

TRINITY 20/ORD 29

Isaiah 53:10-11

Heb 4:14-16

Mk 10:42-45

Three words seem to sum up today's readings; they are Servant, Leader and Suffering. The first reading is the last of the prophet Isaiah's Songs about God's Anointed Servant who he crushes with suffering. Yet through that suffering and sacrificial death, God and humanity are reconciled and many are able to find salvation.

The Epistle to the Hebrews presents Jesus as the High Priest who has offered the sacrifice of himself for our salvation. Every year the Jewish High Priest offered the animal sacrifice to God for the Atonement, the AT-ONE-MENT for the sins of the people. The High Priest was also a sinner so he could empathise with God's sinful People but he could do no more than that. Only the One who has shared our fragile humanity yet resisted yielding to temptation, could do more than offer empathy to the people. Christians believe that Jesus is God's Anointed Servant who could do that because we believe he is divine as well as human. He lived among us so knows human weakness, greatness, barbarity and creativity. He served God's people through being obedient to God's plan for our salvation, even though that involved suffering.

God is love. He is merciful and Jesus shows us God's love very clearly on the Cross. The last verse of hymn 259 in our hymn book written by William Vanstone whom I was once privileged to meet, says this about Jesus on the Cross:-

"Here is God, no monarch he
throned in easy state to reign;
here is God, whose arms of love
aching, spent, the world sustain.

We Christian disciples believe that Jesus defeated the absolute grip of evil on the Cross, but despite the conflict between good and evil continuing, his victory confirmed by his resurrection is the focal point of our faith and good news for all. We, Jesus' spiritual heirs, are called to become more Christ-like and proclaim that good news through our lives of servanthood.

Jesus told his disciples that his call is to serve rather than to be served, so that others may turn their lives to God. Jesus is the Servant Leader who is tough but tender. Being a leader is a person's role, but being a servant is a person's identity. These two things are difficult to marry, but unless they occur alongside each other the leader may have external power and control, but no internal authority. When Jesus taught the people about the Kingdom of God they were amazed because he spoke with authority, not like the scribes and Pharisees who quoted the Law and learned Rabbis. Jesus had no official or academic qualifications but his authority came from his union with his Father deep within him. What he spoke was recognised as the truth.

In our time when the number of disciples and the Church's influence in society is shrinking, the Church really must disconnect from adopting corporate styles of governance which are based on power rather than servanthood. The vibrant early church was most vigorous when it had no worldly power but was open to the Holy Spirit, enabling people to reconnect with God and so build the community of the faithful by serving them and empowering them to serve others.

Leadership in the Church is the equal responsibility of the laity as well as the clergy. This has been stressed during the Plenary Council, but it seems that the leadership that some prominent lay Catholics are seeking is that of managerial power rather than servanthood.

The authority of a servant leader comes from the depths of a person who trusts God and who is endeavouring to become Christ-like through being a person of truthful, prayerful, self-giving servanthood to God, to the Church and the world, whatever the cost to themselves may be. Pray for such leaders and consider whether you are called to be one.

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