

2018 29th SUNDAY

Hands up those who know how many pipes are on our Organ? (84!)

I'm picking that at some stage some of you have sat in this Church bored to tears with a Homily and in desperation have counted the pipes just for something to do. Or perhaps you have examined your watch in infinite detail, convinced it had stopped!

I have been given authority from the Bishop to preach here at St Mary Star of the Sea. It is an authority I could use carelessly- coming unprepared and just talking from the top of my bald head- boring people to despair; prompting them to count pipes. I could use my authority to preach despotically and use my Homilies as an opportunity to humiliate parishioners who have crossed me. I could use it corruptly...spreading malicious gossip. I could use Homilies for self-aggrandisement- continually making a hero of myself.

And if I was to do any of this, parishioners would have every right to complain to the Bishop because I would be using the authority given to me improperly. I would be acting against the spirit of today's Gospel.

Jesus made it very, very plain to James and John and to all the other Apostles that authority within the Kingdom of God is always to be seen as a call to serve others.

My starting point when I prepare a Sunday Homily has to be: 'What are the spiritual needs of my listeners? How can my words help today's Gospel connect with their lives?'

All of us exercise authority in one way or another; be it as in the case of Perky, as Principal, but also parents, teachers, employers, managers, secretaries, baby-sitters. Only the very young are excluded.

It is a good thing as Christians to take time out to reflect upon how we exercise our authority. Do we exercise it according to the spirit of today's Gospel?

We must never forget what it was like to be down in the trenches. As priest I must never forget the 43 years I sat in the pews. A young teacher must never forget what it was like to be bored by teachers talking on and on and on or how terrible it felt to be humiliated by them in front of ones friends. Parents of teenagers mustn't ever forget the confusion they

themselves felt as teenagers. Yes there have to be clear boundaries in some important things but there has also to be flexibility in things which are not world-shattering. There must be friendly communication with lots of laughs and sensitivity for the growing individuality of the blossoming adult.

Employers have to remember the desperation that they felt as young parents when the wages paid to them or the hours demanded of them made family life a total shambles.

When we longer care about the feelings of those we have authority over, when we are continually locked in our own selfish worlds, we have stopped taking the Gospel of Christ seriously.

Those in authority do not have the right to make demands on people they are not prepared to shoulder themselves. A parent who smokes has lost the moral authority of forbidding a child to smoke. A Dad who doesn't raise a hand to help around the house has no right to order his daughter to go and dry the dishes. A priest who does not give generously to Caritas has no right to request parishioners to dip deep into their pockets on Mission Sunday. Authority has to be transparent.

The way we exercise authority has a huge impact upon the people we have charge over

When absolute obedience is demanded, people become robots and lose their ability to think creatively for themselves. People need to be given space to make personal decisions. People need to be listened to and respected by those who have authority over them,

To have authority over others is a privilege. It is a chance to help people grow as human beings.

Christ was an outstanding leader; respecting the personhood of all people; especially the Apostles. Witness his patience today with James and John. He listened to them seriously even though what they were asking for was ludicrous. He did not mock them but tried to help lead them to a better way of understanding discipleship.

Those in authority will achieve wonderful deep-down satisfaction when those over whom they have authority are happy and growing. In the words of St. Francis: "It is in giving that we receive; it is in dying to self that we earn eternal life."

