

**“Not safe but oh so good”**

Amos 6:1a, 4–7

Psalm 146:7–10

1 Timothy 6:11–16

Luke 16:19–31

Homily for 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

C.S. Lewis' celebrated children's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, tells of the adventures of four children in the magical kingdom of Narnia. The story is fun, but it's also an allegory of Christ and salvation, with Christ represented by the lion Aslan. When in Narnia, the children meet Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. Because this is Narnia, the beaver couple can speak.

After a heartwarming-belly filling meal of fish, cheese, breads and cakes they now settle down to conversation over steaming cups of tea.

Conversation turns to Aslan, and Lucy, the youngest of the children asks:

“Is he a man?”

“Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond-the-sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – *the Lion*, the great lion.”

“ooh!” said Susan, “I'd thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn't safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.”

Here we are brought into a conversation that is best described as the language of doxology. When Mr. and Mrs. Beaver speak they make it clear that no one just glibly approaches Aslan because he is the great and majestic one. “The King I tell you”. There is an awestruck quality to the Beaver's description of the Feline Monarch's supremacy.

The Beavers' capture eloquently the theme I want to develop today. Doxology, which means right praise of God, allows us to then do theology, right thinking about God so in turn we can have a biblical anthropology and so be equipped to understand how to live in this world.

Doxology, theology and anthropology inform one another. But it is only when we know how to express biblical doxology that our theology and anthropology can be fully formed.

The word doxology is made up of two words. *Doxa*, which means “glory” and “*logos*” meaning “word. So doxology are “glory words”. The very kind of words Mr. and Mrs. Beaver speak when describing Aslan.

Such doxological language is voiced by St. Paul. Notice the similarity in content and mood with the words penned by C.S. Lewis. Here is Paul, from today’s reading:

***he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. <sup>16</sup> It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.<sup>1</sup>***

This is the language of doxology.

So let me ask you? Do you have a doxological heart? Do you thrill at thinking about Jesus, the King? Are you animated like Paul, like Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, when thinking about Jesus and his kingdom? If you are not, then begin to pray.... “Jesus give me a doxological heart so that I can come to experience you as you really are”. If you do have a heart that is doxological, pray that the Lord will expand your heart even more.

People who are able to live their lives with this doxological voice are then able to shape a theology that is coherent and centred in the person of Jesus Christ.

Theology is of course “speech about God or “God words”. Those who know Jesus, the word made flesh, will be able to formulate a biblical theology because everything they say about God is interpreted through Jesus, the one who is also the centre of their worship.

It was because Paul had such a doxological heart that he could speak with such theological clarity about God and our relationship to him.

God words – that is theological language- find expression in this part of the reading from Timothy:

***<sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius***

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (1 Ti 6:15–16). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

***Pilate made the good confession, I charge you<sup>14</sup> to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>2</sup>***

We lose something of the meaning of this in translation. Three times the word “good” is used”. “Good fight”. Timothy’s “good confession” in the presence of many witnesses. And Jesus’ “good confession” before Pontius Pilate. The Greek word is better translated “beautiful fight” and the two fold “beautiful confession”. In this world, it is a battle to keep before us the wonder and beauty of the faith but so worth it because the content is Jesus and eternal life. Nothing is more captivating and nothing more unifying than God words about Jesus.

The word confession is an interesting one in Greek. It is the word “homologia” Homo, means “the same”, and logia, is a derivative of logos, meaning “word”. To make the beautiful confession means that there is a unity and homogeneity in our theological language that is at the heart of Catholic teaching – What the Church calls the Deposit of Faith. The Deposit of Faith is the fullness of the biblical witness as it unfolds in the Bibles’ 73 books that is joined with the Great Tradition as represented in the Catechism and the magisterial teaching of the Popes. This is a confession, a *homologia* that is coherent, intelligent and beautiful.

A doxological life leads to a theologically focused and unified life which in turn allows us to better understand what it means to be human, so that we have a biblical anthropology. Such an anthropology, that is, a way of being human, is expressed in the first verse of the Timothy reading:

***But you Man of God pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.***

In the Old Testament the only people directly given the title “Man of God” are Moses, David and some of the Prophets. Here in the New Testament it is expanded to include all of us, who by reason of our baptism, are men and women of God. The preposition “of” is possessive and defines to whom the noun, man, belongs. A biblical anthropology is one where we understand we belong to God. Consequently our lives will be spent in the pursuit of understanding virtues that shape our soul and form our character.

What are virtues? The Catechism puts it succinctly:

***“A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good”***

Virtues are habits that shape how we think and live. In the virtue list from Timothy, Paul mentions three virtues that form our souls and three that form our character.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (1 Ti 6:11–14). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

Righteousness refers to our life in relation to God. We are to pursue a life where we have an increasing desire to know God. This will in turn lead to a soul that will be shaped with a deepening faith in, and love for God. As our souls are rooted in righteousness, faith and love then our characters can be formed by godliness, endurance and gentleness.

Godliness is synonymous here with piety or a life of devotion. When we have a deepening prayer life that is centred in the Mass our character will become ever more godly, because doxology and theology, the essence of piety and devotion, will become more central to our lives.

The godly person will then be one, who by God's grace, can endure the challenges and hardships of life with a trusting confidence in God. This in turn will form a character that is gentle. This is the only instance of this word in the New Testament.

This word gentle is another beautiful word that in the Greek has as its root the English word "pathos", a character trait that arouses pity or sorrow (**Prupathia**). People whose characters are gentle have had their lives forged through suffering so they in turn are able to see and respond to suffering in others.

It is this lack of pathos and gentleness that is characteristic of the attitude of the rich man in the parable for today. Even though he knew Lazarus' name, he was careless in how he related to him. There was no gentleness, no suffering with him, no pathos. His was a life centred on himself where his love of expensive clothes and luxury were the habitual vices forming his soul and character. When he dies and appeals to Abraham for relief notice the response given. He had the Law and the Prophets to look to for wisdom and guidance for how to live, but had disregarded their teaching throughout his life. He had the opportunity to shape his life with the glory of God as the prerequisite for a life well ordered. But he chose not to.

And so now in the afterlife he is judged because his was a life devoid of gentleness.

Sadly when we choose to put ourselves at the centre, our anthropology becomes self-serving.

However when we choose to put God at the centre and his praise, then we discover with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver that Jesus is not safe. But oh is he good.

To celebrate his goodness, that is doxology. A goodness he invites us to share in the beautiful confession, that is theology. A goodness reflected in how we live our lives as virtues form our souls and characters, that is anthropology

May you discover ever more the Jesus who is not safe but so good because he is the King shaping us to be a doxological, theological and anthropological people.