

Homily 3rd Sunday in Lent (19.3.17)

The counter cultural Church & the secular mindset

Have you heard the word 'millennial?' Well apparently it can be used to describe anyone born from 1980 onwards, and who obviously would become adults in the 21st century. One reporter calls them, rather unkindly, the 'snowflake generation,' in other words thin skinned and easily offended. Another has described them as 'selfie snapping narcissists' who run in terror from any opinion not currently held by the majority. One study from the U.S.A. called unsurprisingly, 'The Millennial Study' says that this generation is secularising at a rate never seen before, so much so that younger Christians affected by this state of affairs, have drifted far from the Bible and the Church's teachings, into a 'squishy feelgood parody' of Christianity.

Now research shows that Millennials are less religious definitely, but that's not necessarily depressing, because I think there's a problem of stereotyping, and I'll come back to that. We get a sort of stereotyping in today's gospel, with the Samaritan woman at the well. John the evangelist took the teaching of Jesus and many of these sorts of events, and wove a beautiful message about mission and evangelisation. In Jesus' day the Samaritans were outcasts, and on the fringes of society, heretics, and they were despised by the orthodox Jews. When Jesus says bring your husband, he doesn't mean that literally. The woman is representing the Samaritan people, and the word for husband was the same for their pagan god - Baal. This woman / people had had five husbands / gods as a result of five foreign tribes bringing their own gods. The Samaritans took a bit of each belief and wove it into their own religion. The Samaritan woman represents for her people, and for some in our society the mix and match approach to religion that we see today. This mix and match - the squishy feelgood approach to religion is an error known as syncretism.

The Samaritan woman, presents a powerful image, both of the syncretism of her day, and the mass media political correctness of our day. You know the sort of thing - there can be no contrary views to abortion or same sex marriage and

so on. The Church's message of course continues to be counter cultural, and so is offensive to the modern world. We see in the way Jesus encounters the woman that He is able to evangelise her, and give her a powerful experience of the presence of God -

'If only you knew who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink.'

And her reply to Jesus' knowledge of her past history,

'I see you are a prophet, sir.'

The Samaritan woman became a great influence on, and an evangeliser of her own people because of her encounter with Jesus. Women and especially mothers can be tremendous missionaries and evangelisers, and have an invaluable role in converting and influencing for good, the lives of others.

Now, let's return to this typecasting of the millennial generation- there's hope, there's always hope. Look at the young families and young couples who attend Mass here, our altar servers, and our wonderful youth SVP. Last weekend at Wembley there were over 10,000 young Catholics drawn from their churches all over the country, involved in Eucharistic adoration and worship - 10,000!!! You saw it on telly didn't you?!!! Of course not! And that tells you a lot about the media, and their highly selective editing of the news. There's a thirst, a tremendous thirst among young people for an authentic living faith. They seek to encounter Christ, rather than be taught about Him, the teaching is important of course - but having really experienced the living Christ, they too can tell others - they too will be evangelisers to their generation, just like the Samaritan woman at the well.