

There is the story of a Japanese general that I heard on a recording of the BBC Radio 4 series ‘Something Understood’ that was dealing with the topic of ‘Fragility’. This general had a favourite tea bowl which was broken in an accident. He sent it off for repair and when it came back he was not impressed with the job that had been done. He sent it off to a different craftsman who, instead of clumsily trying to conceal the cracks employed a mixture of silver and lacquer to form a glue to hold the pieces together. This is reputed to be the origin of the Japanese art of kintsugi

Rather than throw away a piece of pottery that has shattered, it’s possible to give a new lease of life to pottery that becomes even more refined thanks to its “scars”. The technique of kintsugi, rather than seeking to conceal damage, recognises brokenness as part of the history of the object.

I just want to stay with that image of breaking and remaking as we go on to reflect on our Gospel reading for today. It is one of those readings in which two disciples of Jesus are angling for status over and above the others.

Jesus takes the disciples aside and reminds them

‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup>But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. *Mark 10:42ff*

That is a mould, a mindset that has to be broken. The mindset needs to be remade in the model of servanthood, of identification with Jesus. And so he tells James and John:

‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’

*Mark 10:38*

Mindsets, by their very nature, are deep rooted. Being deep-rooted, they come to the surface on a number of occasions. Luke tells us, that even in the context of the Last Supper, the disciples argue among themselves.

But the other occasion I want to refer to comes a little earlier in Mark than the passage we have just read. Here, after he has spoken of his coming suffering and death, we read of this ongoing dispute about status among the disciples.

Mark goes on:

He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” *Mark 9:36,37*

Here, in the context of the Eucharist, as Stanley and Ngozi bring their beautiful daughter Joanna for Baptism, a little child is set among us. Christ is with us in a very special way today.

Within the context of the promises, the sacrament of Baptism, picks up this theme of breaking and making.

In baptism, God calls us from darkness into his marvellous light.  
To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him.

Therefore I ask:

Do you reject the devil and all proud rebellion against God?

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

Do you come to Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life?

I reject, I renounce, I repent – these all speak of breaking, changing mindsets, breaking down all that separates me from God. I turn, I submit, I come – these in turn speak of making, of renewal, of new life in Christ.

Joanna will be signed with the sign of the Cross – Christ claims you for his own, receive the sign of the Cross. We bear on our brow the sign of the Cross, a sign of making and breaking, a sign of dying and rising.

Returning to the Japanese art of Kintsugi that I started off with, rather than throw away a piece of pottery that has shattered, it's possible to give a new lease of life to pottery that becomes even more refined thanks to its “scars”. There is a recognition of the beauty of fragility. The technique of kintsugi, rather than seeking to conceal damage, recognises brokenness as part of the history of the object.

When the Gospel writers tell us of the appearance of the risen Christ in their midst, we read ‘He showed them his hands and his feet.’. In his risen glory, the marks of his suffering are not hidden, they are retained, emblems of his brokenness, of his vulnerability, which he assumed for our redemption.

The risen and glorified Christ, bearing his own scars, says to us, as he said to his disciples:

<sup>43</sup>But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. *Mark 10:43,44*

You are called to be different. In your life together, you are called to model a different type of community; a community of servants; servants of God, servants of one another.

We go out from this place bearing on our own brow the sign of the Cross, the sign of our own breaking and remaking, recalling the words of dismissal as Joanna is handed her baptismal candle:

God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness  
and has given us a place with the saints in light.

You have received the light of Christ;  
walk in this light all the days of your life.

**Shine as a light in the world  
to the glory of God the Father.**

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