

Homily – Thursday 16th August 2018
On Forgiveness

Ezekiel 12 1-12

Matthew 18 21 – 19 1:

When I speak with some of our street community I quite often find a humility, a self-awareness of their failings and weaknesses – as a consequence they will often ask me to pray for them and bless them. As I do they are hugely appreciative. Even a smile and a ‘good morning, how are you?’ is warmly received. There are others of course, who are on benefits and who beg money every day (often not local people) and who make a lot of money preying on the compassion of kind and sensitive people. These people not only reveal a brashness but show no awareness of their sin – no humility.

One of the tragic cases in the news is that of Peter Ball who so sadly continues to deny many of his offences despite the overwhelming evidence now in the public domain. I knew him as one of the highly esteemed retired clergy with PTO who served in the area team ministry for which I was responsible as Team rector. I knew, at that time, of only one case regarding a 19 year old which he eventually admitted when I challenged him but his general response was that he had been unjustly accused by someone who had it in for him.

The shocking thing for me and many others I know, is that now the evidence of many of his underage offences is overwhelming, he still denies their reality.

The tragedy is the level of self-deception that seems impenetrable. It’s as though he has become blind and deaf to truth with the consequences of having become self-righteous. This was the unforgiveable sin of the Pharisees, a total lack of self-awareness. They had become, in his day, blind and deaf guides, those who had eyes but did not see and those who had ears but did not hear.

This is the tragic end of rebellion with its consequent self-righteous attitude. It’s end is shame and destruction.

In the prophet Ezekiel’s day – the House of Israel had become like this – rebellious and hard hearted – self-deceived and similarly in the days of Jesus – especially amongst the religious leaders of the day.

So God judges them, finding them guilty and because they have hardened their hearts to the prophet who warned them over and over again – they are conquered by the Babylonians and taken into exile – to the very place which their ancestor Abraham had left more than a 1,000 years before. 70 years in captivity – a whole lifetime for some, most would never see their homes or homeland again.

Similarly, in the days of Jesus, the calls for acknowledgement of their sins and repentance was largely ignored by the religious and civic leaders, until the word telling of the prophet John the Baptist and Jesus, ie those who highlighted their hardness of heart - their blindness and deafness to truth. The end result, the destruction of the temple with all its rites and practices and the ultimate dispersion of the people - in exile until God’s time of return.

The real sadness is not that people sin, we all do but that some choose denial of their sin as their truth – they become self-deceived, believing themselves to be righteous – self-righteous and seek to punish the prophets who speak truth to them.

This is the main point I see in the parable told by Jesus in our Gospel Reading today the total lack of self-awareness of the slave. He had no humility despite his manifest sin and the mercy shown to him by his lord and master. And because he did not own his own sin – he showed no mercy to his debtor.

The point is this; Forgiveness of others is motivated by the awareness of one's own sin – which causes a humility - the opposite of self-righteousness. We forgive others and are patient with others failings and wrong doings because we are acutely aware of our own sin and of God's mercy towards us over and over again.

To be saved from our sins we have to own them, confess them and change our ways.

And knowing in our hearts that God so loves us that He is far more ready to forgive than we are ready to acknowledge our sins, liberates us to face the truth of our sins which in him leads to a humble and merciful heart which bears with others who fail and forgives them in turn.