



13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 28 June, 2020
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

On one occasion Jesus, in summing up some of his teachings, remarked that *“everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them is like a wise person whose house is built on rock”* (Matthew 7:24).

As disciples of Jesus we would, I think, all want to be this kind of person: but the problem is that sometimes the words of Jesus are hard to hear and even harder to put into practice.

This is not always the case, of course. Sometimes the words of Jesus are encouraging and consoling. Think, for example, of what Jesus said to the woman who was caught in adultery. She was being denounced and ridiculed by everyone and she was probably expecting to hear the same words from Jesus – but instead she heard the words which were exactly what she needed to hear if she was to have any hope of beginning to put her life back in order: *“I do not condemn you”*.

Or think of the man stricken by the terrible disease of leprosy who calls out to Jesus, *“Lord, if you want to you can heal me”*. Again the reply of Jesus was exactly what the man needed to hear: *“Of course I want to, be healed”* (Luke 5:12-13).

Jesus' words are not always so consoling. When he is confronted by the hard-heartedness of some of the religious leaders of his day, he calls them *“hypocrites (who) are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth”* (Matt 23:27). Imagine what it must have been like for those men to have Jesus speak to them in that way.

At other times Jesus' words seem not so much confronting as confusing and, often, extremely challenging. Today's gospel is a good example. Is Jesus really inviting us, and expecting us, to make him the absolute centre of our lives, as his words today seem to suggest? Are we really supposed to prefer him to our own family? Does he really expect us to follow in his footsteps no matter how great the cost? Is it really the case that even the simplest gestures of kindness, like giving a cup of water to a thirsty person, have real value not simply because they are expressions of human goodness but because they are expressions of our commitment to Jesus himself?



The answer to all these questions in Matthew's gospel is a very clear "yes": this is what Jesus is asking of us - and it is in this that the real challenge lies. What Saint Matthew's gospel is really saying here is that Christianity, our Catholic faith, is not first and foremost about rules to be followed, although those rules provide very important signposts for our journey through life. Nor is our faith primarily about doctrines to be believed, important though those teachings are for helping us to understand who God really is and what it is that God is asking of us. No, before being about rules or doctrines our faith is about a person, Jesus, who is the Word of God made flesh for us so that, in coming to know and love and serve Jesus - in becoming his disciples in other words - we enter into a profound communion of intimacy with God.

Sometimes the rules are difficult to follow because they ask us to live according to values which are more and more regarded by our wider society as old-fashioned and even damaging. Sometimes the teachings seem irrelevant - of no real value in our daily living - and we are tempted to ignore them or even deny them. But if we come to understand that the teachings, if we engage with them, can point to the beauty and mystery of the God who comes among us in the person of Jesus, and if the guidelines and rules can be re-considered as sure, God-given ways of keeping us on the path that leads to the fullness of life rather than simply man-made regulations which limit our freedom to do as we please, then they might begin to make more sense to us than they do at present. If our fidelity to the Church's teachings and principles is understood to offer us a way to a deeper, truer, more intimate and loving relationship with the Lord Jesus, then they will become an energising source of life rather than a heavy weight dragging us down.

There is no doubt, at least in my mind, that the kind of relationship into which Jesus is calling us is challenging and demanding, as any true relationship with another person always is. In the case of Jesus we are being invited to develop an attachment of love and fidelity to a man whose way of life led him to the cross. In following him we will be challenged to make the same journey - to make of our lives a loving gift to others no matter the cost, just as he did. We will find ourselves struggling sometimes under the weight of the cross, again as he did. We may well find ourselves abandoned by some of those closest to us as he was. But to the extent that we already live as disciples of Jesus we will know from experience that living as Jesus lived brings a peace and a joy into our lives which far outweighs the effort required to follow him faithfully. As Jesus himself says in today's gospel, those who lose their lives, those in other words who hand their lives over to others as a gift of love, and do so for the sake of Jesus, will find their lives again in a new and richer and more fulfilling way.

This is the promise of Jesus in today's gospel and, in a sense, in every page of the gospels. If you want to live life to the full then allow God to form in you the same mind and heart that was in Christ Jesus - who made of his life a gift for the sake of others and in doing so has shown us the true meaning and purpose of the life God has given us. Today we pray that the Spirit of God might mould and shape us in this way - and that we can be open to his transforming power.