

A REFLECTION ON THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL - Mark 9: 38-42; 45; 47-48

There are some programmes on LBC that I quite enjoy, some that I don't. LBC started life as the London Broadcasting Company but in the time-honoured tradition of reducing everything to a three word catchphrase, now refers to itself as 'Leading Britain's Conversation'. Essentially it's an all-day series of phone-ins with listeners benefitting from some crackpots as well as people with perceptive insights – but, Hey!, what do I know? One man's crackpot is another's epidemiologist, or something like that. All of Thursday's programmes seemed to deal with the murder of Sabina Nessa, the 24 year old teacher murdered whilst on a five minute walk from her home to a pub to meet her friend. People were shocked and everyone had an opinion as to what was needed to prevent such murders in the future. During one of the 'phone-ins, a mother called to say that some time back she had taken her two, very young children to one side, to tell them that there were a lot of evil people in the world and that they (the Children) must be on their guard, always, and trust no-one.

The call left me feeling very sad, and asking myself: 'Is this what we have become?' Perhaps we are suffering the direct consequence of the commoditisation of women and sex. Perhaps we have turned a blind eye to the proliferation of internet pornography and are now impervious to the argument that says: I'm not harming anyone else. I know that there is a lot of goodness in the world, goodness that will always counteract the presence of evil: but the battle is never won. Like a damp stain on a ceiling, we grow accustomed to the presence of evil as well as of bad people, and begin to ignore them and the stain. Then one day the stain catches our attention once more. We notice how much bigger it is – and before we know what is happening, the ceiling collapses all around us. (I know from painful, personal experience, that damp stains on a ceiling should NEVER EVER be ignored!!)

This weekend's Gospel sees Jesus urging his followers, to make sure that they do not cause others to lose their way in life. He is warning them against giving scandal, if you like. *Anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck.* Recognising that evil exists, that bad people are in our midst, it is not enough merely to avoid them – we must actively confront their evil and their malignant behaviour. We neglect this aspect of this weekend's message at our peril. It's not just enough to make sure that we don't cause anyone else to 'sin', we must actively make sure that His voice is heard above the clamour of those who are bad for us, and bad for others. In other words, we avoid occasions of omission with the same energy we apply to the avoidance of commission. Jesus gives us list of what would be a better fate than acting or failing to act. It makes for uncomfortable reading with its talk of cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye. His message is stark, and we do well to take it to heart.

At the tender age of 68 and three months, I still love The Beatles. I play their music continuously, much to the annoyance of others! In 1967 as a fourteen-year-old I was blown away by these lyrics:

*We were talking about the space between us all, And the people who hide themselves behind a wall of illusion, Never glimpse the truth, Then it's far too late when they pass away
We were talking about the love we all could share; When we find it, to try our best to hold it there, with our love, With our love, we could save the world, if they only knew.*

Try to realise it's all within yourself, No one else can make you change. And to see you're really only very small, and life flows on within you and without you.

*When you've seen beyond yourself then you may find Peace of mind is waiting there
And the time will come when you see we're all one, and life flows on within you and without you.*

The words are by George Harrison and my claim to fame is that his cousin receives this weekly offering! We each have the power within us to make a difference – that is why Jesus believes in us just as much as we believe in Him and why together we will achieve great things.

(The author of these reflections is a friend of Fr Jock living in Northumberland)