is a

branch of that ‘school of eternal life’ which is the beloved Church of Jesus Christ, His spouse. In all sorts of ways, here, through prayer, through the Mass, through Holy Hours and Adoration; through time spent with fellow believers; through talks, visiting speakers, workshops; through trips, pilgrimages, volunteering ... you can grow greatly in faith and understanding. This must be a part and parcel of your university experience if you are to grow into a rounded human being — in fact, your learning to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ is the part of your education that will hold all the other parts together, and provide the comprehensive framework to make sense of the rest, ... to make sense of life at all. But it requires your decision here and now, at university, humbly to place your life at the disposal of Jesus Christ, and to let Him guide you. Don’t let your life at university — lectures, leisure, laziness — cause you to lessen your attention to the lessons of Christian life.

The Gospel of this Sunday illustrates this: it reminds us to *persevere in goodness*: far better, the son who at first

said “no” and then had a rethink, than the son who “yes, yes, of course,” but then didn’t bother. Far better to get it wrong at first and then have a conversion to a new and more loving way of life, then to start out well and gradually to drift away and abandon faith and love. Some of you may be new to faith; here you are! — you have come, *Deo gratias*! Some of you may have been practising Catholics since you were just toddlers ... Either way, let’s persevere: let’s keep at this task that God has given us, of keeping faith, and being constant in God’s service. At the end of our life, there will be nothing more joyful than to say that, “*I have truly loved God, and loved my neighbour* — I have spent my life in giving my all to God and to others.” A humble life is a good life, a life that others can imitate and so grow together towards heaven. For life is not about great achievements, except the greatness of loving God, and this is achieved through simple humility.