**TWENTY NINTH SUNDAY ORD TIME C (2019**

**WORLD MISSION SUNDAY (LK 18:1-8)**

People have sometimes wondered if there is any humour in the Bible. There is if the readers are not always too solemn in their approach to it. Surely the Jonah story is really funny as he argues with God and tries to do the exact opposite of what he is asked to do. He then ends up sulking because while he wanted God to wipe out the inhabitants of Nineveh God saved them all. We have something of a similar approach in today’s parable on the necessity to go on praying and never give up. The widow is a regular symbol of the deprived and abused in the Old Testament. There could be a tendency for us to think of her as old and dressed in black and all bent over. That is not how she comes across in this parable. She is more likely to be young and fit and feisty. And the judge has more than met his match in her. He feared neither God nor man, and he was as crooked as they come, but this woman does not let him get away with it in her case. She may have been too poor to hire a lawyer to defend her, and she is probably trying to secure her property to which the law gave her no rights on her husband’s death. She has health and energy and the judge knew that while she could not damage the rotten reputation he already had and which he could not care less about, she could give him a black eye- the Greek word *hupopiazo* can have that meaning! So he eventually gave her the favourable judgment she demanded. The theological point that is made- as with the Jonah story- is quite the reverse of what the reader would expect. It is all Scripture, reflecting the various situations and attitudes characteristic of life. Jesus the missioner knew how to interest and instruct his audience; he drew on real life the way it is, with sympathy, and surely with humour too. We are further helped in our appropriation of Scripture with the reading from St.Paul in the *Second Letter to Timothy* at today’s Mass.

**2 Tim 3:14-4:2**

Paul, after Jesus, is the most remembered NT missioner; he instructs Timothy on how to use Scripture in the pastoral care of his community. The basic original faith must be respected, delivered once and for all by the accredited witnesses. Then follows the appeal to the Scriptures in explaining it and fostering it. In Paul’s day the Scriptures were the Old Testament. Christ himself as the presence of the kingdom of God in the world, is the fulfilment of what the Old Testament promised-that is the New Testament. The missioners preaching that Kingdom were obeying the demand of Christ himself : make disciples of all nations (Mt 28,20). And how are they supposed to do it? That is the interest of the varying usages of Scriptures, inclusive now of the New Testament writings too. Their application in transmitting the Gospel message must be according to the varying needs of the hearers. The needs are multiple. This has been acknowledged and addressed profoundly at Vatican II (1962-5).

**The Pilgrim Church is Missionary by her very Nature** (Vat II, *Ad Gentes*, para 2 i.e. *The Missionary Activity of the Church*).).

The Second Vatican Council devoted a special decree to the subject. Here the Council Fathers set out in detail what was desirable and possible in trying to evangelise the various people of the world. It pointed out then in 1965 that over two billion people had never heard the Gospel or of the Gospel. It explained the importance of inculturation, that is, getting to know the language and customs and cultures of the people to be evangelised. It is completely realistic about the difficulties. One must do what one can, especially helping in areas of health and education. The proper missionary field for the lay faithful is the secular field, in their families and environment, normally where they work, and through participation in the national public sphere, the world of politics and economics. It is an exhortation to live Gospel values, and that is far more a question of doing rather than talking. Often enough there will be no opportunity to talk about the faith, but one must work solidly for truth and justice. To do so is to be missionary. This means collaboration with others, with respect, as well as taking one’s distance when what is proposed would be a denial of the faith. Those working in health and education run into these problems every day. The Church is committed to serving the needs of humanity out of love, not for gain and not for praise, but because it is right. This is far from proselytism. And it has nothing to do with indifferentism as though the one true faith did not exist.

**Conclusion**

To be perfect is to have changed often. So wrote Saint John Henry Newman in his volume on *The Development of Doctrine* in 1845- published by him when he was still Anglican. He was just on the point of becoming a Catholic. Later he had to deal with the problems of people who felt that as Catholics they did not need to change at all. They questioned his integrity. His cardinal’s hat and the Second Vatican Council vindicated him. He was a great missionary, in so many ways a model of how to deal with difficulties and understand things from an opponent’s point of view. The Council with its decrees on *Religious Liberty* and *Ecumenism* and *The Church Missionary* showed in detail new ways of addressing old problems. Many have embraced them and many have refused them. Today there is a lot of polarisation going on, and perhaps a lack of humour in all of this.

To look back on the way in which people evangelised in different cultures over the centuries must make some people cringe. The Council recognized this. Most of us looking back on our own lives will probably blush at our ignorant stupidity which we pursued with a good conscience. A capacity to laugh at oneself and say sorry shows evidence of maturity and freedom. World Mission Sunday is about preaching and living the gospel wherever possible. A happy Sunday to you all.

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