

12A

It was during the Mexican War. Henry Thoreau, the philosopher and writer vehemently opposed the war, because he believed it to be an attempt to expand slave-holding territories. He refused to pay taxes, because the money was going to the war effort. He ended up in jail, rather than pay taxes. Bill Emerson, another philosopher and writer, a friend of his, and someone who was also strongly opposed to the war and to slavery, visited him in prison. Emerson asked Thoreau, 'Henry why are you in prison?' Thoreau looked him straight in the eye, and quickly asked him, 'Bill, why are you not in here?'

Following Jesus can set us on a collision course with people less motivated to live by the Gospel message than we are. We saw where the Lib Dem leader stepped down recently because he believed his Party's policy on certain important moral issues ran counter to his Christian beliefs. It takes guts to do that.

St Thomas More whose feast we celebrated last week wasn't afraid to confront King Henry over his illicit marriage. Jeremiah, cited in the First Reading, often preached in words which made his listeners feel uncomfortable. He's not known as the 'prophet of doom' for nothing.

But we sometimes are called to step into the shoes of Jeremiah. Christians make noises these days about many things such as world hunger, global warming or child trafficking – all major issue in themselves. But there can be situations much closer to home which test our real mettle. For instance *if you feel that your children are being taught about 'growing up' issues at too tender an age would you have a word with the people concerned? When your older children or grandchildren tell you they are going to move in with their fiancé, as a Catholic Christian, would you advise them to think again? When a person's good name is being dented in conversation would you intervene?* All this is standing up for Christ which today's Gospel calls for.

I doubt if Jesus could have been saviour of the world if he had minded his own business and not challenged the Jewish leaders on a host of issues. At his mock trial they accused Him of being a troublemaker but that was only with people who shut their ears to his message and refused to change. They were the ones who put him on the cross. Only a handful stood by him at the foot of the cross. The centurion, a complete outsider, was one of them. Those closest to the Cross heard him say: "in truth this man was a son of God". He could have kept his opinions to himself.

Let us remember St John Paul's words to the Youth before He died in 2005: 'Do not be afraid to stand up for Christ and his Gospel especially when it's called for.' We could disown Him by our thoughts, our words, our deeds and even by our silence.

But, with His grace, if we pluck up the courage and stand by Him he will not disown us in His presence. 'If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven'.