

Readings:

Wisdom 1.16-2.1, 12-22

Psalm 54

James 3.13-4.3,7-8a

Mark 9,30-37

Andrea Bianchi

This morning I want to begin by talking about glasses. Not all of us here will know how it feels to wear standard plain eye-glasses so that we may see better. If we look around the church we see a mixed group of those who wear glasses and those who don't. There are different types of glasses and different frames. Since the invention of contact lenses, there are as well the "hidden" glass wearers. Most likely there are more of us who know how it feels to see differently with glasses than meets the eye. Through glasses we see more sharply, or things and people more closely, or we are able to read with glasses more easily, and much more of course.

We see or at least we should see better with the help of glasses. I am pretty sure most of us will have tried out sunglasses. They do not enhance our sight in the same way as say reading glasses, but we can see better with them on when the sun is really strong. In both cases we can say that, whether we are wearing normal glasses or sunglasses the world and the things and the people around us do not look the same when we are wearing them. The look of things changes.

Looking now to today's gospel we see how Jesus' apostles, given my word picture above, are given different glasses to look through. This was not the first time. The portion of the gospel we just heard comes from more or less the middle of Mark's gospel. The apostles have already been given enough time in Mark's gospel to get to know Jesus. They had already seen many miracles and

signs. Some of them were present at the Transfiguration of our Lord. Jesus had already told them he would be put to death and be raised from the dead.

In today's gospel Jesus again foretells his resurrection. He gives the apostles the chance to look at him and his work in a new way, a different way. He gives them God's glasses with which to see, so to speak. There is God's project of manifesting his love to the world, his sacrifice and his restoration of all things through Jesus' death and resurrection. But the apostles do not yet understand. Glasses or not, they do not see.

Not long before this passage, we read of Peter's reaction to Jesus announcing his death and resurrection. On that occasion Peter rebukes Jesus for telling them about his death. We can imagine that Peter felt that he was responsible for ensuring Jesus' public image much like a modern day public relations officer in a corporation. Jesus, Peter thinks, should become a better communicator and definitely make a better sell of what he has to offer.

Everyone was waiting for a messiah to finally defeat the Romans single-handedly. The apostles having seen the signs and miracles were starting to believe that Jesus was the promised one, the Messiah. The idea of Jesus' death was anathema to them. It didn't fit their way of seeing things. It didn't fit with their minds and their spirits. Instead of looking through God's glasses, they chose to ignore these and preferred to make preparations for when the Messiah would finally defeat the Romans. It is arguably for this reason that the apostles are discussing who is the greatest.

We know from history that there was no point in starting a war against the Romans. Firstly, the Romans were much stronger than the Jews. Some 40 years after Jesus' death the Jews did start an armed revolt, which was initially successful, but was brutally terminated by the Romans in the end. The Romans

destroyed the Jerusalem temple, and Jewish identity suffered a great loss, because of war dead and the injured but also because they were scattered across their empire and thereby lost their land.

Secondly, even a military victory has of course no relation at all with the kingdom of God. With the glasses of God on, the role of the Messiah is markedly different from what the apostles thought it was. Jesus through teaching and example showed them it was not about pride or power, but rather greatness in and through service. The Messiah comes to serve the world. And the apostles too, as a church, should, by following his example, become great in serving the world. Jesus was not telling the disciples to be “ok” servants, to do a “sufficient” or “adequate” job. The idea of becoming “great”, of being first, remains, but now through Christ it is to be great in service.

Returning to the image of the glasses, the apostles saw, looking through their own glasses, how things would be better for them if they went the way of war, revolt, pride, and power. In contrast Jesus proposed peace made real through humble service. Even more, Jesus tells the apostles that in serving one little child they are serving God. It is not a service of power, of people who count. It is not service which is at the service of the world. Again with God’s glasses on it is a service to the small ones of this world. Figuratively speaking, it is a service to all those who are simply not sufficient in and unto themselves. It is service to all those who are in need.

These are of course the poor, the sick, the vulnerable, the refugee, but it can be each one of us. We can make a start by living out God’s calling to his Church, to be a church of service, by actually starting here and now with the people and the realities around us. There is a growing awareness as the world shrinks through technology that we are all inter-connected and inter-dependent. We can live out

a call to be first, to strive for a prize in Paul's words, but it has to be a call to be first in service.

Living in this world we come to adopt the glasses which we are given by nature and through culture. This is natural and we cannot fully escape this. We come to believe that things work in a certain and set way. We come to believe in an idea of God far removed from the God who meets us in Jesus. Nowadays some in the world would say that God is distant. Seeing the troubles of the world we might be tempted to feel this way. But if there is anything we can take home with us today, I believe it is an awareness that through God's glasses how we see ourselves, others and the world will dramatically change.

This is also the "wisdom" we have heard about in the letter of James. The "wisdom from above" versus the "wisdom from below". Yes, it isn't always easy to see through God's glasses, especially because we are often wearing other types of glasses, the glasses from below nurturing in us a negative way of seeing.

But here comes Jesus who repeatedly walks with us and tells us again and again about the kingdom of God and who with love and patience is at our side as he promised. He has given us his Word, his body the Church, but also the events of life as well as the whole of creation, to speak to us continuously about his walking with us. We will be better off if we gently and humbly open our hearts and our eyes to the wisdom from above. Amen.