



**Fourth Sunday Ordinary Time (Year C)
Blessing and Opening Cottesloe Parish Columbarium**

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 30 January, 2022
St Mary's St of the Sea Church, Cottesloe Parish**

Today's Gospel passage comes from Saint Luke's Gospel and follows on immediately from last week's story in which Jesus makes the words of the prophet Isaiah his own and uses them to outline a kind of a blueprint for his ministry.

In using the words of Isaiah Jesus says that he has come to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to proclaim the recovery of sight to the blind. He finishes by saying he has come to proclaim a year of acceptance on the part of the Lord.

It is interesting to know that Saint Luke's Gospel adds something which is not in the original words of the Prophet Isaiah and also leaves something out. The words Jesus adds are these: *I have come to let the oppressed go free*. What Luke leaves out is the inclusion of "*binding up the broken-hearted*" which is part of Isaiah's mission. The gospel also leaves out Isaiah's announcement of a day of vengeance for God which Isaiah comes to proclaim but which Jesus does not mention.

We could come up with all sorts of theories as to why Jesus does not quote Isaiah exactly. As regards leaving out the phrase about binding up the broken-hearted it may simply be that the other phrases Jesus does borrow from Isaiah already cover this situation. Jesus is clearly making his own the mission of mercy and compassion which Isaiah also expresses. The question of why Jesus leaves out the reference to a day of vengeance for God is a little more puzzling. In other parts of Luke's Gospel Jesus does use the language of judgement and condemnation, but in Luke's Gospel this is always portrayed as something that happens at the end of time, when the opportunity for repentance and conversion has passed. What Jesus seems to be saying, and this is surely the message being constantly promoted by Pope Francis, is that Jesus comes as the revealer of the compassion of God: he comes, to use Pope Francis's famous phrase, to be the face of his Father's mercy.

There is an important message for us here, I believe. It is not our place as disciples of Jesus to judge or condemn. This is very clear, for example, in Matthew's gospel where Jesus speaks very strongly about those who condemn others. "*Why,*" he asks "*do you notice the speck of dust in your brother's or sister's eye and ignore the plank of wood that is in your own eye? Get rid of the plank in your own eye first and then you will be able to see to help your brother or sister get rid of*



the speck of dust in their eye". The time for judgement will come, but the judgement is God's to make, not ours. We are to be signs and bearers of God's love, forgiveness and mercy. Saint John's gospel makes this very clear when, on the night of his resurrection, Jesus appears to his apostles and tells them, and through them the whole Church, that he is sending them just as the Father sent him.

There is another important element in today's gospel story. At the beginning of today's passage the townspeople of Nazareth, having heard Jesus speak so powerfully and so beautifully in the synagogue, are full of admiration for him, so much so that they want to claim him as one of their own. They know his family, he was brought up in their midst, and they believe they have some special claim on him. But by the end of today's story the people's admiration has turned to anger. And why? Because they want Jesus to be one thing while Jesus understands his mission differently: he knows that he has come not to please the people of his own town but rather to do the will of his Father. Saint Luke's Gospel makes this point very cleverly. The townspeople think they know exactly who Jesus is: he is the son of Joseph the carpenter, they say. But we, the readers of Luke's Gospel, know that this is not, in fact, the case. We know the story of the Annunciation, where the Virgin Mary is told by the angel that although she is not married she is going to bear a son. Her child will not, in fact, be the son of Joseph but the son of God. We know too, from reading Luke's Gospel, that when Mary and Joseph eventually found Jesus in the temple, after he had been lost for three days as a twelve-year-old, he said to them, "*Why were you worried? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*" And, of course, he was not speaking of Joseph but of his own Heavenly Father.

When Jesus challenged the people of his own town, and tried to get them to understand the true nature both of who he was and of what he had come to do, they became angry and turned against him. This pattern will be repeated in all four of the Gospels and will culminate in the death of Jesus. It is a pattern which still continues today. Jesus is acceptable to many people as long as his teaching does not challenge them. He is admired and respected by many as a great man whose philosophy is worth following. But when he wants to make the claim that he himself is the Way we should follow, and that his Truth is the truth to which we should commit ourselves, and that his Life sets the pattern for the life we are called to live, then Jesus is often rejected and people turn away.

We must be very careful not to fall into the trap of constructing in our own minds a Jesus with whom we can be comfortable and who does not ask too much of us, but who does not, in reality, match up with the Jesus we discover in the pages of the gospel. This danger is ever present in our individual lives as Christians, and even in our lives as members of communities of faith. In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of a time of acceptance on the part of the Lord God. God is ready to accept us but how ready are we to accept him? The townspeople of Nazareth had locked themselves into a vision of life which was not big enough to appreciate and welcome Jesus. It would be tragedy if we were to make the same mistake.