

Sermon Easter 5 Year C 2019

One of the striking (and seemingly inescapable) features of our age is how complex it has become. I am sure you have all felt- and perhaps quietly said to yourself - *how did it all get to be so hard?* We might not want to necessarily get back to mud huts and making a modest and hard living from what you grow and make with your own hands, though that kind of life does have a growing appeal for some people. But our lives do seem to be increasingly crowded with options and choices and opportunities previous generations could not even have dreamt of.

Technology, for example, is meant to make our lives far easier. And in a million and one ways it has. Think of all those labour-saving devices we would hardly do without. But when once, work was left at the office at the end of the day, it now increasingly follows people home, and even on *the way* home. There are few opportunities for people to become truly disentangled from the demands of technology. Because we *can be* so connected to so many people so much of the time many people find *they must* be connected to all people all of the time. People literally don't know how to turn off.

Choice is meant to enhance and improve the quality of our lives. But that too has really made life so much more complex. So often it seems that a person's primary identity is not as a member of a family or as a citizen of a country, but as a consumer. But if our primary identity is as a consumer, then our lives will always be determined by the ever shifting, ever varied choices on offer. It is a pretty unstable place in which to build an identity. People are often overwhelmed - and so, paralysed - to *inaction* by the range of choices on offer around practically everything: around food choices, and medical choices, and work choices and sexual choices and political choices and religious and faith choices... I could go on. It's hard not to be cynical with all the competing claims so many products make. They can't all be true. They can't all be equally good for us. They can't all be equally beneficial for us. There comes, then, an angst - a real anxiety: *have I made the right choice?* - but without any real standard or framework in place by which to judge and assess the choices we make.

In so many complex, moral and social issues, the *only* argument to be heard - or at least the only argument *accepted* in the public arena - is that personal, individual choice has absolute authority. People struggle over something as basic as to whether men are really men or women are really women. According to the so-called 'Safe schools program' apparently even that is a choice. It seems even the facts of biology and scientific truth have to give way to personal choice. People struggle over what choice of toothpaste is really the best for their teeth, or what is the best, most flavoursome kind of fair-trade coffee. And in a few weeks time, we'll be wondering if the choices we made at the polls yesterday were really such a good thing...

Of course, no one can challenge your personal choice over any matter. Whatever you choose will be right, even if it is stupid and indeed wrong (but, of course, there no wrong!). In so many areas of our lives, it is simply and only personal choice by which we manage the complexities of choice. This in itself should highlight how shaky this moral foundation is.

With a firm moral and ethical anchor - a foundation upon which to build our ethical lives - all but vanished in our culture, *how then* can we make proper, informed, grounded choices? How can we cut through the complexities of our lives? We certainly do not want a tyrannical, dictatorial situation such as we find in North Korea in which we are *told* what to believe and what to think and how to act in *all* aspects of our lives. But at the same time, we must admit that increased choices and opportunities and options has not always made our lives easier and better but in fact more complex.

In this landscape of complexity, we all inhabit we need to be reminded of the *essentials*, of what is truly important. It is important that we - as people of faith - find ways to cut through some of the complexities, to find ways past so many of the distractions and reclaim what is important, and *live by* what is important. As people of faith we do have an anchor, a firm foundation, in which to live out our lives: the apostolic faith. This is not to say there are ready made answers for every complex question that emerges. But *there are* answers we can rely on and trust. There is a wealth from 2000 years of reflection and wisdom that can we can draw on;

2000 years of people finding a way through the complexities of life. We are better equipped than most people to comment on the complexities of human life.

The Lord Christ himself showed time and time again his capacity to cut through complexities with a pure, simple truth. We have an example of it in the gospel put before us today: *love one another*. It hardly gets more important and at the same time more basic than that: *love one another*. This little saying is perhaps more charged, more potent when we remember the context in which it appears. In John's Gospel, this is spoken at the Last Supper, just before Christ's passion and death. This is spoken into a life and death situation: his own. And as so often happens when someone knows their end is near, Jesus wants to leave a last testimony, a last legacy for his followers and friends to carry.

We know that in the complexities of our lives - our work, our families, our close relationships - that it truly is love that matters, love that endures, love that is the one priority that cuts through all the other complexities of our lives. Now, once more, love is a pretty debased word in our culture. So often it is reduced to emotion or feeling. But Christ shows the true meaning of love: that it is marked by sacrifice by self-giving. I've mentioned it before but Thomas Aquinas' upstanding of love is most helpful: love as *desiring the good of the other*... How different that is from an understanding of love which mostly forms and shapes us today. But Christ himself shows how true love is desiring the good of the other. It is not about my feeling, my emotional state, what I get out of this, but seeking the good of the other.

That is the love, as followers of Jesus, we are called to live; the love Christ himself lived. That is the kind of love which will help us cut through so many of the complex choices we are called to make. If we dare to love *so we bring out the good*, then we can find a foundation needed to navigate us through our complex lives. We *do not* have to wallow in either confusion or self-satisfaction. Love cuts through our complexities. It brings us to life. And it shows us the one thing that matters. Amen.