



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

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



For Sunday 3 October 2021

Pentecost 19

We are in the presence of the living God, the one who has spoken and who still speaks, so come, let us worship and listen for that voice.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." *Mark 10:16*



An Illustration to set the scene

The nineteenth-century French priest John Vianney, **known as the Curé d'Ars**, was a **simple yet profound man** known for his pastoral work and simple prayer.

He was illiterate when he began the journey to ordination but knew his prayers by heart.

Once someone came into church and found him just sitting with the Blessed Sacrament, apparently doing nothing.

"What are you doing all day?" the person asked, puzzled. **"Nothing; I just look at him and he looks at me,"** the priest replied.

His ability to align himself with the God who looked at him as he sat silently is what gave him the pastoral heart for which he is known.

He is the patron saint of priests because of this deep friendship with God and his care for his community.

That friendship is a call to all who want to deepen their faith and life.

You don't have to be ordained to simply look at God and be looked at in return.

You don't have to be in a church.

Some of us find being outside in nature, or in the presence of beauty, a place for that intimacy with God that John Vianney experienced.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

To talk about intimacy and then to hear the hard words about divorce in today's Gospel could tempt us to judge the lives of other people or ourselves harshly.

So first a word of warning about the status of women and men in first-century Palestine.

A man could easily divorce his wife under Jewish Law, but she didn't have the same rights.

A divorced woman had no legal protection and would struggle to survive without a father, husband, son or brother to protect her.

The creation story, where God gives the man a fitting partner, is broken.

Nowadays we may say that the loss of intimacy, whether physical, emotional or both, rather than the breaking of a contract is the sad part, and understand that the loss takes place long before the legal separation.

In our reading from Genesis, God says of the first human that it's not good for the man to be alone. That aloneness is solved by God creating one who is his equal, bone of his bone.

So let's not turn to criticising those who find themselves divorced but look instead at the purpose of that togetherness.

The next part of today's Gospel brings it into sharp relief – it's about **being blessed and part of the kingdom of God.**

Jesus doesn't condemn;

he takes the most insignificant person, a street child, blesses it and in so doing adopts it into his family.

Of course the end of a relationship is to be mourned, but here is blessing for all, even the least.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The one at whom John Vianney looked and who looked at him is the same as the one who saw that the first human needed a partner.

In Jesus' action of blessing the child, probably the offspring of the master of the house and a female slave, we can see that **all are wanted by God for relationship.**

So what do **we** do with all that?

There are three aspects:

- (1) **our intimate relationship with God**, who longs to look and be looked at with the eyes of love;
- (2) **our relationship with those with whom we are close**, which needs honesty if we are to live joyful and fulfilled lives;
- (3) and **our relationship with those around**, whom we could so easily judge harshly as unworthy, but who attract Jesus' blessing and need ours.

It's true that **if you give up judging and start blessing, you will find yourself changed.**

That change can bring us all to the simple place of John Vianney, where our life in the community to which we belong **will change and become fruitful**, *not just for others but for us*, too.

If we give up telling bad stories about others and notice what is good and lovely about them, then, like the child that Jesus drew to him, we, and they, will be truly blessed.

“And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.” *Mark 10:16*

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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