**HOMILY FOR SUNDAY ORDINARY 2 YEAR C**

**24 JANUARY 2016 ST BENET’S HALL**

Many of us have become accustomed to hearing about the primaries occurring in the United States presently. Perhaps you, like me, maintain an interest in the political developments in that country. For so many Europeans, the United States is not a distant and unknown land. Indeed, many of us may have lived there for a period of time, vacationed there, and have relatives who live there. Much of what has been reported on the primaries to date concerns the ambitions of the political elite. In fact, we could be forgiven for thinking that the primaries are only about the political class. It is with this in mind, that the New York Times launched a new project, ‘Of the People: Americans share their hopes, fears and frustrations in interviews from the campaign trail’.

I would like to share with you one such person from the New York Times project, as this person could be a resident of the boroughs of our own city of Oxford.

The interviewer (who is a young adult tutor volunteering in a school) introduces a young 5 year old kid, an African American, from Palo Alto, California. In the photograph Palo is wearing jeans, a sweater, and a baseball cap (back to front). He is dressed like any 5 year old, nothing different and dressed neatly. The interviewer tells us about Palo:

‘I tutored a kid. This little black kid. He looked up to me a lot. One day he asked me, “Mr. Ebbie, is jail a good place to be?” I said, “Why would you ever ask that?” He said: “My daddy’s in jail and he said he gets three meals a day. And sometimes my mom can’t make me food and I’m hungry.”

I went home and I cried that night. This is a kindergartener. Teachers told him he was going to jail. I looked at him as a 5-year-old. I didn’t see a criminal. I didn’t see a drug dealer. I didn’t see a rapist. I didn’t see a gangbanger. I saw myself, when I was a little kid 10 years ago. The candidates, a lot of them, are from very privileged backgrounds and benefit from a white, male, Christian power structure. And that’s O.K. I don’t think that white people should feel guilty about their privilege. But they should feel a responsibility to acknowledge it”’.

Of course, power structures are an inevitable part of life. But what our young tutor is pointing out to us is that the very power structures that exist ought not to serve only one class or category of persons. Indeed, these power structures can become the place from which creative and transformative interpretative proclamations can be declared, especially in this year of mercy.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus unrolls the scroll and reads plainly.

What does it mean to communicate plainly?

**1. The avoidance of linguistic-pile ups**: I’m a student at this university and one of the things I have become quasi-paranoid about is my capacity—often unknown to myself—to create ‘terrible linguistic pile-ups’. These pile-ups render readers confused and frustrated. I’m sure the ill- effects are longer for my supervisor. But as Pope Francis has encouraged priests to give shorter homilies I will not elaborate on my supervisors frustrations with my created pile ups. But linguistic-pile ups can also result in a reader simply giving-up. To give one example of the disorientation we can feel when faced with a linguistic pile-up.

Leicester City Council’s 2013 notice to dog-walkers is one awesome linguistic pile-up: ‘A person who habitually has a dog in his possession shall be taken to be in charge of the dog at any time unless at that time some other person is in charge of the dog’.

As Christians, we can create linguistic-pile ups, of a religious, theological and faith order. But this year of Mercy is asking us to veer away from creating such pile-ups. Rather than words that create pile-ups, what if they were to ‘bring good tidings to the poor’.

**2. This brings me to the role of interpretation:**

How are we to interpret the word of God? In the Gospel we hear that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus. In seeking not just knowledge, but in transforming knowledge into wisdom, we must ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit. As a child in secondary school in Ireland, we began the morning with a simple prayer to the Holy Spirit:

“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your [Spirit](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=11004) and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.” Our work of interpretation is not just an exercise in reason, but it is a pursuit of wisdom for the purpose of ministry. And in doing so, we proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind.

**3. Recognition of the gift of difference in our Church and Society.**

The Second reading reminds us that in communicating plainly and interpreting with the help of the Holy Spirit, we come to recognise the beauty of difference in our Church and in our world. Such recognition cautions against the dangers of only seeking and welcoming sameness. For when we only seek and welcome sameness we exclude others from the gift of community and belonging, from the ability to dream and imagine futures that lay ahead.

Our first induction into the gift of difference is our family and our baptism into our church. I come from a family of six brothers, we are all different, and we have all chosen different paths. But our difference does not alienate us from each other, it brings us together. Recognition of difference in how we relate to each other as Church and society ought to ‘let the oppressed go free and proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord, a year of mercy’.

Our Church as a structure and as a community, each of us, are bearers of this proclamation this year, and may God who has begun this good work in us, bring it to fulfilment.