

## Homily for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2011

There is a teenage girl I knew for many years. She caused some confusion for her family because she has two pages on Facebook! She has two persona. I wasn't quite sure which one was the right one. I thought one was a mistake. The two pages tell two different stories. On one page she shares all the usual teenage gossip. On the other, to the horror of her parents, she is a different person. She tells of outrageous exploits using vivid language that leaves nothing to the imagination. It might all be an invention of course. Which page tells the real story of her life? What is she trying to say? It is probably typical of the inner conflict of some teenagers as they grow, and, if the truth be known still is, for some adults.

When we look at each other we are aware that we do present different faces to others depending on how close we are to each person or the situation we find ourselves in. We just want to present the best face that will get us through the day. Sometimes because of injustice or injury we change faces and our real feelings can rise to the surface. We are complex beings. But we don't usually share all our feelings publicly. Yet social media has changed that.

It is pretty easy to be kind to people whoever they are with a bit of discipline. It is another thing to love another person in a Christian manner. St Paul in his letter to the Galatians has a wonderful sentence, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). The law of Christ of course is the law of love. This does not only mean taking care of another in need. It also means carrying the burden of the idiosyncrasies, the irritations, the different personality and opinions, the failures of another. You know this very well in family life. It is also true of community life. We carry each other. Because Paul was not taking in a general way. He was particularly concerned as he always was with the life of the Churches he ministered to.

This sense of carrying each other's burdens is a basic Christian doctrine for Paul that underlies any effort to create community. It is the reason why the marriage of Christians is far more than a convenient relationship. It is the work of a lifetime. It is about offering life and salvation to each other. It is the reason why community building is so important in the Church. So Paul lays it on the line in a passionate and poetic way in the second reading today. "If our life in Christ means anything to you, then be united....." This is not just a moral teaching. This is what Christian life is all about. So he goes on to quote that famous hymn about Christ.

Jesus' life was, and is, one of carrying the burden of all of us saints and sinners. He emptied himself for our sake. He did not cling to the power of his nature as divine to force us to be different. "Always", Paul says, "consider the other person to be better than yourself." That is a big ask. We all find it difficult if not impossible. We do however, think of the other person first in the midst of disaster like floods or earthquake. Yet it was what Jesus always did. It cost him total humiliation on the cross. It did not matter if it be tax collector, prostitute, or Pharisee he was always prepared to offer his love and forgiveness. It is what he demonstrated at the last Supper when he washed his disciples feet, the feet even of Judas who betrayed him.

This is the mind of Christ Jesus that Paul asks us to have. So he is not only asking us to look at Jesus as a model. Christ is the very foundation of our life as individuals and as a Church. This motivation takes us beyond self interest. It takes us beyond quick judgements of people and their actions as we see in the parable of the two sons. God judges the true nature of our hearts. So we do not have two minds, one for this occasion and one for another. We do not need two Facebook pages. We know who we are because God loves us as we are.

Fr Graham