

6.30 Evensong – 29th August 2010
Trinity 13 – Year C

Isaiah 33: 13-22
John 3: 22-36

From our second reading tonight, it was obvious that John the Baptist's disciples were becoming concerned, as the numbers of Jesus' followers grew,

But John knew his own position in God's kingdom, as one who prepared the way for the Saviour.

He was not envious of the success of Jesus because he knew that it had to be that way.

John had to step back so that Jesus could do His work.

The same is true today in our lives.

Like John's disciples, how do we know who to follow ?

The Benedictine author and nun Joan Chittister has some thoughts on the subject of 'Who to Follow.'

It is one thing to choose between good and evil.

But it is another thing entirely, to learn to distinguish between the impulses of a holy heart and the cravings of the self.

Being a moral person and being a holy person – a fully developed spiritual person – are two different things.

To be a spiritual person, that is a person intent on living in the presence of God, we need a light to guide us along the way.

The spiritual path is always a long one, and is often an obscure one.

It is not so much a way as a direction.

Like a lodestone, it magnetises us, and draws us beyond our self-centred selves to our deeper selves, our highest selves, our searching selves.

But no two paths are really the same.

Each of us goes our own personal way.

Only the direction is common to us all.

Then the problem becomes finding the one who is best able to help us find the path in ourselves, without denying us the right to make the path for ourselves.

The spiritual life is not a theology course, it is far more than just studying.

Coming to know God is more than theory - it is experience.

We must begin to ask what it takes to teem with the life of the universe, to move to the vibrations of the soul.

But to do that, there is something else of which we must become aware.

Teachers who are too ready to tell us what to do, may not have much to teach us about God at all.

They may be far more intent on telling us what they themselves want us to do, than on enabling us to find out what God wants us to do.

In the end, the spiritual life requires that we trust what God is doing inside of us, as well as what is expected of us, by the people, the systems, and the leaders around us.

The spiritual life has to do with learning to breathe in the Spirit of God, and refusing to be deterred.

No matter what the system says otherwise, or if it demands more obeisance to itself, than it identifies with the will of God.

Put more directly.

Wearing robes and saying prayers, learning to bow and keeping a schedule – important as such disciplines may be to the centering of the soul – are not the ultimate test of the spiritual life.

There is a story told in Japan of the monk Daruma, who spent nine years seated in meditation, facing a wall.

So long and diligently did he practice his sitting that his legs ceased working.

When the master came by, he said to Daruma, "What are you doing ?"

The monk replied: "I'm practicing seated meditation so that I may gain enlightenment."

The master frowned for a moment, picked up a piece of pottery, and began to rub it on his sleeve.

The monk waited and waited, but the master simply went on rubbing the piece of glaze.

Finally, unable to wait any longer, the monk said: "Master, what are you doing ?"

"I'm making a mirror," the master replied.

"You can't make a mirror like that," the monk said incredulously.

"And you can't gain enlightenment simply sitting like that either," the master said.

To this day, in Japan, they sell little Daruma dolls, to remind seekers of what it means to live in a state of awareness.

There are two types.

One is a cylindrical paperweight that sits stolid and unmoving.

The other has a round, weighted bottom.

No matter how many times it is knocked over, it rebounds again.

The meaning for the spiritual life is obvious.

It is not spiritual practices that define the value of our spiritual life.

It is when we persist, persevere, go on and on and on until we become what we seek, that we are really spiritual people.

The spiritual life is about much more than the repetition of spiritual exercises.

It requires the perseverance it takes to try, and try again, to find the way that is most life-giving for us.

Trying one community, or one guide, after another, if necessary, until we find ourselves truly alive spiritually, truly at home.

It is about realising, that sometimes the perfection of the moment lies in accepting its imperfections.

So to whom should we go to become spiritual people ?

Answer:

To no one, who, in the name of religion, orders us to be more a spiritual robot, and less a spiritual person.

For the word of God to do His work in this world, we have to step back, and let Him do His work in and through us.

Amen.