

19th Sunday (C)

- Pre-COVID times most of you have been on a commercial airline.
- You know, before the flight gets underway, the airline attendants move into strategic points in the aisles, a video appears on the screens & from the speakers comes a set of instructions on safety & on action to be taken in the case of an emergency.
- You are told how the oxygen mask will drop down in front of you should cabin pressure change; where the life-jacket is & how to put it on in the event of having to ditch into the ocean.....
- The idea behind all this is to help passengers to be prepared for the unexpected.
- But very few really pay attention to the information & instructions, especially when we've heard it all so many times before.
- We really don't think we'll need to know any of this anyway because the chances of an emergency are minimal & we'll deal with it at the time if anything does go wrong.
- In the Gospel, Jesus gives us some instructions regarding the "flight of life" - a journey in which all of us are involved.
- He tells us to be prepared for the unexpected – as his little flock of disciples he says that we should keep ourselves in a state of readiness & preparedness – not in fear, but in trust & hope.
- Our inclination when hearing this gospel is to think that it refers to our readiness & preparedness when we are confronted by our own impending death – BUT all this does is to push the instructions out of our minds, because we think it's still way off – why be morbid about it now; we'll face the issue when it comes – there is too much to get on with now.
- BUT the instructions are not just about our imminent deaths – it's about a whole range of unexpected things that confront us in life.
- Something that saddens & troubles me in being with people is the "lostness" of so many of them when they are unprepared for the contingencies of life – when their faith in God should offer hope & trust that that God will be with them & guide them – in fact, is absent from their horizons.
- It doesn't mean that faith in God takes away problems, or that it provides readymade solutions, but what it does mean is that, being in relationship with God can enable us to see reality from a much bigger perspective, enabling us to see things with a hope & clarity that we couldn't have just on our own – enabling us to see through the problems, tragedies & difficulties with God's eyes to something God can achieve in our lives & bring life into what, on the surface seems desperately hopeless.

- Many people's formation in faith hasn't developed since they were children & though they may believe in God, their relationship with God has not really developed – so they don't really know God nor what he can offer.
- So, they are plunged into despair & depression, seeing no way out of their predicaments – they become increasingly sour & embittered.
- The life situations that can bring this about are the death of a loved one, the breakdown of marriage, loneliness, financial bankruptcy, unemployment, fear of failure & when life-plans are thrown into turmoil – all the unexpected contingencies life can bring.
- People can go through life thinking they have no real need for God & that God is not really relevant to daily living.
- And so, when the unexpected does come, they have nothing to hold onto.
- The general thinking is that when the unexpected does come, they will encounter God who meets them in their turmoil - & for many this does happen, but my experience has been that many don't really know God at all, or that they have such a distorted or immature understanding of God that this in fact becomes a barrier to recognising him.
- Being alert to the reality & presence of God in our personal world means learning how to pray – developing a knowledge of ourselves & of who God is.
- The most important element in prayer is an attitude of being attentive to God.
- Today these words of Jesus are also a call to us as Church to be awake to reality & to live responsibly without falling into passivity or lethargy.
- We are surrounded by a whole lot of thunder, lightning & earthquakes & much political noise, but it is the "tiny whispering sound" of God that we need to hear.
- God is constantly whispering to us that we are precious in his eyes & that he wants very much to give us the freedom & joy of being in relationship with him & that God is ready to lead us into new & life-giving places.
- Are we ready to be encountered by God in the different people & circumstances of our daily lives?