

A Right Judgement in All Things

Some of you may have watched this week the film Anne Boleyn, shown over three evenings on Channel 5. If you did, what did you think of it? I came to it with some knowledge of the history of that period. Anne came from an aristocratic family. I have visited her home, Hever castle in Kent. She was cultured and intelligent with a forceful personality and a strong faith. Jodie Turner-Smith, the tall black actress who played her part, showed great dignity but portrayed a bolshy person who threw her weight around not caring, it seemed, whom she offended. Her faith only was evident as she approached her execution. Different perspectives!

In our Gospel reading today (Mark 3:20-35) we meet differing perspectives on the person of Jesus:

1) *First, the perspective of some of the Galileans*

Perhaps they had heard of Jesus as the son of the carpenter of Nazareth: a quiet and thoughtful boy, obedient to his parents, later a careful craftsman in the family business. Then he had disappeared. Rumour had it that he had gone down to Judea to listen to the turbulent new prophet John the Baptist. Now here he was, back in Galilee, a different person. He was teaching with an air of authority and performing astonishing miracles. What had come over him? "He is beside himself!" they said, or as we might say, "He's lost it!"

2) *Then there was Jesus' own family*

They too had heard of the change in Jesus and could not account for it. They came to restrain him, to take him home and sober him up. But he would not even meet them - a painful lesson for them to learn, not to interfere with his divinely appointed ministry

3) *Then there were scribes who had come down from Jerusalem -*

an official delegation who had come to check Jesus out. He was not one of their pupils and was giving religious teaching that disregarded some of their rules - such as not allowing healing on the Sabbath because they considered it a form of work. Their view was that of the Pharisees who, after Jesus healed a man born blind on a Sabbath, declared, "This man is not from God for he does not observe the Sabbath" (John 9:16). So, what was the source of Jesus' power? No-one could deny he was an effective exorcist. "He has Beelzebul," the scribes said, "and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." The name 'Beelzebul' appears to have come from 'Baalzebub', the name of the god of the Philistine city of Ekron (in Gaza) in the time of Elijah (2 Kings 1:2, 6), by Jesus' time used as a name for Satan.

Jesus' response was twofold:

- First, he first showed the illogicality of the scribes' view: a kingdom divided against itself will fall. It *doesn't make sense* that Satan would empower Jesus to destroy Satan's own kingdom.
- Then he gave a stark warning - Mark 3:28-30:

Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin – for they had said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’ (Mark 3-28-30)

The ‘unforgiveable sin’! It is not so much an **act** as an **attitude** – an inability to distinguish good from evil, indeed attributing good to evil. Such people are like fish that live in pools in underground caves in perpetual darkness that have eyes that cannot see. How do people develop such an attitude? One may surmise it is through persistently substituting their own opinions for God’s.

How can *we avoid committing it*? A clue is surely given in the last verse of our Gospel: ‘Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother’ (Mark 3:35). If, when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we say *and mean*, “Our Father, your name be hallowed, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” it will influence the words we say and *the thoughts of our minds*. If we still have wrong perspectives, God will find ways of getting through to us, as he spoke to Saul the Pharisee on the Damascus Road, who thought he was doing God’s will by arresting Christians - by a vision of Christ. In the early 20th century in north India Sundar Singh had a similar experience after he had persecuted missionaries and burnt a Bible.

Let us pray:

The Collect for Pentecost:

God, who as at this time
taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit:
grant us by the same Spirit
to have a *right judgement in all things*
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort;
through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Andrew Daunton-Fear

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