

## FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT

In a film about the Deep South, a young black child, (in England today it could also have been Muslim, Jewish or traveller child,) goes out on their own and has just experienced for the first time what his parents would know to be prejudice. He comes home and says to his father, "Why do they hate us? Are we different?" In the not-so-distant past, and even today this is a ventral experience. And if in the news at this time. Even in school we find that some children still learn it from their parents.

"Why do they hate us," is a question that so many people have asked over the years. Right at the start of the Bible, in Genesis 11, the people tell the story of the Tower of Babel to try to explain why peoples, tribes, hate each other, starting with language differences. But what that story says is, is that it is a confusion born of sin. 'Let us confuse their language so that they cannot understand each other,' because they no longer honour me, says God. But today we know that prejudice is not God's fault but ours. Our loss of God's vision for the world.

We are always praying for peace between Russia and Ukraine, or Palestine and Israel, or so many other areas of the world, and what we hope for is an end to bloodshed and a just peace.

But I think what we fail to see is that **it is not** a question of patching up peace across the world, removing a Putin or Natanyahu, healing the many wounds of warfare, and also healing the wounds in all life breakdowns. **It is** a question of how do we see our world at large. What hope do we have for it? How ambitious can we be for our world? Can we see that a different world is possible?

Jeremiah is reflecting on this in the first reading. He lives within the world of the people of Israel, but he sees the conflict within them and with those around them as Jerusalem is about to fall to the Babylonians. He can only explain this in religious terms, of the covenant with God. He points out that God keeps offering the Israelites, his people, a world of peace, of an agreement of peace embodied in their Covenant with God. If only you would keep my laws and commandments and live them, then you will be at peace. But through him God explains that all his practical attempts to get them to follow him have failed, so God will take matters into his own hands and write this covenant in their hearts, so that everyone, regardless of who they are will understand what it is to be loved and love. What it is to see everyone as God sees them. To see the world in this way.

This is where our world fails too. We cannot see others as God wants us too. We cannot escape prejudice. We let cynicism cloud our hope for a world as God sees it. And it will only come about if we start with ourselves. When God says to us you have to be like little children to get into the Kingdom of Heaven, it is to see the world as children often do in the playground when they play with anyone (not always peacefully it is true), but they see no external differences, until the world teaches them prejudice.

It is interesting that St. Paul says the Son learnt obedience through suffering, learnt humility. This is Jesus as an example for us. Often prejudice is about power over humility. It can be painful to learn to see people differently, as equals. Now when the Greeks arrive in the gospel, the Jews see them as different. They are not like us, is their first thought.

But for Jesus, the arrival of the whole world, represented in those Greeks, is the sign that the world is ready to be converted and saved, by his action on the cross, his suffering for all of us.

Martin Luther King famously said he had a dream that black and white children should sit down together and eat together in peace, in a place where at the time it seemed impossible. We have to have that dream that the Kingdom of God can come true. As we pray every time we say the Our father, that his kingdom will come. Without the readiness to dream, to see the world as God sees it, without that hope, then faith is rootless, built on sand.

On Good Friday Jesus died to reverse Babel, for us to see his glory in his Kingdom restored.