28th Sunday in O T 2024

A topic frequently discussed today, in newspaper and magazine articles, as well as on radio and television, is. “What is happening to men?”, particularly young men? The general theme appears to be, “Men are in trouble. Big trouble”. It is claimed that in our very changed world, men face an existential crisis - they are confused over their place in the world, are lost at home and at work, are often separated from family, particularly from their children, and are suffering from an epidemic of loneliness and plummeting self-esteem. This, so called “masculinity crisis”, is proposed by some commentators as the reason for an upsurge in male depression, male violence, and all too often, “death from despair”.

We may suspect that there is more than an element of truth in this particular analysis, and is thus worthy of further investigation. However, one thing that we have all observed is the growing indifference of both young men and young woman to faith. It is a timely moment to ask if the uncoupling of human existence from God has contributed to this “angst” in so many regarding the meaning and purpose of life?

We humans, in spite of our uncertainties and weaknesses, can grasp the secret of our humanity, and discover that innermost self, that true self, which we call the soul. But this true soul can only be recognised if we know God, because, we believe, that it is in the image of God *(cf Gen.1:26)* that we were created. We find our true selves in God; in God we find the root of our existence, and the very ground of our being – but when rootless and groundless, we easily become lost. As the Psalmist says, “*In God alone is my soul at rest; my help comes from him” (Ps. 62).* This is the staggering truth which so many today are not prepared to accept. The Church, from the beginning, has continuously cried out to all humanity, “Wake up, O Man, and recognise the dignity of your nature. Remember that you were made in the image of God” *(St Leo the Great, Christmas sermon).*

Recently we celebrated the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. As a young man, Francis was indifferent to faith and its challenges. But when circumstances changed, forcing him to reflect on his life, he began to realise the emptiness of his manner of living. – it had no root. He started to ask, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” In his inner self, in his soul, he heard the response, “Francis, whom do you choose, yourself or the Lord?” Eventually Francis responded, “You, Lord”. It was then that Francis discovered a deep joy, a joy which never deserted him, in spite of the many challenges he faced in his life.

In today’s Gospel passage we encounter another young man who, at first sight, seemed to be full of idealism. He ran up to Jesus and knelt before him, and asked, *“Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* It is a question that perhaps he should not have asked, because he was not prepared to accept the answer (we know from experience that it is a mistake to ask a question to which we really don’t want an answer!).

Nevertheless, Jesus did give him an answer, a very interesting one; first he said to him, “you know what to do – live by the rules of your faith, keep the commandments!”, and he listed the commandments, but note not all ten; he said, *“you must not kill, you must not commit adultery; you must not steal; you must not bring false witness; you must not defraud; honour your father and your mother”.* In other words, Jesus was saying to him, “Do no harm to others”. How often we comfort ourselves with the thought, “I do no harm to anyone”, or we console ourselves with the thought that our young people can only be good because they do no harm. The young man in the Gospel enthusiastically responded, “That is me from my earliest days! I do no harm to anyone!”

While that young man had diligently avoided harming others, there was something lacking; this Jesus points to, as he continues to answer the original question, *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* Jesus’ answer in summary is, “Do good to others”. His invitation, *“come, follow me”*, it is an invitation to love others as Jesus loves them, but this was a sacrifice the young man was unable to make, and so *“he went away sad”.*

The basis of our commitment to the Lord must be more than simply avoiding harming to others.Nelson Mandela claimed, “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” Scripture refines this by saying, *"do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb.13:16).*

*“Lord,*

*fill our sadness with your joy.*

*May that deep and abiding sense of inner peace,*

*that can only come from your presence,*

*awaken in us the sense of our dignity*

*as your children”.* **Amen.**