

YOUTH 2000 MASS

27 August 2023

It's standard practice that anyone who is discerning a vocation to religious life or indeed Diocesan priesthood at some point has an interview with the Superior of the Religious Congregation or Diocesan Bishop. So it was that a young guy went to see his Bishop. During their conversation the Bishop asked an obvious question: "*Do you read the Bible?*" The young man replied enthusiastically: "*Oh, yes, I know the scriptures as well as Adam knew Eve! In fact, I know it the Bible all the way from the book of Generation to the book of Revolution!*"

The bishop's eyes widened, as you can imagine and so he nervously asked our young aspiring priest: "*Is there any particular passage in the scriptures that you like?*" There was no hesitation, the young man responded quickly "*Yes, the Good Samaritan.*" "*Could you possibly narrate it to me in your own words?*" So, this is what the young man said:

"A man was travelling from the uppermost city of Jerusalem to the under most city of Jericho. And on the way he fell among thorns. Some thorns choked him, and others pricked him. As he lay there, he came to himself and said: 'Why should I lie here? There are so many rooms in my father's house. Even the servants eat better. So, he got up and sat on his ass and went towards his father's house. As he rode along, his ass ran under the low branches of the oak tree and his hair got caught up on the branch and his ass ran from under him, and there he hung between heaven and earth for forty days and forty nights. Then came Delilah.

Seeing him hanging by the hair she couldn't bear it; so, she went up the tree and shaved his head and he fell on rocky ground and great was his fall! However, he stood up and began leaping and jumping and praising God. And yet again he got onto his ass and went towards his father's house. As he neared the city gates of Jerico, he saw Jezebel leaning out of the window and he said to those standing by, 'Throw her down!' and they threw her down. 'Throw her down a second time!' And they threw her down a second time. Likewise, a third time and then seventy times seven. Of the remains they collected twelve baskets full. The moral of the story is: Whose wife will she be at the Resurrection?!

Clearly, there is much confusion in this young man's mind, but I hope, I sincerely hope that there is no such confusion here among us. The gospel of confusion, the proclamation of a half-baked understanding of the revelation from God serves no one. Giving to others what we've have only partially understood and certainly ill digested will lead no one to liberation, freedom, or healing. Our nation, our society, the place where we live and work- these need from you, and they need from me the truth that will set them free – the truth that will energise them to live life to the full.

Can you recall the Opening Prayer at the beginning of Mass? I will not embarrass you by asking what we prayed, but we asked the father that we might be *'joined together in a single purpose'*. What is this single purpose?

- To love what you command
- To desire what you promise
- That our hearts be fixed on that place where true gladness is to be found.

All this is summed up in the question that Jesus himself asked the disciples, *'but who do you say I am?' It is my urgent prayer that you will not leave this Mass, this weekend, without coming in some small way to be able to answer that question and without having had a personal encounter with the one who is asking it. Who do you say I am?*

In the short passage from Isaiah that we had for our first reading, we heard that Eliakim would be given authority from God *'to become a throne of glory'*. What an amazing promise, but it was not just for Eliakim – each one of us has been created and gifted with that vocation to be a *'throne of glory'*. In a letter that the great John Paul II wrote in 1995, long before some of you were born, he wrote:

“There is a tabernacle of glory, which is the most holy person of Jesus the Lord, where the divine and the human meet in an embrace that can never be separated. The Word became flesh...He pours divinity into the sick heart of humanity and imbuing it with the Father’s Spirit enables it to become God through grace.”

A throne, a tabernacle of glory. Paul highlights this in today’s second reading. How rich are the depths of God. All that exists he says, that is you, me, all that exists comes from Him - Jesus. All that was created was created by Him and for Him. I hope you heard that. More to the point I hope you understand what that means?

It means that you are here, not just at Ampleforth this morning, but you are here, your very existence has little to do with your parents, though they clearly had a part to play in the design of God. You exist not because they decided to have a child, or because they did not decide to have a child, but you came along anyway! You exist because God wanted you to exist. You are not an accident, a coincidence, you were planned, wanted and designed by God. This is incredibly good news. You are a living sign of a divine promise. I am looking at this moment at the meeting place of God on earth – you are the place where the human and the divine meet in an embrace that can never be separated. That becomes a reality in Holy Communion today. This sacred encounter.

Each day you wake, before you get up, take a deep breath, and say to yourself: “I am a throne of glory. I am not an accident, I am not a collection of problems, even though I may have problems, anxieties and fears. I am planned, wanted and designed by love to be in constant relationship with love and to speak love into the world today.” Brothers and sisters this is our vocation. To say who Jesus is, is to realise the extraordinary vocation that has been inscribed into my very being. To know Jesus is to understand and to know myself. He is the mirror of who I am called to be.

Saying this reminds me of a story that I told here in the Abbey Church on the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple 2022. Now you were not here, so that’s okay and the

community will have forgotten what I said, so that gives me permission to repeat the story! A lay chaplain told me of his experience of guiding some eleven year-old pupils in a retreat experience. They were taken through a standard guided meditation in which they were to imagine themselves walking along a lovely beach. As they walked, the Chaplain said, Just imagine Jesus comes up to you: “What do you say to Jesus and how does he reply?” The kids were sent off on their prayer walk.

Later, in conversation with a young boy over lunch, the Chaplain asked how the experience had been. “Okay” said the young guy. “*What did you say to Jesus*” the Chaplain asked. The boy with great confidence said: “*I looked him straight in the face and said how do I really know that you are who you say you are?*” Not a bad question – maybe the top Christological question -not that the youngster could spell Christology. How do I know you are who you say you are?

“*So, what did he say*”, the Chaplain asked: “*He just looked at me and told me my story.*” The Chaplain was aware struck, simply aware struck. The young boy shrugged and got on with the next piece of pizza. To encounter Jesus is to hear the story of your life? Are you ready for that? John Paul taught: “*...to know such a God means to feel the urgent need for him to speak to our world, to communicate himself; and history of salvation is nothing but the history of God’s love for the creature he has loved and chosen...*” To love what God commands, to desire what God promises and to have our hearts fixed on the place of true happiness, is to be moulded into the living image of Jesus, brought into a perfect communion of love.

Who do you say I am? You’re the reason I exist. You’re the love that I breathe. You’re the living embrace of eternity. My friends, don’t let’s complicate the gospel and don’t let’s confuse the gospel with woke ideology and my own silly opinions, but in the light of the liturgy of God’s life-giving Word today let’s live the Gospel and manifest it in our words and relationships. I leave you with a challenge. It’s good to see you, it really is good to see you, but it is not enough, next year I would want to see you all again, but with one other person that you have introduced to Jesus.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

Abbot of Ampleforth Abbey