

SERMON 25A 2026.

My friends as I announced at the beginning of mass, today is Home Mission Sunday, celebrated in all the parishes of this nation, a reminder to us of our duty to share our faith with others. It sounds an obvious thing to say, but perhaps we do need to be reminded that as followers of Christ we should share that faith with others. Our faith can never be just us as individuals, we are members of a community, and we should want others to join us in our community. It is a reminder that we should not be just about maintaining buildings, or just keeping the show on the road, that often heard phrase, mission not maintenance, we have to be outward looking, the modern day rather trendy words for this are being missional, being intentional, being evangelistic.

Sometimes its not a message that we catholics like to hear, perhaps historically, sometimes for good reason, we have been rather inward looking, but all the recent Popes, including Pope Leo, our own Archbishop Peter have called on us to be openly, unashamedly sharing our faith with others, making that practical effort to share our faith with others, which can be done in all kinds of ways. After all, so many of our fellow catholics no longer join us here, we should be reading out to them, inviting them to join us here.

Here in OLSM, we do try to do this, we have a group called the Evangelism group, which has been meeting for a number of years now, discussing this issue and working on it, you will have seen it mentioned in the newsletter. We have enlisted the help of a movement called Divine Renovation, who help and coach parishes to take on the duty of being truly missional, being outward looking, welcoming. As a group over the past year or so we have put together a document to help guide us in this work, its called our vision statement or our ambition statement, (its not a mission statement which many organisations have) it's a description of what we would like our parish to be, what we would like it to be in say 5 or 10 years, what is our ambition for this community-we are distributing this document today, its built around 5 themes – hospitality, prayer, worship, school and outreach. Now we have this document, the hard work starts, since now we need to try to achieve that vision, to make it real, to achieve this vision.

Perhaps today we could think about and consider the first theme, our first ambition, which is to be truly hospitable, to be truly welcoming. We have rooted our view of hospitality in the monastic tradition of hospitality, since we are a mission parish of Belmont Abbey, a Benedictine monastery, in a monastery welcoming guests is a solemn obligation, guests should be welcomed as Christ himself. I know many of you do do this, I think we are a welcoming community, visitors say we are, but its an obligation we all share. In recent years we have welcomed people from all over the world to our community, and from around this nation. But can we do better? After all there is no point in encouraging people to come here, if we are not welcoming or hospitable. There is also the history of this area of Monmouthshire, the history of the penal days, when there was a great deal of tolerance of the catholic faith in this area, of catholics worshipping in secret. Abergavenny is now a town of sanctuary, it prides itself on welcoming different communities, people of different faith and cultures; do we play a role in this. Do we strive to be inclusive, or are we happy to be exclusive? Im very happy to hear your thoughts on this. Do you find this place to be truly welcoming?? What can we do better? Please think and pray about this, Ill be talking about the other parts of our ambition statement in the weeks to come.

I should say a few words about today's Gospel. God's word can be very unsettling, particularly on the lips of Jesus, every time I hear the phrase "I came to call sinners not the Virtuous", it makes me stop and think, as it does every-time I hear the words at the end of today's Gospel-the last will be first and the first last. Jesus in so much of what he said and did confounded people, especially religious people, what he preached was not easy and comfortable but was designed to make them and us stop and think. I suppose this is because we are all tempted to reduce our faith, our religion to what is safe and comfortable, to perhaps reduce the challenge it poses us, but I hope it is in listening to God's word in Church that we are reminded of the challenge that our faith is to us. Over recent weeks that has certainly been the case, we heard such teaching as, renounce yourselves take up your cross and follow me, we have been reminded that our faith might call on us to suffer, to quite literally carry the cross of suffering, we have been reminded of the need to forgive one another over and over again and that perhaps for some of us the cross we have to carry is the burden of other people's sins and the burden, the pain of having to forgive those who sin against us. It is not easy to hear this.

It is no different today with the simple and straightforward parable of the generous landlord, the landlord who recruits workers throughout the day and pays them all exactly the same, no matter how many hours they have worked. The point of the parable is that the landlord, who we are meant to understand as being God, is not being unfair to those who worked all day, after all he gives them exactly what he said he would, but instead that he is generous with those who come later, even those who barely spend an hour working for him. If we are honest, we would probably have complained at the landlord, I know I would, it does seem unfair the way the landlord works. But I think at the root of that reaction is jealousy, jealousy that the landlord has been more generous to other people than to us. That generosity unsettles us, because we are so often afraid of losing out to others, especially to those who we think haven't worked as hard as we have. But of course the point of the parable isn't the number of hours we work, the point of the parable is the forgiveness we should show to others, a forgiveness we so often find hard to offer, but which God, and his Son, Jesus, seemed to offer so easily, as Jesus did throughout his ministry.

It was the way Jesus offered forgiveness to others that caused the real controversy in his ministry, time and again this caused real scandal among the religious people of the day, they didn't like it when Jesus went to the sinners, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the poor, the sick and said he was forgiving their sins. Many couldn't accept this, how could God forgive such people, how could God be so generous, surely God was like them, who refused to forgive and who condemned others so easily. Perhaps we would have reacted like some of the Pharisees and scribes didn't who couldn't believe what Jesus was doing, when he acted just like the generous landlord in the Gospel and gave to everyone who came to him. Like them we might have found such actions intimidating and far too challenging to accept, our pride and self-conceit gets in the way.

But thank goodness God and his Son are not like us, often so narrow minded, jealous, insecure and so easily threatened. For as we heard the great prophet Isaiah say today,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways not your ways - it is the Lord who speaks. Yes, the heavens are as high above earth as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts."

Jesus showed this in his ministry, God's ways are so different from others, and thank goodness he is, or there would be no hope for any of us, for God's works and words seen in his son are far more loving, forgiving and understanding than we so often are.

The challenge we face in our lives is for our ways, our thoughts to become like God's ways and thoughts, to become like Christ, to become like that generous landlord who was loving and generous in all did. This isn't easy, our pride, our often selfishness, our concern for ourselves, our fear can so often stop us from being so loving and forgiving. Our faith can indeed be unsettling, is indeed demanding, for indeed the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Amen.