

Homily **19th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C** (11.8.19)

I had a good sermon last night, but I've forgotten it. So I don't know what I'm going to do. Yeah. You know, when we come to the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and today centres on faith, we get ourselves in to sort of a very airy-fairy language out there and we tend to push them away from experience, and yet we see in the Gospel, for a start, Jesus always told stories. He roots His understanding in action, faith in action, with lamps lit and ready and so on. He gives a beautiful picture. But for me one of the most beautiful expressions of faith is what we listen to in the extract from the Letter to the Hebrews.

"Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen."

What a wonderful definition and incorporating the sense of hope.

You know, I used to like, but I haven't been for a long time, I used to like going to open meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. As a non-alcoholic, I've never gone as a member, but as a non-alcoholic, you can go to certain meetings but you can't participate, and that's good because you just have to listen. And I've not found any other group, greater sometimes than I've experienced in church, that has the profound understanding of faith and hope. Because they know without them they cannot gain sobriety. They've lost all faith in themselves and others have lost faith in them. And it's at that rock-bottom moment that they have to re-discover a power greater than themselves, which is named as God.

I used to love the talks as well, some of the wonderful stories that they made funny, because they had to laugh when they looked at their lives. And I remember one talk, a chap saying who stood up and said,

"You know, the difference between an alcoholic and a normal person is that when a normal person gets into a rut, they hope to get out of it and work hard to get out of that rut and build their lives afresh. When an alcoholic gets into a rut, they build extensions and live there for years."

And that's how powerful their message is. They have to see beyond what the disease did to them.

And that brings me back to this sense of faith not being out there beyond experience, but a very living thing that every human being needs, and the Alcoholics Anonymous organisation teaches us normal people that maybe we should re-look at our own faith. Because we do have to have faith, don't we? You have to have faith in other people, albeit if it's conditional on certain responses.

But imagine if you have no faith whatsoever. I mean, in the ordinary sense of having faith in another person or in your friends or your spouses or your children. There'd be no trust. There'd be no relationship. There'd be no possibility of building up anything. There'd be no community. There'd be no nation. Everything would collapse if there was no faith whatsoever on the Earth. Because faith is an essential ingredient to building strength, not just for me and the other person, but for the community.

Because once we place faith, even though we're let down sometimes, and we need to seek reconciliation or forgiveness, faith is always needed if progress is to be made in personal growth and communal growth. And this is what AA taught me, that they realise that they will stay in that rut and build extensions without faith. And Jesus says, doesn't He, there, in that Gospel,

"Happy the person who is awake when the master comes."

He puts faith very much in an alertness and active attentiveness to doing the Gospel, to being the good news in the world. And then it will come home to us that faith is not only something we need, but something we can practice in a practical and real sense.