

Bishop's Reflection – 26th Sunday

God makes the same request of all his children, “Go and work in the vineyard today.” The request is made to saints and sinners alike, to those who have been ordained and those who are part of the laity: “Go and work in the vineyard today.”

There is no mistaking that we have a common mission, to believe in God's graciousness in sending the fullness of his own self into the world so that our lives may undergo transformation by knowing him. Belief is not just a matter of the head – or even heart, alone. Belief translates in lives transformed, re-directed to the mission of Christ in the world.

God's request to his children, today, applies equally to the Church itself. Like the chief priests and elders, the Church can become set in her ways and comfortable in present practices and established patterns, where people can be reduced to replaceable parts, and the true needs of each member, and the world we are called to serve, go unheard.

God's word comes like a fresh wind to our ears each day. But how ready are we in our response? Is it like the young child, engrossed in a favourite T.V. show or game, promising to tend to his or her chores, but unwilling to pull away from his or her distraction or like a young adult who attends to his or her loved one's every request, anxiously waiting to hear from him or her, lest his or her lack of constancy might jeopardize the relationship?

St. Paul begins today's segment from his letter to the Philippians with a fourfold plea, begging the fledgling Christian community to “be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind,” to “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”; for it is in this that we are truly one with God's will for us.

St. Paul goes on to describe the disposition of one who conforms their lives to Christ, not seeking one's own interest, but allowing oneself to be poured out as Christ was, even willing to take on the position of “slave”, when it is for the greater good of those who need ministry. God's word comes like a fresh wind to our ears each day in these circumstances, inviting us to “go and work in the vineyard” despite the many times we may have done so before.

Some of our parishes, ministries and ministers may have lost that initial fervour and mission. A loss compounded and exposed in the light of COVID-19. Where were we in drying the mourners' tears, comforting the sick, alleviating the worries of those whose lives were thrown into confusion, tending to those who were in need and providing a refuge for those looking for faith and hope? Where are we now as our society struggles to re-open and might be looking at a possible “second wave”? These are only some of the questions with which we grapple, as we come to terms with the Father's request to “Go and work in the vineyard today” and Jesus request to be about our Father's Will.

What might I be suggesting as we may well enter a “second wave”? Maybe it is time to get organized, to identify the vulnerable in each one of our lives, to make a checklist of two or three things we can do, from establishing an emergency fund for groceries, however modest the help may be, to identifying those who might need someone else to shop or run errands for them, from making sure we have better lines of communication with those who are more vulnerable to providing encouragement and support to those who might be losing heart or may need a listening ear.

Many people want a return to what they once had. This may not always be possible or advantageous. God's word comes like a fresh wind to our ears each day, calling us out of our lethargy and our familiar patterns of doing things. As we have seen with COVID-19, God's Call requires a re-adjustment of our lives and willingness to bring Christ's self-sacrifice to the world.

Note: Be sure to check out this week's "Family Connections" on our webpage (www.rcchurch.com) and recommend it to a friend.