

I pray that I may speak in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

When I read the readings last Monday my first thought was that they were about fairness. The examples from the old and new testaments look at fairness and unfairness from both a human perspective and from God's. But as I reflected during the week the importance of humility and honesty became equally relevant.

At the parish online home group last Thursday the question of fairness came up because of last week's gospel reading and the reactions of the workers in the vineyard. The “that's not fair “cry of the child that doesn't get what it wants reminded one of the group of something said to her by one of her parents “ that life is not fair”, yet we know that we are all equal in God's sight. The idea of fairness seems to be hardwired into our society. But when something goes wrong, the compensation culture kicks in, it has to be someone's fault and certainly not ours.

Why is Owning up to mistakes so difficult? Trying to shed the blame onto somebody, anybody as long as it doesn't require us accepting personal responsibility for something we might have done or a decision we took. Our readings today help us to see that God is able to see into these situations and can always be trusted to be gracious and how we as Christians should re-act.

Ezekiel was a prophet in about 600bc. The Jews, who were exiles in Babylonia, held him in some esteem. But they had got into the habit of blaming their situation on the actions of previous generations and you can understand why they could get into that frame of mind, but when they started to say that the way of the Lord was unfair, the Lord said to Ezekiel that he should correct this as his way is just and he doesn't want anyone to suffer for the mistakes of others.

But we, like they, need to be honest and recognise our own mistakes. They are told to “Rid themselves of their past wrong doings, to repent and live. Get a new heart and a new Spirit says God. David, when was confronted by Nathan over his affair with Bathsheba had the same reaction. In Ps 51 he asks God to cleanse him

and wash him, and create in him a new heart. May be there is a sense in which we have to accept our part for the current state of our community and nation.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians talks of Sharing in the Spirit – Koinonia is a togetherness that dispels the pride and selfishness that can hold people and nations apart.

This week saw the launch of the Covid 19 AP that will help identify if we have been with someone with the Corona virus so that we can self isolate and get tested. Just one person’s infection can have a devastating effect on a community, as we have seen in the recent out-breaks especially in the university halls of residence. Together we are being asked to limit our personal freedom and act unselfishly to protect the health of those in our communities.

Paul uses Jesus as the best example of unselfishness, for us he is the ideal model for discipleship. We are called to imitate his total lack of selfishness and to put others first. Paul is probably using the words of a hymn about Jesus.

Even though he was God’s son he humbled himself and was prepared to give up everything, not holding onto anything that would get in the way of sharing God’s love to the world. He was prepared to do things that only slaves would usually do like washing feet. He was always ready to help those in need. Jesus had the spirit of service and humility and was prepared even for death on the cross.

This sacrificial self giving is an intrinsic quality of divine love and as his disciples we too are called to have the same spirit of service and humility, helping us to be obedient like him in everything. But like owning up being obedient is something we find very hard, which brings us to Jesus’ parable of the sons from our Gospel.

The whole point of Matthew’s gospel is to show to the people of Israel that Jesus was their long awaited Messiah. Today in our Gospel reading we have moved on. Chapter 21 begins with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people have recognised this but clearly the Jewish religious leaders have not. The key to understanding this parable is to see that Jesus was speaking directly to them.

He had already caused uproar when he cleansed the Temple and he then uses a fruitless Fig Tree, which is often seen as a symbol of Israel, to highlight that despite all the leaves as trappings of spirituality, the fruit of repentance and following the will of God was missing. The scene is set for a show down which is why Jesus tells them a series of 3 parables. This morning we heard the first story of the 2 sons. The others are the Parable of the Tenants and the Wedding Banquet but they are for future Sundays.

The story of the 2 sons is only found in Matthew, and it may be that as he had been a tax collector, one of those labelled as sinners but one of those who listened to the good news, repented and changed the way they lived their life, that he had to include this parable as part of his gospel.

That's why some think that the first son represents those who were non believers (those considered outcasts by Jewish society) but because of the message of John the Baptist, repented and came to believe in God. The second son is thought to represent the leaders of Israel who claimed obedience but did not do the will of the father and were unable or too proud to recognise their mistakes. We have to be honest with ourselves before God as he can see through any excuses. A little bit of humility can go a long way.

Just like Matthew we each have our own gospel to proclaim, stories of how God has graciously transformed situations and lovingly affected the way we live our lives, helping others to see the glory of God both around us and within us.

To close I have adapted the Choristers prayer which you will have heard the choir say at the beginning of our service.

Bless O Lord, us your servants who worship here and on line. Grant that what we have said with our lips and heard with our ears, we may believe in our hearts and show forth in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

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