

Views from the Pews: Treasure in clay pots

On the eve of his supreme sacrifice, Jesus left us his last and greatest commandment: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you [that is, to the death], so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35). So outsiders should be able to see God in Christian communities simply from the way they love and support one another. This is often true, but not always. Why not?

Paul supplies the answer: “God ... made his light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ. Yet we who have this spiritual treasure are like common clay pots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not to us”. (2 Cor: 4:6-7). For “clay pots” read “human bodies”, which, as long experience confirms, have imperatives of their own. We all know very well the pain and grief of having our own clay pots assaulted by the slings and arrows of life, both those hurled at us from outside, and those we inflict on ourselves and on others.

That is why, week after week we pray together: “Merciful God, we have sinned in what we have thought and said, in the wrong we have done, and in the good we have not done. We have sinned in ignorance; we have sinned in weakness; we have sinned through our own deliberate fault”. Then we line up at the altar rails, to receive the gracious healing of Christ that we so much need, trusting that he will fill yet again with his treasure the cracked clay pots we bring to him.

Our broken ness is precious in his eyes, because it makes us visibly effective carriers of his treasure. The grace he pours into our damaged clay pots flows all the more freely out into the world through the cracks. Jesus knows that our repeated failures to obey his prime commandment are inevitable, so again and again he offers us the grace and strength to keep trying. Lent is a good time to remember that his patience is longer than our weakness, and that he can equip us to find ways to seek justice for and to love each other through our failures.

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