

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [C]

Isaiah 66: 10 - 14

Galatians 6: 14 - 18

Luke 10: 1 - 12, 17 - 20

After you've heard this, you're either going to think I'm a liar or just a sanctimonious old Deacon! I don't swear - I never have. If you don't believe me, just ask my Wife.

She might tell you I snore, and have lots of other faults, but not that I swear!

On the BBC 1 The One Show the other week I heard a psychologist talking about swearing.

He said that swearing was very good for us because it was cathartic, frees us from feelings of anger or frustration, and that it's a viable substitute for physical violence.

What a lot of psychobabble, I thought!!

Swearing is just plain rude, and bad-mannered: and, you know, swearing is not an option for Christians.

But don't take my word for it, listen to what the Lord has to say: "It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth." Mt. 15: 11

And Paul, too, in the Letter to the Ephesians: "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them." Eph. 4: 29

And, as Paul says in another place: "We are Christ's ambassadors. We speak for Christ"

2 Cor. 5: 20

An ambassador should mirror perfectly the person they represent in thought, deed, and word.

Just as Jesus perfectly mirrors, and represents God because He is: "The visible image of the invisible God." Col. 1: 15

But more than being the visible image of God, He is the Word of God.

Jesus: "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jn. 1: 1 as John says right at the beginning of his Gospel.

Jesus speaks the language of God to us; and through His words He reveals to us who God is.

Words are very powerful things, particularly the word God speaks; for as He says: "[The] word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Is. 55: 11

In today's Gospel Jesus sends out 72 disciples into the highways and byways; and let's remember that they were ordinary people - ordinary Christians - just like us.

To be sent out by Christ is not just the prerogative of the 'Professional Christians,' so to speak, like the Clergy and missionaries.

Because of our Baptism into Christ, we're all called to go out, and proclaim the Good News of Jesus wherever, whenever, and however we can.

Firstly, the 72 disciples were to offer peace.

Not a vague, wishy-washy sort of peace, but the peace of Christ that's overcome the world because: "Satan, the ruler of this world." Jn. 12: 31 will be driven out when Jesus is lifted up on the Cross.

Then they are to proclaim: "The kingdom of God is very near to you." Lk. 10: 9

Not an earthly kingdom that rules us by fear, oppression, or coercion; but the presence of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus.

He who reigns as King in the hearts and minds of all men, and women who follow Him as their Lord and Saviour in His Body, the Church.

Then the 72 return to Jesus; and they're astounded by what they'd seen, and done in the name of Jesus.

They rejoiced saying: "Lord, even the devils submit to us when we use your name." Lk. 10: 17

And that takes me back to the beginning where I talked about swearing not being an option for Christians; because words are very powerful things, and reflect what we're like on the inside.

They reflect out to the world our inner life. They reflect where our heart lies. Does it rest in Christ, or elsewhere?

If you don't believe that words are very powerful things, listen to what Jesus says to those 72 disciples when they report back to Him: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." Lk. 10: 18

Not at some point back in the mists of eternity when Satan, and all his angels rebelled against God in their futile attempt to take His place.

Not that moment when Jesus is lifted up on the Cross at Calvary and, as Jesus promised: Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out.” Jn. 12: 31

No: Jesus saw Satan ‘fall like lightning’ - defeated - when the 72 use the name of Jesus to overcome evil.

There is power in the very name Jesus. The power of God.

People today - maybe more than at any time in history - need to hear the name of Jesus.

People who are our family; people who are our friends; people who live in the same street; people we work with.

The world we live in, and the prevailing culture in this country particularly, puts great pressures on us.

It demands that we’re all perfect people, with perfect relationships, perfect families, perfect homes, and perfect good looks.

However hard anyone tries to refuse to go along with that empty-hearted philosophy; the pull it exerts is sometime irresistible.

And so we end up with people who are both bruised, and battered by the world; and others whose hearts have become hardened and immune to love, and to be loved, by other people, and God.

They don’t want to hear us ‘effing and blinding,’ swearing like troopers; they need us to be heralds of Jesus Christ.

They need to hear the voice of Jesus speaking through us.

I think many Christians today, and I include myself among them, have lost that sense of urgency of being heralds of Jesus Christ as those 72 were.

We’ve lost the realisation that when non-Christians meet us it may be the one chance they have in their lives to encounter Jesus.

But to draw people to Jesus we have to rest in the peace of His Cross.

And, if we rest in that peace, people will see a real difference in our lives to theirs, and wonder why.

We may hope to do great things in our life. Some may, humanly speaking, achieve this; hence today’s cult of idolising celebrities who appear to have achieved the ‘good life.’

Most of us, however, will live, as we see it anyhow, very ordinary lives that don’t make the news or get into the photos of the paparazzi.

And, because we’re just ordinary people, it may make us think that nobody could in a million years be drawn to follow Jesus because of me.

But, because we’re followers of Christ, we already live the most extraordinary lives, so often without being conscious of it.

Our lives are extraordinary because we’ve been drawn into the heart of the Living God through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

Not that this should make us spiritually proud, but able to say along with Paul to the Galatian Christians: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Gal. 6: 14

Then we can be secure in, and sure of, our friendship with Jesus.

Then we can celebrate, along with the 72 Disciples because He says to us, as He said to them: “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Lk. 10: 20