

Sunday Homily

5 JULY 2020

YEAR A

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“...and learn from me...”

Matthew 11:29

Illustration

Teaching has taken quite a lot of punishment in the past few years. New teaching methods are blamed for illiteracy rates. A lowering of respect for teachers by the media, and, consequently, some parents and children, has resulted in an increase in verbal and physical violence in the classroom. This is a depressing picture, which some researchers attempted to alleviate by asking a number of famous people for the names of any teacher who had inspired them.

A tidal wave of names was launched into the public eye. Apparently every person asked had the name of at least one or two teachers who had had such influence as to have changed, or certainly added to, their lives and futures. Sometimes it was their academic gifts, but it was more likely to have been their ability to inspire their pupils, to give them a special something which spurred them on to achieve their very best, even to reach heights previously unimagined. Think for a moment, who were your inspirational teachers?

Gospel Teaching

No one can overestimate the influence of a good teacher. Even if we cannot remember a thing they actually taught us, good teachers will be remembered with fondness long after their words have been forgotten. That is because people are more important than words. Qualities like kindness and generosity are always more enduring than principles or rules, and integrity is more infectious than dogma.

In today's Gospel, Jesus offers himself as a teacher: “learn from me”, he says. At this point in his ministry Jesus has had to face up to being rejected by the religious hierarchy and “wise” people of his time. His message found no place in their hearts. Becoming experts in the Law had prevented them from recognising the coming of God's Messiah, the coming of God's kingdom.

Instead, Jesus found a ready audience among the people considered social outcasts. The tax collectors and sinners, those unable to keep the Law in all its rigour, all welcomed Christ's message and the hope it brought. Unfortunately, the experts were so preoccupied with keeping the externals of the Law that they had largely lost sight of its purpose, to lead people to God. They were no longer open to hearing the word of God, because they did not need it.

They placed the Law above every other consideration, even above people. The Law had become an end in itself.

Jesus offered a different “yoke”, a simpler one. We do not have to worry about hundreds of laws, or keeping the minutiae of rules and regulations. Jesus simply offers himself as the model to follow. He alone is the way to God. Follow him and we will find God. Like a good teacher, the lasting impression he makes resides more in who he is, than anything he says. He asks us to be like him, to be gentle and to acknowledge our need for God. It is only when, like the tax collectors and sinners, we are open to the words of God, only when we admit our dependence on God, that we are able to receive God’s mercy. And, like them, we experience God’s love and mercy, not by mindless obedience, but by meeting a person: Jesus, God’s own Son, face to face.

Application

Jesus says that his burden is light. We can be burdened with all kinds of things: the opinions of the moral watchdogs who claim superior knowledge of God, telling others how to live, what to do and think, even when and how to pray. They forget that rules in religion are only useful to the extent that they lead us to God, to the love and freedom he offers. We have burdens from our consumerist society, the burdens of others’ unreasonable expectations and demands, overbearing parents, the demanding boss, the inquisitive neighbour. And then there is our own guilt, our low self-esteem, our unattainable goals. We can become overwhelmed by burdens.

Jesus’ yoke is easy. It is well fitting, tailor-made to the individual. Because the task he sets us is simple – be yourself! Be the person God wants you to be, using Jesus as your teacher. Be gentle, with yourself and others. Be humble, acknowledge your need for God, don’t assume you have to do it all by yourself. Resist becoming overburdened by any unreasonable demands. Resist any “system” or “rule book”. Simply get to know Jesus, the person. Learn from him and you will find rest.

