

Homily 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (2.9.18)

Experience the real, tangible Jesus in the sacraments of the Church

When I'm driving around the parish, or whatever, I tend to listen to Radio 4, in the car. And I was coming back from a funeral last week, and one program really caught my imagination. I can't remember the title of the program. I think it was 'From Digital to Analogue', and it was all about young people, in particular, who were changing their tack about a digital world. And they interviewed at length... A lot spoke on this program about the new discovery they felt handling tangible things. So, for example, there one person was saying how they stopped playing internet games completely and started to buy board games... And he was saying, this lad, that what was wonderful about it, particularly if it was well-made, was the touch and feel, and touching and using moving pieces physically, and it drew you into being involved more than just chatting in an anonymous setup on the internet. And he said, what's more, it brings you together, and you meet real people and become friends.

Another girl said she had stopped reading her Kindle and she was now buying books, because she thought they're fantastic, you know, they are tangible, they've got texture. And she said, "And I always check the quality of the paper, and you can see, for example, from this magazine, it's cheap." And she rattled it on the radio for you to hear, but this one was really good. And she was saying it makes it a delight. She said one of the things you can do, of course, is if you've lost track, you can go back a few pages, and mark the page, but that that is so really hard to do digitally, to go back on pages.

And then the final person was talking about... I mean, they were more people speaking about these things. The thing that impressed him was about buying vinyl records. And he was saying, "You know, it's much better than streaming." He said, "I still do stream, but I prefer vinyl now, I've bought an old-fashioned stereo, and going out and getting vinyl records, because they're exciting and you have to touch them and feel them and plan what you're going to listen to.

And it makes you listen, you are not texting while you're listening to the vinyl and you can even judge where things are, where percussion is, you can see by the streams. I find it fascinating, something moving and alive."

I really listened to that program, didn't I? And you know the great thing was, for me, when I looked at the readings this week, I thought, "This is exactly what Moses was teaching." He never had digital, but it was analogue. And he was saying, of course, that, "Who is as near as the Lord our God is to us, and gives us access to him so easily?" And you see the thing about the law was it was in a beautiful book, it was transcribed, it was used in worship, and if you couldn't read, it was read regularly, the law, in the worship, and that's tactile, because it's sound and seeing somebody handle the book and all the movement and gestures, and drawing people together round a common but beautiful law of God.

Now, when we get to Jesus, Jesus isn't preaching unhygienic behaviour, it's phrased badly in the Gospel, it's not about not washing their hands at the appropriate time, it's about the customs that are built up three centuries before him by experts who had logged everything in the law and said exactly what you needed to do to fulfil it, but introducing a lot of ritual purity, that you have to wash yourself in a certain way between courses, between being in people's houses, and made it part of the religious observance, which was never in the law of Moses. And so he is saying to them, "You've absolutely ruined the analogue message of the law because you've made it something that is like lip service rather than something that you take on board as the law of God in your heart."

And even Jesus tells us to be tactile, like our faith is. Our faith is full of tactile things. Every sacrament has something in it that's touch or tangible: oil, bread, wine, rings for a wedding, and so on. That we need to touch things, we need to communicate more than just words, but by all the five senses, indeed, our church teaches that faith comes through the senses. It's an old adage that we need to be moved in our body as well as our hearts and minds. And so Jesus, in his summing up at the end, is saying part of the religion is being self-aware. And that can only come through prayer. That can only come through personal

contact with God, feeling, touching, tasting his presence. And then when you are in that situation, you look into your heart and you judge and see what you're feeling, again, not digitally, online, but analogue, in the heart. And he says,

"Look deep, where do all the evil things come from?" They come from these appetites. And he lists them all. And he's saying to us, "If you are going to be truly clean, not ritual practices, but taking onboard the very living word of God imbibed 'manually' for want of a better phrase."