

OT: Zechariah 9:9-12

NT: Romans 7:15-25a

Gp: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

There are several occasions in the gospels when Jesus expresses his exasperation with the apostles, with humanity. Such as when the disciples failed to cure a young boy – *Jesus answered them, 'You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.'*

And in today's gospel, he expresses his frustration with an illustration that there is no pleasing some people. Neither feasting nor fasting will content some and open their hearts and minds to the gift of God's love that is before them. They condemned John and his followers equally with Jesus and his disciples. There really is no pleasing some people!

I think it is that word *content* that lies at the heart of the message from today's readings. There is Paul, turning himself inside out to try and at last be at peace, to accept the person he is with all his faults and weaknesses. Describing himself as wretched and almost without hope.

And if we look at ourselves, how many of us, if we are honest, would want to change some aspect of ourselves or our lifestyle? We are not alone. We live in a world where we are overwhelmed with information, where someone is posting on line about improvements that they have enjoyed that could be open to us too. Money making schemes, diets, plastic surgery and implants.

It took me a while to realise that the phrase Turkey teeth meant going to Turkey to have your teeth fixed and whitened and not having teeth like the bird!

Where a sense of community has broken down, people rush to defend what they have and strive to get more. More money, a better car, the right brand of clothing or trainers. And this is a problem played out on an international scale too. I've often thought that if the rich countries of the first world were content, did not go to war looking for more land, for more oil, for more rich minerals, there would be peace.

If I could just be happy with my lot and let my neighbour get on with their lot, wouldn't we all be happier? And just maybe we might come to see that we have more than we need and we could help out someone who has far less and who is struggling.

We could be more open to those who have fled persecution in their own countries, to those who find themselves without hope and home and are living on our streets. All those people whom Jesus gathered around himself because he saw their need for love and compassion.

To some extent we are all like Paul, struggling and coming to realise that we cannot be content by our own efforts. We need to be rescued by the God who loves us unconditionally. *Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* Or to quote St Augustine, *Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.*

Later at the Offertory, we will sing that beautiful hymn, *Just as I am*. I don't think it is about asking God to accept us as we are but it is more of a prayer that we might accept ourselves just as we are. We are the person that God created, with all our foibles and all our odd ways and he is asking us to love ourselves just as fully as he loves us.

He wants us to know peace and contentment but that does not mean that we should be complacent. There is a difference between accepting ourselves and believing ourselves to be perfect! Then we become no more than deluded fools.

God wants us to find our peace in him, to be open to his will, to follow his guidance so that slowly we are transformed as we journey through this world. But somehow too we remain content even though we face new challenges to our health, to our personal circumstances.

I think I have mentioned to you before Chrissie. I only knew her in her old age but as a younger woman she had been a teacher and then a head of a school. She never married but lived with her sister. Eventually her sister died and Chrissie's health began to fail. She needed to have part of her leg removed and her lack of mobility meant leaving the family home and going into a nursing home. I took her Holy Communion one day and afterwards she said to me, *Aren't we rich!*

This is the kind of contentment that I would wish to work for, a contentment that only comes through the love of God and which is open to all who would accept this precious gift.

I listened recently to an interview with the actor, Tom Hanks, when he was asked primarily about his new film but also about other roles he had played, especially Mr Rogers. Fred Rogers was an American pastor and host of a children's television programme for over thirty years where he created neighbourhoods to teach about kindness and acceptance and self-worth with humility. When asked if he thought himself to be a religious person, Tom Hanks replied not really but having played Mr Rogers he had learned never to let a day go by without simply saying *Thank you God*.

It's a good start towards contentment. Thank you God.

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