

The Nineteenth Sunday of Ord Time C

Everyone to whom much is given...will much be required (Lk 12:48)

There is a great sense of realism in the way Jesus speaks of human dispositions. His parables are the fruits of his thinking. They show us his way of observing people and things, and an unrivalled capacity to communicate this thinking. St. Luke in this Sunday's Gospel presents his thoughts on the question of patient fidelity in waiting for the future when there is no certainty when the wait will be over. Indeed, there may be uncertainty as to what is being waited for. This is mirrored in the parable as those in charge of others become impatient, and begin to exploit them. No mention is made of the expectations or reactions of those being ill treated. The focus is directed by the saying: **to whom much has been given much will be required.**

A Word on Waiting

Probably most of us like punctuality even though we personally might not be very good at it. At least we like it in others, especially when we depend on their help in our need. We hope that doctors and dentists and bankers honour their appointments. We want transport to be on time. Understanding and courtesy is demanded all round. Some people are far more careful in this respect than are others. Taking a place in a queue used to be a British virtue, standing up to let a needier person have a seat in the bus, and not parking in a place intended for handicapped people. It all makes for civilised living. There are so many such examples, and we all know them, probably appreciating them most when we are deprived of them. We have all experienced what it is like in some countries to wait mildly in line while the world rushes past us with a totally different understanding of fairplay. But what of other forms of waiting?

How about waiting for someone to grow up? To overcome immaturity? To come to terms with school problems?

We often hear the judgmental expression: what were you expecting anyway? Parents must be faced with this kind of thing all the time, but the children might well be waiting for their parents to have a realistic approach to the childrens' problems. There are genuine difficulties and often heard complaints. Nor are there easy solutions. Who can do anything about it?

On the Grand Scale

In the world of politics and economics important decisions are made in our name. Probably in the days of Jesus, when he spoke of much being given to some, he was referring to the negligence of the High Priests and the failure of the Pharisees among others. In Luke's day it would have been also a question of the way life as lived in the Christian community he belonged to. Were they waiting for the return of Jesus soon? Did His delay in coming lead to relationships that soured between those in charge and those in their charge? When would Jesus come back? Indeed, would He come back? The same question is being faced in today's reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews. The pressure is on faith. How keep the faith when so much militates against it? The writer makes an appeal to those in the Old Testament who kept faith despite the massive uncertainties. Abraham is given pride of place among the "cloud of witnesses". Sarah is likewise honoured. Their faith was in fact also hope. They hoped on despite all evidence to thwart it. In our first reading from the Book of Wisdom we have the same effort by the writer to assure his readers that faith and hope sustained their ancestors when they were told to leave Egypt and follow Moses on the way to the Promised Land. The difficulties seemed insuperable. In this same Egypt the writer of the Book of Wisdom centuries later tries to reassure his beleaguered contemporaries living there not to give up their faith and surrender their Messianic hope. Patient fidelity in the past assures success in the future.

The History of the Church

In our own day here in the West, no one should deny that faith is under pressure. The personal and sociological evidence for this is everywhere apparent. It is sad when external pressure gestates internal dissension. Many people are experiencing this just now- and probably none more profoundly than the present pope. But the history of the Church is a great help – analogous to the history of Judaism and the early Church attested in today's readings. Time and again the Church has shown its capacity to renew itself from within. The Councils of the Church have shown this.

In the past it may be said that political forces had much to do with the success or failure in convening these councils. But such forces did not control their content. Exemplary practising believers among all ranks of the Church brought about the reforms that were needed for the continued mission in fidelity to the Master-selfishness and sanctity.

It always takes time and patience, love and compassion. How important St. Luke thought poverty and prayer to be in pursuing this discipleship. Conversion of minds and hearts are necessary when institutional changes have to be made. Who at any level is not in need of conversion of heart and generosity of spirit? We only live in a local community and that is where we experience it.

Conclusion

In October Cardinal Newman is going to be canonised a saint. He is so near to us in so many ways- not just because he wrote hymns and sermons and learned tomes. He was a human being, who said that to be perfect is to have changed often. He suffered much on his earthly pilgrimage. We can see it on his face. We have so many photos of him and so much detail about his public and private life. He knew the human heart, loving and suffering. He would have been astonished to think he would one day be a canonised saint of the Church that he once feared and dishonoured- until it became his haven and home.

“I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.” A happy Sunday to you all. Amen

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