Sunday 28A. 11.10.26

Hitler gave the people a sense of being part of a huge mass, a ' Volk' which appealed to many after the continuing changes of the early twentieth century, when the old social order had been upended. He also gave people roles to play.... you knew where you were when you became a Nazi party member or an SS man. These roles were emotionally satisfying: they allowed people to submit to a strong leader and feel strong and superior through him. They also allowed them to feel the victim which in turn legitimised anger and cruelty to others "(Guardian 2024 Peter Pomerantser)

We could easily make the same mistake with religion. What I have in mind is Jesus' challenge to the established order of things in today's Gospel passage and a shocking instance of religious insensitivity in an article in Friday's Guardian which cites a possible source for the famous scene in Oliver Twist where Oliver dares to ask for more food. *" Please sir I want some more."* A young pauper confined to a work house in Hendon, Alice Shepherd dares to ask if she can go for a walk and was rewarded with solitary confinement for 24 hours and starved on a diet of bread and water until the next meeting of the board of guardians led by the Rev. Theodore Williams, who recommended this harsh punishment for her " *disgusting conduct*." The accompanying picture of Theodore says everything (to me) about adopting a religious role which gives entitlement and anger to some and denies it to others. Today's parable is a summary of Israel's failure to respond to God's call to be holy, most notably by its religious leaders who have time and again rejected the prophets in the past and now reject such as John the Baptist and Jesus. They have clothed themselves in the rites and rituals of worship, many in official religious garb, but failed to clothe themselves with care and compassion for the flock entrusted to them. They've become stuck in the dressing-up stage and the false authority this has given them. No, the invitation to love and be loved is for all people, good and bad alike. Whether we take up this invitation, good and bad alike, is another matter. We can fool ourselves by thinking that dressing in a certain manner and being a regular attender at Mass -this includes the priest – is sufficient when it's our behaviour towards one another outside Mass , and all the dressing up, the roles we play, which will tell others where we really are with God. Our only hope in all this is God who alone can judge correctly and provide us with the grace to act accordingly, that is to be clothed in love for God through our love for one another. I hear there's a plan to live stream an execution in the States as a warning to others, with strong support from the religious right. Some things never change.

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