

Sunday Homily

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

4 JULY 2021

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

"He was amazed at their lack of faith."

Illustration

Who are the people that we tend to ignore or pass by? Many of us find it difficult to deal with beggars. It is easier to pretend not to see them and pass by. Some people tend to ignore people in wheelchairs, especially if they have somebody wheeling them or standing by. The conversation takes place with the person assumed to be the carer; wheelchair occupants are often treated as people who cannot speak for themselves.

People who serve us in shops or get us tickets for transport or leisure activities, they too can somehow disappear off our radar as human beings. We only really notice them when they are inefficient or all too human in their responses, perhaps a little like ourselves. Then we may ignore those who are closest to us in the household. As the saying goes, "Familiarity breeds contempt", and we can too easily take our nearest and dearest for granted, not really noticing who they are any more or what is concerning them.

There is an argument that we would become overloaded if we tried to take on board the full humanity of all the people we meet. Yet if we let go of that recognition of the other as an important human being, our equal and equally worthy of respect, we can lose sight of our own humanity. And if we lose sight of our own humanity, we lose sight of Christ.

Gospel Teaching

Jesus has just been consolidating the early days of his mission with miracles of healing, the casting out of unclean spirits, the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage and the raising of the daughter of Jairus. In each case the faith of the recipient has been highlighted. Now he returns to his own home town of Nazareth to find that he is not acknowledged in either his wisdom or his power to do miracles. The reason for the people's disbelief is quite simple. They know who he is. They have known him from his childhood, and they know all the members of his family. This knowledge creates a prejudice within them that cannot accept that Jesus may have an extraordinary message or extraordinary powers. He himself is said to be amazed at their lack of faith.

In his comments on this reaction of his neighbours Jesus aligns himself with the prophets who have gone before him. He has taken on their mantle, and like them

he is rejected. As a result of this he will begin the journey that will take him to his own suffering and death. He will also be found living on the outskirts of the towns, in the wilderness or in foreign territories. The message of faith does not find its roots where we might expect, in the centres of traditional belief; instead it is heard on the margins of society. Jesus becomes the outsider who will inspire belief in those whose natural habitat is on the margins, ignored or kept at a distance by those who are powerful and successful.

Application

We still find Jesus where we least expect to encounter him. The gift of faith enables us to stay open to this possibility. Our assumption may be that we will find him in our churches, in holy, devout and respectable people. That is where we tend to look for him; and, if we become set in our ways, we forget that he appears in the very ordinariness of our humanity.

The incarnation reveals Jesus as the one who takes our humanity in its fullness and makes it divine. This mystery of salvation does not mean that our ordinariness is taken away. Rather it is our very ordinariness that becomes the instrument of transformation. On the one hand we see more clearly the miracle that we are. On the other hand this miraculous nature reveals itself to our new vision of faith. And it happens where and when we least expect it, in the casual exchange with a beggar on the streets, in the smiles of understanding offered at the checkout, in the little acts of kindness shared between family and friends.

That is why it is so important not to ignore each other or pass each other by. We miss the many-splendoured thing and become lost and sightless, thinking we see but only being aware of the outer semblance. Perhaps, too, we need to look in the mirror more carefully, at least from time to time, to remind ourselves of our own humanity and that Christ is present in us too.