

## Reflection for Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021

John 17; 6-19

### In the world while not of the world

Not of the world – that sounds strange when we consider that it is the only place we must live. And yet it is true, or at least *it should be true*. In the Gospel of John “the world” is that which goes against the Kingdom. Once we understand this, the meaning is quite clear. We are not of “the world”, or better said – we should not be of “the world” because we should be children of the Kingdom. To make this easier to grasp (in the written version at least) when I refer to this distinction “the world” will be in quotations.

The readings over the past few weeks have come from the Gospel of John and taken from the section of chapters 13 to 17, which in the Gospel is that final time Jesus has with the disciples, in the other Gospels this would be the Last Supper, but as we have seen in John it is the time of the washing of feet and the important teaching about love. This final chapter of that section, is a long prayer that Jesus prays before been taken to judgement and death and resurrection; in this prayer Jesus refers to:

- The disciples (those you have given me)
- The people the disciples will reach (those who will believe through their word)
- The world

As we see, Jesus begins with the inner and smaller circle and widens out to include the whole world, and this is what we will see at and after Pentecost. And while Jesus prays that we may not be of the world, he does remind us even now that we are ***IN*** the world. And this is the struggle believers have had to face up to since the very beginning: ***in the world, not of the world***.

Not of the world, but certainly in the world is not an easy place to be, that is why Jesus asks God:

- that they may be protected (vss 11,12,15),
- that the evil one may not take over (vs 15)
- that they may be one as we are one (vs 11)

This is a clear prayer and a clear message. Jesus knows the way ahead will be tough and knows they will need all the help they can get: The disciples will suffer hostility, persecution, violence for being disciples of Christ. Another reminder that the Spirit of Pentecost will be THAT help, it will give them words to affirm the priorities of the Kingdom. Being a faithful disciple is being part of the minority, and in lots of places even today that is the case, a dangerous case.

Over the past times we have seen how minorities have suffered and continue to suffer; where the powerful exercise their power in a destructive way against those that they see as different, Jesus experienced this first-hand, and today this opposition comes in different forms: be it race, gender, religion, economic situation, sexual orientation, ideology, age...when they are seen as a threat and are minority, there is suffering. So often using religion as an excuse for the exercise of that power.

In this prayer Jesus also refers to those who have “kept the word received” (vss 6,8,14). That faithfulness has also brought on opposition: “the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world”. It is the tension between “the world” and the Kingdom. But always in the world. We must be careful; we must discern (one of the gifts of the Spirit) because Christians and/or the Church have too often followed “the world” instead of the Kingdom as the way. We should always be ready to come back to today’s reading to keep alert and not fall into the trap set by “the world”, where it seems we are doing what is right, but we can be going against the values of the Kingdom. The reading asks the big question: What does God require of us? As humans we already know: Do justice, love compassionately, walk in God’s path.

Throughout history the divide between the Kingdom and “the world” is not that clear, so what happens? What happens when those who are not Christian live more like Christians than Christians? What happens when those in power and control of the systems of this world call themselves Christian, and yet keep the poor poorer and the rich richer? What happens when people who identify as Christian are responsible for extermination and destruction of others who also identify as Christians?

This has happened, and this continues to happen. I know this from the dictatorships in Argentina or in Latin America over the years; it happened during World War II, it happened recently in the United States of America. And I am sure you can think of other cases as well. When this happens, who is “the world” then?

Bear in mind that today is the close of *Christian Aid Week* and much of the help needed will be going to parts of the world where there is pain, brokenness, destruction, and our calling is to “be the Church, to celebrate God’s presence, to live with respect in Creation, love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil” and we do this *IN* the world, but not being “the world”. The questions keep coming, and this simply reminds us that reality is never “yes/no”, life happens in the in-between reality, where we live and must make our choices. It is in a reality such as this that the words Jesus prays become so compelling – “*I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one*” (vs 15).

Therefore, ***being in the world but not of the world is vital***. We must discern which are the values of the kingdom, considering that not everyone who says “Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father”. When we become children of the Spirit we will be led by the Spirit, speak the words of the Spirit, and do the will of the Spirit, that is what will be considered next week on Pentecost. May that truth of God be our truth. Amen