

31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME HOMILY

So we have a baptism tomorrow (today) of a very young man, which is a great celebration for the family. But if we looked at him before the service and then after, would we see any change? I would guess probably not. He will eat, cry, sleep, in just the same way as before. So what are we doing? Why do we bother. An easy answer is to say that we are welcoming him into the Church, which is absolutely correct, and so it is always a great celebration for the Church too. But what does that mean in his life?

When we pour water over him, what effect will it have? It's not even enough to give him a good bath.

When we say, entering the Church, a better answer, but sometimes more difficult to get our heads round is that he is entering the Kingdom of God, or marking his entry into the Kingdom. But this does not help us immediately until we think about the gospels. Right at the beginning of the gospels (especially Mark and Matthew), Jesus tells people what he has come to do. To get them to repent, (change their way of life, their minds literally in Greek), because the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

How can Jesus say that, that this Kingdom is close at hand? Because it becomes clear that he is the Kingdom. To enter into the Kingdom Jesus speaks about, is to be part of his life, to share his life, and in fact his death and resurrection. Why? Because that is the way into the conclusion, the goal, of our journey with this Kingdom. To live with his Father. As we often hear at funerals, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, for this journey, and as it says just before that, he comes to take us to the place he has prepared for us.

The symbolism of the water, is of going down into the death of Christ, submerging ourselves (literally in Greek that is what baptism means) and then coming up into this new life. Putting on this new life we say later in the baptism prayers as we wrap the white garment round him.

So this is what young Caspian is doing today. Little does he know it. So the question then comes, how does he then keep to the right path. As we adults all know it is not always easy, for many reasons.

But what Jesus and the Church guarantees is that through the sacraments we are fortified for this, filled with the Holy Spirit, as Caspian is today (tomorrow). What is then required is for his parents and those around him and the Church, to show him how to use the Spirit and be open to it. To lead his life in a Spirit-filled way.

What we learn from the gospel today, and as I have mentioned before, is how we now see the world and others in it.

We spoke last week of how despised tax-collectors were, and this little tubby Zacchaeus, hated and feared by everyone as a collaborator with the Romans and a traitor because of his job, is struggling to see Jesus. No one is going out of their way to help him. They cannot outwardly challenge him, but they can make his life difficult. So he has to climb a tree to see Jesus. But Jesus, also a Jew, pauses and looks up, and something very special is happening when they look at each other. Jesus is seeing someone who has good in him, though it is buried deep. (Jesus never loses hope in any of us.) Zacchaeus finds himself being accepted and even loved for the first time in a long while. This is a moment of repentance, of change, where someone is meeting Jesus and entering the Kingdom of God. Of being given new life. It is in fact a moment of resurrection. All that Zacchaeus goes on to say is the result, the fruit, of this.

What can we offer Caspian? A fresh way of seeing the world. A way of seeing good in all people, however deep it is buried. A positive vision of our world that leads to a desire to build on the good however difficult it may seem at times. To see, even in a traitor, hope and the possibility of change.