

Fr Dispin John – Homily 26th Sunday Ordinary Time 27/9/2020 St John's Mitcham

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My original plan for this weekend, before this pandemic hit, was to leave after this weekend's masses, take that flight and go to India. Things have changed. So, I'm stuck and you're stuck with me too.

So, I'll tell you something that happened during one of my trips to India. On this particular trip, I encountered this guy who went to school with me. I saw him after such a long time. And I was really excited to hear his story. He was looking well and you know, he was telling me how well he was doing in his business. And then he said, and by the way, Dispin, I know you are a Catholic priest, but I'm no longer a Catholic. That kind of surprised to me. And he said he was one of those born again Christians. And he said, if you really wanted to be saved, you have to be born again. Meaning go to one of those churches. I kind of smiled. But what he said was really impressive. He said he was helping the fishermen by lending them money and also, you know, giving them advice on, you know, the Bible and all of that. So, you know, he seemed, he sounded like a very good practising Christian and he took such a lot of pride in saying that he gave 10% of his earnings to his church

Later that evening, of course I saw another friend was a very good friend of mine. And I said, you know, I met this guy, you know, he's doing very well. He also knew this person. And I said, I'm really impressed with him because of the way he conducts himself, you know, he's really good. He helps a lot of people. And with a kind of a cheeky smile, my friend said to me, and did you ask him what kind of interest he charges on the money he lends to the poor fishermen. I said, well, what's the problem here. He said, he charges such high exorbitant interest rates. The people won't be able to pay back the money. Then he charges over the interest. And if people cannot pay back, he will take their boats and nets. And sometimes even their homes. He said, this man has made so many people homeless and amidst all of this he would continue to say, praise the Lord. When, what you say about Christ and how you live your lives do not match, there is a serious problem. Jesus had such problems with his own hearers. That's what we hear in the gospel today. Jesus encounters the chief priests and the elders of the people today. He's talking to them. Because when Jesus addresses these people, he clearly has an agenda.

He talks to them about the normal ordinary things of life. He doesn't talk about God or the supernatural stuff. Talks about farmers, fishermen, a woman who lost her ring, the shepherds, the ordinary people, and through their ordinariness and through those ordinary stories, he presents God. And today he asked the chief priests and the elders of the people for an opinion, an opinion on the very people they despise. The chief priest and the elders of the people, the Pharisees, they considered themselves as the virtuous, the chosen ones who had everything going right for them because they practised what they believed, the law of the Lord. So they were right.

And then they turned around and said, and these sinners, they haven't got a chance. But Jesus advocates the interest of such sinners. And that is why he says when John Baptist came with a message of repentance, who flocked to him, to the river Jordan, to be repented and to be united with their God? It's not the chief priests, not the elders of the people, not the Pharisees. It is those prostitutes, the sinners, the tax collectors, the despised, the outcast. They went, they repented, and they encountered God. And when Jesus comes, the same thing happens. Such people who were considered as sinners, they flocked to Jesus. In fact, they, formed the basic gathering at Jesus's dinner table.

When Jesus encounters us, he's not looking to see how good we are. He's looking to see, how can I reach out to you, my child? And if I say, I'm perfectly, all right, I don't need you because I'm virtuous. I'm the good one. Maybe Jesus will not have any space in our lives. But even worse when we say I am a regular practising Christian, I pray a lot. And therefore Jesus has a problem with us when our lives and

our prayer lives do not match. Then we have a serious problem. And when people say, I spend a lot of time in my prayer and, and I'm being nasty to my neighbours. I read the Bible the whole day, but actually I am mean to my wife, my husband, my children, my relatives, my friends. Well, I give 10% of my earnings to the church. I know nobody does that in our parish. I hope you don't. You need to look after your families. I give everything to the church. I don't care about those that are dying on the street? I have a serious problem.

Jesus does not want us to spend the whole day in the church. Jesus does not want us to follow every red letter on this book to follow everything. Yeah, it'd be good, but it'd be better if our lives and the way we live and love and laugh and reach out to others can be matched by our words.

Do you feel that you need God? Is there sin in your life that you need to turn around? Is there something that you believe, "I need God's help here." It is not too late. God is always there. And that is why, in the gospel today, we see Jesus really appreciating those who turn around despite their darkness, despite their weakness, their sinfulness, Jesus invites them. Jesus tells them, you know, you are making your way to the kingdom.

Is there something that is stopping you? Small sin, big sin. Made a big choice, a terrible choice that you feel that you are being alienated from God. Don't worry. It is never too late. You can still come back to God, repent and be part of the kingdom. Just like the last Sunday's gospel, which said that God came even at the 11th hour to pick up those who were waiting. We may be like St Augustine, who said late have I found thee. Late have I loved thee. He waited a long time, but when he found the Lord, his life changed forever.

Is there something that you need to offer to God and say, I want to turn around and find you like those people who flocked to John the Baptist. Like those people who sought the comforting presence of Jesus at his dinner table. We need to turn it around. Let's talk about it. Who will not turn around? It is those who find themselves or think of themselves as virtuous and not needing God's love or God's help. They would say I'm all right. But it is those who need and repent and say, "I need you, God". They have a better chance of the kingdom of God. So, the call is ours. 1. To acknowledge that God is waiting for us 2. To have the courage and two repent and turn around and go back to God. 3. To remember that, no matter where you are, you are saved because you choose to walk towards God.