



Fr Paul's Homily

8th November 2009

32nd Sunday in the Year of Mark

In towns and cities throughout the land people will be remembering the war dead this weekend. The visitor to the remembrance field in Westminster will see little crosses in the ground each bearing the photograph of a member of military personnel who lost his or her life in the Afghan conflict. A conflict that is claiming the attention of people throughout the world especially those who have lost loved ones there.

As we pray for those who died in war and conflict today, we give thanks for their generosity and service, which throughout history has in some way brought protection and freedom. While in the present time it might be hard to understand the complexities of global defence policy, today we remember those who have given everything in the hope that their sacrifice will further the well being of humanity worldwide, present and future.

It is humanity worldwide that is waiting for Christ to bring reward and salvation because we know that war and conflict, no matter how justly fought, cannot alone bring the well being for which every human being yearns. Those of us gathered here know that it is the Lord Jesus, who offers himself to us as divine gift, who alone brings life and joy to the full.

The death of so many in the human struggle for truth and right and the death of Christ, which pours into humanity and creation that gift of the Spirit bringing complete wholeness and reconciliation, brings into sharp relief the words of Jonathan Sacks this week. Jonathan is the chief Rabbi in this country. He was talking about Europe and its culture. He isolated the problem by saying that in our own time we see consumerism and instant gratification as the priority. He said that we are undergoing the moral equivalent of climate change and no one is talking about it. Our own Pope and leaders have said the same; because we have so much material choice and opportunity we are blind to those choices that open us to the real life and growth. Hard words but if we stand back and reflect we can see the temptation that surrounds us. To accumulate more and more power so that we can have what we like and find pleasure and satisfaction, foolishly thinking that these things will lead to happiness.

Of course there is nothing wrong with enjoying ourselves and having a life full of good things. The difficulty is the ease with which a life full of good things can blind us to what is crucial and at the heart of everything. In his teaching today Jesus takes the example of the scribes. These men were respected people who were teachers of the law. They did indeed enjoy the front seat in the synagogues because they were so important. But their importance and power and the esteem in which people held them had gone to their heads. So Jesus criticises those scribes who made a show of wearing long robes and lengthy prayers so that people would be impressed. They basked in the glory of their own self-obsession and took pleasure in it and it was worse than that. They used their power to exploit the poor. They swallowed the property of widows who were especially poor because their husbands were their only source of income.

And then Jesus sat down and watched people putting money into the vast trumpet shaped chests, the income from which maintained the Temple system that supported the corrupt

scribes and many others like them. He watched as this particular widow put into the treasury everything she had, her two small coins which were equivalent to one sixty fourth of a day's wage. Not only is she one of the people being exploited by the wealthy scribes she comes out on top because she did not contribute from her wealth but she gave everything and had nothing left. As Fr. John reminded me yesterday, Jesus judges generosity, not on the amount we give, but on how little we have left afterwards.

The Gospel story invites us to choose one of two approaches to living. The first is about reputation, self absorption, consumerism and instant gratification. The second is about giving and using everything we have in love and trust.

All this points to the act of generosity that is at the core of everything. Jesus offered himself completely, squandered himself for our good, pouring himself out so that he might fill us. That was his death and resurrection and it is his gift to us each time we celebrate the Eucharist.

The challenge for each of us is to decide to always be moving from the position of the scribe in the story, who for my purposes, represents consumerism and instant gratification, towards increasingly modelling our lives on the Lord's Cross. As we eat and drink the Lord's body and blood today, his divine life claims and consecrates everything we have and are to his divine service in the world. Constant must be our endeavour to become like Christ giving ourselves and using everything we have in love. Putting into the treasury everything we have just as the widow did at the Jerusalem Temple.

As Jesus offered himself so must we by ensuring that our gifts and energies are used wisely in the service of love and the Kingdom of Christ. Moving away from the temptation to consume and accumulate for pleasure and self-fulfilment.

As Jesus offered himself so our family life is marked by the massive sacrifice of money, attention, time and emotional energy poured into the growth and development of our young people.

As Jesus offered himself so ought we in works of justice that pave the way for peace. As we remember the war dead today and as we pray for lasting peace everywhere, let us commit ourselves to becoming the time and place where the self-sacrificing love of Christ is recognisable pouring life into the brokenness of our world.