

4th SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YEAR C HOMILY 2022
JESUS, A PROPHETIC VOICE FOR A CHANGE OF HEART
Lk 4.21-30 Jer 1.4-5, 17-19 1Cor 12.31-13.13

My 4 siblings and I are now all in our 60's, acutely aware that we have now outlived our Dad, who died of MND, just short of his 60th birthday, in January 1982. Both of our parents, Kath and Bernie were born 100 years ago this last week, marrying 70 years ago in 1952, this same week, so it has been a nostalgic time as we happily remember them and their shared and actively lived Catholic faith, with love and gratitude, along with the natural sadness of loss. I was particularly conscious of this, as I celebrated another 3 funerals with grieving families in recent days, with 3 more to come next week.

And now, who said this? "I believe that life is a unity and therefore not divided into compartments. That means that worship, music, recreation, work and all other 'little boxes' of our lives are really inseparable, and that is why I believe that people should be given the opportunity to worship God with the language and music that is part of their ordinary life." Here's a clue. (Play - Janet Mead 'Our Father'). And that's why I wear my diverse stoles reflecting faith, life and the world around us.

This is the only song hitting the top of the pops, which is fully scriptural, every word coming from the Bible, and that came in 1974, "The Lord's Prayer", sung by Janet Mead, a Sister of Mercy in Adelaide. My youngest sister, Barbara, provided me with the spark for beginning this weekend's thoughts, as she informed me of her death at 83. Janet was the first Australian recording artist to have a gold record in the USA, and donated all of her royalties to charity. She humbly continued her mission in teaching young pupils music and, throughout her religious life, was ever committed to social justice and service of others, faithfully living the Gospel.

Speaking of faithful commitment and service, a word of acknowledgement, appreciation and congratulations must go to 2 of our local, faithful Charity Sisters, Josephine, at 103 celebrating her 85th year of profession (Can you imagine? This must be up to Guinness Book of Records standing!!) and Maureen (Walters), only her 70th!! And Sisters Cathy only her 61st, and Sister Regina on a similar track also. We were privileged that they joined us for the parish Australia Day Mass on Wednesday.

Today's Second Reading is the Corinthians classic, chosen for weddings by 90+% of the couples whose marriages I've celebrated over the last 44 years. Sometimes it appears at funerals too. I sometimes say I am tired of hearing it, somewhat facetiously, as its popularity reflects its ongoing relevance to what love and life are all about in terms of Christian faith, and the heart of the message constantly preached and practised by Jesus. Paul is looking at an initially enthusiastic, but divided Christian community, where class distinctions endure and exclusion rather than inclusion was the continuing practice. He highlights the fact that faith is to be alive and active for all who profess to be followers of Jesus.

Paul provides a practical reflection on how love is to be lived out, with the realities of diversity, conflict, perseverance and patience, forgiveness and reconciliation all being part of the deal. The acknowledgement is there that there are bound to be difficulties in every individual's life, as well as in any community. No Utopian society is ever going to emerge, given the human condition into which we are born, and where, as Paul tells us, where faith, hope and love give us the strength to endure whatever comes our way.

Then we see in the following Gospel reading that this was not the mentality of those who were familiar with Jesus in his own home town, with the old adage 'familiarity breeds contempt' to the fore.

And so we continue with Jesus' early mission launch, which quickly turns sour and nasty, as some of the locals, familiar with his background, decide that he is not worth listening to, as what would he know? It's an old story, following on from last week's introduction, where they start off thinking Jesus is saying nice things to keep them comfortable, but then start to realize he is preaching a broader message of God's love and concern, and so is offering hope of salvation for all who respond to him in faith. His is a message against elitism and exclusion, but rather universality and welcome. God doesn't play favourites, even though many of those of Jewish background at the time, particularly the religious leaders, saw themselves as special. Jesus disabuses this notion from the start, and suffers hostility and rejection for it. There's no suggestion in Luke, however, that those of Jesus' immediate family are among the objectors.

Brendan Byrne SJ suggests it's more those who don't like being challenged, who wish to remain comfortable in their own closed minds and familiar community, with no willingness to look beyond themselves, to the needs or rights of others: "Today's Gospel confronts the potential for violence that lies in every human heart

when the boundaries of comfort and convention are challenged. It is a profound exploration of the conversion that full response to the Gospel requires.” A sense of superiority is the antithesis of what Jesus presents as the truth and reality of God’s love.

From the start of his public ministry, Jesus moves forward, adopting the prophetic approach of opening minds and hearts to the God of mercy and love he constantly reveals through his words and actions. And it is clear that some just don’t like it, as it doesn’t suit their narrow world view. Some things just don’t change, as we see the same attitudes in our world today, despite the shrinking global village to which we all belong, and yet the ongoing misunderstanding, hostility and conflict, between people who should know and could do better. And so could we all!

john hannon

30th January 2022