

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR 14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

James MacMillan is a modern composer and a Catholic, and on Thursday we had a clergy day with him. Not being a great music person I went with some dread but in fact his talks were engrossing. He spoke about his own life and the power of music in it, his grandfather was a coal-miner in Ayrshire who played the euphonium in the local brass band, and where music had brought him, (biography 'A Scot's song-a life of music, small and readable.'). And about the discussions he often had with other musicians and artists about religion and art, but especially, even with atheists, the sense that they were searching for and found a spirituality in their lives through music.

One priest objected that classical music was all for middle class these days and had no effect on the working classes. (You can make your own decisions about that comment.) But another countered by saying, "Have you ever watched the film: The children of the train?" You may not be surprised to know that I had and it is a very powerful film.

In Italian (with subtitles, persevere even if you don't like subtitles) about Naples at the end of WWII. The poverty was intense. The Communist party of a city in the north, I think Modena, sent eager people down there by train to offer children a year in the north in which to eat better and get to school. At the end of the year the children went back to Naples.

While in the north our young hero discovered the violin, and, even though he went back to Naples, he became an international master player. The action of the communists and of music had changed his life.

It was all made possible by those young communists who were both convinced in their belief in communism, but saw the need to bring light and even life, as the children in the south were dying of hunger, into the lives of those they could see needed it. The experience of music for our hero came by a chance encounter with someone the hero met. The communists were moved by belief. Their actions came from humanity. That others needed their help.

When Jesus sends out his disciples in the gospel today a number of factors are at work, just as they were in Italy in 1945.

That Jesus sees that humanity needs healing and has come among us to begin that process. He gathers a small group (small at first) of dedicated people around him to teach them why he has come and the need to then share that with those around them. He does not come to feed people, though he does at times, he comes to feed them spiritually. What he sees is a desire within all of us, often not recognised by us, for spiritual feeding without which our lives can never be complete.

What he also knows is that he needs people to go out and help others find what will truly feed that need, which is the message he brings and an understanding of why what he is about to do on the cross is central to that healing, and that St. Paul has realised is the heart of his message and makes him a new creation with Christ. That at the Last Supper he gives us the possibility of sharing in this.

When the Church presents us with a set of readings each Sunday, as we listen to them and, if we can, mull them over in the week, the Church is asking, what do you think the message is in the readings for you, just as St. Paul has found his.

When the composer was discussing music with others, what was common to himself and the others was a search. In composing they were looking for something. He pointed out how many famous works of music were composed in the face of disaster or concern for the world, Napoleon's conquests, invasion to the gates of Leningrad, the horrors revealed at the end of WWII, a search for the future good. From them came works of great inspiration, even joy.

For us we share that search for Christ in our lives, and a desire to share what we have learnt with others, and that in this search in our lives comes great joy too, because whatever the state of those lives we are drawing closer to Christ.