

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts
be pleasing to you O Lord our Saviour*

INTRODUCTION

Last week we were thinking about **Grumbling and Thankfulness**. In our Old Testament reading the people of Israel are still grumbling ... will it never stop???. Surely they knew Moses and Aaron are doing their best. Those called by God need encouragement and poor Moses and Aaron often wanted to give up.

However, today I want to highlight something from each of our readings which is a counterpoint to this. Last week's counterpoint was Thanksgiving.

✘ Counterpoints

✘ PSALM 78.1-4 Think of the Next Generation

A counterpoint from the Psalms is to think of the next generation. The Psalm says **we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD**, - what do our children hear? Complaints about the church and about other Christians? Negative comments about services or a desire to discover what God is saying to us each time we are at church. If we are overly church focussed we may have a lot to complain about .. but if our focus is on Christ we can always talk positively. This is not to say we should not be realistic about the church, rather it is to say that there is something – or someone – greater!

I have never been able to accept the premise that we leave it to our children to decide when they grow up. We teach our children about all sorts of dangers and aim to encourage them into all sorts of values. Of course, children have to make decisions for themselves - that is why we have confirmation. Confirmation, though is not the beginning of a process – that comes with baptism – it is the beginning of the next step.

I believe the Gospel is too important to not feature as a major – and I would say – **THE** major part of the growth and development of the next generation.

✘ OLD TESTAMENT READING Exodus 17:1-7 Prayer strengthens us

A counterpoint from the Exodus reading is prayer. Moses is despairing – he says in v4 *What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me*. What does Moses do? He goes to God in prayer and presents the problem to him. He recognises that only in God can he find strength.

Part of the role of any church leader is to go to God and cry out to him. I take at least one day a month in prayer to ensure that it is in God's strength I go. In a session on bullying of ministers in our area of the London Diocese, over 90% said they had experienced bullying. As Bishop Robert has made very clear, this ought not to be. How can we present an alternative to the world if we do not act differently from them. I am so thankful for the streets and parks of Barcelona – places to walk, talk and reason with God. Nothing happens in this church without a lot of prayer – from me and from many others. The counterpoint to grumbling is prayer.

✘ **NEW TESTAMENT READING Philippians 2:1-13 Be Christocentric**

A counterpoint from the Philippians reading is Christ – I all this as being Christocentric – centred on Christ. The Philippians reading says ⁵*Let the same mind (or your attitudes should be) be in you that was in Christ Jesus.* Paul says: 12 *Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* It is Christ's good pleasure we should be focussed on. We cannot please all the people all the time ... our focus is to be on pleasing Christ. Christ can prevent us both from being a grumbler and complainer and someone who listens overmuch to grumbling and complaining.

✘ **GOSPEL Matthew 21:23-32 Obedient Action**

A counterpoint from the Gospel reading is Obedient Action. The Father asked the sons to do something, the one son said yes and didn't whilst the other said no – and did! Obedient action was praised ... Our Lord gives some very strong words to self-righteous chief priests and elders: *Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.*

✦ Sincere people act! We all have different personalities ... but the one to be praised is the one who acts – and doesn't just speak about it.

✦ I believe Jesus would say to us ... are you thankful in your heart for all the good things in your life? Does your thankfulness result in doing? All doing should arise out of your listening to the Father. Who sets our expectations? Is it voices inside us from our past? Is it those around us pressuring us? Is it the Father as we listen to him – directly in Scripture and prayer, and indirectly through his people – and particularly in this case, we have to weigh up as to what we believe is of God and what is not.

Therefore, 4 counterpoints to grumbling and complaining:

✘ **PSALM 78.1-4 Think of the Next Generation**

✘ **OLD TESTAMENT READING Exodus 17:1-7 Prayer strengthens us**

✘ **NEW TESTAMENT READING Philippians 2:1-13 Be Christocentric**

✘ **GOSPEL Matthew 21:23-32 Obedient Action**

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.