

Sermon

- ◆ **First Reading:** *Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17*
- ◆ **Second Reading:** *1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28*
- ◆ **Gospel:** *Matthew 25:31-46*

COME, YOU WHOM MY FATHER HAS BLESSED, TAKE FOR YOUR HERITAGE THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU.....FOR I WAS HUNGRY, THIRSTY, A STRANGER, NAKED, SICK, AND IN PRISON, and YOU SHOWED ME KINDNESS ; then there's the other end of the spectrum GO AWAY FROM ME WITH YOUR CURSE UPON YOU, TO THE ETERNAL FIRE PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.....

FOR I WAS HUNGRY, THIRSTY etc.....FOR YOU NEGLECTED TO SHOW KINDNESS TO ME....TRY TO IMAGINE what our world would be like if there was no kindness anywhere, we'd be at each other's throats, certainly the animal kingdom would have nothing to do with us ; animals have a lot to teach us about the ways of kindness ; I watched a nature programme on television a few years ago, a group of farmers beyond Orissa, India, sat down by the side of a river ; on the other side of the river they saw a calf stuck, couldn't come up from a steep river bank, the mother cow seemed anxious for her calf, she was on higher ground but just couldn't reach her calf. Unexpectedly an elephant family happened to be passing that way, one of the elephants saw the situation of the calf ; with its great strong trunk, the elephant leaned down and gently grasped the calf and hauled it back up to safety ; the farmers stated "YES! WE SAW THIS, ALL OF US JUST SAT THERE AND COULD HARDLY BELIEVE IT"!!! Isn't it great to see animals being kind to each other? "but" says you "It's even better to see it among humans" ; a world without kindness would be HELL ON EARTH ; During this Pandemic kindness is being shown everywhere, especially to the most vulnerable in society, great to see so many who care for their sick housebound neighbours "what can I pick up for you while in the shop?, have you enough food?, have you enough to get by?" even just to ask these simple questions is an expression of kindness ; towards the end of March this year, at the start of the Lockdown, it was announced on the news ROUGH SLEEPERS HAVE BEEN PROVIDED WITH ACCOMMODATION, a break at last for the poorest of the poor ; each of us has something kind to give away free-of-charge without counting the cost ; what do you and I give away in kindness? Do we take a risk occasionally and ask the person who seems to be always alone "Hello there!, how are things?, how are you managing during this Lockdown?" a kind word, a

listening ear costs nothing. According to this Gospel reading, It's these small acts of kindness that will get us to Heaven **I WANDERED THE STREETS ALONE and RETURNED TO AN EMPTY FLAT WITH NO ONE TO TALK TO, AND YOU GREETED ME** ; that same Gospel reading, I believe, is encouraging us to show kindness when the opportunities come our way, you(or I) may be the only person there present to extend a helping hand to the other in need. One of the more serious social problems here in the U.K. is LONELINESS! Believe it or not, it's estimated that over 9 MILLION people in this country are lonely, this takes in all categories, young, middle-aged and elderly ; imagine being in hospital with your next-of-kin thousands of miles away, so no visits!! **I WAS SICK and YOU CAME TO VISIT ME** ; though a lot of kindness is being shown these days as already mentioned but can we "see" the loneliness close by? On the issue of LONELINESS is it that we are "NOT SEEING" each other anymore, with too many of us immersed in our own little world of smartphones and ear-sets? Are we heading towards a stage of "DON'T BOTHER ME!!, I DON'T WANT TO KNOW" as in "LEAVE ME ALONE, KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, I REALLY DON'T WANT TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE nor MUCH LESS ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS.." this of course creates HELL-ON-EARTH!!, as in, people cut off from each other with no compassion, are we slowly heading towards a society of lovelessness? I hope not!, thankfully there are still so many caring wonderful people out there, the salt of the earth ; BY THE WAY, if you notice in the Gospel reading and the Last Judgement, there's no mention of religion, HE dosen't ask "WERE YOU A GOOD KIND CATHOLIC?!", nor "DID YOU OBSERVE THE SABBATH DAY and PRACTICE KINDNESS FOR THE REMAINING DAYS OF THE WEEK?" This, I believe, is something to think about! There are atheists and their kindness is exemplary ; there are devout catholics who are not exemplary with their gossip and judgemental attitudes ("...Oh! Lord, deliver us....") ; Thankfully kind people are everywhere, we can learn from their humble example ; what would you say is your kindest trait?, are you a good listener?, but first you have to be generous with your time in order to listen with the heart; or maybe you have a gift for making people feel wanted and important ; perhaps you are gentle and non-judgemental, then you'll never be short of friends **BLESSED ARE THE GENTLE, FOR THEY SHALL HAVE THE EARTH AS THEIR HERITAGE** ; or can you make people laugh? there's a saying "those who make us laugh deserve Paradise" SURELY you and I can see our "kind-spot"!!, therefore we are bound to use it for the betterment of those around us, especially for those in need ;

I'LL conclude this reflection by "handing-it-over-to-you" handing over what? that second part of the Gospel reading where the Son of Man sends the unkind to their eternal destiny **GO AWAY FROM ME, WITH YOUR CURSE UPON YOU, TO THE ETERNAL FIRE PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS** ; IF I'm not mistaken, the "eternal fire" refers to Hell ; what's your understanding of Hell? and why do souls end up there for eternity? Why do so many scoff at the existence of Hell even people of varying faiths!! "NAW!! THERE'S NO SUCH PLACE"!! Was Our Lord only JOKING when he made

references to the existence of Hell? hardly! ; someone once said to st.Padre Pio “oh! No! I don’t believe that Hell exists” to which st.Pio replied “well! when you end up there, then you’ll know all about it” ; In the catechism it clearly states “the last 4 things are DEATH, JUDGEMENT, HEAVEN AND HELL” or maybe it would be far easier and less daunting to leave it at just THE LAST 3 THINGS ARE DEATH, JUDGEMENT AND HEAVEN ; lets’s go a step further, THE LAST 2 THINGS ARE DEATH AND HEAVEN !!! would’nt that be NICE and EASY for all of us?, that’s what’s known as “watering-down-your-beliefs”, again to make it all nice n’ easy with little or no effort ; I seriously doubt if our Lord was joking when he made references to Hell ; What’s your definition of Hell?, of course you don’t want to go there, I’d say you have already chosen the thorny uphill path to Heaven, be that as it may, but when was the last time you seriously thought about or discussed with others the existence of the “Warm Place Below”?? at some stage in a future reflection I’ll share my own thoughts on the subject based on the words of Our Lord in the context of one of his parables

“....BUT THAT IS NOT ALL, BETWEEN US AND YOU A GREAT GULF HAS BEEN FIXED, TO STOP ANYONE, IF HE WANTED TO, CROSSING FROM OUR SIDE TO YOURS, AND TO STOP ANY CROSSING FROM YOUR SIDE TO OURS...” luke 16 ;26

Stay healthy.....be well.....pray for, and look out for those who are lonely, they are not far from any of us.....

Fr Kieran A. Fitzharris SVD