

July 25, 2021

Father Ed's Sunday Reading

(continued)

We resent any excessive and unwarranted intrusions on our liberty, whether by our neighbours, or by officials such as police, bureaucrats, revenue collectors, or even by the leaders of our Church. We want to be free to do as we please with our lives, our energy and our income. This is a good desire, on just one condition, that what we desire is itself good. It's not enough to be free from pressures and interference. Freedom must also be for something. It is not complete until we put it to work, using it for something worthwhile.

A Christian should be positive. We all know some people who seem to have an unusual level of freedom and initiative, in deciding what to do with their energy and their time. They get things done, while others would still be anxiously fretting and wondering whether to do anything! Paul of Tarsus was a great "Doer," a man who believed in his mission in life, which was to share Christ with as many people as possible. Among the apostles, he was the supreme activist, spreading the Gospel "in season and out of season." While the conservative Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem worried about what conditions would need to be imposed before letting Greek converts into the Church, Paul was already out on his mission-field, winning those Greeks for Christ. What made Paul so sure that his way was right? He was deeply convinced that it was God's way, that his vocation came to him direct from the living God.

Each one has a personal vocation. He wrote this letter not just to the leaders, nor even to the whole community in Ephesus, but to every one of his converts. It is meant as an "encyclical," a final word for all his mission parishes. And his message holds good today, for each adult Christian who is willing to listen to God's call. The whole basis for our faith, says Paul, is that the good God has blessed us, and made us his children by grace: there is one God, the Father of us all. He is the God of mercy, who "opens wide his hand" to bless, and is "loving in all his deeds." Once we realise this, we also understand how much is asked of us in response. We need to love others as God loves them, "with unselfishness, gentleness and patience." This is the truly "good" life, the proper life-style for a Christian. Of course, such perfect love and unity with others is not an easy vocation, and indeed is never quite within our power to achieve. Still, it is there as a guiding ideal, calling us onward and upward. Any worth-while vocation is like that; it calls us beyond ourselves.

The importance of making a Start. All too often, our response to such high idealism is to shrug and say, "Be realistic! Don't expect much from me! I'm no hero, just an ordinary person." Paul would not let us cop out of the love ideal so easily. With a nice sense of balance, he advises, "do what you can to achieve and preserve it." The problem often lies in getting started. What you or I can actually do, here and now, to help our neighbours, may seem woefully small. But it's all that's required of us just at this point in time. Elisha's servant felt that his twenty small loaves were nowhere near enough to feed a hundred hungry men. Still, once distributed, those loaves made all the difference.

Cooperating with Christ. The Christian vocation to love others, whether it comes to us as married or as single, as lay-person, religious or priest, is always part of our personal relationship with Our Lord. It is only fulfilled in co-operation with him. Each of us can be like those disciples, who took the bread that Jesus blessed, and then distributed it to the crowds. Some of us, like Philip, may feel reluctant at first to get involved in a problem that looks too big to solve. Others, like Andrew, are a bit more optimistic, and begin to notice whatever glimmerings of hope are there in the situation. But if Jesus has the willing co-operation of all his friends, something great will be done for the people in need.

We just need to open our eyes, to see the needs around us. Problems to be faced; people to be loved, respected and listened to. To be involved in helping others, with our talents, our energy and our love, is the best and proper use of our freedom. And it will, please God, add up to "a life worthy of our vocation."