

A summary of the Homily by Brother Martin SSF at S. Mary's, Kenton, on the Third Sunday of Lent 2012

"Jesus knew them all, and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him."

(from today's Gospel - John 2:24)

These words are somewhat frightening. Jesus knows all about each one of us, and even about our most secret thoughts. There is an old saying, used when someone is deep in thought: "a penny for your thoughts"

The words from the old Prayer Book, addressed by the priest to the bride and bridegroom at the Marriage service are indeed very challenging: "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed....."

In drama, actors in Greek tragedy wore masks by actors so that nobody could identify them. In some Japanese plays the actors put on so much make-up that no one knows who they are. Many of us wear masks, hiding our true self.

Jesus said that the Pharisees of his day were hypocrites, and this Greek word simply means 'play actors'. He saw them as playing a part.

There is a rightful place for play acting. In the film *The Iron Lady*, Meryl Streep acted brilliantly in portraying Margaret Thatcher. That is fine. But this does not justify the acting of a part outside the theatre. But in real life we may be able to 'get away with it', but we shall never succeed in the sight of God.

Lent is a good time to ask ourselves who we really are. Am I the person in the outward show *or* the real person behind the façade?

In the Old Testament we read the story of the choosing of David to be King. When Samuel went to Bethlehem to find the future king among Jesse's sons, God said to him: "The Lord sees not as man sees, for a man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

In the New Testament we have the story of Simon the Pharisee, who invited Jesus to a meal. A woman in city, described as a "sinner", brought an alabaster box of ointment. She washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with her ointment. Simon thought to himself that if Jesus was a prophet he would know how bad this woman was. He never spoke aloud, but Jesus knew his thoughts and severe reprimanded him.

In the Sacrament of Confession & Reconciliation, we should confess our bad thoughts if we dwell on them, for God sees them, and they are part of us.

But there is always the need to be positive. If we simply try to repress our thoughts there is danger of creating a vacuum. We should bear in mind Jesus' words about

an evil spirit returning to place he left, and finding it swept and tidied it goes off and finds seven other spirits, and the final state is worse than the first.

So we need to fill our minds with good thoughts, through prayer and meditation and good reading. S. Paul wrote these words to the Christians in Philippi: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Lent is a good time for sorting this out.

It is far too easy to feel self-satisfied. A girl sang in front of Edward Elgar one of his own compositions. She had a voice of exceptional purity, clarity & range; her technique was near perfect. Someone asked the composer what he thought about her performance. He replied: "She will be really great when something happens to break her heart."