

Homily for 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time



Bilbo Baggins, an old hobbit at the start of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, gazes at the ring and says: 'It's mine, all mine, my precious.' His greed for the ring was caught from Gollum, (I won a prize for my drawing of Gollum many years ago, which was nothing like Gollum in the film),

Bilbo's greed was contagious as sin often is.

In the parable today I wonder who first thought up the idea of killing the landlord's servants, who instigated it, and then persuaded the others, and once they were all involved there seemed to be no way out but to go for the son too. From greed to murder, the greatest of crimes/sins, in easy steps. 'We want the vineyard for ourselves.'

Jesus of course is talking to the Chief priests and the elders, and in the parable the vineyard is Israel, (and more widely creation), that God has built, provided for and then protected from outside threats too. But the real threat comes from within (in which there is a message for us too.) The cancer of tenants' greed eats away at the peace of the vineyard. The servants are the prophets, whose then leads to the death of the Son, God's Son. But where the message changes from an ordinary tale is that it is the weakest of all in the story, the dead Son, who then overturns the greed and murder of the tenants, who becomes the corner-stone.

Jesus is speaking to those who should be the guardians of the faith, of the people's faith, but who are corrupted by the desire to hold onto their role and their power. Even today this can affect or infect our leaders. On a very light note, it is said, I am sure apocryphally, that Bishop Brewer having just become bishop of Lancaster stopped his car in the Lakes overlooking Thirlmere, and stepping out and opening his arms wide said to himself out loud, 'It is all mine, all mine.'

But as we know the Vatican itself is not immune from people clutching at their roles, very much in the past, but in some quarters even today.

There is a temptation to hold onto what we have. To put a wall around it and look at those outside as threats to what we have, and use some old saying such as 'Charity begins at home' as our excuse.

When I first went to Rome to study back in the '90s I was sure that our bit of the Catholic Church was very important. That we should have a big say in what went on. But perhaps the most important thing I learnt about the Church then was that we are only a tiny part of it. I was sitting with people from S. Africa, the Congo, Uganda, Latin America, India, the Phillipines, who faced problems that were so much greater than ours and looked on us as a small, well looked after, niche in the Church, which we are. Once we meet people from other parts of the Church and hear their stories, we then begin to understand both their needs, our wealth, and that they are our sisters and brothers.

In 1967 Pope Paul VI wrote a letter called, *Populorum Progressio*. He is considered a rather conservative Pope but only because of *Humanae Vitae*. This letter was a radical call to share our resources across the Church and the world. He quoted St. Ambrose from the 4th century saying about charity, 'You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what you have been given to hold in common for the use of all, that you happen to hold at this time. The world is given to all, not just to the rich.' And then he speaks of the three duties of human solidarity, social justice and universal charity.

This week we are handing out the Family Fast Day envelopes on behalf of Cafod which is the bishops' charity for overseas aid. (I know that some have struggled with Cafod in the past, but could I suggest that, if we do, we overcome that for the good of all.) Each of us can help in some way. Let's open our hearts to our brothers and sisters elsewhere, and pray for them, as they will for us. If we are able we can help more materially as well.