

HOMILY FOR 'CARE OF CREATION SUNDAY'

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

As Fr Paddy said at the beginning of Mass, today is special. A sign of how special is that he has asked the parish Live Simply group to provide the homily. My name is Gerry Burke and I am giving the homily on behalf of Fr Paddy and the group.

The writer of the reading today from the book of Ecclesiasticus tells us: The greater you are, the more you should behave humbly, and then you will find favour with the Lord. We are also told: The heart of a sensible person will reflect on parables. There's no shortage of parables, the stories with a message, in the way the gospel writers report the actions and words of Jesus. Today's parable is typical and if we're sensible, we'll listen and reflect.

The leading Pharisees who had invited Jesus for a meal were watching him closely; but they weren't the only ones watching. Jesus was also looking. And what did he see? People eyeing-up the tables to get the best place to sit. And what did he say? Well, nothing about table plans, like we have at modern weddings. He was keen on getting across a different message:

- don't do just what you feel like doing,
- don't trample over everyone else to get what you want,
- don't think you are entitled to have more than others just because you think you are important.
- stand back, wait, let others go before you,
- take your place where no one else wants to sit.

This sort of thinking was not just a challenge two thousand years ago; it's a challenge here and now. And I'm not talking about the scramble to get on to a Ryanair flight, or even worse the queue to get the 52 bus outside the cathedral.

Jesus was turning the world upside down every time he opened his mouth. He constantly tells us that God has invited us to share this beautiful world, this small part of a mysterious universe, this glimpse of what God is really like. He uses the example of a feast: we have all been invited but those invited first and foremost are those who have least and expect nothing. The response we made to the psalm today says it all: "In your goodness, O God, you prepared a home for the poor".

When we sat in the sun last weekend we might have wondered aloud again, as maybe also in February and July: what's happening to our weather? When we see pictures of the trees burning not just in the Amazon but in places like California, when we see terrible floods not just in India or the Philippines but in West Yorkshire, we might say: why is this happening?

Is it just the greed and thoughtlessness of a few, or is there a deeper change happening? Is all the talk of climate crisis real or is it made up? Well, Pope Francis thinks it's real and wants all Christians to take a lead on doing something – he calls it 'caring for our common home'.

In his startling encyclical letter called 'Laudato Si', (these words are taken from a song of St Francis praising God for the gift of our world), he links this call to action to the same challenge Jesus issued to the guests at the meal: the world belongs to us all but first to those who have least; it's not the poor and under-privileged who are causing the problems, it's those who have more – whether that's individuals or nations, whether its goods or power.

Pope Francis writes: All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning (He's referring to the constant pressure for us all to consume more). The world is governed by seasons. Jesus often refers to the seasons. The Pope has committed the Catholic Church to a new season, the Season of Creation. It starts today and ends on the feast of St Francis on 4 October, four weeks involving all the Christian Churches world-wide, that's 2.2 billion people called to action by all their leaders.

The gospel message is to put those on the margins of society more at the centre of all our endeavours, because these are those most at risk if things go wrong. In this parish we are going to try even harder:

- praying for a change of all hearts: we'll be doing that in a moment in the bidding prayers
- seeking out those who have the power to make things happen and giving them encouragement as well as warning: taking example from the enthusiasm of young people
- finding ways to limit the damage we might do in our everyday living: have a look at the display and the goods to share in the narthex as you leave Mass today. Have a look around your own life and your home. Have you noticed the tip in the bulletin every week?

In his letter, Pope Francis also says: Rather than a problem to be solved, our world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. In the first pages of the Bible we read that a good way of describing the world is as a garden: the writer says that 'God walked in the garden in the cool of the day'.

There are two questions for us today, as we contemplate our world in prayer and think about what we should be doing: Are we looking after the garden properly? Does God still want to walk there with us?