

Homily for 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2011

The other day I received a copy of a book telling the story of the first nine Parish Priests in Ipswich (*St Mary's Ipswich, The Luckie Parish*, John Kane, Ipswich, 2011). It describes briefly their history from 1849 when Fr Eugene Luckie arrived to 1983 when Dr Own Oxenham finished his appointment there. Of the nine only Dr Oxenham was Australian born. Seven were Irish and one was French. The three since have been Australian. However, the way things are going the present PP could easily be the last Australian born!

It is hard for us to appreciate how Irish the Australian Church was right up to the 1970s when I was ordained. It was a real cultural shift in the Church here. I spent a few years in Ipswich with Dr Oxenham. I find it interesting as I read to reflect on the humanity of those men of the past. They had their share of controversy and conflict with bishops and people as they dealt with the problems of their day. They had their strengths and weaknesses, and their particular gifts for ministry. It can be easy with hind sight to be critical. But we were not in their shoes.

Our liturgy today partly focuses on leadership. Jesus' parable takes up the image from the first reading of Isaiah. The prophet compares Israel to a vineyard that God has planted and tended. He tells it as love story. The owner of the vineyard has done all he could so that the land would produce good fruit. But the vineyard wants to go its own way and so does not produce any grapes. The landowner can only use the land for other purposes. Like the owner, God has loved his people and given them everything possible. Yet, they were ungrateful and went their own way. They were not producing a harvest of goodness but only bloodshed and distress.

Jesus builds on that image to teach a lesson to the chief priests and elders in his day. These leaders are the tenants of the parable that God has put in charge of the vineyard. But they have betrayed that trust using the vines for their own selfish needs. In Jesus' story it is not the vineyard that has gone astray but the tenants. They reject the owners envoys eventually killing the owners son. The point is clear. Jesus is identifying himself with that son whom these leaders are rejecting. The Kingdom of God will therefore be taken from them and given to leaders who will produce fruit.

We, who are Jesus' disciples, have been grafted onto the vine of Israel through our Baptism. The priests of the past each ministered to their community according to their own gifts as each of us do. All of us who have a responsibility for family, or community or Church must heed Jesus message. We are called to love those in our care as much as God loves them. God even gave his only Son for their sake.

This morning at Mass we Baptise two infants. By the grace of God they too are grafted onto the vine of Christ. Let us be living witnesses to God's love for them.

Fr Graham