

This last week has seen the latest Summit meeting of EU leaders. One of the features of these summits would be the meetings that go on ahead of the summit itself, or apparently chance encounters that happen on the edges. And so over the last few days we have had pictures of Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande in deep discussion; then there was that picture in the Irish Times of the Taoiseach and Angela Merkel in conversation. People jockeying for position, getting close to those in positions of power, trying to get assurances in advance on topics that will come up in the main meeting.

There is something of that in our Gospel reading this morning, as James and John try to get their word in ahead of the rest of the disciples. We heard of the fury of the rest of the disciples; a fury possibly rooted not in what James and John had asked for but in the fact they had got their voice in first.

In the passage immediately preceding the portion we read today, Jesus had been talking of his coming suffering and death. So there is something quite shocking in this brazen attempt to acquire status. In fact it is one of a number of passages in the Gospels in which Jesus talks about his coming suffering and the disciples revert to thoughts of status. We read a similar passage last month, On that occasion, Jesus placed a child in their midst.

This morning, in our 11 o'clock service, in the context of Baptism, we place a child in our midst.

As the disciples debate their status relative to each other in the Kingdom, they are presented with one who has no status, no standing, one who is to be seen and not heard.

Colm and Hazel bring their daughter Lucy for Baptism. Here they will undertake to provide a home and environment within which the values of the Gospel will be upheld and she will be encouraged to participate in the life and worship of the Church. Like their parents before them, they will watch over and encourage Lucy on her journey into maturity. (We welcome you as you come today to seek baptism for this lovely little girl.)

Of course not every child in this nation is so blessed. Quite apart from the quite awful stories we have heard of abuse in a whole range of institutions down through the years, there are children who, for no fault of their own, cannot be adopted, cannot experience the security of family life. That of course is the background against which the Children's Referendum is being held in but three weeks. There is no doubt that it will be passed, but it is vital that there is a significant turnout for that vote, that in that vote there is a ringing endorsement for the amendment.

In our current economic environment, as the date of the budget approaches, we have seen various powerful interest groups lobbying for position, seeking to have their interests maintained. In a modern democracy that is a very proper part of the democratic process. But who, I wonder, in our present day would the risen Christ place in our midst. In his day he placed a child, one with no voice, no standing, in contemporary society. Maybe he would place the old woman living alone who has learned that her home help is to be cut yet again. The monetary savings are at the cost of dignity, of the ability to stay in her own home. But she has no voice and unless enough of us speak on her behalf she will lose yet more of her already inadequate help.

Or maybe he would place a young dyslexic boy in our midst. He is not stupid, he just has problems with aspects of reading and writing that you and I might take for granted. He has a Special Needs Assistant at School but her hours have been cut or maybe she has had to be laid off. We are told these cuts will only last for a few years but these few years are the years in which his parents will have expected that he will gain skills essential for later life.

Or maybe he would place a young mentally challenged girl in our midst. She lives in our society, we see her going past on the bus to her school or her sheltered workshop. Her parents wonder what is going to happen to her when she is old and they are gone. And resources for places such as Prosper Fingal are due to have their resources further cut – the bus may go, the number of days per week she can attend the centre may be reduced and with that a measure of the dignity and independence that we take for granted will be further undermined. But she will not be heard unless enough of us speak on her behalf, her quality of life will be further undermined.

Our Gospel began with an old account of individuals lobbying for position. We see that in our own day as part of the modern democratic process. Jesus put a child in their midst to remind them they were called to a different way of living in the world.

Today in our worship a child is placed in our midst. Lucy in her innocence, in her lack of voice, in her total dependence reminds me of those without a voice in our own society. As powerful interest groups argue for their own interests in the weeks leading up to the budget, who will give voice to the needs of those who have no voice?