

Homily – 3rd Sunday of the Year 2021 24th January 2021

What humble origins are at the root of the Apostolic Life of the Church.....

Jesus, travels after the death of his cousin John the Baptist, in consolation, to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. There, walking along the shore he invites some fishermen to leave their nets and follow him. There guys, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John would be the core group of apostles. They would hear his teaching, witness his miracles and above all his passion, death & resurrection. They were illiterate, uneducated and untested but Jesus would, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, entrusts them with the Sacramental life of the Church; starting with Baptism, but going onto Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist. With the exception of Judas Iscariot, they did not betray him.

Jesus called the apostles, from the Greek 'Apostheskai' - meaning to be sent out. The life of the Church depends on those who have the faith, the desire and the courage to pass it on. Honourable people of God, who stop at nothing to pass on the teaching of Jesus to the next generation. Baptising new born children; teaching them their faith and forming them in the Way of Christ, with faith, hope and charity – is a core responsibility for parents.

For many of us, we are the product of that generational Catholic Faith that has been passed down to us by our ancestors, in Scotland, Ireland, Poland, Spain, South America, Africa, India – all originated at the banks of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus started his apostolic Sacramental life. – one of those apostles Andrew, is the Patron Saint of Scotland.

We hear in the First and Second Readings today, that the race against time to be Godly people has happened in past times; think of the people of Nineveh, that it could have suffered the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah; if Jonah had not pleaded with God to give them a chance to redeem themselves; to repent and believe in the one true God.

Psalm 24- is the song of King David pleading with God to help him sort his life out, to stop sinning and guide him on the right path. Again, in the 2nd Reading St Paul is pleading with the people of Corinth to rescue their lives from an ungodly existence; to be baptised into dying to sin and living for Christ....

Nicola Sturgeon, is talking just now about the race in Scotland between the COVID-19 virus and the vaccine. The same parallel applies between the decline in Christianity in Scotland and saving the lives of our Catholic Parishes. This week I received a text message from Fr Younis, in Pakistan, one of the most powerful Muslim countries in the world, a 'hot bed' of historical persecution of Christians, there he asked for prayers as he laid the foundation stone of a new church near Faisalabad. People are hungering and thirsting for the faith.

Here the Church is facing a different form of attack/persecution; secularism and materialism are taking their toll. The Sacramental life of the church is being undermined by cynicism and apathy; the biggest threat, is apathy, I believe. Lack of self-will, lack of obedience to ancient traditions and good practise has led many people; ground down by the pressures and temptations of secular living; just not to have the drive and determination, the will.... To defend and protect their beautiful Catholic heritage. People also feel cut off and at times, betrayed by institutional authority, including the Church. – are risking, the loss of their Catholic faith and not passing it on to their children.

Its time to go back to the shore of Galilee and meet our blessed Lord; to hear again the power of the Gospel and give our children the best of what Christ has to offer. The physical churches may be

closed; but the sacramental life of the Church goes on, walls of stone and brick, closed doors will not stop the work of the Holy Spirit.

The race is on to protect our Sacramental life in our parishes; if we do not respond generously to that Mission as parents, teachers, clergy and children; then the faith of the Church, will be taken elsewhere; to where it is growing, such as Pakistan,

The justification for Catholic Schools is hanging by a thread and the sooner we awaken to that reality; the better for our sacramental future, - Why should the Government provide Catholic Schools for the lapsed?

I delight and give thank for all those young families who prepare to protect the faith and form their children well in the ways and truth of our Blessed Lord.

Candlemas day is in 10 days' time, may it mark new beginnings for us all; in embracing the apostolic life of the Church; in saving Christianity in Scotland.

God Bless you all at this critical time.

Fr Jeremy Bath