

Homily for February 8 2019

Friday 4th Week of Ordinary Time

‘One of my favorite stories is The Emperor's New Clothes. It is the tale about an Emperor who was swindled by a supposed tailor. The man claims to sew a new, special suit for the Emperor. It is special because only those who are wise will see the clothes, while those who are foolish will find them invisible. Not wanting to be labeled a fool, the Emperor pretends he can see the suit, pretends to put it on, and then proceeds to walk around the castle in his underwear. Not wanting to be considered fools, all his advisors and servants pretend to be able to see the clothes as well and comment on how beautiful they are. As the Emperor leads a parade through the city, his loyal subjects "ah" and "oh" over clothing they cannot see. Everyone is lying, because they are afraid to tell the truth. If they admit they see the Emperor in his underwear, they will certainly be ridiculed by all their neighbors. But, finally, one young boy exposes the deception. He blurts out that the Emperor is not wearing any clothes and his words encourage others to speak the truth as well.

King Herod ran a court of fools with himself at the head of the fool's parade. His court was a place of make believe where every decision was based on impulsive whims, with relationships inspired by too much wine and no common sense. Into Herod's court arrives John the Baptist, the only person present who is willing to speak the truth – the emperor is naked – like Adam in the Garden of Eden. Herod does everything to hide from God through a life of amusements and drunken promises that results in his committing murder. Herod character was as flakey as a teenager's shoulders dealing with a bad case of dandruff. Always changing, no constancy and reliability of character.

Now contrast Herod with Jesus, of whom the writer to the Hebrews declares is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus the true king who literally had no clothes as he was stripped naked on the Cross is the one who ultimately confronts the madness of worlds of make-believe as run by the Herods of the world. It makes all the difference to how we live our lives depending on the leaders we follow.

To follow the Herods results in people like Herodias taking vindictive revenge on holy men like John, because seductive young women can mesmerize drunken kings to completely suppress their conscience and thereby commit murder.

To follow Jesus who is constant and never vacillating in how he leads inspires others to be the kind of leaders whose lives are worthy of imitation.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Heb 13:7). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

When leaders take to heart the word of God and join it to their way of life their lives are worthy of imitation. St. Paul said to Timothy that he was to watch his life and teaching closely, meaning there is to be a correlation between what a priest teaches and how he lives. What is the fruit that ripens in communities where people celebrate the steadfastness of Jesus' presence that is then embodied tangibly in the one who is persona Christi? It will be a parish where people are living with a generous hospitality towards others, there is true compassion to those who are suffering, especially for their faith – as is mentioned by those in prison and being persecuted. Such communities will be environments where the sanctity of marriage as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman is upheld and people are supported to live out this sacramental vocation. This are communities where money is to be used in the service of life, not as the end that is to be served. That is why we are told:

⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have;

Sometimes people refer to the world outside of the Church as the real world. I would suggest it is the other way round. The worlds represented by the Herod's are parodies where people pretend that the emperor is dressed so fine..... when in fact there is no substance to the man. The Church on the other hand is that community that when we take to heart and follow the unchanging Jesus, the same yesterday, today and forever, can be inspired to live genuine and authentic lives that is the real world surrounded by other worlds of make believe.