OTA33 2017

A poem was circulating recently which I think we printed in the newsletter. It is carefully and inventively crafted; so that read from start to finish it spouts many of the negative comments and thoughts we entertain when we see refugees as a threat.

But read in reverse, beginning with the last sentence; we get a totally different perspective; one that refocuses us on our more worthy attitudes of compassion; recognizing our common humanity and inviting a warmer response along the lines of *“but for the grace of God, there goes I”.*

For it is difficult in our more affluent societies to imagine ourselves experiencing the despair and destitution suffered by those forced from their homes by violence, threats, economic stagnation; who set out at least with the hope of making a home for their loved ones that is safe, where they can experience the dignity of working and contributing to a society that opens its doors to them.

Bearing all this in mind, I was disappointed when I first looked at today’s opening reading;, read from start to finish (like the poem) it seems to regard the woman in terms that focus on how advantageous she is to her husband. And because it comes from a book that is regarded as part of Holy Scripture, some might conclude that it endorses the patriarchal structures of its culture. It is tempting to shrug the shoulders and leave it at that.

But how about reading it in reverse.

If we do this, we begin with the picture of a woman established and confident in society, sharing the rewards of the economic system, renowned for her wisdom, generous towards the needy, skilled in her craft, a constant source of emotional support, in sum she is priceless. Anyone would be very blessed to have as a life partner.

The poem and the first reading then can be read from different perspectives producing different outcomes and attitudes.

Treating every human being as beloved of God and worthy of respect creates an atmosphere in which even those who struggle are at home and a society in which keeping an eye out for everyone dispels the fears of ignorance.

And God deserves no less respect, which is perhaps where the third servant in our parable went so badly wrong. He had an image of the master that relied too much on the gossip of others. God was seen in negative terms; someone who is harsh and to be feared.

In contrast the other two servants acted in a way that mirrored God’s ever expanding generosity; love begetting love in super abundance.

The church is at its best when we too mirror this image of God in our own behavior and attitudes; letting go of negativity and fearsome deities so that we can contribute to the flourishing of others as well as ourselves.

Pope John XXIII once said about the Church: “We are not on earth to guard a museum, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life.”

Our role then is not simply to preserve what we already have but to craft a society in which all can flourish and grow. © pcm 2017