

Sunday 23A 6/9/26

You will be glad to hear that priests and religious are now obliged to undertake safeguarding training on a regular basis with the threat of an audit at some stage to make sure that this is happening and that each parish is following due protocol, proper process, safe-guarding. We had a meeting yesterday to this end and it was very helpful not least in naming the elephant in the room at the very beginning which is of course the fact that our former bishop is awaiting trial for alleged sexual offences. ‘Alleged’ already a loaded term but due process is being followed and final judgement is still to be made, and even when it is, whatever it might be, this is not, for a Christian, to be a final condemnation or final conclusion of any sort - for only God can do that. This highlights a central tension at the heart of yesterday’s meeting and in the readings today: due process and yet love of neighbour whoever they are and whatever they’ve done highlighted in it’s turn by Jesus concluding his account of due process with the command that if all this has been done and yet the offender

*“refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector”*

This is deliciously ambiguous because the practice of Judaism at the time was to have no dealings with pagans and tax collectors if possible, at least in the religious sphere, but Jesus is famous for eating with just such people. To put it bluntly would you be willing to invite Bishop David or to a meal if he survives his trial, whether found guilty or not guilty, even if only in a prison canteen?

This central tension worked itself out yesterday in a case based on a true happening in which someone anonymously sent a letter to a priest alleging that the sacristan was having an affair with an under-age altar server and demanding his dismissal. Our group decided that the best course was to contact the safeguarding authorities for advice on what to do, any other course of action seemed to risk misjudgement and false allegations becoming public to the harm of all concerned. In other words we could no longer follow the advice in today’s gospel to approach the alleged offender alone before involving others – it was too risky, and this seems to me to highlight the central tension at the heart of Christianity between Spirit and Law not because they are necessarily opposed but because they necessarily need one another. We needed the advice of others in order to love well. Or, just as well, we need the love of others in order to love well, and this applies to us all whether we think of ourselves as sinners or not. The command to love remains, however the Law chooses to express it.

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