SERMON : 17TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 2020 *(Matthew 21:23-32)*

MAY the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. <Amen>

I"Authority" is the theme running throughout today's gospel. The chief priests and elders take issue with Jesus' authority. The two sons challenge their father's authority.

I think we ALL have authority issues but I am not talking about authority issues in the way we usually understand them.

In our usual understanding of authority issues the obvious question in today's gospel is whether we recognise and submit to the authority of Jesus and the Father. That question, however, is so obvious that I have to wonder if it is really NOT the question at the heart of today's gospel. It is so obvious that I think there has to be something more going on.

More often than not we are confused about authority. We misunderstand it to be based on credentials and expertise, a thick resume, years of education, successes and accomplishments, status and reputation, or the position held in relationship to another. We assume that authority comes from outside a person and that it is given them by their circumstances. In this understanding some have authority and others do not.

For those who do not have authority … well, they don't like someone else correcting them, or telling them what to do. We hear that in the challenge of the chief priests and elders to Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" We see it in the refusal of the two sons to go to the vineyard.

There is, however, another authority issue at play in today's gospel. That issue is our failure to recognise, claim, and exercise the authority that is within us; to go - because of our own choice - into the vineyard. That's the authority issue I believe this gospel is holding before us today.

So let me push you a little bit on this authority issue! If you think God is the boss of you, you've misunderstood authority. Let go of that idea. God is not the boss of you. God is not the boss of me. <PAUSE>

God is not the boss of us. God is our "author". Every day God AUTHOR-ises us to enter into His vineyard, to serve in this world with His authority and on His behalf through the gifts He has bestowed upon each one of us.

This "authority" then always comes from within. It is an interior God-given quality not an exterior circumstance. That's what the chief priests and elders failed to understand. I think that's why Jesus was always so aggravated with the religious leaders of his time.

They chose to exchange their God-given authority to serve for human power.

God given AUTHORITY confused with, exchanged for HUMAN POWER.

In the absence of true authority there will always be power struggles. Look at the gridlock in many political systems. Look at the wars throughout the world. Those are about power, not authority.

World leaders often exercise power but very few exercise authority.

In the exercise of power we look to our own interests but in the exercise of authority we look to the interests of others. <PAUSE>

Now … think about the people who hold authority for you. They are not concerned about themselves. They do not dominate or control you. They inspire you. They call forth from you faith, hope, and trust. They expand your world, open new possibilities, and bring forth life and gifts in yourself that you never knew were there. They cause you to reevaluate your life, change your mind, and live differently.

That sounds an awful lot like Jesus and it's very different from those who want to exercise power over you.

ALL authority originates with God, and God shares His authority with us. The authority God shares with us is nothing less than his own divine attributes. It is the expression and manifestation of God's life in and through our own.

That shared authority exists in us and is revealed by us as the many and varied gifts, God has imparted on each of our lives. That means every one of us has authority. As your priest I do not have more authority than you. I do not have better authority than you. I just have a different authority. God gives each of us gifts and authority unique to our lives.

God is generous, extravagant, with the gifts he gives and the authority he shares.

We all have God-given gifts and authority.

There is no one without authority. The difference isn't that some have authority and others don't. The difference is that some recognise and exercise their authority and others do not.

So let me push you a little bit more on your authority issues! What is the authority God has given you? What gifts, what divine attributes, has God bestowed upon you? Are you living from that authority and sharing those gifts? Have you gone to the vineyard or are you simply mouthing the answers you think God wants to hear?

I runga e te Ingoa o te Atua, te Matua, te Tama me te Wairua Tapu.
In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit <AMINE>