

# Homily Notes:

Guides for preaching the Word on the days when the children show us the moral courage that is so desperately needed (*All-Age Climate Protest, September 2019*)

## Sunday, September 15, 2019

**First Reading:** Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14  
**Second Reading:** 1 Timothy 1:12-17  
**Gospel Reading:** Luke 15:1-10

Word count: 650 words. (About 4.5 minutes.)

In our second reading this morning, Paul makes a most astounding claim. Paul, remember, is one of the most important figures in the history of the church. After the Gospels, most of the New Testament was written by him. He hated Jesus when he was alive. A genius expert of the Old Testament law, he was a religious fundamentalist of the most certain kind. He was literally an assassin, on a mission to kill Christians, when he was famously converted. He changed his name from Saul to Paul, and spent the rest of his life travelling around the Mediterranean telling everyone he could meet about how God really did become a man and how that man longs to be in relationship with everyone.

That remains true. Jesus wants a relationship with all of us this morning.

In our reading, Paul, this great saint of God, this hero of this church, this giant of Christianity, declares “This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

He did not come for the righteous. Such a person needs no help. He came for us, the strugglers, the compromisers, the half-hearted, and the lukewarm. He came for the scoundrels, the secret savages, and he came for *me*.

Paul is distilling the gospel here: it is not a message for those who have everything together. It is *good news* for those of us who can’t get things straight. Paul, this champion of the faith, then declares: “Of these [sinners], I am the foremost.”

My friends, I need you to know this morning that you do not need to be moral hero to take your place in this congregation. We are gathered this morning because Jesus is the hero; we are the ones who need saving. As Pope Francis says, the church is a field hospital for the walking wounded, not a gallery for pristine perfection.

The reading is taken from a letter written by Paul, to a very young man named Timothy. Paul trusted him with great authority, leaving him in charge of churches in Ephesus, a city in modern-day Turkey. He writes to encourage and instruct this bright, young man. His confession that he is no perfect saint, but a foremost sinner, is notable because it shows us there is no arrogance in Paul because he is older, wiser, more experienced.

This Friday, the young people of Ireland will show those of us who are older, wiser, and more experienced, what it looks like to take moral responsibility. The teenagers have asked that we would join them at noon on Friday to protest climate breakdown and ecological devastation.

Our first reading was from the great story of the hollow, false god that was the golden calf. Surely our hollow, false god, is the throwaway culture that mistakes prosperity for wealth and does untold damage to God's creation?

Many in the church today lament the exodus of young people over the last generations. This week, we have a chance to go seek the lost sheep that Jesus describes in the Gospel reading. They are not hiding from us. They are not in rebellion. They are planning to go out on the streets in defence of our common home. The leaders of the church have said many fine words in the last decade about how it is our calling to be careful stewards of the environment. The young have moved beyond words to action.

Paul was no arrogant man. He knew that faced with his blindness, he had to change his ways. Perhaps we have been blind to the damage we have done to the Earth? Perhaps we need to change our ways? Paul was a humble man who knew he needed God's guidance. He welcomed the leadership of Timothy, though he was young. Perhaps we need to welcome the leadership of the young and go support them?

## Friday, September 20, 2019

**First Reading:** 1 Timothy 6:2-12

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 8:1-3

Word count: 544 words. (About 3.5 minutes.)

Today's Gospel reading is not one of the famous texts that everyone learns in primary school. It would be easy to pass over it. It says that Jesus travelled from here to there, preaching his message, along with his apostles and a wider entourage.

But when you look more closely – like with life in general, so often with the Gospels, looking closely is the key to insight – you see Luke has left a remarkable message behind in this passage. Along with the twelve were some people he had healed. You recognise the first name: Mary Magdalene. The second name is one that we do not know, but since it is the wife of the equivalent of the Tánaiste, she was probably recognised wherever she went. Her name is Joanna, she was married to Chuza, who took care of the government for King Herod. We have lost any memory of who Susanna is, but maybe she was very important in the early church or the people Luke was writing for knew her.

