

Pentecost 5

9th July 2017

Zechariah 9.9-12; Psalm 145.8-15; Romans 7.15-25a; Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30.

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life

I don't know how many of you here have been watching the television series "Broken"? If you haven't seen it then I commend it to you and strongly suggest you catch up with it on iplayer or on dvd. It is the best depiction of priesthood I have ever seen on television or in films. The series was advertised as telling the story of a Roman Catholic parish priest in a northern English city, who *despite* suffering from his own troubles stemming from a traumatic childhood, tries to guide several of his most vulnerable parishioners through the trials and tribulations of everyday life. However I would say that it was not despite the priest's own brokenness that he ministers so compassionately and powerfully to others, but *because* of it. And it is the acknowledgement of his brokenness that also, without giving away any spoilers, enables him to be ministered to by others as we see at the end of the series. This priest knew that without the sacraments, a care for others, and being honest about himself there would be a betrayal of priestly ministry and a subversion of God's work.

Yes of course management, committees, governance, buildings and finances are important parts of the ministry of many priests, especially if you are a Rector, but it is all nothing if the sacraments and pastoral care do not lie at the heart of all you do and are, and also that you minister out of your own brokenness and vulnerability and allow others to minister to you. St Paul was so right when he talked of (2 Cor 12.9) the Lord saying to him 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness'.

I was ordained deacon 21 years ago and priest just over 20 years ago and I know, I truly know, that without the sacraments – without regularly receiving the Body of Christ to better be part of the Body of Christ ministering in and to the world, without acknowledging my own limitations and failings I would be denying that this is Christ's ministry I participate in. I also frequently need to hear and respond to Jesus' words from today's gospel '*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*' (Matt 11.28).

Now the promise of rest should not be taken as meaning that's all our problems are now solved but as re-assurance of God's presence, that God is in it with us. Ministry, indeed all of Christian life, is not about duplicating the actions of an absent Jesus but about relying on the ongoing presence of Jesus himself "I will give you rest" – I will be with you always. As Matthew reminds us at the beginning of his gospel, Jesus bears the name of the one promised in Isaiah: Immanuel, "God with us" (1:23)

The call to minister out of our own brokenness and into the brokenness of others is not just for priests and those in other ordained and authorised ministries but for each and every one of us –for you, for you, and for you. And whether we acknowledge it or not, the truth is that at times we are all weary and carrying heavy burdens, we are all in some way or another broken – be that overload or other stresses at work, the worry of children and/or aging parents, our own health or that of those close to us, friends going through difficulties, the state of the world, and I could go on

We all need to come to Jesus with our heavy burdens, our brokenness, so that through sacrament and prayer God can break in and work in and through us, and with others around us who are so often willing to share our load as we are to help to carry theirs. Time and time again I see others here readily willing to help others – often in quiet unsung ways - but so clearly helping to carry the heavy burden another is bearing.

In his book *The Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen - a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian who died just over ten years ago - speaks of four words that he believes are central to the spiritual lives of Christians. His four words are taken, blessed, broken and given. You probably recognize those words as we hear them every time we celebrate the Eucharist "our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples".

Nouwen said to be taken, to be blessed, to be broken, and to be given is a summary of the life of Jesus who was taken, blessed by God, broken on the cross, and given to the world. It is also a summary of our lives, because like Jesus, we are chosen and blessed by God. We are broken and have been given as gifts to the world.

The great paradox is that brokenness is central to healing . In all our human frailty and fallibility we remember Jesus' words "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12.9) and we bring our burdens to him and as we rest in him, as we are reminded of his presence with us, by the grace of God through us God's kingdom, the kingdom of justice and peace, of healing and wholeness, continues to grow.