

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(Wisdom 2:12.17-20 / Mark 9:30-37)  
19.09.2021  
*Knowledge*

Today our Gospel reading is taken from chapter 9 of St Mark's Gospel. This is a tough chapter for the disciples. At the beginning they are terrified by Jesus' Transfiguration (v. 6), next they do not understand what he means when he speaks about his resurrection (v. 10), then they fail to cast out demons (v. 28) and finally a few minutes ago we heard that, once again, they do not understand what Jesus is saying, they are afraid to ask him for explanations and, to crown the whole thing out, they are caught arguing between themselves about who is going to be the first.

All this is quite reassuring for us. We can be followers of Christ, live close to him, and sometimes not understand everything he says or does. We are reminded that, in the school of the Lord's service, we are all slow learners. There are many areas of our lives whose meaning is quite obscure and which will remain a mystery for us until the day when, on the other side, we will see all things from God's perspective.

So the drama is not that we do not understand everything, the drama is that we stop asking questions. The disciples commit this big mistake in our Gospel reading. We see this when we are told that, because they did not understand what Jesus said, they were afraid to ask him.

To stop asking is to stop desiring and to stop desiring is to stop loving.

The challenge for us is to be honest enough to acknowledge that we know only a little about the Lord and to be humble enough to ask questions in order to know and love him more.

The problem is when we think that we know everything, that the point we have reached in our spiritual journey, in our knowledge of the Scriptures, in our relationship with the Lord is fulfilling and satisfying.

Pride, laziness and complacency can lead us to settle into a kind of comfortable and cosy form of Christianity.

But there is another aspect to the problem: knowledge empowers and so, there was always the temptation for few to prevent many from having access to knowledge. This happened with the lawyers in Jesus' time: "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering." (Lk 11:52) Unfortunately, in the Church, over the centuries, this situation of abuse of power has been perpetuated.

The reality is that the Church is not made up of two categories of people: those who teach with authority and those who listen passively. In the Body of Christ, we are all supposed to listen to one another and to learn from one another. Bishops, priests, lay people and consecrated men and women, we all have different skills and different life experiences, we do not have the same mission but we need one other in order to grow in faith, we are called to help one another to better understand and discern the promptings of the Spirit within and around us.

In 2010, in his *Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland*, addressing the bishops, Benedict XVI wrote: "See that the lay faithful are formed in such a way that they can offer an articulate and convincing account of the Gospel in the midst of modern society (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) and cooperate more fully in the Church's life and mission. This in turn will help you

once again become credible leaders and witnesses to the redeeming truth of Christ.” (n. 11, 19.03.2010)

The two important points made here are, first, the formation of the laity, and second, the fact that the bishops become credible leaders when lay people are properly educated in their faith.

This explains why Jesus’ words are so important: “If anyone wants to be the first he must make himself last of all and servant of all.” To serve in the Church means to give life, to foster and empower people. Jeremiah and Ezekiel have hard words to speak against the bad shepherds who do not take care of the flock (cf. Jr 23, Ez 34).

While it is clear that bishops have been entrusted with the particular responsibility of teaching the faith, it must be clear that we all have been confided the mission to help one another grow in faith. When we neglect or refuse to provide for the emotional, spiritual or intellectual needs of our brothers and sisters, we are bad shepherds of God’s people. When lay people and ordained ministers are not fed adequately, all become weak and are unable to present their defence to anyone who demands an account of the hope that is in them (cf. 1 P 3:15).

The National Synod of the Catholic Church in Ireland is a God-given opportunity for us to check and correct what is lacking at the moment in the formation all the members of the Church. The listening process the Synod entails should help us to learn from one another and to grow in our ability to dialogue with all in a mature and informed way. It is a time for us to create a space where, like the disciples, we can acknowledge that we do not understand everything, where we can ask questions and search together for answers, so that we may all “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 P 3:18).

May we not be cynical about the Synod. It will be what we bring into it. So let us commit ourselves to pray for it, to take part in it so that our Church and each one of us may become true servants of the Gospel for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.