

These are radical texts, both then and now, and show God's original intention for all humankind: of a society based not on power but on love and a vision which needs repeating and revisiting over and over again because of our sinful nature, the wilful nature which we can only be free of in Christ, and this always as a work in process.

The radical nature of these texts lies in their 'literally' going to the root of the problem which is one in which power - human power - inevitably seems to corrupt: the higher up the tree you go and the more power you wield, the further you go from the reality of your true origin in the earth and the stronger the temptation to feel invulnerable to the needs of others. And so another cardinal falls prey to another cardinal sin, - greed for money this time, but any reading of a history of the church or of any society will tell us that it was ever thus when a frail human being is given too much power. The history of Israel is a history of the world in this respect but also a history of prophetic hope. Mary's opening words in her wonderful Magnificat are a paraphrase of Isaiah's words which we hear in today's first reading

" I exult for joy in the Lord, My soul rejoices in my God"

And her exaltation of the lowly also echoes that to be found in Isaiah, and so many of the prophets, and which Jesus himself makes very explicit when he returns to his roots in Nazareth and reads from this same text.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

The irony being that his own lowly roots cast doubt on his authority to speak in such a manner, to speak truth, that is, to power.

This is Joseph's son surely? Who does he think he is?

But if we dig around a little and look at the missing text from today's reading from Isaiah we will read that all are called to be 'priests of the Lord' and "ministers of our God' but it's through the 'poor' and not the ' powerful' that God wishes to work. This is why these texts are so powerful and radical still today because they subvert our normal expectations. This is renewal from the ground up

*For as the earth makes fresh things grow
as a garden makes seeds spring up,
so will the Lord make both integrity and praise
spring up in the sight of the nations."*

This should give us hope that when we see over and over again corruption taking hold of those in power it's the poor, that is the needy and afflicted, who come to be God's corrective to the powerful, where God is truly at work. And this can include us in our daily struggle to make a difference. It's what incarnation is all about. This is God working from the ground up.

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