

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

It is frequently the case, especially on Sundays, that members of the congregation arrive in church well before Mass is due to commence. Some say the Rosary, others leaf through the bulletin (with commentaries on the scripture readings they are about to hear during the Liturgy of the Word) while most just sit there, “in vacant or in pensive mood” (Wordsworth) or already raising their minds and hearts to God in prayer. Most people come to Mass with a lot on their minds. They have had a busy week or are worried about issues that may arise in the week ahead. Some have permanent issues that occupy their thoughts both inside the church and outside, although those minutes before Mass often offer them a welcome opportunity to confide their immediate cares to the Lord.

Those seemingly empty minutes before Mass begins are often minutes of great grace. This weekend we are asked by Pope Francis to reflect on “the Word of God”, i.e. the message of the Scriptures. It is worth asking to what extent the readings proclaimed during the Mass address the problems and concerns to the forefront of the congregation’s mind, do they make any impact on the way those issues which have been reflected on or prayed about are understood or digested. The word of God is, St. Paul tells us, a “double-edged sword”, it cuts right through to the heart. Even if it is addressed to the whole congregation, it has an uncanny way of speaking to each heart differently. The OT reading was written two thousand five hundred or more years ago, the NT two thousand years ago. It is true that the plays of Sophocles from ancient Greece or the writings of Cicero on matters of social ethics or politics carry messages or describe human situations which sound uncannily contemporary.

So age has little to do with it. But we Christians do believe that when the Word of God is proclaimed in the here and now, albeit using imagery and describing human relations of a different epoch, it is directed at the women and men of today. And all too often those who are carrying with them problems or unresolved issues that worry them today find insight, understanding, illumination and comfort from the reading of scripture they hear at Mass today. That is why the language of the scripture is so important and that is why so many of us are concerned about the prospect of a new Lectionary being issued for use in the liturgy by our Catholic bishops. We have got used to the easily accessible language of the Jerusalem Bible, our companion Sunday after Sunday for over fifty years. Because of our deeply felt need of the Word of God it is vital that can understand it. Perhaps, given that it has become such a trusted companion and that in this present pandemic it has become such a reliable lifeline for so many of us, our bishops might just leave well enough alone. For most of us the current translation of OT and NT we have in the lectionary is the only one we know. For many of us it contains words we love in a language which speaks to our heart. We should ask our bishops to leave stand while doing our best to understand it better.

Father Patrick