

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Deuteronomy 30:10-14 / Luke 10:25-37)
10.07.2022
Christ in your heart and in your mouth

“The word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.”

I am not sure that Abraham was fully aware of the prophetic content of his words. They are powerful words which found their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. For us, the word is Christ and, as promised, Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (cf. Eph 3:17).

By dwelling within all men and women Jesus has imprinted upon humans his own features. Our Gospel reading today reminds us that, first and foremost, Christ should be recognised in the poor, those who are wounded, persecuted and rejected. Moreover the parable of the good Samaritan makes clear that Christ comes to us as the one who challenges our narrow religious, ethnic and political convictions and boundaries.

If Christ is alive in our hearts, we can look at all men and women, and indeed at all things, from Christ's perspective. We can say with St Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20) and we can relate to others with the conviction that “Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:11).

Because our inner eyes are often obscured by our wounds and fears, they become unfocused and unable to recognise Christ in others. Because of our sins and our poverty our hearts can be a bit muddy and somewhat stingy and so unable to welcome Christ.

So it is clear that to relate to all people as Christ does not come spontaneously to us. It is the fruit of a radical conversion within us. A real change of heart. It requires of us an act of faith, it demands the courage to open ourselves to Christ who is always coming to us in challenging and surprising ways.

It should be clear to us that when we say that “Christ is in our heart”, we are not thinking first of all of warm and nice feelings. That is not what the heart is about for the biblical authors.

For them the heart is not only the place of our affectivity, but also, and maybe principally, the place of our freedom: the place where we make decisions and act in accord with our deepest identity as children of God.

The fact that Christ is also in our mouth leads us to consider another aspect of our human nature and of our being in Christ, or, better, Christ being in us: our responsibility when it comes to our use of speech. What we say and the way we say it matter. Words are not neutral, so we must ask ourselves whether or not we can say in truth, like Job: “My words are from the uprightness of my heart” (33:3)?

As a community, every morning, we begin our first time of public prayer by making the sign of the Cross on our lips and singing the words: “O Lord open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise” (Ps 51:15). And all of us, during Mass, before the proclamation of the Gospel, we make the sign of the Cross on our forehead, our lips and our breast. Do these gestures really mean something to us or are they just empty gestures, carried out in a mechanical way? Are our words and deeds marked by the sign of the Cross?

It seems to me that the way we treat migrants, in the United Kingdom or in the United States, where so many people claim to be Christians, does not proclaim God's praise. In Northern Ireland, when we consider the refusal of elected representatives to make the

institutions work, we can ask ourselves how it is possible for so many to be Christians and so few to care for the common good.

Last week in our shop, while the number of Covid cases was spiking, a person explained to me that masks and vaccines are useless against the virus and that faith in God is enough as a form of protection. Again let me share with you my puzzlement and ask: how is it possible to be a Catholic and to speak and behave in ways that are selfish and self-referential, ways which do not respect the basic good of others?

All of us, as persons and as countries, can allow our intelligence, our decisions and our speech, to be clouded by pride, self-centredness and lack of consideration for the good of others. Yet all of us know very well that pride, self-centredness and lack of consideration for others are hindrances to our becoming Christlike, obstacles to our personal growth in humanity and the well-being of our countries.

If we want our personal lives and the future of our countries bear “the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23), there is no other way for us than to proclaim Christ by deeds and words of love, from our hearts and from our lips.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is clear about the fact that life is ours only if we love, only when we love, love God and our neighbours as ourselves. May this celebration be an occasion for Christ to find a home in our hearts, for Christ to be upon our lips so that we may be seeds of love in the world.

Pope Francis reminds us that “all of us, as believers, need to recognize that love takes first place: love must never be put at risk, and the greatest danger lies in failing to love.” (*Fratelli...* n. 92)