

The Ambitions of Youth (OTC15 2019)

It is a good thing when young people show ambition.

It is a sign that they have an as yet untapped energy waiting to be released.

It tells us we've so far done a reasonably good job in helping them grow in confidence.

It's also an encouraging indication that they have not been too worn down or discouraged by the challenges and set-backs that have brought them to this point.

How we respond in the face of such youthful ambition matters. We can pour cold water over it or we can acknowledge the vision.

There is a story of a young man from a Newfoundland fishing community who had learned to handle a boat from the fishermen, he also watched the craftsmen in the boatyard; and longed to have a boat of his own. So, even though he came from a poor family he decided to build one himself. It was a simple, unrefined, but seaworthy boat. One day he gathered some of his belongings and some provisions to make his maiden voyage. As he set out from harbour most of the messages he heard from the crowd were cautionary, bordering on discouraging. But rising above them all was a voice he knew was his grandmother who almost sang out her *bon voyage...* (just hold this image)

It's difficult to keep our counsel and not interfere too much in the life choices and ambitions of our young people. But our most important role has been to bring them to this point safely, confident in themselves as human beings; and any wisdom we have can only be offered not imposed. Ours is to recognise the vision as theirs and respect it. (in doing this we position ourselves to support them come what may without having to utter those dread words "I told you so").

Youthful ambition of a different sort (the romantic kind) is found in one of W B Yeats' most popular poems: *He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

The young lover acknowledges that his means don't match his ambition.

He wants to offer his beloved the very best *The cloths of heaven*, but honesty requires that he doesn't fake it.

So he takes a big risk, the sort of risk that is required if we are to achieve any of our ambitions with our integrity intact and our self-worth enhanced.

The lover takes the big risk of admitting his poverty and vulnerability. There are no cloths of gold to lay before the beloved's feet, all he can do is hope that his dreams hold the same value in her heart.

So he puts his cards on the table and places his hopes in the hands of the beloved... (once again, just hold this image)

The lawyer who approaches Jesus in today's gospel, bears all the hallmarks of youthful ambition. His motives may not be entirely well intentioned. He is out to impress his mentors by outwitting this man who was causing people to question their authority in interpreting God's law.

So he puts his question, and it's a big one, characteristic of youth: "How can I inherit the kingdom of God?"

But Jesus does not embarrass his questioner, he does not tread on his dreams. He offers him the opportunity to impress the crowd with his own grasp of the law founded on the two pillars of love of God and love of neighbour.

When Jesus praises the lawyer's answer, his response is less than gracious; he uses another lawyers' trick and asks Jesus a supplementary: "But who is my neighbour?"

This time Jesus responds with a story, the young man is invited to expand his horizons beyond the standards sources:

And in the story Jesus presents a picture of a world in which neighbourliness reaches beyond the boundaries set by religious affiliation (PRIEST) beyond the boundaries of social status (LEVITE), and beyond the boundaries of ethnicity (SAMARITAN).

As Moses reminded us in the first reading, this is not rocket science. We don't have to reach to the heavens or navigate the seas to discover that the truth of this parable. It is beyond contradiction for all who sincerely seek to be citizens of God's kingdom whatever our age. We are called to tread lightly on God's vision, God's dream, God's ambition for a world in which all are one.