

Homily 7th Sunday in Easter - Year C (2.6.19)

Thank God the bishops' got rid of that daft thing of moving the Ascension to Sunday, and putting it back where it belongs, Ascension Sunday, it doesn't work does it! Ascension Thursday, not Sunday. Now this restored Easter 7th week is about reflecting on the glory that's given to us in the Ascension.

And it's all about glory isn't it? We had Stephen seeing the glory of the appearance of the Son of Man in heaven, the Book of the Apocalypse, the glory of the consummation of the world and, in the Gospel, Jesus giving glory now to his companions. But what do we mean by glory? Most people in the world think glory means conquest, winning a war, the glory of war or some big achievement. For some people it might be a football match that may or may have not happened yesterday; The glory of winning the Champions Cup.

But Jesus' glory is something different, and it is specific. He says,

"I give them the glory now."

So it's not just pie in the sky when you die, it's about receiving glory now, and in what sense can we understand that? Well, the best way I can explain it is by talking about this in relation to my father, because I think he experienced glory before death. Because, even in World War II on the front line for four years, the glory of war, when he came out, money was so tight that at one point he had to have three jobs, and he stopped going to mass very briskly after the war. I never knew my father go to church. He stopped going to

church completely in '45, '46. But then in 1974, he was stirred in some way and returned, and he was deeply moved, the priest gave him a set of rosary beads in thanksgiving for his return. I remember him saying of his experience of return,

“I cut off my nose to spite my face.”

And the three glories I'd like to focus on that Jesus gives us I think my father had.

The first, and it doesn't sound obvious, is the glory of the cross, of bearing our burdens.

“He who takes up his cross and follows me, is my disciple.”

And my dad certainly had lots of crosses. Not just the war, but illness and other problems in life, especially money, so that by the end of his life he said to me,

“Son, I am not frightened of death” – now what a glory was that!

And the glory Jesus promises is that not only will He give us the grace to deal with these things, but it will form and shape us for glory, as it did Him. If you think of His walking around on earth, not just the cross itself, but how many obstacles and problems did He have to meet that formed and shaped the wonderful character of Jesus? So that's the first thing. It certainly formed and shaped my father.

And then I think the other thing is that we have to achieve to gain glory is a relationship with God. A formal relationship with God, that's how we have glory. And that comes through prayer. My father used to pray on his way to

work at 5 am. He said it was the most meditative time. He had to walk a long way to the bus stop, and he developed quite a substantial prayer life. He used to read the Bible at night. A working class man, he worked in a foundry, of all things. And he acquired this new found faith and relationship with God, and that is a form of glory, because sharing with God through Christ, we share the uniqueness of Christ's relationship with His Father. We link into that so that the glory that the Father gave the Son in his relationship is open to us too.

And the final thing that I think my father had is not just giving glory to God, but showing the glory of God to the world in our witness. And you know some people have it naturally in their face. Don't they? They might have faked it really well, but some people have a wonderful face that emanates sometimes a very prayerful life and you want to be in their company, because they radiate something of the goodness of God, and my dad did in time. He lived 10 years after he came back to church before he died. And I remember as a young man him saying to me, remember he worked in a foundry with 18 other men in Keighley, and he came up to me and he said,

"Son I know I swear, but I only use the B words."

He said,

"Do you think I'm sinning?"

I said

"Dad, if that's all you do, you're positively saintly."

Working with 18 rough men in a foundry, but he had an integrity, and an honesty and a devotion that shone through him in his faith. And this is what

I'm meaning by giving glory to God, and I'm sure that all the people in that foundry had a great respect for my dad because of that, and he witnessed to his faith.

And, of course yes, there is the glory of the world to come, but that's last on Jesus' list.

"Now I give them the glory now",

He says to the father, because to enter into the glory now is the pathway to the glory of the future yet to be realised.