

Homily: 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B) 2021

Before I came to St Clare's – a little over four and half years ago now – I remember being slightly overwhelmed by the task in front of me. It was the first time I'd been asked to lead a parish community, and I knew that I was being asked to fill the shoes of two very committed and hard-working priests. It seemed to me that there were so many challenges ahead, and I wondered if I'd be able to handle it all. My mind was racing with all these thoughts, and in the end I got a bit exasperated with myself. So I turned to the Lord and said to Him: "Look, Lord, it's Your parish. You'll have to look after it!" Well, I have always felt that He has done. Long may it continue! I later discovered that Pope St John XXIII used to say something similar each night when he went to bed: "It's Your Church, Lord; You can look after it while I sleep." Having done his day's work, he returned to the Lord's care all that the Lord had entrusted to him.

There's something similar in today's Gospel. Last week, you may recall, we heard of Jesus sending out the Twelve in His name, instructing them to travel lightly, to proclaim the Kingdom and to cast out evil spirits. Today we hear of their return. It seems they have been very successful: they are so busy ministering to people that they barely have time even to eat, and when they cross to the other side of the lake, a large crowd hastily goes to meet them. But at this point, the Lord "*sets Himself* to teach them" – the Apostles hand back the people they have helped, and the Lord looks after them whilst the Twelve get some opportunity to rest.

But this 'handing back' is not simply about the Apostles leading the people to Jesus for Him to take over, like some sort of relay or shift work. Their whole mission has been to lead the people to Him. The mission of every Apostle, every preacher, every priest – indeed, every Christian – is to lead others to Christ. And at this point we also see the compassion and care that Jesus shows towards them. "The Apostles rejoined Jesus and told Him all that they had done and taught." I like to imagine Him patiently listening to them as they told Him of their work. Perhaps they shared with Him the things that had gone well, the successful moments, the fruitful encounters. Perhaps they also told Him of challenges and opposition. Maybe they told Him about the mistakes they had made along the way. Jesus patiently listens to it all, and then encourages them to rest after their work. The Good Shepherd leads His flock near restful waters, to revive their drooping spirits.

Obviously this speaks to me as a priest – I know that my vocation is very similar to that of the Apostles, and it helps me to know that the Lord will listen to me as I explain to Him, in prayer, all that I've done: the successes, the failures, the mistakes and the learning experiences. But actually, the same opportunity is given to us all. If you're a parent, you devote your lives to caring for your children: nurturing them, helping them, guiding them, sharing with them your faith, your knowledge, your experience. Sometimes it's exhausting. Jesus invites you to share it all with Him. Spend a few moments with Him in prayer, regularly. Tell Him of the joy your children bring you; tell Him about the challenges; share with Him the mistakes you've made and the areas where you need help. He listens! Or maybe you're not a parent, but you care for someone, or you have a lot of pressure in your

working life, or you are retired and face new joys and challenges in old age. Tell Him everything, and know that He is listening. Today's Gospel presents us with such a beautiful scene – so simple, but so beautiful – in which Jesus, the Lord of all, listens patiently to His disciples and friends.

Each evening when I say evening prayer, I think back over my day and find three things to say 'thank you' to the Lord for. It's never hard – there are always many blessings in the day. And when I say night prayer, I look back over my day and find three things to say sorry to the Lord for. Sadly, that's not difficult either: the careless word, the missed opportunity to show kindness, the uncharitable thought or moment of impatience, a lack of concentration in prayer – every day has its little failings. These moments of thanksgiving and sorrow are opportunities for me to bring to Jesus all the things that matter to me in life, and to hear His invitation to offload everything onto Him. And they also remind me of an important truth we find in today's Gospel: Jesus is interested in us. He cares about our daily lives, the ups and downs we experience. He wants us to bring it all to Him, and to find peace and rest in His presence.

Fr Andrew

