

Reflection for Sunday 27th September 2020

One phrase that has always stuck in my mind is this one: *when all is said and done, more is said than done*. I believe it is attributed to the Greek author Aesop, but you might be able to fill in the gaps in my knowledge. When I ask myself what I have said and not done, I can see the gap between my good intentions and then what happens. I think though it is always important to hang on to the good intentions and try to improve on the follow through. We all know that life is full of unexpected and urgent events that can upturn the plans we have made for the day ahead. There are other difficulties we encounter when we try and follow through on our intentions. Writing in *The Times* this week, Daniel Finkelstein remembering when he was in San Francisco and often getting lost, he nearly always turned downhill rather than up, he wrote *I've since noticed this bias in others, too. I call it the San Francisco Error. When you can't be sure what the right answer is, you're more likely to think things are easier than they look than harder than they look.*¹ It is not always straightforward to carry out those things we wish to do as there are unexpected events, unanticipated difficulties and other problems. But intentions are important.

In the readings we have for the Mass this weekend, it is our direction of travel that is key. Our first reading from the prophet Ezekiel highlights this issue, encouraging those who are good not to turn aside to the bad and rejoicing when travel is in the other direction. It seems from this text that travel can be in both directions, so there is an encouragement to perseverance – to keep going on the right track, despite difficulties. The beautiful second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians puts before us the goal of having the mind of Christ, so that *every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. We are not without help on our journey. We have one another for support, especially in prayer, in running the church, friendship and in practical ways. Jesus tells us that *I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.*² We could even bring in Aesop again *No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted*. Even if we are initially resistant, for whatever reason, we can always think better of it and go into the vineyard and carry on our good direction of travel.

So, we do face difficulties and obstacles, such as unexpected events and the San Francisco error. We also face temptations to change our direction of travel and we can resist the good, putting on a different mind to the mind of Christ, who tells us *to love one another as I have loved you.*³ In the Gospel Jesus highlights the obstacle that he faces and St. John the Baptist battled against. Those in religious leadership of their time who did not respond to either of them, that is to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and his prophet John the Baptist. They paid lip service, saying yes, yes but really in their hearts it was no, no. It can be a danger in our own time too. Pope Francis says that pastoral workers can fall into a temptation, he calls it a practical relativism: *This practical relativism consists in acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, setting goals as if others did not exist, working as if people who have not received the Gospel did not exist.*⁴ So as we return from the Summer break it's a good time to think about the image of going to work in the vineyard of the Lord, even if the weeks ahead may seem a little daunting. It doesn't mean breaking the Covid-19 regulations or forgetting to be careful. But perhaps, as we do what we can, we do it thinking with the mind of Christ and knowing he is always with us to help us. God bless you, Canon David

¹ Johnson has undercooked his virus plan, Daniel Finkelstein, *The Times*, 23rd September 2020, p. 25

² Matthew 25: 40

³ John 15:12

⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 80