

Last May, Rachel and I returned to the city of Krakow to visit my daughter in law's family. It was a lovely opportunity to visit this lovely city – we returned to many of the places we had seen before when we were there for Anthony and Angie's wedding. Angie's father had kindly made available to me a small car to enable us to get around Krakow – I tried one trip out and decided to stay on foot! One day we joined a walking tour and our guide took us to places we had not seen before. One was the Franciscan Church, opposite the Archbishop's Palace. It had been nearly destroyed by fire in the 1850's and had to be totally restored. The most notable feature of this Church is a collection of windows by the artist Stanislaw Wyspianski, the most striking is the West Window and depicts God in the act of creation.

When it was erected in the early 1900's, it caused great controversy. Not because of its style but rather the face of God. The artist chose as his model for the face of God a beggar who used to sit outside the Church. This man, who was well known in Krakow, had had a very disturbed past – people were offended by the idea that the face of God was the face of one who many just walked past. For a number of years this window remained in storage until finally the Church authorities persuaded the congregation to accept it, that in a very real sense God had been sitting at their door as they came in and out of worship.

It is a very powerful reminder of God present in all humanity and the importance of recognising God in each and every human being. I recalled this window as I read our Gospel passage for today.

‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ *Mark 9:38*

There was no argument as to what the man was doing and that he was doing it in the name of Jesus. But he was different; he was not one of us. It is interesting to note that earlier, Mark tells us of the disciples attempting to cast out demons and failing – could the disciples be slightly threatened by the success of this ‘outsider’. Of course in chapter 10 of Mark’s Gospel, we read of children being brought to Jesus and the disciples telling them to go away – maybe they were a bit noisy, maybe they were a distraction.

On each occasion, attempts to exclude – ‘We told him to stop’, tell the children to go away – are countered by statements of inclusion:

‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us. *Mark 9:39*

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." *Mark 10:14,15*

There is something in us that wants to set boundaries, that dismisses the unfamiliar or the awkward. But time and time again Jesus challenges us to be inclusive, to be generous in our attitude to those who may think differently, who may worship differently. He calls them to remember the generosity shown by others to them in the past and to show of that same generosity of spirit to others

⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. *Mark 9:40-41*

I come back to what we have been thinking about over the last few weeks. There is something secure about a boundary – we know who is in and we know who is out. There is something secure about a hierarchy – we know who is above us and we know who is below us.

To follow Jesus is to follow one who looks at the world differently and calls his followers to do the same. He is one who reached out across boundaries and touched the leper, who allowed a woman to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair; who taught his followers to turn the other cheek, to walk the second mile, to give away the coat.

I come back again to the face of God in the window in the Church in Krakow, the face of the beggar who sat outside that Church. In our own setting we are facing huge issues relating to the growing levels of homelessness in our own society, the refugees from Iraq and Syria and elsewhere that are going to confront us for many years to come. Those in positions of authority, both on the European and national level, face difficult decisions and need our prayers. There are no easy answers but whatever answers we arrive at, these cannot ignore the face of the God who made heaven and earth and who meets us in the poor and the dispossessed.