

Pentecost 12 2025 All Souls' **ANGELS IN DISGUISE** dtw

Hebrews 13.2: Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it (alt 'unawares'!)

Some words from a 60's song by Sydney Carter we used to sing at St Michael's House when I was a student. 'No use knocking on the window, there is nothing we can do, sir; all the beds are booked already, there is nothing left for you sir...Jesus Christ has gone to heaven: one day he'll be coming back sir. In this house he will be welcome, but we hope he won't be black, sir...standing in the rain knocking on the window, knocking on the window in the same old way'.

When I was working in the parish of Midland in Perth, I became the foundation Chair of the Midland Aboriginal, Police and Community Liaison Committee. The largest metropolitan community of indigenous people lives at or near Midland. One of the projects we took on was establishing a Sobering-up Shelter there. It was a huge challenge, not because we couldn't get the finance and human resources, but because no-one wanted it in their back yard. We even had an efficient shuttle-bus service which, along with security arrangements, meant that vagrancy, street violence, vandalism and theft could be reduced enormously and that the whole community would benefit. The proposed site moved a number of times until, after nearly 3 years of bureaucratic procrastinating, the Shelter was built. All sorts of programmes for the edification of the Aboriginal community and the community at large have followed.

Most of us are acutely aware of our social comfort zones but we would rather not talk about them except perhaps to our closest friends. Even the language people use about overseas people can put up instant shutters or invite positive engagement. Today is National Refugee Sunday. What if we had 'Asylum Seekers Sunday'? But then a more comfortable take could be 'Sustainable Population Sunday'? Big difference? Interesting. This weekend there are anti-migration demonstrations everywhere. And inside all of us there are different voices jostling for attention: like Pauline Hanson, Dick Smith, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi....Jesus. Who gets the most votes?

In our Gospel today Jesus says, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you... (Luke 14.12-14)

In his book *St Francis*, GK Chesterton wrote of Francis of Assisi, 'He was riding listlessly in some wayside place, apparently in the open country, when he saw a figure coming along the road towards him and halted; for he saw it was a leper. And he knew instantly that his courage was challenged, not as the world challenges, but as one would challenge who knew the secrets of the heart of a

man. What he saw advancing was not the banner and spears of Perugia, from which it never occurred to him to shrink; nor the armies that fought for the crown of Sicily, of which he had always thought as a courageous man thinks of mere vulgar danger. Francis Bernadone saw his fear coming up the road towards him; the fear that comes from within and not without; though it stood white and horrible in the sunlight. For once in the long rush of his life his soul must have stood still. Then he sprang from his horse, knowing nothing between stillness and swiftness, and rushed on the leper and threw his arms around him. It was the beginning of a long vocation of ministry among many lepers for whom he did many services; to this man he gave what money he could and mounted and rode on. We do not know how far he rode, or with what sense of the things around him; but it is said that when he looked back, he could see no figure on the road.' (GKC 1874-1936)

Have you and I acknowledged our own 'fear coming up the road towards' us? I often say that we need to see and shape our churches through the eyes of the stranger, because those who are not here should be our highest priority and we want them to feel right at home; our own homes should also be places of wonderful hospitality where newcomers get glued into our lives so that it is no longer 'them and us' but 'we'. All this has implications for the welcoming and inclusive church that we claim to be. May we 'knowing nothing between stillness and swiftness' rush upon angels in disguise and throw our arms around them.

I leave you with a reflection of mine from my first little book entitled *Christ in my Neighbour*

*Loneliness is the smell of gas and last year's calendar hanging on the wall. If you've been to many old boarding houses or apartment blocks, you'd know what I mean. That's where the lonely people live, and there's probably one or two in your street as well.*

*I can't think of anything worse than loneliness. I'd rather be in pain with someone there to hold my hand than to have every material benefit and no one to talk to.*

*Jesus experienced extreme loneliness, those times when it seemed that the world had forsaken him, when no one understood his mission. And the world still forsakes him in my lonely brother and lonely sister. Inasmuch as I have done nothing for them, I have done nothing for him.*

*Lord, help me to be so very sensitive to the needs of the lonely and afflicted of your world; my world. Can I really worship you in Word and Sacrament if I do not tend to you in my needy brother and sister? Help me to worship you and find you there too Lord. Bless those who seek out the lonely people and thank you for each one who finds hope and a purpose for life again.*

*DTW If Fish is all You Want 1983*