

TRINITY 16 – 2020  
Ezek 18:25-28  
Phil 2:1-5;  
Mt 21:28-32

“It’s not fair, we are suffering for our parents unfaithfulness.” This was the cry of those Jews who were in exile in Babylon after Jerusalem had been destroyed in 597BC. Blaming others is as old as Adam and Eve and every human exhibits the trait. In blaming past generations for their suffering, the exiles were saying that God is unjust for allowing this. Ezekiel’s response is that God is not unjust because we humans are responsible for the consequences of our decisions and actions. Unrepentant sinners will not be saved while repentant sinners may suffer the consequences of their actions but will be rescued and saved.

Ezekiel’s words are clearly expressed in the gospel reading. Jesus tells the parable of the two sons to the chief priests and elders. The Father asks his two sons to work in the vineyard. One says he will but doesn’t while the other says he won’t, but later he does. Jesus’ point is that the pious Jewish leaders were like the first brother while the sinners were like the second. Action speaks louder than words and it is possible to change a ‘no’ into a ‘yes.’ The Christian life requires disciples to be committed to God, to love him and be channels of that love in the world through how we live our lives.

St Paul picks up this theme in his epistle to the Christian community in Philippi. He reminds them that in the Church God not only works in the life of individuals, but also in the life of the faith community through Jesus to whom the community is spiritually joined because it is his visible presence on earth. St Paul makes 4 statements about the life that disciples in a faith community should exhibit,

1. Jesus calls God’s people to be the New Israel in which disciples as individuals and in community are commanded to obey God’s law and will.
2. Jesus, Scripture and the Church encourage us not only to listen to God but to be open to responding positively to him.
3. At our baptism and confirmation we received the gift of the Holy Spirit who has been promised to strengthen us in our efforts to be faithful to God’s leading.
4. If we *know* the power of God’s love, then it is not enough to say we love God, it must be visible to others in the practice of our faith and in the love that we share.

It is easy to sit here and listen to this, nod our heads in agreement but think it applies to everyone except us. Discipleship is God’s invitation to us. It requires our response as individuals and as a community. As a community we must have a common way of thinking. Do we see ourselves as a community that is half-full or half empty because the answer to that determines whether we flourish or shrivel? I don’t mean we must all think the same, but we must all be committed to our common ministry and mission.

Some people know they are spiritually starving and look to connect with a Catholic faith community. They don’t want to do so *because* they have a deep faith in God, but because they *want* to have faith in God as revealed by Jesus. In other words they want to connect *before* they feel able to *commit*. We never know when seekers might appear, or when

practising Catholics may visit us looking for a spiritual home, so it is vital that those members and those who have made this their home are committed to be at mass. If they aren't, what visitors see is a half empty rather than a half full community.

A half-full community is excited about the faith and commitment to the Church and its teaching. Is our worship ordered, reverent and God centred? Do you participate in the worship, not so much by lots of people doing lots of things, but by praying and singing together as a faithful community? Is the gospel preached and the faith taught? Would visitors 'feel the love' of and for God and each other? Would they be noticed, assisted with the worship, spoken to and invited to return? Would they leave with a glow in their hearts and an urge to share their exploration of faith with this community? Laity are the primary evangelists in any faith community.

I am in not giving marks out of ten about whether we are half full or half empty but leave you to do this remembering that 'Action speaks louder than words for the road to hell is paved with good intentions.'

Msgr Harry Entwistle  
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