22nd Sunday in O.T. 2025

Chatting, some time ago, with an elderly parishioner, he reminisced “When I was young, I was very proud, and it caused me a great deal of worry. I was constantly worrying about what other people thought about me. When I got older and wiser, I said to myself, “I don’t care what they think about me!” And now that I am even older and wiser, I realise that they weren’t thinking about me at all!”. The thought behind this little story is that pride blinds us to reality.

Jesus often addressed spiritual blindness in his encounters with the Pharisees, the crowds, and even with his own disciples. His teachings on this subject reveal the importance of spiritual insight and the dangers of remaining blind to the truth.

I suppose we have all, at some time or other, pretended to be something other than who or what we really are – an affliction greater for some than for others! However, which of us hasn't tried to impress someone by presenting an image of ourselves which wasn’t quite authentic? We all have an “ideal self-image” which is more perfect than the actual reality. Why do I love the person I am not, and hesitate to accept the person I am? Jesus identified such an affliction with blindness – pride blinds us to reality.

The Scriptures of today's Mass present the humble person as one who sees reality as it is and is not indifferent to the plight of others. Those same scriptures also stand as a stern warning about the dangers of becoming “self-obsessed”. The self-obsessed are small hearted, full only of themselves! The first reading says plainly, *“The greater you are, the more you should behave humbly, and then you will find favour with the Lord.”* The Gospel says something similar, *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted.”* Christ's true followers are those who see what he sees, who love what he loves, and with hearts moved by that love, have within them a deep concern for others.

Jesus was particularly critical of the “religious elite” of his day. They prided themselves on their religiosity; imagining that they were superior in God’s sight. Their “holier than thou” attitude caused them to look down on others, particularly on those Jesus described as *“the poor, the lame, the blind……and the unfortunate”.*

But of course, it is not only religious behaviour that can be flaunted – we can flaunt our opinions, our intelligence, our job, our wealth, our position in society. Jesus shattered the carefully constructed “ideal-self image” of the scribes and pharisees. He seeks to alert us to the fact that pride and arrogance, snobbishness and a superior mentality, a misplaced sense of entitlement and callous self-sufficiency, not only blind us to reality, but are also real sins!

Jesus was indeed critical of those who sought out the places and titles of honour, yet, at the same time, led a double life. While we too are aware of those, both in civil and church circles, who abuse their positions of power and responsibility, the Gospel also challenges us to look at our own attitudes – for example, “Am I my own favourite subject? Do I always put my myself and my opinions, in first place?” Acknowledging the truth of his word, *“Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted”,* will enable usto check self-inflated and self-referential egos.

A further aspect of today’s Gospel passage is particularly relevant for our society. When St Luke wrote his Gospel, he was aware that a revolution was taking place. Hundreds of non-Jews were becoming Christians. In other words, they were taking their place at the great banquet, which Jewish converts thought God had prepared for them alone. Many of the Jewish Christians found this difficult, if not impossible, to understand, and hesitated to accept these “newcomers” as “brothers and sisters”. Frequently a “narrow nationalism”, or populism, has, at its heart, a false sense of superiority, which can blind a society to important realities.

On a very practical level, let us be aware that we have in our parish, and our congregation, many who have their origin in other lands, but are now “part of us”. Today is as good a time as any to acknowledge that truth, and to *“honour”* them by introducing ourselves and by exchanging names. Challenging perhaps, but the outstretched hand is always the truly Christian attitude!

Jesus offers himself as our model; he invites us *“learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Mt.11:29).* The first reading today also offers us this piece of advice, *“be gentle in carrying out your business, and you will be better loved than a lavish giver.”* As we celebrate this Eucharist, Jesus Christ, in a most extraordinary act of humility, gives himself to us – it is as simple as that! He gives himself to us, his entire self, body, blood, soul and divinity. To each of us, without differentiating, he says, “This is my Body. This is my Blood”. But it will all be in vain unless we go out from this Mass to live lives of dedication to God, and in humble service to our neighbour. Nothing else will do!

*“Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine.”* **Amen**