

**30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year B: Rejoice! God has pity on his people - or has he?**

**First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-9: The hope of salvation;**

**Second Reading: Hebrews 5:1-6: Jewish high priests were all too human;**

**Gospel: Mark 10:46-52: Jesus cures Blind Bartimaeus.**

Do you notice the reaction of the families of the people killed in the on-going war in the Middle East? This applies to those suffering in air-attacks in Lebanon, the ground war in Gaza, and even the families of the Israelis killed in the Hamas raid a year ago. The TV news depicts crowds screaming in the streets, and calling for revenge on anyone who had anything to do with the killers. I cannot help but contrast this with the Ukrainians who have suffered under Russian bombardment in the Eastern European war. They present a very different image: anger & determination, but also calmness, with less stridency.

I mention this because of the emotional language in the first reading and gospel. Jeremiah, writing about the time of the great exile that lasted 70 years in the 500's BC, looked forward to the end of that disaster, and his language was very strong: *"God will bring them back from the far ends of the earth – the blind, the lame, women with child, a great company returning here. He will comfort them as he leads them back."* The response at the Psalm is similar: *"What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad!"* In the gospel, Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, tended to bawl and scream a bit, when he heard Jesus was coming. Even the middle-eastern locals were embarrassed, and told him to keep quiet. When Jesus had cured the man, he said simply: *"Go; your faith has saved you."* Bartimaeus' prayer of request had worked.

But all this raises the question: how far should we bottle up emotions? One extreme is the British "stiff upper lip" approach – but this can lead to isolation, despair and depression. The opposite is the sort of scene we see on TV after those killings (or other disasters) in the Middle East – streets full of people shouting, and tearing their hair out. To many here, this sort of thing looks mawkish and chaotic. It may be natural for some people, but it gives them no real motive to move on or improve things. These are my personal views, but I suspect many will agree with them. I would hope for a happy medium between the two extremes.

However, it can be quite hard to get the 'happy medium' when dealing with life-and-death situations. Whether we are dealing with the loss of loved-ones, the killing of good people, the suffering of children, or whatever, our

feelings naturally run high. I suspect that this is also the time when we find it harder to pray. Yes, we know that we must all die sometime; yes, we know that “the time has come” for an elderly or very sick relative or friend to leave this life and find peace; but, all the same, the whole process of loss and bereavement hits us hard. It takes much faith and patience to accept God’s will at times like this, especially when the death was unexpected or the result of violence. (In cases like the Middle East killings, how can this be called “God’s will”?)

It may be worth taking a look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading (Letter to the Hebrews). The writer, as we saw in previous weeks, believed Jesus to be “The High Priest” – the great mediator between God the Father and us. In this week’s section, the writer shows that the ordinary Jewish high priests “*lived in the limitations of weakness*” – and, to a certain extent, this was also true of Jesus. (Mind, he did not need to offer sin-offerings for any personal faults of his own.) I suggest that, at the human level, Jesus did not know fully how it would all play out for him. He must have known that his public life would lead to execution – he had made too many enemies for any other outcome – but I am not so sure that, as a human, he could have foreseen the full effects of his Resurrection and Ascension.

This is where you and I also “live in the limitations of weakness” – we do not know the whys and wherefores of our own futures, or those of our nearest and dearest. It is fine, I suggest, to pray for their health and happiness; but, at the same time, all adult prayer must also have Jesus’ own qualification when he prayed in Gethsemane, just before his arrest: “*Let my not my will, but yours, be done*”(Luke 22:42). This is less a religious insurance-policy, more an important act of humility.

I do not claim to have any real experience of the Ukrainians, but their calm demeanour when seen on TV would indicate a certain dignity - and some basic religious faith. We cannot know what lies round the corner, so when an unavoidable disaster strikes, we may see it as our share in our Lord’s cross. That led to the resurrection, where our own hope of glory lies. This weekend, as the clocks go back to winter time, making it pitch dark at 5.30pm, and November beckons, that is a good thought on which to end. *Fr Jim Dunne.*

