



The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER

14 September 2021



BEING FAITHFUL TO THE WAY OF JESUS 25th SUNDAY B

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37

It's a well-known fact that many men read a newspaper backwards. This is because of their great interest, sometimes even fanatical interest, in sport. Their interest extends to all kinds of sports, even sports played in other countries. They may have noticed, then, that a while back the New York Yankees Baseball Team paid \$30 million for a new star performer. As a result, they began to win games galore.

What's clear here, there, and everywhere is that the club with the most money can buy a champion team. What's also clear is that the famous saying of American football coach Vince Lombardi rings bells with many people: 'Winning isn't everything,' he said, 'It's the only thing.'

No doubt about it! Achievement, winning, success, being number one, and beating all opposition, are among the strongest values of human beings everywhere. For that very reason, the parish bulletin, like cigarette packets, might have carried a countercultural warning today. It might have read: 'Warning! Hearing and listening to the Word of God today might cause you dizziness, confusion, and disorientation!'

Why do I say that? Because the message God is giving us today is so different. In a nutshell, WHAT GOD IS TELLING US IS THAT HE IS NOT ASKING US TO BE WINNERS BUT TO BE FAITHFUL. Jesus in particular is putting that path of fidelity to us no matter what our fidelity may cost us. In his case, the price he paid for fidelity was the way of the cross - the way of pain, torture, and humiliation. It was a path that would finally lead to victory, the victory of the resurrection. But to reach that victory he had to first pass through the agony and brutality of his Passion and Death.

While I sense that the way of Jesus is 'the road less travelled' for most human beings, there are significant exceptions. One striking exception I've read about is a Sister Mary, who works in a health service for homeless people in London. After working most of her life as a doctor in Africa, she came home to England. She was horrified to discover enormous numbers of people living homeless on the streets of the capital. It made her angry that in such a wealthy country there could be so many people who were so poor, so uncared for, and so unloved. So rather than retire, she set herself to work for the homeless people she saw, including providing them with a free medical service.

One day, a man who had been homeless for about 30 years came into one of the hostels for the homeless. He was about 55, and had been abusing alcohol and other drugs for nearly forty years. When he arrived, could he have been any dirtier? His entire body, clothes, hair, and face were covered with a thick matted mess of dirt, drool, vomit, and dried blood. There were even lice crawling on his skin. To protect the other residents, the warden of the hostel insisted that he could stay only if he had a bath. But the man refused point-blank.

Even on a bitterly cold January night in London, he would prefer to go back to the streets rather than take a bath. A male volunteer tried to talk to him, to reason with him, but he kept shouting all kinds of nonsense, and would not listen at all. So, the volunteer called his boss, Sister Mary, for advice. She said she would come and talk to the man. When she arrived, she said nothing. She just sat down beside him and held both his hands in hers. Instantly, he stopped shouting and began to weep. For a long time, he just sobbed his heart out. At last, after what seemed like an eternity, he said: 'That's the first time anyone has touched me like that in twenty years.'

Softened by that touch, he had a bath, a shave, and a haircut, and put on a clean set of clothes. Within an hour he seemed like a new man. But the real miracle was what happened next. From that day to this he has never drunk any alcohol or used any drugs. Within three months he found a job and moved out of the temporary hostel into his own flat. That one moment of grace - of love and compassion communicated - has changed his life forever.

Of course such a dramatic change does not happen often or easily. But that's exactly what did happen to that particular homeless man.

So, Jesus means what he's saying to us today: 'Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me...' I cannot think of a more powerful illustration of his teaching than the story of Sr. Mary and the homeless man. It convinces me that the essence of true greatness is found in loving, serving, and helping others, and in doing that, being the best, that we can be.

Surely, then, an authentic life is not about seeking out those people who can do things for us, but those for whom we can do things, and do them with the humility, kindness, gentleness, care, compassion, and grace practised by Jesus himself, and doing them without any thought of reward or recognition other than believing and knowing that this is the way and will of Jesus.

His way and his will surely, for both you and me! Can we rise to his challenge?

May the passion of Jesus Christ, and his everlasting love, be always within our minds and hearts!

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