

SUNDAY 26B ALL SAINTS 2018 9.30AM

To tolerate means to endure, to put up with, to allow to happen. If a person is tolerant we consider them to be someone who doesn't judge others harshly but allows them to do what seems to them right. Tolerance is demanded these days by those who talk of freedom of expression and the rights of individuals. There is, however, a difficulty in drawing the line between tolerance and laxity. When do we stop being tolerant, especially in the face of deliberate wrongdoing? Are we to put up with wrong? Do we tolerate it and allow others to do as they please. No of course not! Wrong doing must be confronted, but can we confront in a tolerant way? Sometimes we appear to be so tolerant that our values and principles seem of little effect.

2

Sometimes it appears we tolerate any kind of behaviour. We do need to stop any behaviour which harms or abuses others. We do need to protect those who are most vulnerable in our society. Sometimes drawing the line between tolerance and laxity is a difficulty we have to struggle with.

The question of tolerance and laxity is addressed in today's gospel. It's not an easy gospel because it is a collection of Jesus sayings which seem to be unrelated. They are a commentary on last week's gospel and relate to Jesus coming suffering and death. The sayings continue the theme of the necessity of sacrifice and self denial. They encourage the

followers of Jesus to reject jealousy and ill feeling.

3

Suffering and death, sacrifice and self denial. These are not words we like very much nor do we use them very often. But they seem to be essential for the followers of Jesus. These words are not to be taken literally. What is required is the principle of self giving so that others may have life. You see self denial is not simply about giving things up. Self denial is about giving life to another.

Self denial and self sacrifice are both qualities that demand tolerance. Tolerance is the answer of Jesus to the problem with which he is confronted. John came to Jesus complaining because he had seen a man who was not a disciple, casting out demons in Jesus name. It was a common problem in the early church. Pagan exorcists used Jesus name and apparently with some success.

Jesus answer to John's complaint is "anyone who is not against us is for us".

Jesus was demanding a very tolerant attitude. He was trying to enlarge the perspective of the disciples. John wanted to restrict Jesus message to those personally chosen by Jesus. John was anxious to preserve the truth and

purity of Jesus message. The man exorcising in Jesus name may not have been a follower in the true sense, but he was none-the-less doing something that was right. He was healing in the name of Jesus. Jesus concern was to liberate people from what was oppressing them. It doesn't matter where the freedom and love come from, as long as people are being freed and given new life.

5

John receives a strong rebuke from Jesus. "Anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great

millstone around his neck". Harsh words indeed. The use of exaggerated language was a common way for Jesus to get his message across. Saying something extreme is still often what brings the message home. Such sayings are not to be taken literally. We are to get at the message behind the saying. Here Jesus is saying the faith of the little ones is important. Little one's doesn't just mean children. It refers to all those believers who do not have the support and comfort of belonging to the group of disciples. Their faith may be a bit off key and clouded and fragile. It may be a faith like that of a child. But it is their faith none-the-less.

6

Those who are disciples need to encourage the faith others profess however small that faith may seem. Perhaps belief and practice don't always match up. But it is not the duty of Jesus followers to look down on others with disdain. Those who belong to the realm of God, need to learn to encourage those whose faith is simple and fragile in order that it may grow.

The gospel reading concludes with what seems a very intolerant attitude. "If your hand causes you to sin cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin tear it out." We need to be careful not to take these words literally as some have done. What sort of abusing God is it who would demand such things? Jesus uses extreme language in order to help us realize that where there is sin, where words and

actions are breaking relationships, there is no room for tolerance.

7

But notice, it is not, "if someone else's hand," but rather "if your hand". Each disciple should look at themselves and see what causes broken relationships with God or with others. When we see these broken relationships we have a duty to repair them.

There are no easy answers to the question of tolerance. It is clear we are not to tolerate abuse or harm to another. We are not to tolerate wrong doing. To tolerate actions which lead us to be loving forgiving and hopeful people are what is required. Whenever we seek to establish good relationships within

family or community that is the outcome of tolerance.

8

These are hard sayings of Jesus. There is no easy way to be a disciple. We have the task of trying to work out how we are to show tolerance and a desire to grow in faith. After all, God is tolerant of us when he draws us back to himself each week in this Eucharist. How can we not try to reflect this same generosity of spirit in our own lives and allow our tolerance to bring freedom and life to others.