

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
3RD FEBRUARY 2013

So tempting to talk about St Paul's beautiful treatise on love.....

In the gospel today those listening approved of Jesus. They were astonished by his gracious words. But this astonishment doesn't lead to faith in him, as we will see.

Perhaps pride took over, mixed with jealousy. They had heard about his miracles in Capernaum and now he was back in his home town. We might think it was quite natural that they wanted to see the same, I am sure I would. However, they didn't want miracles because they had faith in him, but rather they were jealous, shouldn't Jesus look after his own people first? And who is this Jesus anyway; he's only a carpenter's son?

Approval turns into pride and judgement. They are prejudiced, Jesus as prophet or Messiah doesn't fit the mould. Yet we must know that God will use whoever he chooses to fulfil his work, so why not a carpenter; for that matter why not a bus conductor, driving instructor, plumber, someone unemployed; indeed, why not you? They are some people here God is calling to a particular task and you may be old or young (or middle aged!), and I have a message for you. Although today we didn't hear the whole answer, when Jeremiah was called he tried saying "Ah, Ah, Ah Yahweh, but I cannot speak and I am too young". Well God's response was straightforward, he said "stand up and tell them all I command you". So if God is calling you, don't say no to him but remember he promises that he will be with you. There's another message here for everyone else. Support those who step out in faith. That doesn't mean don't discern the right thing, but it does mean keep pride or jealousy out of it. If someone doesn't look like they tick the right boxes, we mustn't limit anyone because of our expectations. If it's God's work, we must be supportive.

Jesus is aware of their deeper intentions, so he challenges them and makes them look inside themselves. (We all find this uncomfortable, probably why we avoid doing it)

He reminds them of two historical stories they knew only too well. The first recalls how Israel was suffering a famine and Elijah was sent away from his own people to a widow in Sidonia. It was a foreigner who looked after Elijah; she hadn't ticked the right boxes. The second story is even worse. Namaan was a commander in the Syrian army who regularly attacked Israel. There were lepers in Israel yet this foreign soldier is cured instead of their own people! Jesus is giving them, and us, a strong message.

They didn't think that God's benefits should be shared with non-believers. Only they deserved God and his benefits. This should make us think, do we keep God for ourselves? Even worse are there people we don't think should be here with us because we like to have nice middle class people around us? Are we prejudiced against someone just because they are different to us? Anyway, Jesus' listeners couldn't cope with examining their inner thoughts and their next response reveals several things. They become full of rage; they even want to kill him.

And here's a lesson for us all. When we behave in a way that deep down we know is wrong, or pride makes us unable to accept what someone else says, many of us can get angry. Yet isn't this anger in fact a response to conflict within ourselves? And see what happened in the Gospel. Their anger fuels itself and they try to kill Jesus. But what does Jesus do, and not do? Well, what he doesn't do is perform any miracles. That's the consequence of their sin and lack of faith. Whenever we choose a course of action that is not what God wishes, we move a little away from him. Things like pride and anger can block us hearing what he wants. The result, he can't perform those miracles in our lives. It's not that Jesus doesn't want to work miracles for us but rather that *we* block him from blessing us, just as Jesus was blocked from doing miracles in Nazareth.

And what is Jesus' response? He slips through the crowd and walks away! Surely there's another lesson here. Firstly, how did he do that?! It can only be because he is God. And in his deep love for them he doesn't punish them, but he does leave them to the consequences of their actions...

Summary....Jesus' love is for everyone, no single faith group has a monopoly and we have no right to keep it to ourselves. We must be careful not to judge anyone, not to restrict our views of who should be leaders. And for those budding leaders here today, listen to how God is calling you, and say yes, however small or daunting the role may be. And don't let our own pride, or jealousy, or anger get in the way. God desperately wants to give us so much, but he won't force himself on us, he will allow us to experience the consequences of our choices. But he will shower us with his love and blessings if we let him.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser