

A CHANGE OF HEART AND DIRECTION

There is one place that means a lot to Pope Francis, and he has spoken about this place a lot of times. In fact, the knowledge of this place is key to unlocking the Personality and Papacy of Pope Francis. That important place is CORDOBA. From June 1990 to May 1992, Pope Francis who at the time was Fr Jorge Bergoglio was in exile in Cordoba; a city 402 miles away from Buenos Aires. While in Cordoba, he lived in Room 5 of the Jesuit Residencia Mayor which is at the centre of the town. Fr Jorge Bergoglio was exiled to Cordoba because after years of being the Provincial of the Jesuits in Argentina, the Rector of Collegio Maximo and one of the Procurators of the Order, many Jesuits in Argentina saw him as a very divisive figure who not only changed the curriculum of the studies for the Jesuits but had introduced a mandatory pastoral orientation of 'Preferential Option for the Poor' by demanding they get their hands dirty. Many of the Jesuits had had enough of him, wanted him gone and all his policies totally erased. While in Cordoba, Fr Jorge Bergoglio was not allowed to celebrate Mass in public. He was not allowed to make phone calls without permission; his letters were controlled, and his supporters were told not to contact him. The one thing he was allowed to do was to sit at the confessional in the Jesuit church and hear confessions all day. The 2 years in Cordoba broke him, softened him, kept him close to the people and changed him. It was a profound experience in which he had to let go of who he was and what he thought; he was forced to listen to the voice of God and allow God to mould him into the person He wanted him to be. Fr Jorge Bergoglio's exile came to an end on the 13th of May 1992 when Archbishop Ubaldo Calabresi - the then Papal Nuncio to Argentina, after a meeting with Bergoglio at the airport, informed him he had been named an auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires to assist Cardinal Antonio Quarracino who spearheaded his rescue from his exile. Pope Francis recalled that his exile to Cordoba was upsetting to him initially; however, those 2 years changed him, changed his heart, changed his worldviews and approach to life; they remoulded and changed him into the person he is today. Pope Francis calls his 2 years in Cordoba as years of metanoia and change of heart and direction. It is this same change of heart and direction that we are summoned to in the readings of this Sunday.

In today's Gospel pericope from Matthew Chapter 21, Jesus presents us with the parable of the 2 Sons whose father approached to help him in his vineyard. While the first said no and later did the bidding of his father, the second said yes and never bothered. The Greek word used there for the first son's change of heart is *Metamelomia* which means to be repentant, remorseful and to change one's mind and purpose. *Metamelomia* is a change of heart and direction upon reflection on one's actions and/or inactions; it is a regretful afterthought which leads one to a total change of heart and direction of action. It is this change of heart and direction that Prophet Ezekiel talked about in today's First Reading from Ezekiel Chapter 18, when he stated that anyone who renounces his/her past and becomes law-abiding and honest deserves to live and not die; whereas anyone who renounces integrity to commit sin and dies in them deserves that due to the evil the person had inflicted on others. When there is individual change of heart and direction, we inaugurate and guarantee a change of heart and direction within our

community by considering others to be better than us as St Paul reminds us in today's Second Reading from his letter to the Philippians. This new change of heart and direction within our community is not to boost our egos but in imitation of Christ who is not only the epitome but the exemplification of kenosis (Self-Emptying of Self). Although He is God, He assumed the condition of a slave and was humbler than all men and women put together.

My friends, there is a bit of the 2 sons in all of us. Like the First Son, there are many times we have listened to the Word of God, the Teachings of the Church and right moral principles and never paid attention to them; in fact, many times, we had consciously closed our ears from hearing them and few times had indulged in things contrary to what the Word of God, the Teachings of the Church and right moral principles stipulate for us. It is only when guilt, shame or other things befell us that we started regretting our actions and running back to carry out the same things we had rejected. Like the Second Son, there have been many things we drew up wonderful New Year Resolutions and made Promises to God to be better people and yet we never bothered to see them through. It is easy to sit on our pews today and point accusing fingers on others without looking at ourselves and asking that crucial question: **What needs to change in me?** What are the ways you and I are contributing to the corruption and decay in our world and society? What are the ways you and I are contributing to the depression a lot of people are battling with by what we have said, written and done? What are the ways you and I are contributing to the destruction of the environment God has entrusted to our care? Every cycle of change begins with me. If I change, others will notice that and change with me.

Like Pope Francis who was changed by his time of exile in Cordoba, we all need to take up once more those wonderful habits that will ensure we are examining ourselves regularly to ensure the necessary change/s take place. Some of those tools we are familiar with are: Particular Examen, Days of Reflection, Retreat Periods, Quiet Times, and Meditation Slots. As Socrates stated: "An unexamined life is not worth living." One thing is sure, if there is individual change of heart and direction, we would have commenced a Mexican Wave of change of hearts and directions that would make our world and communities better place for everyone no matter their background in life. Let us remember that it is never too late to change our hearts and directions; today is that Kairos moment, let us seize it and run with it. Eddie Espinosa captured this well in his song thus: **"Change my heart, O God. Make it ever true. Change my heart, O God. May I be like you."**

Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru

Homily for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (01/10/2023)