



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone

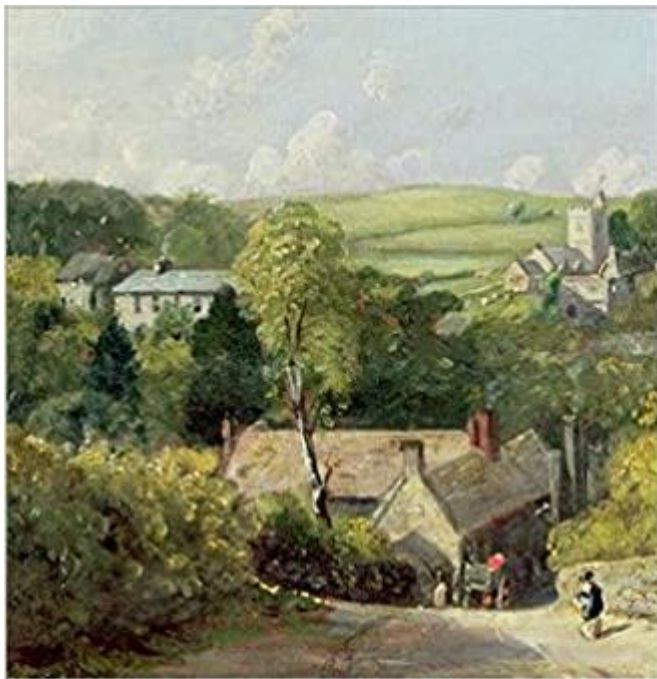


For Sunday 26 September 2021

Pentecost 18

Today we recall that the Lord wants everyone to experience life-giving love, truth and justice, and so we come to hear God's word and to worship.

Reflection for this week's Gospel



George Eliot
Scenes of Clerical Life

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

"Whoever is not against us is for us." Mark 9:40

An Illustration to set the scene

In the third of George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the parishioners of Milby are upset by the arrival of the evangelical Revd Mr Tryan as curate at the chapel-of-ease at the unfashionable end of town.

Although they don't really know what evangelicalism is, they see this enthusiastic young preacher as a threat to the vicar at the parish church, a man who has served for some fifty years

and to whose ways they have become accustomed.

Their indignation grows as the curate's preaching and pastoral visits attract more and more people to the chapel, and when he decides to ask the non-resident rector for permission to hold Sunday-evening lectures at the parish church, the town splits into two factions: those who support the curate, and those who oppose him.

His opponents are indignant because he is not one of them, but Mr Tryan proves to be a hard-working and successful clergyman who brings a religious and charitable revival to the town.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's Gospel, **the disciples are indignant** because someone else is casting out demons in Jesus' name – someone who isn't one of them.

Like the parishioners of Milby, they try to stop him, but Jesus tells them not to, pointing out that if someone is performing miracles in his name they can't then turn round and speak evil of him; **"Whoever is not against us is for us."**

In fact, Jesus goes further than that.

Not only do people not need to be part of some inner circle to do God's work in Jesus' name, it seems that they don't need to do anything especially dramatic or difficult.

The simple act of giving a disciple a cup of water to drink supports his ministry and will be rewarded.

But there is a flipside to this.

Jesus goes on to give a stark warning against anyone who puts **"a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe"** in him.

Any disciple who causes an ordinary believer to reject Jesus or stop following his way will be severely punished.

Jesus is very dramatic and describes body parts being cut off and thrown away in preference to the whole person being sent to Gehenna – **the smouldering rubbish dump outside Jerusalem that is a metaphor for hell.**

Jesus' listeners would have recognised the punishments that were meted out by the secular authorities.

A thief or forger would lose a hand (or a foot for repeated offences) and loss of an eye was the punishment for sexual misconduct.

Some scholars have pointed out that these punishments replaced execution, and so were in fact more lenient than what might have been expected.

Nonetheless, Jesus regards causing someone else to reject his message as a very serious offence. Those people may appear to be for him, but are in fact against him.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

All in all, the point here is that what you do is more important than which group you belong to. **“Whoever is not against us is for us.”**

Sadly, there have been people within the Church who have caused others to reject the Gospel and turn away from Christ.

A number of highly regarded bishops have prioritised the interests of those whom they saw as **“one of us”** over the protection of those who have suffered abuse, and some have been found guilty of abuse themselves.

Understandably, this has led victims of abuse to lose trust in the Church and sometimes, sadly, to lose faith in God as well.

Others have become disillusioned when otherwise well-intentioned church people have failed to demonstrate Christ's love to those who are "not like them", whether because of race, sexuality, social class or other difference.

Such discriminatory attitudes should have no place in the Church if we are truly to love our neighbours as ourselves.

We can ask what simple acts we can do in Jesus' name to further his kingdom and bring people closer to the God of love, truth and justice.

And we can appreciate and support the good work done by members of other denominations, other faiths or secular groups – and give thanks for all they do to demonstrate love and care to those around them.

"Whoever is not against us is for us." Mark 9:40

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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