

And as we reflect on today's readings we may perhaps see, that God is asking those of us whose disabilities are not so obvious, those who struggle in ways that no one else knows, whose flesh, for the most part, is reliable and functioning, whose standing and status in life is, at the very least, reasonable, to realise some profound truths from the lives of people like Marian.

...and that is that we are not measured in the eyes of the Lord by physical prowess, by intelligence tests, academic ability feats of endurance, or outstanding skills and gifts.

But rather that God values simplicity of living, affection and complete trust over the size of a bank balance, the cars we drive or the influence we wield.

That we do not live more fully merely by doing more, seeing more, tasting more, experiencing more, as the world would have us believe, but that the opposite is true....

That we will not begin to live more fully until we have the courage to do and see and taste and experience and be grateful for much less.

We are judged on love and on nothing else. When we stand before the Lord at our death, all we will be asked is how we loved....

Marian's suffering, while lamentable, gave birth in her some truly Christ-like qualities and I am certain, just as she was, that all those who pass through this life, disabled or disadvantaged in some way, and who suffer because of it, unable to live as others have, will be changed and given back a complete and perfect body.

This is our faith and our hope, and we have it because of the resurrection.

The Apostle Paul reminds us *"If Christ had not been raised, our faith is futile"*

Marian's life will have had little meaning beyond the value assigned to it by the world, and that is true for millions of people. But because of the hope and the certainty we have in the resurrection, Marian, and those we have known, who while followers of Jesus were in this life broken and who knew suffering, are now face to face with the God they loved and prayed to unceasingly and are at this moment healed beyond measure.

Amen.

Sermon St. Mary's Sanderstead/ St James Riddlesdown

17.2.19 3rd Sunday before Lent - Blessed are the Broken

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 / Luke 6:17-26

We all want to go through life having a sense of accomplishment, with feelings that bring happiness.
But what I wonder does it mean to be happy...

I think we'd all agree that happiness is by and large is a short lived experience in life which can be with us one minute and gone the next...

I never thought that a bag of crisps could bring such excitement, they are my favourite thing to eat while watching a film and the other night I took 2 packets of salt and vinegar hula hoops to bed but elation of eating them was gone with the realisation that in order to loose what I had just gained in eating them I would have walk a treadmill for 30 mins.

My happy feelings were gone quicker than it took me to eat those delicious crisps...

Go to any magazine rack or turn on the television and you see a consistent message.

What matters is how beautiful you are, how much money or power you have. What status you have in society....

The world however includes many billions of poor people, people who rarely make magazine covers or the news.
And yet our society tends to focus on the superrich, Bill Gates or Oprah Winfrey....but this isn't unique, throughout history nations have always glorified winners, not losers the beautiful not the supposed ugly.

Marian died a while ago, and I've changed her name so as not to identify her, but she had, had a difficult life.

She never enjoyed good health and childhood polio left her severely disabled where she spent most of her childhood in an iron lung.

Her parents were unable to cope with her disability and any love and care they might have felt for her was withdrawn and so as a child she was very isolated.

Having received little to no schooling and effectively orphaned, Marian was sent to live in an institution run by nuns where she endured repeated vicious beatings and mental cruelty, including the enforced removal of her leg callipers so that she could scrub the floors on her knees.

She was eventually taken pity on by a visiting priest who made arrangements for her to be transferred into the care of social services.

She was moved into social housing where she relied on state-funded carers to meet her basic needs.... three simple meals and a daily shower.

But she looked forward to their visits, as this was her only regular contact with people.

A wheelchair, and later, a mobility scooter gave her some freedom of movement but again, this was limited.

She was largely confined to the house, and was often in pain, mainly from a stoma that was forever getting infected but also from muscle weakness.

Her spells in hospital were frequent and increasingly prolonged and eventually she was moved into a state-run nursing home, which was beyond depressing.

But Marion knew happiness.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus declares that the poor, those who hunger, those who weep, and those who are shunned and excluded are blessed by God, while the rich, those who are full now, those who laugh now, and those who are well connected – loved by all are the object of God's woe.

Gone is the image of the God of strength and power – a God who identifies with the influential, who blesses the privileged and whose presence is signalled by riches and political strength.

For Jesus says that God is most present with those whom society has forgotten. People like Marian.

I guess like me you have visited or known people like Marian, who while on the outside appear to be broken, experience God's presence and strength, through their weakness.

In my curacy I used to take communion to a lady who while born with sight lost it as a child.

"I experience God's presence daily and immeasurably" she would say "but can't wait to go to heaven for I know that Jesus will give me back my sight and I will see forever what I only remember now...."

Marian never complained and seemed fully reconciled to her predicament.

She was completely accepting of everyone. She had forgiven her parents and the nuns for their callousness and cruelty. And more than anything, she enjoyed the life she had. She would say "I love life, me, I love life" ...And she was thankful for the life she had, no matter how limited or depressing it looked to the outsider.

Marian was also extremely faithful. She didn't question God whose providence in some strange and incomprehensible way had allowed her to be so afflicted and she attended church faithfully every week.

It's amazing how we discover our own need for transformation when we are with people we think are the needy ones.... That the Jesus we assume we are taking with us is already there....

That whether we are handing out food to the homeless, visiting the sick and dying, or simply chatting with friends from work over about a difficult situation they're in, that we are not responsible for bringing Jesus along, much less for explaining him, but rather only for following him into the crowd of suffering and hope that we practise the presence his love through acts of care and compassion.

Marian did not, could not, make flesh her strength? She was weak.

And it would have been pointless for her to try and measure herself against others, but her forgiveness of others was so total and it didn't occur to her to ration her love to those she thought deserved it.

I think we all know of someone or have heard of someone like Marian.