



The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

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Homily at Mass 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C – 29 September 2019

Caught in early peak time traffic on Punt Road in Richmond I saw a sign flashing overhead: “You are entering Tigerland”. Was there perhaps a similar sign flashing over the roads in Parramatta and Western Sydney: “Beware ... giants walk here”

As we look around the landscape of today’s readings from Sacred Scripture who do we see? Jesus presents us with 3 significant figures: the rich man known as Dives; the poor man Lazarus; and the great father of faith Abraham. The Old Testament prophet Amos takes us inside the rich man’s house – rich and comfortable, well fed if not overfed, drunk and shameless – it’s a fairly ugly party. Equally awful is the sight of poor Lazarus, crouched at the rich man’s gate. The name Lazarus means “God helps”: perhaps that’s all that Lazarus could hope for. Prostrate with hunger and destitute, ignored by those in a good position to help, perhaps his only friends were the dogs who licked his sores. We hear this parable and we shrink with embarrassment. Christian eyes cannot but feel shame at such a sight. Christian hearts can only be moved with pity, compassion and a desire to help to lift up the poor, to bring healing and comfort to provide shelter and clothing, food and drink. The Popes and saints of the late 20th Century consistently called the world to bring peace by a human response to the poor and needy, to share our world’s resources, to treat everyone with dignity, honour and equality.

In this Gospel parable both the poor man and the rich man come before Abraham. This is an image of judgement at the end of time. In the Creed at Mass we express our hope that one day we will – all of us – enjoy the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. But before that will be the return of Christ “to judge the living and the dead”. For some this can stir fear. For many, those who live as if God does not exist (Pope Benedict), or those so caught up in this world’s affairs that they can’t see to the horizon of this life, the prospect of death, judgement, the next life, is beyond thought or reason. Our goal is to live a good life. For us, the good life includes faith, hope and charity. Faith – our belief in God who made us, who loves us and cares for us, who wants us to share life with him in Heaven. Hope that sustains us even in dark and difficult times – hope encourages us, reminding us that we don’t battle life on our own: God is with each one of us. And charity – love for God and neighbour as Jesus teaches in the Gospel. St John says in his first letter; ‘If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother is a liar’ (1 John 4:20). And the 16th century Carmelite Saint John of the Cross famously said: “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on love”.

The history of the Church is very much a story of love for neighbour. In the early centuries, when plagues and diseases regularly struck the cities and towns of the Roman Empire, while those who could escaped, Christians both rich and poor deliberately stayed behind to bring healing and comfort and to care for the sick. The young Jesuit seminarian St Aloysius Gonzaga died of the plague that struck Rome in 1591. He contracted the plague from those he tended on the streets and in the hovels of the city. The great champion of the poor in our time was most certainly Mother Teresa.

A saint who should be better known is Bl Pier Giorgio Frassati – Pier Giorgio was born in Milan in 1901 into a well to do family. His father owned the Italian daily newspaper La Stampa. From a young age Pier Giorgio was active in social outreach, and he joined the St Vincent de Paul Society. In order to disguise his identity, the poor whom he helped, whom he visited in their homes, to whom he gave his train fare and even his warm winter coat, knew him as Bro Jerome. He died at the age of 25 from polio, contracted from those he helped. When Pope John Paul II beatified him in Rome in 1990, he proclaimed him “the man of the Beatitudes”: Blessed are the poor; Blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart”.

Christianity still has a marked influence on our society, although it can appear to be selective. We are right to defend the innocence of children and to name and shame those who set out to bring harm and destroy lives. Australians always respond generously to the Good Friday Appeal for the Royal Children’s Hospital; we turn out for fun runs in huge numbers for all sorts of causes. When Mother Teresa was presented with the Nobel Peace Prize for her work for the poor, she spoke about the destruction of life in the womb, the poor aborted before they can speak, with no one to defend them. Drug addiction is a terrible scourge but now cannabis use is legal in the ACT. And in Victoria we are notorious for our iniquitous disregard for life – abortion to term and euthanasia. This is the murky atmosphere we live in and breathe each day. Let’s be encouraged by St Paul in today’s 2nd reading:

“Dedicated to God,
Aim to be saintly and religious,
Filled with faith and love,
Patient and gentle,
Fight the good fight of the faith
And win for yourself eternal life”.