

Last Sunday a day of celebration; a day of celebration for two families in our Parish as they celebrated the arrival of new members of their families; a day of celebration for us as we welcomed them into the family of the Church; a day of celebration for the Archbishop. As he remarked afterwards rarely does a bishop get a chance to do one baptism, let alone two.

It was also a day of course that marked the culmination of the work on the external fabric of this Church of St Mary's, that has seen the external fabric of this church secured for future generations..

In his sermon the Archbishop encouraged us to draw inspiration from those who had gone before us. St Nessian and his sons who had the faith to build a church on Ireland's Eye; those who had fostered and passed on the faith through the tumult of history, the Reformation, Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and the early years of this State. He also encouraged us to look forwards and outwards, highlighting in particular the emergence of new housing areas on the edge of our Parish.

He used three expressions that have resonated with me over this past week and as I reflected on our Gospel reading for today. He called us to a *Generous Christianity*. Picking up on the title of the Gospel manuscript associated with Ireland's Eye, he spoke of an Anglican *Garland of Generosity and Inclusion*. Then picking up on an expression used within the Church of Wales as they prepare for the 100th anniversary of their Disestablishment, he warned against an attitude of *Self-Generosity*.

Our Gospel reading gives us one of the best known of the parables of Jesus, the parable of the sheep and the goats. In our Parable today, both encounter the King at the end of time. Each discover that they have met him before in the poor, the naked, the hungry, the prisoner. Neither recognised him for who he was as each protest, ‘When did we see you poor, naked, hungry, in prison?’

For the goats, their ignorance is an excuse for their inaction. ‘Lord if we had realised who it was in those grubby clothes, of course we would have helped.’ The sheep discover to their amazement that in serving the poor and the marginalised they had served their King.

I just want to take two of those terms used by the Archbishop to characterise the two groups in the Parable; those of *Garland of Generosity and Inclusion* and *Self Generosity*. I do this not just as a way of reflecting on the parable itself but also to further explore some of the things the Archbishop was talking about last Sunday in the context of that parable.

I have always found this Parable to be one of the most challenging of those told by Jesus. Maybe I have more people calling at my door than the rest of you. As I meet each person I know there are some who are quite frankly chancers but some who are cases in genuine need. I frequently find myself asking have I made the right call. But needs are not always simply material. I would suspect that there is often a much deeper need of loneliness, the need to be simply treated as a human being. And this is where I find the present arrangements of shifting homeless families from one hotel to another, of the arrangements in many of our Direct Provision Centres. I never cease to be impressed the Focus Ireland Centre in Eustace Street where I leave off toys and dry groceries we

collect at this time of year. There is a profound truth to those oft repeated words, that a society can be judged by the manner it treats it's weakest and most vulnerable.

As I have said on a number of occasions, completing the work on the roof and external fabric of our Parish Church for future generations is the easy bit. We are still faced with the most crucial part of our task, that of securing the future of our worshipping community into the future. What sort of community do we envisage in this place in thirty or forty years time? In one sense it is tempting to say, 'Well that's not really my concern, I won't be around here for that.' But in reality the community that is going to be around in thirty or forty years is being formed now.