

Homily – 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year – 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021

I've always been ambivalent about how human beings handle power and authority. You can have an orgy of power but an absence of leadership. Our world is in dire need of wise courageous and resourceful leadership at every level of society.

In the Gospel of the Passion, when Jesus is standing before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, Jesus stands alone with his hands tied, crowned with thorns. Pilate sits on a throne, surrounded by guards and servants. He is Julius Caesars seconded Commander....

The irony of this encounter is that, it is Jesus with the real leadership, the real authority. Christ is our eternal King; whereas Pontius Pilate fades and turns to dust like the rest of Caesars Roman Empire.

Real authority and leadership are not gained by violent threat and intimidation, but rather by wise and sacrificial dedication to the cause of those under your charge. They talk in politics of a weakened and discredited Prime Minister of being in office but not in power.

The lesson of Jesus Christs leadership is that it is one built on justice and truth; where the manner of leading is honourable. Justice without honour is flawed and destined to be corrupted. People grow in hope and confidence when they follow a true leader. One that is honest, wise and prepared to take unpopular decisions. One not swayed above all by consensus, but rather of sound and righteous principles.

For Jesus, a true leader of Christianity always sees themselves as servant of God and his people. As Isaiah the great prophet said, 'By his sufferings, shall my servant justify many taking their faults on himself'.

Mark Twain, once said, "Most Kings are rascals", - Mary's song, the Magnificat, alludes to the same; or as Lord Acton wrote in 1887, to an Anglican Bishop, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely".

This real observation does not negate the need for leadership in our world today; whether it is in politics, religion, science and technology, education and sport, there is an urgent need for Christo centric leadership.

In todays Gospel, Jesus, the eternal priest, prophet and King implores his apostles, not to get 'Drunk on power', not to seek stature and honour in this life, to seek only to serve honourably the people put into their charge.

The history of the Catholic church sadly has been overshadowed by those who have abused their power, and by dint of their disordered motivations have been unworthy disciples of Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Ecclesiastics, it reminds those called to public office, 'My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for the testing, set your heart right, and be steadfast.

It is true to say that to be a true spiritual leader, you have to die to self in order to live for Christ. To know that God is everything and you are nothing compared with the Divine.

I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit will call a new generation of women and men to carry the baton of unselfish leadership at every level of our vocational work in Scotland today, including, in the Church. Knowing that no one is above the law, transparency is healthy and reminding ourselves to

be accountable to God in everything. No wise leader seeks above all else to please everyone but rather to do what is right according to Christ's teaching.

This means, ultimately as Jesus says, in the last line of the Gospel, that being a spiritual leader, as priests and religions that we are prepared to do everything in the cause of the faith, even to die for the faith, as did St John Ogilvie, S.J, and also Archbishop Oscar Romero.

God Bless you all,

Amen

Fr Jeremy C Bath