



## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

*Whatever you refuse to do to any of these, the least of your brothers and sisters, to refuse to do unto me.*

### ***Lent 2***

#### ***Who is Jesus and why do we call God “Father”?***

We are all capable of messing up our vocations as disciples of Christ. It is incredibly difficult being faithful to Christ's expectations and witness. Surely there are times when we do not have to turn the other cheek, forgive seventy-times seven or accept everyone as being made in the image and likeness of God? Surely there are times, people and occasions when we can let these and other commands lay in abeyance? There are people who come into our presence and we just want to respond to them as if they were lepers, or the equivalent of the woman at the well, the Syrophenician woman or a tax collector like Zacchaeus. Surely we are all allowed our off days or are able to keep one or two of our brothers and sisters in the naughty corner every now and then? Sadly, the only answer I can find to this question is: no exceptions at all. The very people we might like to put on our “leper” list are the very ones Jesus expects us to forgive seventy times seven and then seventy times more.

#### ***Wounded Healers or rubbing more salt in their wounds?***

One book that had a significant impact during my years in formation prior to being ordained was by Henri Nouwen. It was called *the Wounded Healer*. More than anything else, I was attracted to the title. How does God bring good to all things, out of all things? We know the pain of being wounded by others but instead of that pain causing us to turn away, to reject the person hurting us, we must use our pain to transform *us*. We take it to the cross of Jesus, sit there at Golgotha with him, and in our pain and isolation, our anger and our self-righteousness, offer our pain and hurt that the one hurting us may be saved. That is discipleship. That is imitating Christ. Not the sugar coated “love everyone” we hear so often in pious sermons and coffee conversations after Church. This pain; all pain can be transfiguring of us when done in Christ and , the true power, transformative for the one offending.

Sadly, for many of us it is just too hard, asks too much of us and it is easier to leave the other in “rejected” box. It requires too much of us to see this other as Jesus saw the woman *caught in the very act of committing adultery*. It is easier to pick up a rock and to throw it as the sinner. The other sinner, not me. Makes us feel better and there is something quite satisfying about turning our back on that horrible sinner and digging our knives in just a little bit more.

This is now the way of the world of Social Justice Theory that dominates society today. We cannot forgive, or we say we can forgive but CANNOT FORGET with the last bit always sounding as though it is said in capital letters. Does not matter how long ago the sin was committed, it remains ever festering. And like all festering sores, it infects everyone, including, or especially the one feeling most aggrieved.

## ***Scratch away deeper than the surface and we find God***

One of the realities of Lent is that while we might be happy giving up chocolate or wine, we are not too comfortable in taking on the real areas of our lives calling us to repentance and a new beginning. Peter, James and John could not see the reality of Christ in Jesus, even though Peter did make an oral confession of faith just prior to today's Gospel. They were stuck on the surface level, could see Jesus as a man, though clearly a man from God. It would not be until the resurrection they could truly say "I believe". Even this Transfiguration did not transform them. They go down the mountain and begin to argue about who is the greatest!

To see the reality of the identity of those we meet, particularly those who are members of our own faith community, is difficult, impossible without grace. Can we see in that person, in every person – particularly in those people with whom we are in conflict of some kind – God's image and likeness shining through? Can we see in our perceived tormentors a soul for whom Jesus died on the cross, someone God loves enough to have sent his only Son to die on the cross for? Does that person have to change before we can see that and celebrate it as a reality, as a gift to us?

### ***We are the ones who need to see the true reality of "the other"***

Or, is the Transfiguration mainly about changes to our own eyes, to our own way of looking at self, the world and particularly at others? The Jesus on the top of the mountain was the same Jesus they had been walking around with down below. They lived with him, listened to him, witnessed his miracles and his holy way of life and yet could not celebrate his true identity. Why not? Like us, their eyes were clouded and they saw Jesus under their own terms, according to their own expectations and desires. Jesus did not meet those and so they fled at his arrest. The one-off event of the Transfiguring of Jesus, their meeting with Moses and Elijah and the words of God from the clouds did not change the way they lived once they left the mountain top. They were the ones needing to be transformed, to have their eyes opened.

We are filled with the graces necessary to overcome our own limitations, sins and bigotry in our dealings with others. And to be fair to all of us, most times we bring healing to others through those graces. But we can be selective in applying them. There are always some people for whom we make exceptions, in whom we are unable to see the glory of God shining. But for Jesus there were no exceptions and he reached out his healing hand to everyone who came to him. So foundational was this to his person and ministry that he died on the cross, was crucified by people he forgave with his dying breath...*Father, forgive them.*

That is the bar that has been set for us. We will fail many times, but the one reaction God simply cannot tolerate, will not forgive is the one where we do not even try to be the wounded healer of others. As God comforts us in our pain and hurt, are we not baptismally bound to pass that same comfort and forgiveness to the very people hurting us? Not exceptions. Is this not foundational for our lives as Christians, for the very existence of the Church in the middle of the world that refuses to forgive and forget? If we refuse to do this *to one of these the least of my brothers and sisters*, we fail to do it to Jesus. Is this not one of the major invitations from God this Lent?