

Evensong: Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Mark 3:20-30)

31/7/16

“Does it matter how I live my life?”

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

I was recently invited for an interview for the position of chaplain at a prestigious school. It was an interesting experience. After various questions and answers, the vacating chaplain explained to me that many of the pupils in the school, although traditionally a church school, were “unchurched”, so to speak, thus were unfamiliar with liturgy, tradition and the ecclesiastical protocol.

The interviewing committee were concerned that I might struggle to cope with dealing with children who were unfamiliar with the church. What the interviewing committee did not realise, is that for the last twenty years I have slowly witnessed the removal of religion from schools...

I had become used to the idea of teaching children who were unfamiliar with the notion of God and, in many cases, seemed quite proud to announce themselves as atheists or non-believers. (Often not even understanding these terms)

The truth of the matter is that schools have been forced to become multi-faith. This is positive in the sense that a multi-faith approach encourages tolerance and ideally, the encompassing of various cultures within a society. The downside of this is that often schools are overwhelmed by the logistics of facilitating education in the various faiths. Teachers themselves may feel awkward about teaching a faith that is different to their own. If specialists are brought in to teach a specific faith, then these periods are often minimal and chosen by those already partial to that particular faith.

The bottom line is that as a country we are sitting with an increasing number of youth in schools who no longer know God. Many youth are brought up in homes that no longer see the relevance of the church in society. So if a child is

not exposed to God at home, as well as not in school, where then is a child given the opportunity to meet God?

All of this has become evident in the behaviour of some children whom do not understand what it means to take God's name in vain, yet they do so regularly. If, as a teacher, I intervene and explain to them that blasphemous language is unacceptable, they often seem quite shocked and surprised. This is because many children are brought up in an environment where blaspheming is the norm and acceptable, with the result that some children of today do not understand what they are saying.

What does this mean for you and me as Christians?

Well, never before has our behaviour and witness as Christians become so important, for if we are unable to share Christ in most of our schools today, then the only way we have of sharing Him is through how we live our lives...

How do we live our lives?

This is personal and a private matter.

Our lives and how we live them, as Christians, are a direct reflection of Jesus and the church. Now I know that you and I are fallible and that we do not live perfect lives, for we are a fallen people who rely on the saving grace of Jesus. This is true and I for one am the first person to admit that my life is far from perfect.

But, I am also very aware that I have many people, both at school and in the church who look up to me, they watch how I behave, respond under pressure, work in a team, honour promises, speak, act and love.

I still make mistakes. I still have to say "sorry" often and ask for forgiveness of my sins, but I am trying.

You see, Jesus calls each and every one of us to be the best person we can be in what we are doing, in who we are with and in how we do it. I know that we all have days where we are tired, stressed, feeling unwell, under pressure and struggling to cope with the demands of the many roles that we have to play. But, it is precisely during this time, that we need to surrender ourselves to God, breathe in the Holy Spirit and centre ourselves in Jesus, so that His light

can shine through and help us to stand out from the crowd. Sometimes, that is all we have- our witness through our behaviour as Christians in the real world.

Remember, you are not expected to do this alone. Jesus left us with the Holy Spirit to empower us for occasions exactly such as these. We are surrounded by many people who are unchurched, who do blaspheme, and who do not know the love of God. Perhaps the only contact some people will ever have with God will be your behaviour as a Christian.

How do we live out our lives?

Do we live with humility?

Do we live with God as the centre of our lives?

Do we give back to those around us?

Do we remain un-materialistic?

Do we work at increasing our spirituality?

Do we try to improve the witness that we are as Christians to people in the world around us?

These are very real challenges.

I am reminded of the elderly Christian Priest, Fr Hamel, who gave his life in France last week when he was murdered at the altar for being a Christian. Fr Hamel was living his life as a Christian, being the best witness that he could be, and it cost him his life.

How would you and I handle a situation like that?

Would we stand up for Jesus if our lives were threatened?

Jesus stood up for us when our eternal life was threatened.

He lost His life.

Jesus set the ultimate witness for us as Christians.

We owe Him to be the best Christians that we can be.

May God bless you in the week ahead as you focus on living your life as a beacon of His love in the world.

Amen.