

Sunday Homily

FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

26 DECEMBER 2021

YEAR C

“And all who heard him were amazed
at his understanding and his answers.”

Luke 2:47

Illustration

Imagine that you are in a great cathedral, like Canterbury, admiring the architecture, reading about its history and soaking in the atmosphere of prayer which has evolved over centuries. Suddenly you come across a group of people obviously having a lively debate. You want to find out who they are and what they're talking about. You recognise the dean of the cathedral; the man in the purple shirt and dog collar is clearly a bishop; and all the others look very wise and knowing and, look, is that the archbishop himself approaching with speed and great excitement? At the centre is a boy, about twelve years old, firing questions at the older men and women about deep theological issues: the doctrine of the Trinity, transubstantiation, and the exact translation of a hard passage in the Bible. You realise this is no ordinary twelve-year-old, but who is he?

Gospel Teaching

Who is this boy? Jesus, aged twelve, is in the Temple in Jerusalem discussing religion with Jewish leaders and showing such knowledge and understanding that all who hear him are amazed. Later the question will be, “who is this man?” as all who hear Jesus continue to be amazed at his knowledge and authority.

For now, though, we're hearing about Jesus at the age of twelve, yet only a few days ago we were celebrating his birth. What's been happening in those years about which we know so very little?

It seems that Jesus has been developing a sense of who he is and of his special relationship with the God he will call “Abba”. He has been acquiring knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. And now he's enjoying this opportunity to learn from others and discuss his own ideas and ask questions.

Just as we know so little about his first twelve years, so too we have very little information about the next eighteen years until he is thirty and embarks on his public ministry. What was happening during those years?

We are told that he grew in wisdom and perhaps he used this time to work out his own interpretation of the Law until he had a solid foundation on which to

build that public life and ministry. The foundation that Jesus laid for himself was perhaps the summary of the Law which we hear him declare in the Gospels:

“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.
You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
with all your mind,
and with all your strength...”

“Love your neighbour as yourself.”

“There is no other commandment greater than these,” says Jesus. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Application

This is a time of resolutions and new beginnings: a chance to reflect on what it means for us to live out our faith.

Paul too thought through his faith and what it meant to live it out in the world. When he wrote to the Colossians he suggested ways in which we would live if we truly loved our neighbour as ourselves.

Loving our neighbour may sound straightforward, but the illustrations Paul offers show that it presents a challenge to us to rethink how we relate to people.

Loving our neighbour means showing compassion – compassion to people suffering through their own fault or who have shown no compassion for others. It means being kind – kind to everyone, not just those who are grateful and appreciative. It means being patient – patient when every fibre of your being is screaming out for action or change. It means forgiving others – forgiving even those we said we would never forgive.

Living out the commandments is not easy. Living the Christian faith requires commitment, discipline and a willingness to learn and grow.

It may sound daunting, but we are not required to do this on our own. As we seek to love God and our neighbour (and perhaps ourselves) we are in fellowship with others on the journey. We can learn from each other, share with and encourage one another.

Today is exciting. It’s a day of new beginnings, the start of a new adventure. We can stay where we are, not wanting to risk the unknown. Or, like Jesus in the Temple, we can step forward, thinking, asking questions, exploring ideas, willing to change and grow. As we do so, we know that Emmanuel, God with us, is our companion on the journey.