

Homily 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2024

I was quite challenged by a poster I saw a few years ago: 'If you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?' The Gospel by its very nature should make us feel uncomfortable, unsettled and should even disturb us. Jesus never sugar coated his message and if his words and actions don't challenge us then we are almost certainly watering them down.

Prophets don't so much foretell the future but rather speak on God's behalf. Moses in The First Reading from Deuteronomy speaks of a prophet who will 'speak God's word' which will disturb the people and bring them back to God. Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah etc. did just that and their fate was rejection and even death. Of course, there were also messages amongst The Prophetic writings of consolation and hope of freedom and salvation, but these men did not mince their words when they called out the Jewish leaders, priests and people for straying from God's Commandments.

Today those who divorce and remarry outside The Church are often stigmatised, travellers rejected, gay people made to feel unwelcome, the poor feel ignored, the sick, elderly and housebound abandoned, prisoners forgotten, sinners condemned, the downtrodden overlooked...and believe it or not that's by the very Church whose mission is: 'To bring Good News to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the downtrodden and to proclaim the Kingdom of God to everyone!'

We must constantly remind ourselves, as disciples, that Jesus' mission is primarily to the broken, 'I have come for the sick, the healthy have no need of the doctor.' Jesus' mission is to lift heavy burdens from the shoulders of the anxious and worried, unlike the Pharisees who piled weights on their shoulders 'not raising a finger to lift them.' Jesus' mission is 'to love God and our neighbour as ourselves' and to reintegrate outcasts into his Kingdom - the adulterous, tax-collectors, sinners, lepers, the possessed. Yet these are some of the very people who are so often badly treated by The Church.

In today's Gospel Jesus is listened to because he speaks with 'authority', because he speaks God's message of the Kingdom 'straight from the shoulder'. He confirms his authority by healing a possessed man. Interestingly the cast out evil spirit, unlike the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, recognises Jesus as The Son of God. Oh yes, Jesus' words and actions disturbed, unsettled and even made the Jewish leaders, who began to plot his death, very uncomfortable but his liberating ministry was greatly welcomed and appreciated by the oppressed.

I'm sure to get some negative and critical reaction to this reflection but I welcome it as a compliment to have made some feel uneasy, unsettled and even disturbed at our growing refusal to embrace The Master's mission to the most vulnerable.