

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE 21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

26th August 2018

“This is a hard saying!”

Jesus has finished his teaching on himself as the Bread of Life.

Now we hear the reaction of his disciples, clearly many more than twelve. Many of them are found the teaching too hard. Do any of us leave Mass thinking “this teaching is too hard”?

What does Jesus think when we struggle to believe? He knows, but he wants us to think why we are upset so that we can understand him. Jesus asks: “Does this scandalise you?”

Yes, this is the word that St. John uses in the Gospel – scandalise – literally to place an obstacle between us and God, something to trip over and cause us to fall.

He loves us and causes us no unnecessary difficulty, but he is truth, his words are truth.

Truth, if it really is truth, can hurt.

Two examples this week: The tragic death of the mother of two young girls in our parish and Pope Francis’ letter. This letter is addressed to all Catholics,

It accepts and apologises for widespread sexual abuse by ordained ministers and religious in the Church and denial of the truth by their superiors.

Jesus asks: “Does this scandalise you?”

Yes, of course it does, but it’s true. To ignore truth, to live in denial, does more harm than good. The scandal of abuse in the Church hurts more because of the attempts by some bishops and superiors to ignore or hide the truth.

So what does Jesus tell his despondent disciples?

He tells them to imagine him his ascension; to think beyond the here and now and see ourselves with him in eternal life. When suffering is forced upon us by circumstances beyond our control, Jesus tells us to have faith in him to lead us to eternal life with God who is not only love but justice. Innocent and undeserved suffering will be vindicated but only if we have faith, but faith in the Church is the problem.

Pope Francis sees clericalism, the abuse of power by ordained and consecrated people, as the root of the problem and he wants to stop it.

So what can we do?

Jesus insists that *his* words are spirit and they are life, but too often his words are obscured by the way they are taught and lived in the Church.

They are obscured not only by the scandalous behaviour of our teachers and leaders but also by complex theology and academic moral judgements that seem alien to our lived experience.

Many of Jesus' disciples walked away from him. In St. John's words "they went back to their old way of life before they had followed Jesus. They had had enough. Jesus does nothing to stop them. It's their choice.

Many no longer walk with us at Mass, though they may still walk with Jesus in the Spirit.

Jesus then asks a question to those who remain, like us: "Don't you also want to go?" Jesus is expecting them to go. He is very sad here.

Peter answers with another question: "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Thank you, Peter. That's the point. To whom shall we go?

How would it help the bereaved children and the huge number of scandalised people if they blame Jesus and leave him when he has the words of eternal life?

Let's trust Our Lord Jesus and continue to walk with him in spite of any difficulties that the Church may cause us.

Rev Geoffrey Carey