

HOMILY – 17TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – 30 JULY 2017

It makes you feel good doesn't it, when long lost friends come up to you and say "You haven't changed a bit in 10 years"! (I wish). You look at them and think, perhaps, 'yep, you are definitely looking older', but out of politeness, you tell a 'porkie pie' and declare "Neither do you"!!! – Gulp!!

The truth is, our outward appearance does change with time, hair dye is no magical cure!! Hands are a giveaway. But what about our inner selves.... Have you changed as a person in the last five or ten years? Have you acquired good or bad habits? Have I changed for the better or worse? Am I fundamentally the same person I have always been? Do I change depending on the company I am in?

In the first reading from the Book of Kings, we hear of young King Solomon, asking God in a dream, to grant him, not gold or silver or power, but rather the gift of wisdom, to make wise decisions. This, God is willing to grant, as long as Solomon is faithful to Him. However, sadly, through time, Solomon gets complacent and power hungry. He wastes away his father, King David's, inheritance, becomes immoral in his lifestyle, divides his sons and eventually divides his kingdom. He changes for the worse, choosing not to make a wise decision.

The parallel applied to Henry VIII, who early on in his Kingship, was awarded the title 'Defender of the Faith', by the Pope, but in due course, when he was refused an annulment of his marriage, changed radically and sought to destroy the Catholic Church, and so ensued the Reformation in England.

In truth, life in all its experiences, good and bad, does change us. We do become perhaps, wiser or more cautious, after the mistakes we have made but on the other hand, like Solomon and Henry VIII, we can change for the worse and spoil all the virtue that we inherited – 'throw it all away or give up.

Remember that Jesus, God and Man, remains eternally the same person. He never changes in his love and wisdom. In his call to find the Kingdom, he calls on all of us to change for the better, to search for the spiritual solution to life's problems. Obvious examples of that conversion of mind and heart are St Matthew, the Tax Collector, St Paul, tentmaker and persecutor of Christians, Mary Magdalene, prostitute, Zaccheus, another Tax Collector. However, we can also go the other way. Think of Judas Iscariot, keeper of the common fund who changed and betrayed Jesus with a kiss, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Once you have found the Kingdom of God, don't lose it!! Being a Christian is no guarantee you remain one!

In order to continually protect ourselves from moral decay and betrayal, we must always look to Christ. He, more than anyone, can help us not to lose our spirit of goodness and love. As St Paul says in the second reading "God cooperates with all those who love him, with all those that he has called, according to his purpose".

Once you realise that your whole life hinges on Christ, that He, above all else, helps you to remain a good, kind and loving person, then it is like finding treasure hidden in a field. So then, our thoughts and prayers are a continual call or conversion to hold fast to what is good and not become someone that we are not. The ultimate destiny of sin and evil is to change someone into a pale shadow of their former selves. You know the saying "She used to be such a sweet young girl but how she has changed" or again "He was a really decent guy but something has got into him and he is not the same man". Recently I read of a tragic story of two brothers in Milngavie, Glasgow, who fell out with each other, their relationship changed for the worse. One of them became like a monster, came to his brother's house,

doused him with petrol, set him on fire and killed him. Never underestimate how much someone can be changed by evil and disordered thoughts - it is a vicious spiral.

Only truly God, in faith, can rescue us from the path of depravity and madness. That in the clear light of repentance and renewal, we can rescue our lives from changing for the worse. To step back from the brink of self-destruction and find the grace of God, living within us.

Let us finish with the words of John Henry Newman, who said "To change is to grown, to change often, is to grow to perfection". Help us Dear God, to always to change for the best and help our neighbour to change for the best too.

God Bless you all