

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel is about following Jesus. To do so, the fishermen have to leave their boats behind. So the gospel is also about having the courage to be free to leave behind whatever may be holding us back from responding to his call. Jesus is calling us to be committed to doing God's will whatever the circumstances of our life. We hear Jesus renewing his commitment to this right up to the end, as in the Agony he prays: 'Not my will but yours be done'. Following Jesus means learning from him to have the same commitment.

To want what God in love is inspiring us to be and so to do, and to be willing to let everything go that gets in the way of doing it constitutes the essence of being a disciple of Jesus. It requires three things of us. Firstly, we need to trust God. We need to believe that God is love and wants for us what is best, however difficult or painful it may be. If we lack this trust we will never be able to leave behind what gives us security and dare a journey that takes us into the unknown.

Secondly, we need to learn to live our life with an attentive heart, listening for the inspiration of the Spirit of love revealing God's will to us in the various circumstances of our life.

Thirdly, we need the courage to free our heart from whatever proves an obstacle to following what we are being inspired to do.

Today I want to reflect with you on the second requirement. We might trust God. We might even be ready to leave what we are doing and follow his call. But how do we hear God's call? What might God be asking of us today? To answer this question we need to reflect on our own personal lives. We need also to think of the way we relate to other people in our family or local community. However, it is also necessary to think big, to examine our relationship with society as a whole and with the world.

It is on this third aspect of our behaviour that I wish to reflect with you today. We are becoming increasingly aware of our responsibilities to all the people and other life forms who share this planet with us.

Jesus is calling us to repent. The prophets of our time are telling us that we must repent as regards our attitude to the earth's limited resources. We have to find a change of heart that affects our way of life, or the very future of the earth as well as our survival is at risk.

Let us look first at global warming. Last year was the hottest in recorded history. We also see the effect of global warming in rising sea levels and increasingly erratic and destructive weather patterns, and an alarming upward trend in the temperature of the atmosphere and oceans. As confirmed yet again in the latest Intergovernmental Report on Climate Change, it is mainly the result of the lifestyle which we richer nations have embraced with the massive using up of resources and the consequent creation of greenhouse gases and other waste that is rapidly warming our planet and harming the ecological balance of the earth.

One does not have to be a prophet to see what will happen unless our generation acts courageously in this matter: the wiping out of low-lying land, loss of fresh water and arable land, mass extinction of species, extensive relocation of peoples and the increase in refugees with

the better off nations attempting to tighten their boundaries against those seeking to survive. As the saying goes: We have to learn to live more simply so that others may simply live. Here is a matter for serious reflection.

We are undergoing a new world order in which uncontrolled globalisation is rapidly increasing inequalities in wealth, education, health, shelter and food. A recent (2014) Oxfam study has shown that about 50% of the world's wealth is owned by just 1% of the population. Half the world, that is, 3.5 billion people, live on only \$2.50 a day or less.

The latest World Bank development report shows that \$1.5 trillion was spent on the military in 2008 whereas just 5% of that would provide access in developing countries to basic social services including healthcare, nutrition, family planning and education.

An article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1999, states that globalization 'goes hand in hand with considerable destruction. Whole industries have been wiped out in every region of the world. The result has been social suffering: mass unemployment, underemployment, precarious employment and exclusion. We are now witnessing the over-exploitation of men, women, and – even more scandalously – children, 300 million of them, in conditions of unprecedented brutality ...

'Globalisation also means the plundering of our planet. Large corporations are ravaging the environment on a massive scale, they are exploiting the wealth of nature, which is the common property of humanity, and they are doing so with neither scruple nor restraint ... By turning words and things, minds and bodies, nature and culture, into commodities, we are aggravating the world's inequalities. State structures and traditional social structures are being swept away, with disastrous results ... Seductive new "opiums of the people" offer false dreams of better worlds, distracting people's attention from the real issues and directing them away from civic and political action.'

All this is pretty scary stuff. We cannot put our head in the sand and pretend it isn't happening. Nor are we, as followers of Jesus, to despair. We are not asked to solve these massive problems on our own, but neither are we to do nothing. At least we can pay more attention to the effects of our choices on the world at large and become more aware of what is happening.

Here at Saint Mary's Towers we are taking some small steps forward. You know about the BioBank where we care for one of the last remaining areas of Cumberland Forest. 17 endangered species inhabit this area of bush. We care for it. People who come here are asked to stay on the designated paths and not disturb the habitat. Living as we do surrounded by such beautiful gardens (thanks especially to the constant loving care of Mick Reis and Reyer Flapper), can we learn to nurture beauty wherever we see it in nature, and especially in people.

Here at Saint Mary's Towers we also take small steps backwards when we don't discern carefully how we use resources, for example, the reverse cycle heating and cooling. Often out of care for others we want to make the environment as comfortable as possible, so rather than do what everyone did not so many years ago and dress appropriately and let our bodies adapt to the change of seasons, we throw a few dozen switches and use up energy.

Paul VI in his marvellous encyclical 'The Progression of Peoples'(1967) wrote: 'Both for nations and for individuals, avarice is the most evident form of moral under-development'(n.19). As well curbing any of our personal over-consumption, can we not get more politically active and choose leaders who will implement policies that reflect our values of social justice, peace and sustainability, rather than policies of short term economic growth at any cost?

In 1971 Paul VI wrote: 'Let each one examine himself to see what he had done up to now, and what he ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustices, if at the same time one does not realise how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first. The Christian's hope comes primarily from the fact that he or she knows that the Lord is working with us in the world. This hope springs also from the fact that the Christian knows that others are at work to undertake actions of justice and peace, working for the same ends.'[Octogesima Adveniens, 1971, n.48].

In his encyclical, The Third Millennium (1994) n.13, Pope John-Paul II reminded us: 'When in his providence God gave the earth to humanity, he gave it to everyone. The riches of creation are to be considered as a common good for the whole of humanity.'

Let us commit ourselves to think about our lives in the light of the above. God will inspire us as to what actions he is asking of us. It is up to us to live reflective lives, to be committed to seek the truth and to join with the many wonderful people who are seeking to build a more just and more sustainable world, a world that better reflects the glory of God.

I conclude with the words of Psalm 25:

'If you stand in awe in God's presence
the Lord will show you the path to choose;
your life will be full
and your heirs will inherit the land'.

Some links where I found more recent stats are:

[United Nations Human Development Report 2014](#)

[guardian article on the Oxfam report](#)

[global issues](#)

[World Bank - World Development Indicators 2014](#)

See also the IPCC Fifth Assessment Synthesis Report "Climate Change 2014".