

In the past we had many 'Wayfarers' coming to us from all over the country – each on a circuit of sorts hoping for a bed at night, a meal and perhaps a little money to see them on their way the next day. They made no pretence to be religious or to act the part of a pilgrim though initially at least many were rather good at “bragging”, passing themselves off as this or that to win sympathy and perhaps a bit more money: I need to get to Liverpool, my mother is very ill. Can you help? Or even in one instance a man in a car who had run out of petrol? The stories were numerous and often quite creative but we soon learned to challenge them and once done things calmed down, the play-acting stopped and we could engage in normal discourse about the weather, football, regional backgrounds and a favourite topic: other Wayfarers – they mostly knew one another and all had stories to tell. I could keep going on this for hours but the connection with today's gospel and the other readings especially that of Elisha and the woman of rank is one of discernment, of separating out the holy from the unholy, the false from the true. It's not a new problem: Chaucer is very hard on the itinerant friars, and many other supposed religious of his day. He recognised some as good, following the precepts of St Francis, truly poor, truly charitable, but by his day there were many others wearing the Franciscan garb but enriching themselves at the expense of others

*A Frere ther was, a wantoun and a Merye;  
Ful wel biloved and familiar was he  
With frankeleyns overal in his cuntre  
and eek with worthi women of the town;*

He certainly carried out religious duties but

*He knew well the taverns in every town,  
And every ostiller or gay tapster.* (from the prologue to Canterbury Tales)

Wandering pardoner's were even worse selling salvation at a profit, some licenced, many not and the wonder of it is how many of us are open to deceit, to believing the blagger, the salesman, the politician, the priest perhaps, able to string words together in a way that captures our hearts and heads and lead us astray – drawn into the story of another until there's no escape. This is where the gospel-teller is proved true, or not, by their deeds and we are not necessarily here in the realm of the miraculous but of the practical working out of love – the test of any relationship of course. Does what they do match what they say? That's a challenge for us all. Eventually if our actions do indeed match our 'holy' words then we will have become transparent to grace and to one another – only we won't know it but others will, those who've learnt the art of discernment, the grace of allowing others to

be and reveal themselves. I'm not sure we ever reach perfect knowledge of this in this life – it's always a learning process and a delicate balance between judgement and non-judgement knowing that the final judge will get it right in full charity. It's a work in process, of allowing the Christ in me to recognise the Christ in you and vice versa.

(Frankeleyn: landowner of free but not noble birth ODE 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century)

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