

Homily by Canon Philip Dyson, Holy Family Parish: Sunday 31st January 2021 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Deuteronomy 18:15-20. Psalm: 94. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. Gospel: Mark 1:21-28.

You may have seen in a news item, an Imam in Leeds, teaching his congregation the importance of the vaccination for everyone's safety and protection. He was doing this because many, especially in some ethnic communities do not trust 'those in authority.' The Imam was seen by them to have the authority they would recognise.

When Jesus went into the Synagogue at Capernaum, three times in the first verses St Mark uses the word teach, teaching, taught, and with the word authority attached, which the people then take up, 'here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it.'

Teaching is also very relevant with our schools mainly closed except for essential workers children and those with special needs. The fact of home schooling has many parents saying what a struggle it is, as they are not teachers etc. Into all this we have 1 teacher, Christ Jesus.

All religions have their teachers, their guru's, their catechists. For us the bishop of the diocese, in communion with the Pope, is the first preacher/teacher of the gospel by his words and by the witness of his life.

Last Thursday was the 7th anniversary of our Bishop Mark's episcopal ordination, and the opening collect prays; "O God, eternal shepherd of the faithful, who tend your Church in countless ways, and rule over her in love, grant, we pray, that Mark, your servant, whom you have set over your people, may preside in the place of Christ over the flock whose shepherd he is, and be faithful as a teacher of doctrine, a Priest of sacred worship and as one who serves them by governing..."

Everyone needs some teaching authority. For us it is first of all Jesus, but also as he himself said, the Holy Spirit, who will teach you all things and lead you to the complete truth; thus showing us the rich source of teaching we have available to us; first and foremost in the sacred scriptures

themselves, but also in the teaching authority of the Popes, down the centuries and presently the teachings of Pope Francis. His latest, which is not an encyclical, but comes from conversations with Austen Ivereigh, called “Let us dream: The path to a better future.” **

In it Pope Francis says “to come out of this pandemic crisis better, we have to see clearly, choose well and act right.” The prologue opens: I see this time as a reckoning. I think of what Jesus tells Peter in Luke 22:31, that the devil wants him to be sifted like wheat. To enter into crisis is to be sifted. Your categories and ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities and lifestyles are challenged.

You cross a threshold, either by your own choice or by necessity, because there are crises, like the one we’re going through, that you can’t avoid.

The question is whether you’re going to come through this crisis, and if so how. The basic rule of crisis is that you don’t come out of it the same. If you get through it, you come out better or worse, but never the same. We are living in a time of trial. The Bible talks of passing through fire to describe such trials, like a kiln testing the potter’s handiwork. The fact is that we are all tested in life. It’s how we grow.

Pope Francis ends with a poem from a Cuban actor Alexis Valdes, Hope, which he says captures the path to a better future. Hope, that neglected of the Triad, faith hope, and love. Hope we all need, which have in Jesus. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight!

Canon Philip Dyson

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** Pope Francis: ‘Let Us Dream’ - the path to a better future - with Austen Ivereigh. Publisher: Simon & Schuster UK (Dec 2020)

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See: <https://www.simonandschuster.co.uk/books/Let-Us-Dream/Pope-Francis/9781398502208>