

SERMON for Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2010

SCRIPTURE READING: **Luke 6:27-38**

It has wonderful to be back with you all after spending time away with my brother and his wife. My holidays were topped off for me with preaching in the Dom yesterday for the Chorus 2000 Cultural Exchange Festival. Chorus MM or 2000 was formed in 1998 with the purpose of promoting cultural exchange through singing and friendship. Money raised from the two-day event goes to various aid groups for destitute children around the world - this year the money is going to the Franciscan Sisters School in Brazil.

This year there were choirs from Canada, Russia and Germany. A choir from Africa and two from the US had to pull out at the last moment due to economic reasons. The Saturday morning has an ecumenical service and this year I was invited to co celebrate with the Dean of the Cathedral and to give the homily. I did not know I was doing this until Monday afternoon but nerves aside it was a wonderful morning.

I spoke with them about shaping a caring, loving and compassionate community based on the teaching of Jesus from Luke 6: 27-38: the text and the theme that was chosen for the Service and the Homily. I am sure you understand that I have expanded these thoughts for us this morning.

The primary verse was "Give and it will be given unto you". Words that strike a chord! Who doesn't like to receive, but, then again, you know, we are not always crazy about the giving. I was watching a DVD from a US television show Thursday night - Brothers and Sisters; and one character said to another: "What is happening here? You only like to give when you expect something back in return'. And aren't we often told 'you should give and expect nothing in return - give for the joy of giving'.

So what is being said in this verse: 'Give and it will be given to you': but let's read the whole verse: Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it

will be measured to you." Now you have to admit that sounds pretty good as well.

But, let's look further into the verse and take a good note of what is being said about giving and receiving: For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you; or putting it another way, what you give, how you give it, the emotion behind the giving; will be given back to you - pressed down, shaken together and running over. Quite a good image.

It's okay if we do or say is thus: 'Here this is for you' and hand it over with a smile that lights up the face; or we do something for another happily or willingly. On the other hand, what if it something like "HERE THIS IS FOR You' as the gift is slammed across the table or dumped in someone's hands; or we do something for another moaning, sighing, grudgingly. The measure you give is the measure returned pressed, shaken down and running over. Now it becomes not such a good image.

This verse, and Chapter 6 come within the context of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. This teaching comes at the beginning of the three-year Ministry of Jesus. Remember Jesus had a specific Mission Manifesto based on the words of Isaiah. We are told in Luke 4 that Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, restore the sight of the blind, set free the oppressed, preach good news to the poor and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord: the coming Kingdom of God. He began his mission by calling a small group of followers, disciples. And with this Sermon Jesus starts to teach this group what life with Jesus of Nazareth and the Kingdom of God is all about.

In this sermon he outlines the attitudes and behaviour that are to distinguish this community. These words from Jesus push attitude and behaviour to a new level; they are taken beyond the norm. They are words of health, life, and salvation not only for then but for now too. Basically what we have is what we all know as the Golden Rule. This is all about love - not a love that is simple like 'We love Sacher Torte' or 'Goulash' or ice cream on a hot day. But this is a profound love - agape. A love that puts others before ourselves, before our own needs. Such a love as this is not only

something of the heart but something also of the will. It is something we have to determine to do.

Commitment to being followers of the Risen Lord, the people of God, carries both a privilege and a responsibility. It is true to say that it is often easier said than done to live God's way.

*The people of Israel discovered this too.* In Deuteronomy 10: 12-22 they were told about the privilege and the responsibility involved in being the Chosen People of God. They were about to go into a land 'flowing with milk and honey'; their God had promised a life of blessing that to them. And in response they were to "Fear God, to walk in the ways of God, love and serve God with all their heart and soul and to keep the commandments being given to them."

This 'privilege and responsibility circle' was emphasised a number of times. It was not a one off thing, it was to be a way of life and was always to include the poor, the widows, the orphans and strangers who lived among them – those who came from elsewhere, those who did not fully belong, and those whose culture was different. As God cared for them when they were weak and held no position in society as in Egypt, so they were to care for those amongst them.

There are two problems with privilege:

- a. We may come to enjoy it so much that we forget the responsibility
- b. We may keep our privilege within a closed circle. We can get exclusive and leave those who don't fit our group out of the circle of care.

There are many examples of these problems in the Hebrew Scriptures. Perhaps that is why Moses is recorded as constantly emphasising privilege and responsibility. The prophets such as Micah later take up these two themes. There is a dynamic relationship between privilege and responsibility. Living God's Way is to be so much more than a simple 'keep God's rules' and you 'get the reward of God's favour'.

We have noted that Jesus of Nazareth in his ministry and in his teaching such as the Sermon on the Mount emphasised these twin

notions of privilege and responsibility. This is why Jesus was often on the attack with the religious leaders of the day because, whilst they enjoyed the privilege of their position, responsibility was something they ignored. The religious leaders cared little that the people were struggling with the rules imposed on them.

The Apostle Paul also spells this notion of privilege and responsibility. Along with the privilege of being a member of the household of God comes the responsibility of walking and acting in love as Jesus of Nazareth, the Risen Lord, did.

Ephesians 2:17-22

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in the one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1-2

The claim in these readings is that Christ breaks down the barriers that exist between people. And it goes beyond the breaking down of barriers. Ephesians tell us the Jesus rebuilds us into a new humanity/a new community and that we are to act as responsible citizens of that transformed community. We are individuals within community - not a community of individuals.

Being God's chosen people carries both a privilege and a responsibility. The message from Moses, Jesus of Nazareth and from Paul echoes down through the corridors of time to us today....the 21st century disciples of the Risen Lord. We too are privileged to be citizens of the Kingdom of God but with that comes responsibilities. The Gospels, which give to us the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth the Risen Lord, spell out for us our

responsibilities. Read them for an understanding of what we are to be about

What does living God's way mean for me:

As an individual - Have I accepted living God's way and accepting the responsibilities that come with the privilege of being a child of God?

What does living God's way mean for me:

- At church
- With my friends
  - At work
- With my family

I received a letter on Thursday from a young US Student who had been us for the last couple of months of his student exchange in Salzburg. Zack thanked us for our love and support. He enjoyed being with us and our care helped alleviate his homesickness.

With these words Zack reminds us of our responsibility as the people of God here. His words encourage us; we are going well but we constantly need to assess "Can we be doing better" with the responsibility given to us.