

A REFLECTION BY BERNARD TRAYNOR ON THIS SUNDAY'S READINGS

(St Paul to the Romans 11: 33-36; Matthew 16: 13-20)

It is a source of constant regret to me that more people are not aware of the spiritual richness to be found in the 12-Step Programme of Alcoholics Anonymous. The fact that I continue to be a functioning human being is in no small part due to the efficacy of the Programme. The 12-Steps help me every day to cope with situations which, in the past, would have baffled me and would have me reaching for alcohol just in order to cope. Now I function perfectly well without the crutch of alcohol and the Programme has helped me to find meaning and purpose. Although it never claims to be a religious programme, it is, nevertheless, deeply spiritual. Some of you may recognise elements of Ignatian Spirituality running through the discipline. No-one has to be an alcoholic to benefit from each of the Steps. As well as the 12 Steps of the programme, there are also 12 promises. These bring great comfort and hope. Promises 11 and 12 speak in the following way: *We will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us* - and *We will suddenly realise that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves*. This is so true in my own life. On many an occasion God has done great things for me and I know that I have been truly blessed. I am, indeed, a happy man.

In this weekend's Gospel Jesus addresses Peter with a similar sentiment. *"Simon, son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven."* Simon has been tested and has come through with flying colours. In one sentence *"You are the Christ"* - Simon, son of Jonah moves seamlessly from humble fisherman to Jesus' anointed one. Such a step was only possible with God's grace. God does for Peter – what he could not do for himself. Peter will be able to handle situations which would baffle lesser individuals. This same promise is available to each of us and all that is required to earn such a gift is to commit to faith in Jesus Christ. *"Who do people say I am?"* is addressed to us today exactly as it was addressed to the disciples in Caesarea Philippi. We cannot avoid the question nor shirk from it. The answer will not be found in a book, but it will be found in our hearts. The other day I was watching a cook from India showing James Martin, the TV Chef from Yorkshire, how to prepare a vegetable Biryani. It was amusing TV – not least because she was incredibly bossy and abrupt. At one point she announced to her host that Indian cooks have no use for scales or measuring jugs. *"Our eyes and our hands are the only measure we need."* She reminded me of my own mother and how, as a very young child I would watch agog as flour, eggs, butter and sugar were transformed into a sponge cake, her only measure seemed to be a tablespoon which was sometimes overflowing, sometimes half-full, sometimes a quarter. Her eye was the real test and the daintiest of little fingers that seemed to be used for everything from taste to consistency. Occasionally she might refer to a recipe book if she was trying something new but for the most part it was an instinctual process. I tackle my batter-mix for Yorkshire Pudding with military precision – with her it was pure instinct. We don't need a book or manual to answer the question *Who do you say I am?* We do need an open heart. When we turn our attention to giving our answer, we need to remember that the answer will involve three rooms.

There is the room of our past with all of its clutter and paraphernalia, memories good and bad. We must befriend that room for it has helped to form who we are. The sacrifice of Calvary means that we must not dwell on or regret the past. It has no hold over us – otherwise Christ's sacrifice was pointless. Then there is the room of the future. We cannot see into this room for it has not happened yet, but it holds no fear. St Paul in today's second reading reminds us: *How rich are the depths of God*. He will be there for us – just as he is here now. For we are now in the room of the present. We live every second of our time in this room as if it is to be our last. We promise to live here and now, to embrace the present. The only 'Yes' that is of interest to God is the 'Yes' of now. If we can say 'Yes' to Him now – this very instant, we will comprehend serenity and we will know peace – peace in our hearts. *We will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us* - and *We will suddenly realise that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves*. And as Paul ends today's section from Romans: *All that exists comes from Him; all is by Him and for Him. To Him be glory for ever! Amen.*