We often hear the accusation that the New Testament is a misogynistic text and that the church is anti-woman. But throughout the books that make up the New Testament, we find this sort of passage repeated over and over. Utterly unlike any other ancient text you can read, the New Testament is constantly stopping the action or pausing the argument to share names and details about women that many would have dismissed as incidental to the main story.

The final element that Luke shares here is the most explosive. He says that along with Susanna, there were many others and they provided for Jesus and the apostles out of *their* resources. In the social context of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, this is a dynamite detail. When women were so derided that they could not even testify in court as witnesses, Jesus welcomed them as his equals, his friends, his travelling companions, and even his benefactors. Any

good journalist can tell you that where the money is, there is the power. Luke's whispered message to us needs to be heard.

Women were easily dismissed in Jesus' society. He sought them out and brought them in. There is a message there for Christians today.

I mean that literally. Today, on Friday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, we have an opportunity to seek out and bring in those who are often dismissed. Teenagers in our society are the subjects of our condescension or our scorn. We fret about them or chastise them, but we rarely listen to them. We do not let them lead us, the way that Jesus let women take the power position of being in charge of the finances. Yet today, on Friday September 20<sup>th</sup>, the young people of Ireland are leading us. They have called us to join them at noon in their *all age* climate protest. They have asked for our support as they stand up – as Pope Francis has urged us all to do – in defence of our common home, which is God's good creation.

Our first reading encouraged us to pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. This afternoon, I think we will find an opportunity to do that with the young people who are all too often left in the margins.

## Sunday, September 22, 2019

**First Reading:** Amos 8:4-7  
**Second Reading:** 1 Timothy 2:1-8  
**Gospel Reading:** Luke 16:1-13 (10-13)

Word count: 595 words. (About 4 minutes.)

Our second reading this morning is taken from the first letter that St. Paul wrote to Timothy. Paul was one of the most important leaders of the earliest church. Timothy was a very young man who, perhaps when he was still a teenager, was put in charge of parishes by Paul. This is a letter he writes to teach and instruct his young apprentice.

This week, many of us who are older here were led by the young people of Ireland. You will have seen the footage and photos from the all-age climate protest they organised around the country. The crisis of climate breakdown and ecological devastation was not made by our young people, yet they are stepping up in leadership and demanding the changes that are needed. We are much more responsible for the problem. Through their leadership, we have a chance to now contribute to the solution.

Some people might feel like conversations about topics such as climate breakdown – as important as they are – should not be addressed in homilies. This understanding of religion as a private matter, purely a question of the soul, is not authentically Catholic. We see this in the message Paul shares with Timothy: he calls for prayers for those in political leadership so that everyone would enjoy peace, tranquillity, and dignity. Our primary form of protest is prayer – we pray to God that our leaders would see the need for changes in how we treat the earth and we work to ensure quiet, devoted, tranquil, dignified lives are available to all.

The Gospel reading this morning is one of the trickiest going. Jesus tells us this story about a steward, who facing imminent unemployment, goes around to all his boss' clients and

renegotiates their contracts. It is worth reflecting on how Jesus so clearly sets up the love of money *against* the love of people. Relationships matter more than profits in the Kingdom of God. He literally closes the story with the warning that our society most desperately needs to hear: “You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

The love of wealth, greed for more and more, endless consumption – these are the habits that have driven us to the edge of environmental collapse. Our throwaway culture is not sustainable. We need to change our ways. The worst of climate breakdown has not yet hit us, but it is already killing hundreds of thousands every year in the poorest places on earth, where the rivers are drying and the seas are acidifying and the weather is growing more extreme. The first reading should chill us. The prophet Amos speaks to our age when he says: “Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land! ... The LORD has sworn ... Never will I forget a thing they have done!”

The young people are our leaders in the care for our common home. The poor of the world are already suffering. Our consumption creates their devastation. Which God do we serve? The “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all” or the lord of the markets called Mammon, who holds us all to ransom in his pursuit of more and more?

We must protest when money becomes a god. Our primary protest is prayer. “In every place,” Paul says, “the people should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.” Let’s join those prayers with the protest of our young people and make the changes that preserve God’s earth and cares for our distant neighbours.