

Whitsunday C 05/06/22

Phillip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Phillip, and still you don’t know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14: 8-9).

How much is Philip like the Rolling Stones? They can’t get no satisfaction. Remember those lyrics from the mid ‘60s? No matter how much they tried, they ‘can’t get no satisfaction’”.

He and the other disciples had been following Jesus around for about three years, watching him heal people and perform miracles, listening to him as he taught and preached, grilling him with questions, and they still weren’t satisfied. They wanted more.

Phillip put it into words: “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Enough of these parables and stories that make us think. We don’t want to have to think or interpret or work at this anymore. We want you to just tell us the answers. Put it out there in bold, stark relief. Make it plain, simple, and direct. Give us those and we’ll be satisfied. Except you know he won’t. You can almost hear Jesus rolling his eyes.

When Jane and I were first married we were both on teacher’s salaries, living in a rented house for \$50 a week. We thought we were rolling in money, averaging a total of about \$900 per week. We bought a Toyota Corolla to replace our 1972 VW Beetle. There were just so many things that we wanted to buy, so many things that we convinced ourselves that we really needed to own, to try, to experience. Thankfully, reality settled comfortably on our shoulders, and we realised that we could be satisfied with less. But it wasn’t an easy decision to come to and it came over many years.

Our culture bombards us with constant messages telling us that we are crazy to be satisfied. We should be striving for, working for, grabbing, taking, making more, more, more all the time. To be satisfied with what you are and what you have is to be an unmotivated loser. We need only read a couple of newspapers, watch a couple of commercials, or glance at a couple of ads on our Facebook pages. The world wants us to be constantly unsatisfied, constantly in search of more and better.

John D. Rockefeller was an oil tycoon and one of America’s first millionaires at a time when the average American earned eight to ten dollars per week. It is told that someone once asked him how much money was enough. He answered, “One more dollar.” Money is easier to come by than satisfaction, it seems. But it’s not just money or possessions we are supposed to be unsatisfied with.

Money, possessions, food, and even ourselves — take your pick. We are expected, even encouraged, to be dissatisfied. Maybe it’s because I’m at the threshold of crossing into my dotage, my senior years, but I’m noticing a lot more commercials on television aimed at convincing seniors that we don’t have to be satisfied with who we are.

I look at those magazine or internet or TV ads with the before and after pictures, for skin cream that removes wrinkles and bags under your eyes and, I’ll be honest, I can’t tell the difference in the pictures. Maybe that’s because I have old people eyes and should consider some kind of eye surgery, or maybe a facelift, a gastric bypass. Or a liposuction or body contouring procedure, whatever that is. After all, about 1.2 million other Australians had plastic surgeries or procedures last year.

One could do worse, financially speaking, than owning a plastic surgery practice in Australia. Just listen to some of the catch phrases that are used to lure you into a plastic surgery clinic when your level of dissatisfaction with your appearance reaches critical mass:

“A more beautiful and confident you!”

“A more natural, younger you.” (Youth is always a big seller.)

“You can be perfect.”

“Because you’re precious.”

“Boost your confidence.” (And probably other things as well.)

“Discover a new you.”

“Emerge to incredible possibilities.”

“Feel beautiful.”

“Helping you achieve your goals.” (Well, someone’s goals.)

“Holding back the years.” (There’s that youth thing, again.)

“Improving you.”

“Live beautifully.”

The world of commerce is counting on you being dissatisfied. But we don’t have to cave to that pressure. We can, actually, be satisfied without spending our retirement savings on bigger lips, a tighter face, a boat, a holiday house with a pool, or a trip to Europe. We can choose to be satisfied.

I submit that the road to satisfaction with our lives and ourselves, starts with being satisfied with our relationship with God. But how? How do we get a spiritual life that is, ultimately, satisfying? Some people believe that a satisfying spiritual life is to be found in books and lecture theatres.

When I was in theological college, I knew people who were there not because they wanted to be priests or theologians, but because they wanted to find God. They were always disappointed when our tutors told them that they were doing it backwards. Most people usually go to theological college after they’ve found God. Theological College is where you learn how to talk about the God you’ve found (Theology = Theos (God) logos (words). God Words.

Others turn to Christian self-help or what is often referred to as pop theology. There’s an author who can prove that God exists in forty thousand, easy to understand, two or three syllable words. No need for faith when this author can give you proof.

There’s another who cannot only give you faith, but make you rich at the same time, or at least tell you why you’re not rich, which is usually because you don’t have the right kind of relationship with God.

And there’s another who will heal you of whatever ails you — mental, spiritual, physical, or financial — if you will just say the magic words: “Jesus Christ, my personal Lord and Saviour,” and become a sustaining member of his ministry with a payment every month.

Of course, that’s not what Jesus said.

Read today’s Gospel and we hear that Jesus said, clearly and without confusion, in small, mostly one and two syllable words, that the path to knowing God, not just knowing about God, but having a satisfying relationship with God is to be found in none other than Jesus himself.

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Do you want to know God? Know Jesus.

Know Jesus, know God.

And according to our Christian tradition, there are two ways to get to know Jesus. One is through the Scriptures, especially the gospels. It is in the words of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the spiritual gospel, John, that we find and become acquainted with Jesus.

It is in those books that we see his miracles, hear his teachings and his commandments, and watch his example. It is in that seeing, that hearing, and that watching that we become his disciples.

It is when we stop simply reading the gospels and start actually studying them and discussing them with others who are on the same journey we are on, that we can adopt his name as our own and call ourselves Christian.

That brings us to the other way we can encounter, hear, watch, learn from, and abide with the Master. That is, when we enter into and become a part of his resurrected body, the church. It is in the fellowship of believers that we see the active, living, loving, and saving Christ.

It is in the divine offices that we hear his words. It is in the classroom that we study his teachings. It is in the mission field that we follow his commandments to love. It is in the sacraments and the music that we feel his presence standing next to us. It is in the shared meals, the handshakes, the hugs, the laughter, the shared space, shared time, and shared lives that are found only in the church that we come face to face with Jesus Christ.

Not every time, not all the time, but sometimes.

Sometimes, when we are wrapped in the fellowship of the church, when we are with our Christian brothers and sisters in worship, in song, in service, in prayer, in work and in play, sometimes, at times like those, we look up and realise that we are, really and truly, living and leaning on Jesus, our Lord.

And when we are leaning on him, we are leaning on God the Father, Almighty. A most satisfying state of affairs, to be sure. Amen.

Fr Robert Newton