



Homily Notes: Home Mission Sunday 2009

‘They will know Him by the good words that you do.’

It is strange how it is possible to spend so much time with someone and yet not really know them.

The disciples of Jesus spent so long with Him, and yet many of the things He said and did remained a complete mystery to them. They had no idea who He really was. They knew very well that He was a teacher who had a great appeal to the crowds. They loved to hear His parables, and even more so, the sick, disabled and possessed came to Him for healing and deliverance. The disciples knew about these external aspects of Jesus’ ministry, but they did not really understand what it all meant, especially when He began to speak of His future suffering, death and resurrection. Maybe they just passed off these revelations as the mystical talk of their rabbi?

The core teaching of Jesus, heralding the Kingdom of God, was particularly attractive to the disciples. They did not understand that this Kingdom was not an earthly Kingdom, and nor was it a kingdom of worldly authority. It was because of this lack of understanding that they would set about, in secret away from Jesus’ hearing, discussing who among them would be the greatest in this Kingdom.

Despite their shame and their silence when questioned, Jesus knew where His disciples were in their thinking. It must have exasperated Him to know their slowness to believe, and their lack of understanding despite having been with Him so long. Jesus therefore began to speak to them not of the mysteries which were beyond their understanding, but introduced them to how they could come to accept his Kingdom. ‘If you wish to be the greatest, you must learn to be the least.’

Today is Home Mission Sunday which is a day of prayer for the spread of the Gospel in England and Wales. It is the day when we recall how we are called to bring the Gospel alive for others, to witness to our faith. Just like the disciples, many people who believe themselves to be Christian have no idea who Jesus really is, nor what the message of the Christian Faith is. Many think that to be Christian means to be kind, generous, and good to others. The message of salvation through forgiveness of sins, which is Christ-centred, is easily replaced by good works, which are human-centred.

Although the Christian Faith is not fundamentally about doing good to others, this is the fruit that it is bound to bear. The letter of St James shows very clearly that we reap in good works the peace that is in our hearts from faith, just as bad relations flow from jealousy and selfishness. If we want to live our faith, it will show itself in charity to others.

Pope Paul VI in 1975 in his Exhortation ‘Announcing the Gospel,’ said that the first stage of evangelisation – of bringing the Gospel to others – is witness. Witness means allowing the Gospel which we have come to believe, and which has brought us into a relationship with Jesus Christ, to speak through our actions. We cannot hope to bring the Gospel to others if we have not first of all allowed the Gospel to transform our lives. Our life then becomes a clear statement of our faith. This is witness. But, Pope Paul went on to write, that witness, at a certain point, has to be able to ‘give an account of the hope that is in us’. It has to be able to speak the name of Jesus, and to give witness to how He has transformed our lives.

In the difficult economic times that we are experiencing at the moment, in a climate where people are worried about their jobs, their debts, the bills, the decreasing return on their savings, we have a great opportunity to reach out, even in small ways, to others in acts of charity. (In support of this reaching out there are leaflets available at the back of the church - one for each family - about how we can do this.) But in addition to our ‘doing’ we also have the responsibility to make sure that witnessing to others is backed up by a deepening of faith in Jesus on our part, and a willingness not only to act in charity, but also to tell others Who it is who gives us the inspiration and strength to be the ‘servant of all’.

Today there will be a second collection in support of the work of the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE) which provides training and resources in service of Home Mission. CASE also runs the Catholic Enquiry Office, offering free and confidential information about the Catholic Faith to enquirers. For non-practising / resting Catholics, CASE resources an initiative called 'Come Home For Christmas' and has developed an evangelistic website for 11 – 13 year olds called Yfaith. Whilst our collection today is optional the Agency is part-funded by it and relies on our support. A free leaflet about CASE and the resources that it offers is available at the back of the church; there are enough for one per family. Please do take one home.

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