

Luke 18: 1-14

When I read this gospel I am reminded of that line from twangy country and western song; *Oh Lord it's hard to be humble when your perfect in every way....*

How hard it can be to be humble when those around us are full of dogmatic certainty! My immediate stance is to think there is something wrong with me! I should be forceful! I should have strong opinions. By contrast I ask myself 'can I understand the opposite point of view?'

The difference is between self-righteousness that rests in piety, good-works, moral observance and ego, and the humility that says; I need **is to rest in the place of uncertainty.**

You see, even as a priest I don't have all of the answers. In order to know how to respond to a situation I need to pause, peel back the layers of the onion until I come to the part that rests in God. In other words, I have to enter spiritual process. This is a different space to knowledge that we use in the ordinary world. I can't always pull the spiritual position out of my back pocket. Spiritual experience doesn't respond to deadlines, force and manipulation.

How difficult it is for us to maintain a link to God because it is ephemeral. Facts and opinions may appear more attractive and certain than time consuming deep engagement with God where outcomes are uncertain. There are times when I wish that the answers and knew how to respond definitively.

I feel sure I frustrate some of you who have firm views and express them without hesitation. I take a different approach. That is because I know that any view I hear may be partial and my own view might also be wrong. So what do I need to do? I need to say as the tax collector did "I am a sinner". Knowing that we are sinful, misguided, and capable of exclusion frees up thinking-space for new

possibilities. In Luke 18: 19 Jesus says ‘why do you call me Good? Only God is good’. Even Jesus himself opens to the necessity of prayerful reliance on God. If any of us is tempted to think that our own resources and past experience are sufficient for the road ahead, we are like the pharisee.

Those of us who heard the Archbishop of Canterbury speak last week know that it is his opinion that only God can solve the world’s problems. Restoration won’t come from of our ego plans. Left to our resources, opinionated thinking takes centre stage and we can’t even understand all that is at play. So how is it that wonder and uncertainty can be of God?

This is what Richard Rohr has this to say.

“It has taken me much of my life to begin to have what I call the second gaze. By nature I have a critical mind and a demanding heart, and I am so impatient.¹ These are both my gifts and my curses, yet it seems I cannot have one without the other. They are both good teachers. A life of solitude and silence allows them both, and invariably leads me to the second gaze. The gaze of compassion, looking out at life from the place of Divine Intimacy, **is really all I have, and all I have to give**, although I don’t always do it. Did you hear that? “This is all I have to give”. Strip out the ego the Me, or I, and experience what is left in the uncertainty.

Here is what another Franciscan has to say. “If Christians actually believed in a humble God of poverty and humanity let them abandon their opinions and prejudices and judgements so they could be more open to love others where they are like God. Francis believed that God descends in love to meet us where we are and he found God in the most unexpected forms; in the disfigured form of a leper or in

¹¹ Rohr R. *Daily Reflection* 41

the complaint of one of his brothers or in the physical world for example the sun². The wisdom of St Francis says God loves us in our incomplete humanity even though we are always running away trying to rid ourselves of our defects, wounds and brokenness. If we could only see that God is there in the cracks of our splintered human lives we would already be healed.³

From the Franciscan point of view, God accepts the ordinary, the fragile and the messiness of life and we keep running away from it in search of certainty. From this standpoint every person and creature deserves the utmost respect and attention because in that living being God dwells".⁴

Recently I've had several profound experiences that ground me in the Franciscan reality. First at the memory care café. I played cards with clients and their carers. There was joy, encouragement, and respect at the table. Have you ever found yourself stripped down to the essentials of goodness? I was immersed in it. I was blessed at that table. I wasn't the table of the Eucharist but it was a communion of a very significant kind. It was the place of love, Shalom and well-being freely shared.

Then there are Pastoral Care visits to St Vincent's Care. When we go there we find ourselves exposed emotionally. It is confronting to meet both those who we may have known once in robust good health, and to be with them in their frailty. We share with both friend and stranger in a deep place of respect and love. We take the sacrament and offer prayer. This is an experience in an emersion in goodness. I am not telling you this out of the moralistic stance of the pharisee in the gospel who gloats over his virtue. I tell you in order to explain that sometimes uncertainty and vulnerability and awkwardness are the places where we can experience God's presence in a deep way; if we are brave enough. You see times when we may

² Ilia, D. *The Humility of God* p31

³ Ibid p31

⁴ Ibid p32

not know what to say or do, what opinion to offer pause and
hesitance may bring us God's grace. When the trappings of power or
competence and influence are stripped away we are as God sees us.
Objects of his love and compassion.

AMEN

References

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Rhor, R. Daily Meditation Week 41 *The Second Gaze* WWW.