

The readings for this 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time continue the themes of recent weeks. We hear once again from the Letter of James and Jesus perseveres in his teaching and formation of the disciples who themselves persevere in their own self-preservation and promotion.

In last Sunday's "Evangelium" we heard a superb presentation from Bishop Richard Umbers. One of the several hats worn in the Archdiocese by Bishop Richard is that of Episcopal Vicar for Evangelisation. Perhaps taking his cue from the attitude of the disciples in today's gospel, early in his presentation Bishop referred to "uber Catholics". Referencing Pope Francis, Bishop Umbers's basic point was that sometimes our attitude to other people can get in the way of our efforts to evangelise. This may be particularly true of the "New Evangelisation", that mission of the Church to preach the gospel anew to so many "non-practising" Christians and the unbaptised in the historically Christian nations. At one point, Bishop Richard said something like: I know you know chapter and verse of the Catechism of the Catholic Church - which of course is an excellent thing in itself; but Bishop added that something else is also necessary because in evangelisation we are always interacting with people; there is always an inter-personal process going on. There is always a social context to our missionary endeavours, a psycho-social process to which we also need to pay attention, if we are not to get in the way of our own missionary efforts. My excellent professor of moral theology, an American Redemptorist and one of the most competent teachers I ever had, used refer to those Catholics "who beat you about the head with the truth"!

It was interesting that the previous Sunday we had over 250 people online to hear what was also an excellent presentation from Doctors Paul, Samuel and Vy concerning the scientific and moral basis for vaccination, as against fewer than 50 for a similarly excellent presentation on the Catholic apostolate. Between vaccination, or perhaps more likely anti-vaccination, and evangelisation, we lost 200 people! We all have our blind spots in our knowledge and practise of the Catholic faith, including the apostolic and missionary endeavours to which all of us are called. As Pope Francis has taught from the beginning of his pontificate, to be a Catholic is to be a missionary and to be a Catholic parish is to be a missionary parish. Bishop Umbers had something to say about a truly Catholic style to our evangelising which we all needed to hear, including myself.

In this Sunday's gospel, which is mirrored in the first reading, the disciples, still preoccupied with their own status and power, feel threatened by those who were doing the Lord's work but were "not one of (them)". Jesus patiently tries once more to bring them back to an attitude of disinterested service of God and his Kingdom, as against self-service and their hoped for earthly kingdom via Jesus the messiah.

The Letter of James (a cousin of Jesus and the first bishop of Jerusalem) is sometimes known as the "social justice epistle". On Thursday, over one hundred members of the presbyterate of the Archdiocese of Sydney "gathered" via the ubiquitous "Zoom" for one of our regular clergy conferences. The theme of this particular conference was "Cry of the earth, cry of the poor" - the title of this year's social justice statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, itself taking its cue from the papal encyclical *Laudato si'* (concerning the care our common home).

One of the most telling comments at the conference was to the effect that we will not get traction with the new evangelisation unless our concern for the daily living and working circumstances of the lives of the people is integral to our strategies for mission and evangelisation. In today's second reading, Saint James demonstrates the passionate concern of the very first church, that of Jerusalem herself, for these matters, citing as one example the imperative of the just remuneration of workers.

In the final part of today's gospel, Jesus seems to pivot from a focus on mission to one of personal conversion. Of course the two are inseparably related: a sole focus on our own salvation, without our going out on mission, may endanger the former; while attempting mission without chronic conversion of self may endanger both!