

Trinity 6 St Bride July 27th 2014

Last week, this question and answer formed a small part of the homily: 'So, what are we called to do, what we must do more of, if we desire to see salvation? The answer is an example of the way a Christian life is often counter-intuitive to typical human reaction.'

I think perhaps that the answer should really say that 'the answer is to be found in the fact that a Christian life is often counter-intuitive to typical human reaction'.

And if I need to look for the proof of that statement, I need look no further than the Gospel of Luke in the sixth chapter, where we find ourselves challenged by Jesus' words as Our Lord speaks what are radical concepts of forgiveness and humility.

It is as if Jesus is setting out an obstacle course for the apostles and disciples following Him as He is setting out with them on the pathways of His ministry amongst us. It is like the strategy to 'set the bar high' so that the enthusiastic and the determined are challenged, and the waverer and uncertain are discouraged: the result being that those who have passion for the work will achieve the desired results, whereas those who are ambivalent will find a different path to a different goal.

And when I speak of a 'path', there is a beginning – where they are in this passage, and there is an end: whether that be an end of a human life, or the end of the task that has been set, or perhaps both ends complement the other? But as with any path, there is a route along which we must follow, along which there are good things, and there are bad things. Have you noticed that Jesus Christ has never denied the presence of evil: after all, he has met and struggled with Satan himself during those 40 days of temptation in the desert! No, it is as if Jesus has to prepare each one of us for the fact that we are involved in a struggle between light and dark, good and evil, even as we live out our lives in the relative security and peace here in Canada: in that, we are the fortunate, whereas so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are taking their places in the front lines of the struggle, a struggle confused for us by the adoption of disguises, where the good can appear to become the bad, and where the ugly can be transformed into the beautiful. In short, the struggle is deliberately formulated to be a 'devil of a mess': dissent fostered by confusion, mediated by Satan.

So Jesus asks from us the impossible! But is it so? Consider the idea of the pathway. Perhaps we have all, at some time, had major challenges and troubles in life, where the feeling of bewilderment leaves us confused as to why this has happened – to me? How can I ever forgive? How could I ever meet and speak with that person again? We need to find a mentor, a good counsellor to help us with our quandary: but where can I find such a guide?

In life, there are those who shine, and so very often it is that they shine not with their own glory and achievement, but they shine with an extra radiance that goes above and beyond. Often, as they are only too well aware of their own small part in what has occurred, they are often found to be humble and contrite, even when in earlier days, they may have had a reputation for assertiveness and 'power'.

Two names: two people of our times who may illustrate the power of the message from Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: the first was a humble Albanian nun, and the second was a terrorist rebel, imprisoned for many years. The first made it her work to care for the dying, those who otherwise would be left by the roadside in the Indian city of Calcutta. But her work did not stop there: by her teaching of the essential truth of the words we have heard this day, the work spread around the world and continues even here in our own city of Vancouver (385 E. Cordova St. Vancouver, BC V6A 1L4 Phone: 604 322 6840).

The second: suffered severe treatment for over 27 years in prison, as a result of his campaign for basic human civil rights in his country: a campaign that was successful, but with that success came an immense problem of fear and anger where a small spark could set fire to an immense conflagration: what was needed was an acknowledgement of the hurts felt, the anger which had resulted after so much bad treatment, and with that acknowledgement, and understanding that what had driven the actions taken by the then 'rulers' was founded not on strength, but on their great fear – on their weakness! It was as if despite all the guns and water cannon, the people who operated them were afraid, and they need to be reassured in their turn by the majority of whom they were afraid: how can the victim now turn and comfort the offender?

There are two people who have answered that question, and they use the same methodology that Jesus has told us in the Gospel of Luke: I have no doubt that it is only by the Grace of God which we all need so much in our lives that Mother Theresa and Nelson Mandela were able to show us the way that we all need to find: that pathway where we hear 'But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest.'

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