

Homily for the 19th Sunday of the Year

“I will hear what the Lord God has to say, a voice that speaks of peace.” These words come from the psalm chosen for today and they do so in a week when one of the greatest exponents of peace in Northern Ireland died, namely John Hume. It would be almost impossible to overstate his contribution to the peace process after thirty plus years of the so called Troubles. Let me quote a short passage from his Nobel Laureate speech in 1998: “I want to see Ireland as an example to men and women everywhere of what can be achieved by living for ideals rather than fighting for them, and by viewing each and every person as worthy of respect and honour. I want to see an Ireland of partnership where we wage war on want and poverty, where we reach out to the marginalised and dispossessed, where we build together a future that can be as great as our dreams allow.”

He was a voice speaking of peace at a time when there was little evidence of it and at great personal cost to himself and his family. His was a prophetic voice, like that of Elijah in the first reading today. Elijah, too, experienced great danger. He was fleeing for his life, sustained by bread and water provided by God, arriving at Mount Horeb and experiencing God, not in earthquake, wind or fire, but in the still small voice of calm.

In today's gospel, the disciples are literally all at sea and in great danger. Jesus wasn't with them. After feeding the 5,000 he had sent the people away and told the disciples to cross the lake. He then went alone up the hills to pray. It is easy to miss this point but it reminds us that prayer, that intimate communion with his Father, was what sustained him especially when times were difficult. As an aside John Hume was a man of prayer which sustained him through the darkest moments of those years of mistrust, prejudice and violence. Jesus then appears walking on the water, which, rather than reassuring the disciples only increased their fear. Even when he said, ‘Courage, it is I, do not be afraid,’ Peter needed reassurance, ‘If it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.’ ‘Come’, said Jesus, so Peter did and for a moment walked on the water until he took his eye off Jesus and began to sink, only to be saved by Jesus' outstretched hand. No wonder the disciples bowed down before him saying, ‘Truly, you are the Son of God.’

Fear is a great obstacle to faith, ‘Man of little faith, why did you doubt?’ Jesus said to Peter. There are times when fear may prevent us from either doing or saying the things we know we should. John Hume knew fear but his faith, his prayer and his practical Christianity helped him to overcome them. He also had the vision to see that peace is possible, that enemies can speak to one another, that there are ways of living which do not have to resort to violence, or to use his words, ‘**living** for ideals rather than fighting for them.’ May he rest in peace and may we all hear and live the words of today's psalm: I will hear what the Lord God has to say, a voice that speaks of peace. May peace in Ireland and throughout the world be his lasting legacy and our aim.

Bidding Prayers for the 19th Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

Let us pray on behalf of the Church family and the human family, for our God never passes us by, but rather draws near in sunshine and storm.

Reader:

For all who bear the name of Christ, especially those suffering persecution – that they may not grow discouraged by wind and wave, but rather take heart in Jesus who abides with us and has walked the way before us.

Lord in your mercy

For the leaders of nations as well as those who promote terror and violence – that their hearts may be transformed to work unceasingly for a world in which justice and peace shall kiss.

Lord in your mercy

For the peoples of the earth – that they may never know again the horror of weapons of mass destruction whether they be nuclear, chemical, biological or other.

Lord in your mercy

For those researching for a vaccine for the coronavirus – that their efforts will be rewarded and the spread of the virus be curtailed.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the coronavirus, for John Hume the architect of peace in Northern Ireland and May Huston, Peggy Woodcock, Margaret Gowdrige, Arthur Somerville and Jack Rodgers whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord hear us

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

God of love, help us to listen ever more attentively to your voice, and respond ever more willingly to your will. Be with us both in times of peace and times of turmoil and strife. Draw near to all who are in need. Through Christ our Lord. Amen