

Homily 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's First Reading from Exodus says, "Do not oppress the stranger. You must not be harsh with the widow or with the orphans." (Exodus) Widows, strangers and orphans had a special place in Old Testament Jewish society because of their vulnerability and because they were often marginalised and discriminated against.

I was talking to an old Irish Traveller woman and in her despair, she expressed her sadness 'that they were so judged and discriminated against that even The Church had abandoned them. Some travellers have given up their faith and many had gone over to the Evangelical Churches who welcome them with open arms and attend to their spiritual and pastoral needs', She went on and stated, 'It breaks my heart that our Catholic faith is becoming more and more irrelevant to many travellers because they meet with rejection and prejudice, even by some priests. Thank God we have The Margaret Clitherow Trust* and Fr John, otherwise many more of the Irish Travelling Community would be abandoned and be without The Sacraments.

Arguably, modern-day strangers, widows and orphans are the members of the GRT Communities (Gypsies, Romas and Travellers). Relatively recently a Member of The House of Lords described the GRT Communities as the last of the ethnic groups to suffer open and unacceptable prejudice, discrimination and marginalisation. 1200 years before Christ the Biblical Writers already made it clear that the most vulnerable in society should be looked after and have a special place in the hearts and minds of The Chosen People, yet 2000 years after Christ we, even as Christians, accept indiscriminate prejudice and discrimination against those considered most vulnerable in contemporary UK society.

In today's Gospel The Pharisees try again to trick Jesus by asking, "What is the greatest Commandment?" Jesus again in his wisdom states, 'You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and you must love your neighbour as yourself.' Jesus, at the beginning of his public ministry, also prioritised the most vulnerable as the focus of our Christian love and attention: the poor, prisoners, the sick, the DOWNTRODDEN AND MARGINALISED...

As disciples of Christ yes, we are called to respect civil authority, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's", but we are also called to be a counterculture, challenging the institutional injustices and social inequalities perpetrated against the vulnerable. At the end of the day, I won't be answerable to men but I will be held accountable by God. Isn't it unacceptable that some Christians aren't even practising the teachings of The Old Testament far less the teachings of Jesus. St Paul in his Letter to The Thessalonians urges us, 'to become imitators of the Lord...in spite of the great opposition all around you.'

***The Margaret Clitherow Trust**

Founded in partnership with and for the benefit of GRT Communities. We work predominantly in the South of England but our mission is to all across the UK. St Margaret Clitherow gave her life in the service of others, serving and protecting people regardless of the community they came from. We believe passionately in a world where everyone is included and given equality, dignity and justice no matter their religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or social background. We believe that this full inclusion is possible for GRT communities and look forward to the day when that is fully realised. We work in chaplaincy, education, health, law, and offer training to different public sectors agencies in order that statutory provision for GRT communities is effective.