

Sunday Homily

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

28 JUNE 2020

YEAR A

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

Matthew 10:40

Illustration

Picture the scene. It's the final of the 4 x 400 metres relay in the Olympic Games. We're cheering our team as each of them runs their lap, pushing themselves to the very limit. The baton is handed on smoothly each time, and the exhausted runners stumble from the track to watch their team-mates complete their laps. At the finishing line they're cheering on the last runner as loudly as we are in the stands... and we've done it! All that hard work has been worth it. Our team has won. An outstanding team effort, against all the odds. And now it's time for the medal ceremony, and all four of them are on the podium. Our flag is raised, our anthem is played and our whole country celebrates.

Gospel Teaching

There's something of a relay race in today's Gospel. Jesus is handing the baton on. He's sending out his closest disciples to continue his own mission of both proclaiming and putting into practice the good news of the kingdom of God. In this chapter Matthew has named the twelve apostles and then recorded the instructions that Jesus gave them for their mission. They were to heal the sick, drive out evil spirits, bear witness to Jesus and announce that the kingdom was near. It would be a difficult task, and they would need to risk hardship, rifts with their loved ones and even their very lives. Why, then, should they bother?

In this final passage of the chapter, short as it is, Jesus sums up the whole purpose of their mission. The people who listen to them, the ones who welcome the good news they bring, will receive a reward: a prophet's reward, or the reward of the righteous. A prophet's reward is to see his prophecy come true, while the reward of the righteous, as Jesus made clear in the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount, is nothing less than a place in the kingdom of heaven.

This, then, is the ultimate purpose of the mission: that those who are listening will know that the disciples' words come from God and that they too will be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven, where the whole company of saints will celebrate the victory that Jesus has already won for us. There is a sequence here, almost like the handing on of a baton in a relay race. God reveals his word of love in Jesus, who passes the word to the disciples, and the disciples hand it on

to those who listen to them and welcome them into their lives.

There are some important differences, of course, between the model of the relay race and the reality of mission and evangelism. When we hand on the baton of God's love, we don't lose touch with it ourselves! Love, especially the love of God, is something which can be kept and passed on. And as any Christian minister will tell you, those who listen will often hand it back, polished and shining, as a gift to enrich the minister's own life.

The relay race of revelation is one which goes on and on, round and round the track of this life. God's love flows through Jesus, through the action of the Holy Spirit, through the Church, through us as individual Christians, into the lives of those who hear about it for the first time... and back to God in our worship. We are caught up into the dynamic which is at the heart of God the Trinity: love in action.

Application

We are the disciples; we are the runners. The baton passed to us is so good that we want everyone to have a chance to hold it! Like dedicated athletes, we are not coerced into this race, but enter it. And the reward for this race, not earned but freely given by God, is eternal life.

Like the original disciples, we are called to spread the good news of the kingdom of God, the good news of God's love. What a privilege, what a responsibility! But talking about it isn't enough – it needs to be put into practice, like the disciples healing the sick. In this Eucharist we remember that Jesus didn't just preach about the kingdom of heaven: he opened the door to it. Here, in Jesus, is the word of God, love in action. Pass it on!