

## 28<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR A)

When would you hear these words: ‘you do not have to say anything. But it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.’ Most of us would only hear such words as we watch an episode of some TV crime drama for these are the words spoken by a police officer as they caution someone they are about to arrest.

The formula that has to be said in such circumstances begins by making plain the right to silence: you do not have to say anything. This has been a legal right in England since 1912. It is sometimes called the privilege against self-recrimination; the Americans have this right enshrined in their constitution and refer to it as the 5<sup>th</sup> amendment. Many other nations have a similar provision. You might think the right to remain silent applies in every situation. You’d be wrong; in England and Wales if the Serious Fraud Office is investigating you, there is no right to silence.

Another situation where we cannot really say we have a right to silence is when we stand before God. There is a tradition rooted in certain biblical texts which says at death we will stand before Jesus Christ who will want from us an account of what we’ve done with our lives. When he does and we confront the prospect of either being admitted into eternal life or condemned to hell is any of us then going to claim the right to silence? Will we not be bursting to speak up in defense of all the good we have done? To stand before God is not something to put to the back of our minds for whenever we think our time on this earth may be up.

To stand before God is something we do every day. We stand before him as we make our moral decisions, as we pledge ourselves to a particular course of action. We stand before him as God invites us again and again to recognize where he is in this world. That we fail to respond to his invitation; that we frequently seem to claim the right to silence before all that God is doing - this is the situation which this Sunday’s word of the Lord would have us consider so that we might then determine how best to reply.

In these readings from the Old Testament and the New, God’s word speaks of the loving relationship which he keeps trying to build with us. In the reading from the prophet Isaiah his word tells of a vision where God’s willingness to love us extends to preparing a ‘banquet of rich foods and fine wines.’ God is the lover who spares no effort to attract our attention. As God speaks to us in the song of the psalmist his word tells of the fidelity of God who is committed to being our shepherd, leading us to restful waters where a drooping spirit can be revived. As he speaks to us in these sacred texts God’s word made flesh, in other words Jesus, is preparing us to hear the parable he told the chief priests and elders of the people.

This is a parable, a story, of God’s bafflement. How can the invitation to the wedding be refused? Has God not proven his intentions towards humanity by sending into the world his Son? How can humanity reject him? This is what the parable seeks to address. God has pledged his love to us all in the person of Jesus Christ but still we walk away making excuses, attending to our business and claiming if you will the right to stay silent.

Jesus wanted a reaction from those to whom he first told the parable and I think he wants one from us. Jesus offers himself to us in Holy Communion and in the other sacraments of the Church. Jesus offers himself to us in the living Word of the Bible, he tries to reach us through prayer and yes through the love of others in which we catch a glimpse of the body of Christ. How do we respond? Too often we are silent before these proofs of God’s love. When did our prayer last include a litany of the people and places where we encountered the Lord? Such prayers can make us grow in recognising God’s grace and I think we need this at a time when many people are anxious about so much that is going on in the world.

This Sunday the Lord invites us to recognise through whom, with whom and in whom he is still at work. Let us not leave Mass today without giving him the start of a reply: ‘Lord, you were

there in that person. And I found you in that experience.' I can't help thinking that the legal formula for whenever an arrest is made is one which God would change, saying to us: 'I keep trying to arrest you with my love. You do not have to say anything. But with all the evidence I put before you, will you really stay silent?'