

Homily 5th Sunday in Lent 2024

“We are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2). This statement comes from last Sunday’s Second Reading and it struck me forcibly and moved me deeply when I heard it proclaimed at Mass.

My favourite works of art are Rembrandt’s Prodigal Son in The Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Michelangelo’s David in The Academia in Florence and The Mona Lisa by DaVinci in The Louvre in Paris. I have had the great fortune and privilege to have seen all three and, in every case, I stood for ages in wonder and awe at these wonderful human masterpieces. Their combined worth in monetary terms probably goes into hundreds of millions of £s. Wow!

We, not as human masterpieces, but as God’s works of art were in his plan from all eternity. When God created our world he moulded us first in his ‘image and likeness’ (Genesis 1-2). When The Chosen People, ‘broke the covenant’ made with Moses on Sinai but God again took the initiative to write his Law in the hearts of his people, and in so doing God claimed them as his very own children, “The days are coming – when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel (and the House of Judah), but not a covenant like the one I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine...No, this is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel. Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31: 31-34). We are indeed God’s masterpiece, made in his image and likeness, with a special relationship as his children with love planted, not in tablets of stone or books, but in our hearts.

In today’s Second Reading our inestimable worth is underlined as the writer of Hebrews states that God loved and valued us so much that he sent his Son to earth who suffered and died to secure our freedom from sin and our victory over death, “During his life on earth, Christ offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard. Although he was Son, he learnt to obey through suffering; but having been made perfect, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation.” (Hebrews 5:5-7).

In The Gospel from St John today we are urged, as God’s ‘works of art’, to also acknowledge our sisters and brothers as great treasures, to be cared for and looked after. Jesus calls us to die to ourselves for the sake of even the least of our sisters and brothers, “Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. If a man SERVES me, he must follow me, wherever I am my SERVANT will be there too. If anyone SERVES me, my Father will honour him. (John 12: 20-33)

It’s indeed inevitable that if we are of such value in the eyes of God then so too are our brothers and sisters whoever they are: those who sit next to us at Mass each week; the elderly, frail and housebound; the homeless in our streets, the sick and dying; the other Christians in our town; our Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist sisters and brothers and other people of faith and people of no faith at all; the addicted, the broken, the suicidal and those shunned and marginalised by society. Thomas Merton, the great 20th Century Trappist mystic said, “If we only knew the value of the person standing in front of us, we would fall on our knees before her/him.” You and I, no matter our situation or status in life, are indeed precious beyond all human imagining.

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