Sunday 25th November 2022

Luke 16 19-31

Richard Rohr frames this gospel reading in this way. If you don’t get it now, you won’t get it then. In other words, our attitude to others and our personal response to them will determine our quality of life in the next world. At issue is not that wealth is bad, but what we do with our wealth that is significant. This teaching is essentially about the state of our heart. So, who should we follow in this life?

Recently we have been set an incredible example of a life of service of the Queen. Her behaviour and attitudes form a sharp contrast with the narcissism of the contemporary world of utube, tik-tok and influencers. We might name them the Me generation.

I have to be careful here that I don’t fall into the trap of hypocricy in telling others how to behave. I live a life of luxury and worship in a beautiful church. So how do I turn my attention to the one who is starving and has dogs licking his sores?

What we need to do is turn to the inner world and attune to our mystical self. How often do I say that! We all have an inner world. People can mistakenly think that the mystical has nothing to do with what we term real life. Some assume this is a place of parapsychology; not so. Mysticism is experience that is open to everyone. It describes a state of being touched by God in a way that is inchoate that goes beyond what we can think, express, imagine, or clearly feel. Mystical knowledge is real knowledge that we can’t conceptualise. Why should we turn to this aspect of the self?

This is the place of transformation. Ronald Rolheiser says that unless we are hardened by sin or drugged by excessive selfishness and distraction, the presence of God can be felt and progressively swell the heart until God’s reality, goodness, forgiveness, and moral demands become part of life. The aim of turning inward is to foster a pure heart. One coloured by God. When a person’s heart, life, and perception, are influenced by God’s presence then self-consciousness fades[[1]](#footnote-1). The gaze must turn inward. This form of attention is not about puffed up self-image and how one is seen by others. This is about self- emptying. Receptivity and gratitude are at the root of purity of heart. [[2]](#footnote-2) Rolheiser tells us that gratitude is a result of discipline. We have to work at it. But how?

We have to restore our contemplative faculty to its full power. We need to work at receiving everything as gift- life, health, the people around us, love, friendship, food, drink, sexuality and beauty as gift. How often do we actually stop and think about giftedness? Perhaps you are like me and you get swept up into the frenzy of the next task!

We need to restore wonder in our lives. A kind of primitive or childlike vision. A form of spontaneous wonder. Before children are socialised into critical judgements that become sophistication, they are able to believe in angels, ghosts fairies, and Santa. Filters of scepticism eventually remove the belief capacity. Purity of heart and a re-learnt naivete are good for us. The child’s original naivete wouldn’t be ideal for us as adults.[[3]](#footnote-3)

So how do we move beyond our post-modern sophistication to relearn the child-like contemplation? Though image, poetry, music or dance, any mode that we can find that quells cynicism. **We need mystery.** This is the path to finding the purity of heart that will prompt right action in relation to those in need.

Rolheiser suggests some alternative beatitudes: blessed are those who do not take life for granted they are within measurable distance of taking life as **granted to them by God.**

Blessed are those who see the finger of God in the accidents that make up their lives, they shall be rewarded by daily miracles.

Blessed are they who take on the heart of a child and the heart of a virgin; they shall delight in Santa and believe in God.

Blessed are those whose discipleship includes the discipline of prayer; they shall know that it is in God that they live and move and have their being.

Blessed are those who kiss a leper, or who make it a preference to think about the poor, for the love and God will overwhelm them.

And blessed are those who make this a life-long quest; they will make a good beginning.

So the call of today’s gospel is to examine the way that we live now. If we walk past the beggar the one whose friendship is the dog who licks his sores we are no better than Lazarus in this story. We are called to care for those in need.

We have to remember need is not always financial. Last week we heard about St Margaret’s relationship with St Vincent’s Care. Harry’s testament was powerful. May we all foster the willing heart. You see, what I have spoken of here is about opening the self to vulnerability.

I finish with a metaphor by Joyce Rupp who says the season of autumn gives the image of surrender to the season. Or the purposes of the heart.

Autumn

The season of vulernability,

when the great arms of oak

stretch their summer leaves

to the wild winds.

All that has been life and green

is stripped from strong trees,

and the tall, wide branches

seem to be deathly wounded.

Across the lawns in layers

lie the near-dead leaves;

onto the forest floors they fall

as if to say; “all is lost.”

This is the season of vulnerability

when trees open wide to wounding

when all the summer security

is given away to another season.

Wiser are the trees than humans

who clutch small arms around self,

shielding their fragile hearts

and stifling future Springtimes.

* Joyce Rupp[[4]](#footnote-4)

May we know such times of surrender and renewal!

AMEN

References

Rolheiser, R. *The Shattered Lantern* Crossroad Publishing New York 2013

Rupp, J. *Fresh Brea*d Ave Maria Press Indiana 1985

1. Rolheiser, R. *The Shattered Lantern* p76 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Op Cit p 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Op Cit. p 174-175 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rupp, J. *Fresh Bread* p 128 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)