

Life before Profit – Service before Self

I love the logic of the godless in the first reading.

You have a prophet who is proclaiming the justice of God,
which means that he is saying things, that are making others feel uncomfortable,
upsetting the status quo.

Now we don't know what he is saying, but he is probably saying things like.

Those of you, who have two chariots, should give one to those who have none.

Those who have extra food should share it with those who are hungry.

The godless maintain the attitude of, "Well I worked for it, why should I have to give it away."

In not so many words they are saying,

"We really don't care about what happens to you,
we are only concerned with what happens to us."

They are striving to maintain their status at the expense of the other.

Jump ahead to the gospel.

One almost has to laugh at the disciples.

Jesus is talking about his impending Passion and Death,

and you would think that the disciples would be concerned about what is going to happen to him.

But no, they are concerned about themselves.

In not so many words they are saying,

"We really don't care about what happens to you,
we care more concerned about what happens to us."

Think about that, "We really don't care about what happens to you,

we care more about what happens to us"—

think about that...and think about what is happening in our world today.

In the last 50 or 60 years our society has focused on individual rights, "I can do whatever I want."

Along the same lines of "I really don't care about what happens to you,

I am only concerned with what happens to me."

However, the issues of Residential schools, COVID, refugees, abortion and euthanasia

have forced us to refocus on the need for communal rights.

We cannot just focus on our own concerns...our own rights...

This is what the disciples were doing in the gospel.

We need to refocus, on Christ, and the rights of all the people that are around us.

With all the anxiety in the world, the real question is,

"How can we let go of our own concerns and refocus on the concerns of others?"

My all-time favorite comic strip is Calvin and Hobbes.

There was one episode when Calvin and his family come back from a holiday

and found their home had been burglarized.

Although this was a tragic event, Calvin, the young boy, wasn't too concerned.

He was snuggled up in his bed, with his stuffed toy--all safe and cozy...

trusting that his parents could take care of everything.

The humor is in the last frame of the comic strip

his parents in bed, with this worried and desperate look on their faces.

Children have this innate ability to trust that their parents will take care of everything.

They are completely oblivious to what is happening around them.

They only know that they can trust their parents.

In the gospel Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

In not so many words Jesus is saying,

"Don't be concerned with what is happening to you;
be concerned with what is happening to the people around you."

The exact opposite of the attitude of the disciples,
and those who are only interested in maintaining the status quo.

I think one of the great prophets in the modern world,
someone who is inviting people to look past the status quo is Pope Francis.

However, I know that he has a tremendous uphill struggle.

When I was newly ordained, I lived with then Fr. Albert LeGatt.

I remember many of my parishioners saying to me,
"Fr. Jim you are a good priest, and you often have a good message,
but tell us what the Pope says."

I remember speaking with then Fr. Albert LeGatt about this,
and saying everyone wants to know what the Pope says,
and then asking him, "What happens when the pope says something they don't like?"
Hold that thought for a moment.

A few years ago I read an article about one theologian,
"When John Paul and Benedict were in power,
this theologians common response to any challenge was "We must listen to the Pope."

When Francis came to power his common response to any challenge was,
"Well that's what the Pope is saying, but he is not speaking ex Cathedra...
so you do not need to listen to him.

The writer of the article posed the question,
"Did he support Pope John Paul and Pope Benedict, because they agreed with him,
or did he support them because they were pope?

Because if he was supporting them because they were Pope,
Why doesn't he support Francis in the same way?

The question that we are being challenged with today is,
"Do we listen to Jesus, the prophets, the authority of the Church,
or any authority for that matter only when they agree with...
which really is a variation on ,
"We really don't care about what happens to you,
we care more about what happens to us."

James in the second reading picks up on this

Where there is envy and selfish ambition,

There will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

“You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder.

You covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts.

James then goes on to note the qualities of God’s universal law,

“The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable,

gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits,

without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

This gentleness and peace is the natural outcome of an attitude of:

“Don’t be concerned with what is happening to you,

be concerned with what is happening to the people around you.”

James goes on to say, “If there is no peace, if force is being applied, if people are not willing to listen,
if there is no mercy,

you can almost be certain that envy and selfish ambition is at work.

Which is the natural outcome of an attitude of:

“I really don’t care about what happens to you,

I am only concerned with what happens to me.”

As we go home this week,

we need to take some time to reflect on whether our primary concern is for ourselves,

or are we primarily concerned with the people around us?