

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Friends and Parishioners,

One of the issues which kept theologians busy, be they patristic, scholastic or children of the Enlightenment, was the matter of just how much Jesus knew. When his distressed parents found their twelve-year-old son in the Jerusalem temple, after three days of frantic searching, talking to and being questioned by the scribes and doctors of the law they were less amazed by the learning he was displaying than distressed at what they perceived as his disobedience. Luke has not left any record of what Jesus and his elderly co-religionists were discussing, but one can fairly surmise that the Law and the writings of the prophets featured in their exchange, and perhaps too more abstract questions about God (even if generally speaking the Jews of old were not as philosophically inclined as the Greeks). Mary and Joseph would have known that their son was intelligent and observant, yet it is highly improbable that they had any books or scrolls in their humble home in Nazareth. As a boy Jesus would have attended religious instruction at his local synagogue but it remains an open question as to how much as boy or adult he would have known about the complex history of the Jewish people or what familiarity he might have had with the writings of the prophets.

Today the Church puts before us an extract from the prophet Zechariah describing how the king promised by God “*comes to you...humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*” (**Zechariah 9, 9**). Would Jesus have realised that, as he entered Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, he was fulfilling that prophecy? Or would the evangelists, describing that triumphal entry of Jesus, or some of the early Christians, make the link with the OT prophet Zechariah? John’s gospel gives us a profound insight into Jesus’ relationship with the God he called Father but also suggests to us that Jesus had a deep understanding of the nature of the divinity. Was his knowledge based on reading and research, or was it intuitive? The scholastics argued a lot about how extensive Jesus’ knowledge was, yet the scriptures suggest to us unusual powers of observation, an intelligent understanding of human nature, the familiarity any devout Jew would have had with his religious tradition, but that his deeper knowledge was based on what St. Augustine would later call “*divine illumination.*” That too is what Jesus thought, as is made clear in today’s Gospel: “*I bless you, Father ... for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.*” (**Matthew 11, 25**).

Jesus in the temple was in animated discussion with the learned and the clever when Mary and Joseph discovered him, yet Luke suggests that he held his own with them to such an extent that “*all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies.*” (**Luke 2, 47**). Jesus did not impress by book learning, his replies were inspired by an intuitive knowledge of God and by a religious conviction that was born of his heart. A friend once said to me: *we learn most of our theology on our knees.*” Recent months have seen most people spend a lot of time with their children, often in prayer. It will come as a surprise to many just how much they have taught us about God.

Father Patrick