

3rd Sunday before Lent (Septuagesima)

Jer 17:5-8

1 Cor 15:12,16-20

Lk 6:17,20-26

Trust is defined as the belief that someone or something can be relied upon to do what they say they will. Trust matters in all aspects of life and a challenge for us all is deciding who we can trust. Joseph Stalin said he could trust no-one, not even himself, which explains a great deal about him. All of us have a philosophy of life, so who and what we trust will shape how we live.

Jeremiah says that our choice is to trust God or to trust in humanity. He says that trusting entirely on human nature is like a shrub in the desert. It may initially appear to flourish, but in the absence of nourishment from outside itself, it will wither and die. Without nourishment from outside of itself, human nature turns to drink, drugs, pornography or power and control. In contrast, Jeremiah says that the person who trusts God is like a tree planted by the waterside, able to flourish no matter what troubles it encounters. It was Jesus who said about the water from the well of Samaria, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst" (Jn 4:13). He also spoke of the streams of living water which is the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:37-39).

The Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent reminds us that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves. The gospels do not tell us to be self-sufficient, but to be God-sufficient. Today's gospel reading comes from Luke's version of Jesus' teaching to the crowds who gathered round Him. Jesus' message is that those who know they are not self-sufficient and trust in God will receive a blessing. Those who put their trust in possessions, gluttony or power will learn the painful lesson that all these things are an illusion. They go no further than the death bed. Blessings are from the God who we are called to trust.

St Paul learned to trust the resurrected Jesus the hard way. For Paul the Resurrection is not a mere symbol expressing our hopes. It is real, and if it is not, the Christian Faith is an illusion. The Resurrection of Jesus means we can trust God even if we suffer for doing so. Those Christians who try to re-write the gospel to make it more acceptable to the secular world will shrivel and die. St John Henry Newman said that, "The claims of truth must not be compromised for the sake of peace."

I have often said that in our current troubles the tide is turning. Notice how quickly the gospel of political correctness and wokeism that has dictated our western culture for many years is now under threat. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32-33). He spoke of the Truth of God, namely Himself. It is through Him we can drink of the water of life.

Jesus did not come to create a new ecclesiastical institution. He came to gather a new community of God's people who through their trust in God would become His agents in the world and channels of love and peace. The disciples Jesus gathered had to become His team, and a team is not a group of people who work together. A team is a group of people who trust each other.

Trust is under threat somewhat in the Western world, including in the Catholic Church. There is some distrust of the Vatican dicasteries, of the Tradition of the Church and some fundamental Catholic doctrines. Self-focussed agendas rattle around Synodal meetings, which can lead to a house being divided against itself.

I thank God that our community is a team who trust God and each other however hard that might be at times. For this reason, I believe we are planted by the riverside and so, as we explore God's future for us, we can do so with confidence and not despair.

The difference between being a dying shrub in the wilderness and a tree thriving by the water's edge depends on who we trust.

Msgr Harry Entwistle

Feb 16th, 2025