

DIVISION AND CROSSES, BUT ALSO WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY

Mt 10.37-42 2Kings 4.8-16 Rom 6.3-11

Welcome once more to our virtual celebration of Eucharist, , now over 100 days since the pandemic shutdown, whilst the risks are ongoing and real, and no end yet in sight.

AS THERE HAVE BEEN FRESH OUTBREAKS OF CORONAVIRUS IN THE LOCAL SCENE, AND THE RULES HAVE CHANGED YET AGAIN, FOR THE COMMON GOOD. UNTIL AT LEAST FRIDAY JULY 10 2020, THE LIMIT FOR CHURCH SERVICES, HAS BEEN HELD TO ONLY 20, APART FROM FUNERALS, WHERE UP TO 50 ARE PERMITTED TO ATTEND. THEREFORE, WE WILL CONTINUE WITH VIRTUAL MASSES ON-LINE FOR WEEKENDS AND WEDNESDAY TO FRIDAY WEEKDAY MASSES, FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD.

Up to now, with still just over 100 deaths in Australia, compared with 125,000 in the USA, 55,000 in Brazil and 45,000 in Britain, again we must be vigilant and careful, with the unseen, insidious and ubiquitous coronavirus still creeping around out there.

And so, another strange week passes, with overhanging concern about an increase in numbers of coronavirus cases, some in our own area.

Today we move from Jesus reassuring us that each individual, no matter how small matters (*as Dr Seuss reminds is in his parable of "Horton (the Elephant) Hears a Who" and the minuscule Whos of Whoville!*), and not to be fearful, difficult as that may be, more important than the sparrows and the hairs on our heads all counted!! The tone changes as we are warned of the demands and difficulties of being genuine disciples who follow his way. **'Family First'** is not an adequate principle or position to take, as the disciple's mission is to look beyond oneself and personal comfort zones, in order to engage with others, and to develop relationships and take up responsibilities in the broader world, as prescribed in the 1965 Vatican II document titled *Gaudium et spes (Joy and Hope)*, also known as ***The Church in the Modern World***.

At present, unfortunately, to my mind, we live in an increasingly divided world, as people tend to turn in on themselves, rather than to look to the common good and shared humanity of all. There was a rather negative and critical article published recently, titled ***"The destructive blindness of #blacklivesmatter"***, wherein the suggestion was that the problems were overstated, playing down the fact of ongoing prejudice and injustice, for example, in relation to black deaths in custody, critical of US police officers going down on one knee in solidarity with protestors against prejudice. The issue is real, whatever we might like to think, and we need to know the truth of the sad history of racism, slavery, and ignorance and even denial, of indigenous rights and culture. Gospel values surely require that we consider the issues and have a sense of the social injustices of the past and present, with a view to addressing the wrongs perpetrated.

Meanwhile, Jesus' call to and journey of Christian discipleship continues in Matthew's Gospel, with a tough reminder of not just difficulties, but outright hostility being faced, even within families, because of commitment to the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus, but rejected by some. Faith can't be forced or imposed, as personal acceptance and belief are required before one can claim to be a genuine disciple.

Scripture scholars point out that this is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that the cross is mentioned by Jesus, being a reminder of the hard yards or sufferings ahead, as was being experienced in the early Christian communities, afflicted with family divisions in particular. We don't have to go seeking crosses

in our lives, as sufficient will come our way, as time moves on for all of us. The call of Jesus is to face up to those crosses or burdens, and to support each other in carrying or dealing with them.

In those times, as now for us, really, family is at the heart of our lives and relationships, but there's no such thing as the ideal family either, so let's not kid ourselves. Different personalities, perspectives and beliefs easily lead to misunderstanding, conflict and alienation in all of our lives and relationships. Jesus is not at all saying nuclear family is not important, but that it is not where our engagement with others should end, and that we all have responsibilities in the broader scene of life.

In fact, sociologists have referred to *amoral familism*, as an extreme form of family loyalty, being an unhealthy syndrome, where family has become the be all and end all of life and priorities, with no broader reference to involvement in society and the broader world. It has been said, perhaps out of context, that there is no such thing as society, but don't we know, that governments and we as Church, have a responsibility to work for and provide a just and fair environment in our world so that the dignity and equality of every person, no matter who, all are cared for. That's the goal, but don't we fall a long way from it being achieved?

Jesus' words wake us up, though sounding harsh and unreasonable, when he talks of bringing a sword and not peace, and warns of extreme family divisions. He's certainly not condoning violence! Along the way, in the Gospels, we hear nothing of the family lives of the apostles (apart from the visit to Peter's mother-in-law), although it is presumed that most were married men before they took up with Jesus as his followers. We can only surmise that they continued to support their wives and children in the background, but also giving priority to applying his message to their lives and relationships, and their mission as disciples.

But also, we need to heed his example in the way he constantly reaches out to the ostracised, the left out, the suffering in mind and/or body, the demoralised and despised, as in the lepers of society, the women seen as sinners or second class, the sinners, the lonely, the different. He reaches out to bring them all forward, and offers understanding, encouragement, acceptance forgiveness and another chance, without being judgemental, except to those who are self-righteous and hypocritical, such that their double standards are exposed by him, which they clearly resent. There is where his real condemnation lies, on those who make it hard for everyone else, thinking they are superior because they observe all the externals of law and ritual, and falsely believing that they have all the answers!

His is a challenge to look constantly beyond ourselves and our families, to the needs of others, and to engage with them as he does. The simple example of the cup of water being offered is only a starting point. In fact, the Jerome Biblical Commentary takes this further to ask: ***“If God will reward one who gives a cup of cold water to a disciple, how much more will he reward one who installs an entire city water system?”*** This is not to say that we're all after rewards, but rather the satisfaction of knowing that we are doing our best to be faithful disciples in word and action, starting at home, to be open but not naïve, with a spirit of welcome, hospitality and willingness to share ourselves and our resources.

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