

## **087a Sixth Sunday of the Year B**

### **Earthenware Vessels**

In his second letter to the Corinthians, St Pauls write: 'we are only the earthenware jars [the clay pots] that hold this treasure to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.' (2 Corinthians 4:7) St Paul likens human beings to clay pots, and I find that very significant, because there are two seemingly contradictory things we can say about clay pots that also apply to humans. They are very strong and very fragile.

Clay pots are remarkably strong. A large clay pot can contain several cubic metres of soil and a tree, and will not break. Clay pots are also resistant to fire and ageing. When people dig up the ruins of antiquity, they often find clay pots that are thousands of years old. Many other items had perished but the clay pots had not. In 79 AD, Mount Vesuvius erupted in southern Italy burying several Roman cities including Pompeii under huge amounts of molten ash and lava. When the ruins of these cities were excavated in the last century, many pots were recovered. The immense heat of the lava had not destroyed them.

However, besides being very strong, clay pots are also very fragile. If I was to hold one up now and drop it on an angle on a hard surface it would shatter into several pieces.

And we can say something similar about human beings. In the face of some terrible situations of war and destruction, of adversity and disappointment, human beings are remarkably resilient. Think of the people of Ukraine, and others caught up in violent war zones. Think of the survivors of the recent earthquake in Turkey. Their personal living conditions seem unbearable, and their losses are very great, but many of them will survive and gradually rebuild their lives and homes.

But besides being remarkably strong and resilient, human beings are also fragile, and can sometimes break as a result of a single word that is spoken or a single unthoughtful action by another person.

And I think it is in the area of human relationships that we are most fragile. We have many things built into our DNA, that just happen naturally for us. But human relationships is not one of them.

We all have to struggle to some degree to foster good relationships in our life. While we may survive being bombed by an enemy we don't know, we can become distraught and near breaking point if we feel betrayed by a close friend, in whom we believed we could trust.

And that brings us to the Gospel of today, where Jesus urges us to be very attentive to the way we relate to other people, the way we treat them. It's not enough that we don't kill someone, Jesus says. It very important that our anger doesn't break out in an unhealthy way towards someone. This could cause great damage. And we should never see people as objects for our own selfish gratification, but always give them the respect that is their due as a fellow human being. And we also need to pay attention to our speech, to try to be honest and caring in what we say and how we speak to people. A few words spoken carelessly or in anger can cause so much grief.

Today let us give thanks to the people who are a part of our life, and also the people we meet occasionally or casually. May we show to them the respect and love that we ourselves would hope to receive. Let us try to live by the golden rule that Jesus will express a little later in the sermon on the Mount – to always treat others as we would like them to treat us.

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