

Donnybrook

24 March 2022

Welcome

Last night we have a quite wonderful gathering in the parish centre, as part of the synodal pathway. It was a larger, more diverse gathering, with a surprising presence of students from UCD.

Topic

As in our readings today there is opposition – both to Jeremiah and to Jesus. There is also option to the synodality. It all depends on how we deal with opposition.

Steps

There are some in the church who are totally opposed to the synodal approach initiated by Pope Francis. Such opposition can be highly principled, so we need to listen. At the same time, such opposition forces us to deepen our understanding of and commitment to the future way of being church.

Last night's was a listening session and we were invited to say our piece and then simply to listen to others, without comment. There is a discipline and a respect involved in that. Of course, varieties of views emerged and there was what we may gently call contrasts. What matters is how we deal with such contrasts.

I came across an account of a Methodist church in the US which was beginning to reflect on having Eucharist every Sunday, something not typical in the past. There seemed to be sufficient support and a parishioner suggested voting on the matter. The pastor stood up and said, quite strongly, there will be no vote. We will continue to talk until we can move forward together. Then we can confirm our discernment with a vote.

Conclusion

This is the hope enshrined in the synodal pathway. Of course, there are differences. Of course, there are warmly held contrasting opinions. But by choosing to listen, with respect and even with love, we may move forward together.

Welcome

The Gospel just read still has the power to shock. People did recognise that Jesus performed extraordinary deeds. Naturally for those who do not accept him, it must have another explanation: he is an agent of evil.

Topic

Such a perverse reaction gives rise to various reflections.

Steps

First of all, there is a back-handed acknowledgement that Jesus did indeed perform wonderful healings in his life-time. Even the enemies can't deny this. The obvious explanation is unacceptable to them and so they seek another. Their "explanation" is perverse and shows the level of resistance to the work of God. But the fact remains that Jesus healed people.

Secondly, the wonders in the Gospel are never simply about x being cured or y being set free. That is wonderful in itself but there is more. Instead, the healings point beyond themselves to the coming Kingdom of God. They are symbols of God's salvation, extended to everyone, then and now. In this present moment, God wants us all to be fully alive and he wants us all to be fully free. As Irenaeus of Lyons put it eighteen centuries ago: the glory of God is the human being fully alive. And as Jesus himself says in John's gospel: I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Thirdly, the biggest threat to being alive and to being fully alive is death. If death is really the end, if our personal extinction is indeed the last word, then the value of being alive in the first place is radically altered. But, in the word of St Paul,

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Conclusion

St Paul also writes succinctly in Galatians: for freedom Christ has set us free. We are free from the power of death and from the fear of death. We are also free for: free to love, to serve, to give ourselves without counting the cost.