

Homily. 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.A. 26/27 September 2020.

My father's 30th anniversary of death was this past Thursday. Pondering his life, a life that was in some respects a long way from being easy, got me to thinking about the way that he tried to live. Dad's wasn't so much the way of words, something he wasn't great at, but the way of actions, of doing helpful deeds.

For more than 40 years he faithfully went to work in the mines, on the City Council and at the local Base Hospital. He provided for us as best he was able. When people were in trouble Dad tried to help them by offering his friendship and doing small acts of care and kindness. In situations of crisis, and who doesn't have them from time to time, Dad acted firmly and courageously to end the crisis and protect those in trouble. The sick were visited, those without transport were given a lift in our old Holden, contact with family was maintained through thick and thin and hard work was never avoided. Dad went to Church with us, having converted from a staunch Protestant background, but his way of faith revolved around helping and doing more than talking and discussing. In many ways he was a man of his era, being born in England in 1924, but he was his own man, too. If the father in the gospel story had come to his room asking him to go and work in the families vineyard I know Dad would have done so without hesitation labouring long, hard and happily.

The Chief priests and elders were of a different cut. Similar to the second boy they were full of fine words and high intentions but notably slack in the doing department unless there was something in it that improved their own comfort and status. The well known public sinners had their issues,

too. Like the first son they went their own way of pleasure and satisfaction regardless of God, of others and the good of the community. Their only advantage was they could be brought to realise the extent of their self-centredness, changing in ways that would help match their deeds and words to the father's desire. This possibility of conversion flowed from their poverty of spirit, their need for mercy, forgiveness and a better way forward. Sadly, the privileged group of social and cultural elites, the chief priests and elders of the people, could see nothing within them that needed changing. It's the matter of their facade, their public face of 'Yes, I'll go and help' but never actually doing so that rendered them unconvertible even by the offer of God's mercy and grace. We'd say that they were self-righteous, all talk and show but deeply lacking in the departments of substance and integrity.

Living inside of all of us is a bit of both boys, some selfishness born of passion or of privilege, of wilfulness or of comfort. Integrity has been well described as making our insides match our outsides; having our deeds and actions singing the same tune as our words and intentions. This is what Jesus Christ offers to us; integrity of life proved by what He said and did and by how He lived and died for us all. As St. Paul tells us; In our minds we must be the same as Christ Jesus who emptied Himself out in service of humanity. In the end only our openness to the action of God's saving mercy, a mercy that changes us for the better, can help us to become like our Lord, uniting the two sons within us to our Father's will.