

Sermon for Third Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 10: 40-42

The background to today's Gospel reading is that Jesus is preparing his disciples for their first "solo mission". But, before sending them out on their first mission, rather than giving them an upbeat, confidence-building speech, as would very likely be the case nowadays, Jesus gives them dire warnings about the rejection and hostility that they will inevitably face.

Now, just before the disciples set off with nothing but the clothes they're standing up in, come words of reassurance and hope. But these words aren't for the disciples themselves. Jesus explains that anyone who welcomes one of his disciples receives Jesus himself and, by extension, his heavenly Father. The reward for such hospitality is not for the disciples, but for those who welcome them.

So where is the reward for the disciples themselves? We shouldn't forget that they have sacrificed their personal comfort, material possessions and security to go on this mission – do they not deserve some form of recompense?

Well, this passage makes it clear that any small act of kindness or thoughtfulness brings overwhelming rewards, because doing God's work is a reward in itself. St Paul, in his letter to the Romans, writes that the reward for a faithful disciple is not something that can be measured "in human terms", as he puts it. Rather, the disciple is rewarded by a deepening relationship with God and an experience of God's love and

spiritual gifts. And this reward, freely given, is more fulfilling than any material incentive.

Some years ago I heard a marketing guru claim that

“Successful marketing starts with the WIIFM factor.” WIIFM stands for “What’s in it for me?”

Sadly, I don’t think this attitude is confined just to marketing in our world today

But today’s Gospel, as with so much of Jesus’ teaching, turns this idea on its head. And there’s a paradox here. When we put others before ourselves, without any expectation of reward or recompense, we receive the “prophet’s reward”, as it’s sometimes called. Where faith comes into it is in believing that, ultimately, we will be much richer for it.

In his famous prayer, St Ignatius of Loyola prays that he might “give and not... count the cost... toil, and not... seek for rest... labour, and not... ask for reward – except to know that I am doing your will”. It’s a good starting point for anyone wanting to learn how to live “under grace”, as Paul calls it.

If we are welcoming and generous; if we make the smallest of gestures, such as simply offering a cup of cold water to a child; if we humble ourselves, come down to the child’s level and listen to what God is telling or showing us, our life will be hugely richer for it. Our lives may not be easy or cushy, but Jesus promises that our self-giving gestures and acts of true selflessness will earn us something infinitely more fulfilling, something that goes far beyond human imagination.