

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24 / Mark 5:21-43)  
28.06.2015  
*Power*

On BBC Radio Ulster there is a very famous show which, in the past, used to always begin with the statement: “where the people have the power”.

In fact, these words are very misleading because all those who promise to give power to people, ultimately keep it for themselves. When they say, as David Cameron said in 2010: “I intend to take power away from politicians and give it to the people”, at best, they are saying: “Give me the power and I will exercise it for you”. On the BBC radio show, at the end of the day, the presenter has the power.

To promise the power to people is not only misleading, it is also quite dangerous. At the moment throughout the world there are men, women and children who suffer from people who misuse the power given to them. Closer to us, we can ask: would it be wise to give power to people who cover with racist graffiti the houses of foreigners in Belfast? Is it good for us to give power to people who continue to think, speak and behave according sectarian lines?

The great challenge here is not about giving power to people but about what do we do with the power we have. To promise the power to people is easy and quite irresponsible, it would be better to help one another to exercise our power in a responsible and life-giving way.

In every religion, power is an essential attribute of divinity. In the Creed, the first article states our faith in “one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth”. We know and we believe that God’s power is essentially a creative life-giving power. In our Gospel reading today we see this power at work in Jesus Christ. When the sick woman touches him, Jesus is “immediately aware that power has gone out from him” and the woman is restored to life, physical life, and also religious and social life – for let us remember, her sickness prevented her from participating in the religious and social life of her people.

Jesus’ power is a power for life, eternal life for all those who have been entrusted to him (cf. Jn 17:2).

In our first reading, we heard the wise man declare: “Death holds no power on earth”. These words find their fulfilment in the last book of the Bible, wherein Jesus proclaims: “I am alive for ever and ever. I have power over death and the world of the dead” (Rev 1:18 GNB).

As sons and daughters of God, we live in the power of Jesus, in him we have been empowered for life. Jesus to whom all power on earth and in heaven has been given is with us always (cf. Mt 28:18), he is within us and he has given us “power and authority” (Lk 9:1).

After the secular examples mentioned earlier, the radio show and politics, maybe it would be good to turn our attention towards the Church. It is clear that, in the Church, all forms of power should be exercised for life, for growth in life.

When power is misused or unused, life is endangered, the flow of life is blocked. From this point of view I think that the main problem for our denomination here in Ireland is clericalism. There is an unchallenged and accepted clericalism in the Catholic Church which allows members of the clergy to misuse their power and the laity to give up theirs.

Obviously not all priests are little tyrants and not all lay people are passively complicit and enjoy the situation. Yet there is a culture which encourages priests to function

as if lay men and women had no power and lay men and women to think that it is enough for them to go to Mass on Sunday and to give their weekly offering envelope in order to be disciples of Christ.

Pope Francis declared that “clericalism (...) is an obstacle to the development of Christian maturity in a large section of the laity” (16.11.2013). It is an obstacle for priests too. Clericalism keeps them in a childish world of all-powerfulness!

Christian maturity is the goal for all the members of the Church, whether they are lay people, priests or consecrated men and women. Because of our baptism, the same words apply to all of us: “God did not give you a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2Tim 1:7).

For all of us, the challenge is to live according to this spirit of power. The Church will remain a living body, our communities will be life-giving only if each one of us, according to his or her calling in life, allows the Spirit of power at work within him or her to bear fruit for the good of all.

In the daily lives of our communities, and in our society we are commissioned to bear witness to the power of love. This love which casts out fear (cf. 1Jn 4:18) is meant to free us and to release strength and hope for the building of the Kingdom of God.

It is time for all of us in our Church to stop wasting time and energy in competing with one another for power, power to dominate or to control. More than striving to gain power, we should be striving to grow in courage so that we may live according to the power of love present in our hearts, a power which is for the good of all, a power to serve and to bring to life.

It is time for each one of us to be renewed in an active participation in the mission of the Church; a mission which is, according to Pope Francis, to “bring to the world the force of God which is the power of love” (20.06.2013).