

Reflection from Fr. Colm on the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Hello everybody for those who've been at Mass yesterday my apologies if you'll hear this again just if you don't want to just switch off. However, it's just a reflection that I think is quite relevant in relation to the readings yesterday.

Mark Twain said, "*A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.*" Well, I agree to this to a point. The importance of approval of others is never to be denied. People can feel the disapproval of others directly or indirectly but to simply imply that the circumstances we develop in are not important would be to eliminate the need to address such issues as social housing, family abuse in all its various forms, job satisfaction or the effects of failed relationship on our ability to develop cohesive, loving relationships with others.

In other words, the effects of family and environment are pretty important, I think. Sometimes we don't move beyond the limitations that some of these influences have had on our early or latter years. Sometimes something massively affirming is required. This can come through sport, a book, a teacher, a friend or guru, a spiritual director, a counsellor or indeed it can quite simply come from the personal intimacy regained from an encounter with God especially in the form of Jesus. These encounters become more inaccessible however as our culture becomes more alienated from a religious culture.

For me my upbringing was huge, of course, it was. There were defects, nothing is perfect. My parents however did give me an understanding of what it means to be a Catholic. Of course, it had holes in it but there's far more enriching aspects to it than defects. Indeed, the priests who educated me were representative of something that was unique to their particular vocation with all the baggage of guilt that they surely must have carried but their own humanity came through all the time.

This brings me onto the Gospel of today, this life-affirming statement of Peter "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" These fishermen in the time of Jesus they weren't owners of some super fishing trawlers that you might see in any of the big fishing ports now. They were mostly

uneducated, stank to high heaven of fish, it was in their clothes, their hair, shoes, hands. They were rough and that's before you got to the way they spoke, the accents, the language. They would never ever be the first port of call to get an opinion on anything or anyone.

Abbie Farwell Brown is a poet and she wrote on fishermen *"He knows so much of boats and tides of winds and clouds and sky. But when I tell of city things, he sniffs and shuts his eye."* These fishermen in the time of Jesus sensed a different knowledge that being out alone under the stars and at times in dangerous storms they smacked of an earthiness that the city folk were denied. I remember from my own childhood the fishermen and the port that was quite near me at home in Dublin, they weren't as the fishermen in the time of Jesus, they would've been more educated, cleaner, yet there was something about them about their personality that was silent, reflective. Words were short, greetings were brief, always friendly though.

And so we come into this wonderful situation where Jesus asks and Peter responds. *"I don't care who other people say I am"*, says Jesus, *"I want to know who you think I am."* Probably these men were never asked such a profound question in their lives before and here was this rabbi asking them to give an opinion of who He was. People who suffer and are on the margins very often feel inadequate, unable to respond to questions, easily intimidated, but Jesus elicits this most extraordinary statement from Peter.

Bishop Christopher Moleka who developed the Ujamaa cooperative movements in Tanzania described by Time magazine as a modern saint, mind now we're going back twenty or thirty years now, but he spent two weeks of each month as Bishop working in the fields barefoot and clad in tattered shirt and dungarees. However, for Bishop Christopher, good works were not enough. Like many holy people, he sought a social solution. And in relation to elevating the ordinary person into a state of real dignity, he asked us to reflect on what is most immediate to us and perhaps what we've become preoccupied in the Western church. He'd said regarding self-acceptance and the confessional that we need two types of confessional boxes in our churches. One on the right side and one on the left. In the left ones you confess your sins getting as a penance to go to the right side confessional with the obligation to confess honestly the good that you did, the good in you, the God in you. Affirmation. Good morning, good afternoon everybody.