

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C)
26th June 2022

Following the feasts that take over from Sundays after Eastertide, we have finally landed once again in the green Sundays of the year. There is something a bit random about this, as exactly where we land depends on the date of Easter, but this year we have ended up in a pretty suitable place. Jesus has been transfigured on the mountain, and he now sets his face resolutely for Jerusalem. The rest of St Luke's Gospel is an extended journey up to Jerusalem, for the final confrontation with the old way of doing things, the final confrontation with the religious leaders of the day. He has turned towards Jerusalem, and nothing will distract him from that: there is a real power, and drive, and energy about this progress.

This resolute setting off for a clear destination, avoiding all distractions, is very different from the self-indulgence that St Paul writes about to the Galatians. Jesus keeps his eyes on the goal as he sets off on his journey; the self-indulgent person, that is a person who allows himself to be distracted and delayed by pleasures on the way, will travel in a very different way.

Self-indulgence can, though, be quite a difficult thing to define. If I sit in my garden at the end of the day with a beer in my hand and enjoy the view, am I being self-indulgent or am I just revelling in the wonder of God's beautiful creation? The path to wisdom requires us to take this question seriously, and to have a little self-awareness. We need, perhaps, to ask ourselves: what are the things that I am really attached to? Are any of these things that I am so attached to that I cannot imagine doing without them? Might some of these pleasures have ceased to be harmless diversions that I can take up or leave at will, and become instead demanding masters that govern my time and which I find I can no longer say 'no' to?

As we celebrate the World Meeting of Families this weekend we might just think a little about how the tension between resolute progress on the one hand and self-indulgence on the other plays a part in family life, and the ways in which families act as the school of wisdom where we learn how to balance the two. One of the great joys of family life is that belonging to this little community means that we do not have to explore these questions alone. There is someone else there to say to us 'That's enough beer, enough sitting, enough gazing at the sunset' – or, indeed, 'that's enough activity and work, its time to stop and stare for a while'. The family is created by God to be a School of Wisdom where we can try and explore these questions together. The task of working out what human life is all about, what is good and what is bad, what is life-giving and what is life-sapping, this is a difficult task at the best of times, but it is hardest of all if we try and do it alone. The family is given to us to be a place where we can explore this in a safe place, surrounded by people who love us and are no threat to us. In the family we can safely explore those things that are so important we must set our face resolutely towards them; those things that are dangerous distractions, that might leave us to stop too long on our resolute journey, or even make us abandon it altogether; those things that are harmless enough in themselves, but which are for me (but perhaps not for you) a kind of stumbling block which I find it very hard to get beyond. It is not impossible to do this alone, but it is certainly much harder. It is much better to do this as a part of a safe community, and so we do this together as a Church, and we do it,

too, within our families – our own families or those who generously welcome others into them as kind of honorary members.

Family life always requires a certain resolve, a certain firmness of purpose, and an awareness of the dangers of being so attached to distractions that we lose our way. One of the gifts that parents give their children is to model this, however imperfectly, and to guide them towards understanding the distinction and putting it into practice. This is part of what being a parent is all about. But, of course, it works both ways and it is also part of what being a child that honours your father and mother is about. One of the eye-catching phrases from the Second Vatican Council comes from *Gaudium et Spes* where it says: 'children contribute in their own way to making their parents holy' (n. 48). Within the Christian family, the children play a part in helping their parents become holy. Parents do not have all the answers, and one of the exciting and challenging aspects of being a parent is discovering that your children have things to teach you, even things that might lead you further into holiness. This is a very beautiful truth!

On the one hand we have Jesus resolutely setting off for Jerusalem, setting off to do what he knows must be done. On the other hand we have the self-indulgence St Paul fears might overwhelm the Galatians, and stop them in their tracks so that they make that journey no longer. Picking our way between the two, so that we travel resolutely towards all that is good, but still allow ourselves to stop and rejoice from time to time, is a lesson in maturity, a lesson that is best learned in company with others, a lesson in life that the family, school of wisdom that it is, is designed and intended to guide us through.