

The thing that struck me about the readings this morning is the capacity of people to take the wrong path. It happens in all walks and at all stages of life.

People forget where they left their car. We take the wrong turn on the motorway and finish up in the wrong place. We select the wrong life partner.

In the gospel story Simon said to the disciples "I am going fishing". The others went with him but they had their nets on the wrong side of the boat. In the reading from Acts Saul was heading for Damascus when a voice told him that his energies were misdirected.

Two themes emerge. One is our ability to be on the wrong track. The other is the interaction with the divine.

The disciples were on the water when they heard a voice. At the time they were unaware who was

offering them advice or the basis for the advice but they were prepared to test its validity. I expect they felt they had little to lose.

It was only after they had a net full of fish that the "disciple Jesus loved" whom we assume to be John said "It is the Lord".

Saul responded to the voice saying to him "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" The voice then informed him "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting".

Both the disciples and Saul had a spiritual encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. Which is what John in the reading from the Book of Revelation also described.

Now the book of Revelation is not the easiest book to read and or to understand. It was written at a time when the lives of those who followed Jesus were under threat.

It was consequently written so as to obscure its meaning and disguise any reference to those threatening the Christian community. It is also describing a vision and as such shares many of the characteristics of a dream.

We know from dream work that there are certain clues that help us understand dreams and that there are often significant messages contained in our dreams if we are prepared to explore them. It can therefore be rewarding to take time to think about what a dream might be saying.

When I cut through what is said in this reading from the book of Revelation I find a vision in which the risen Lord Jesus is heralded, along with the one seated on the throne; presumably the creator God.

It's an encounter that links the crucified and resurrected Jesus as a part of the eternal

Godhead. As such it is an encounter, such as many experience, in which one is not always sure what is being communicated and/or what to make of what is seen and heard.

What is common to at least two of the experiences contained in our readings today is that they are unsolicited. Peter and John (the disciple Jesus loved) did not invoke the help of the figure on the sea shore. Saul's experience was not part of his planning.

There is some suggestion that John was engaged in some form of spiritual quest on the Island of Patmos. It is even suggest that some if not all of his experiences were influenced by mind altering substances.

Before we dismiss the book of Revelation as being too difficult to understand (and there are certainly parts that I for one, find difficult) it is important to

recognize that it does contain some gems. By too quickly dismissing the whole we risk missing significant insights.

However strange this morning's extract from Revelation seems to us it does relay what we hold to be true. In fact the creed states that Jesus "is seated at the right hand of the Father" which resonates with what John records in his revelation.

John's revelation was gifted to him. Jesus' voice from the shore was a gift to Peter and the disciple Jesus loved. Jesus' words to Saul on the road to Damascus were a gift to him. The thread I am drawing from these three encounters is that the risen Lord breaks into human history when the risen Lord chooses to do so. And often in ways we don't necessarily appreciate.

It may be: as a voice suggesting a change to where we place our efforts, in a blinding light that brings

about a change in our thinking, or in a vision that confirms our understanding of the faith.

As noted earlier it is not uncommon for us to find ourselves on the wrong track and resistant to the message received. Which brings us to consider what these readings might say to us individually and collectively.

What might I encounter to challenge the direction I believe I should be following? What might God have in mind about the direction you have mapped out for yourselves?

Might we be casting our nets in the wrong direction? Could we be misdirecting our energies and failing to attend to our dreams and visions?

History tells us that people make wrong choices all the time. Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit. Cain killed his brother Able. Sampson trusted his wife

with the secret to his strength. Goliath believe he could easily defeat David.

Many countries have made wrong choices. We look at the volatile political situation in the countries of Africa and think of Syria and the Sudan; in Europe we think of Greece and Italy; in the Pacific we think of Fiji and New Guinea; in South East Asia we think of the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea.

We are aware how easily countries succumb to internal and or regional pressures and find themselves embroiled in conflicts or difficulties they might otherwise have avoided.

We think of the earth we share with other species and bemoan the extinction of fauna and flora. We think of our use of fossil fuels and the impact they have had on the environment. The use of CFC gases and the impact that had on the Ozone layer.

The use of asbestos and the impact it has had on the health of so many people. We have certainly made wrong choices.

At the time we were engaged in these activities few of us realized the consequence of our actions. Most believed that what we were doing was right. This is why we need to remain open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and actively seek the intervention of God in all we do.

Left to our own devices all too often we find that we have our nets on the wrong side of the boat. Or are vehemently opposing something God has initiated.

St Paul's has been through the unsettling situation of having your priest retire. You are looking for a new parish priest. I have been with you for almost twelve months. Soon you will have another locum

and before too long will have a new incumbent to become familiar with.

You will experience change. Some you will welcome. Some you will find less to your liking. You will do well to listen for the divine voice that may come through others or from within to assist you to assess whether you need to cast your net in a different direction. If you resist too strenuously the risk is that you might find yourselves opposing something God has inspired as Saul did.

When I read today's readings I was struck by the capacity of people to take the wrong path. I thought about Simon going fishing and finding that his net was on the wrong side of the boat. Saul on the road to Damascus and finding that his energies were misdirected.

I suggested that two themes emerged for me. Our ability to be on the wrong track and our

interaction with the divine. By remaining open to the Holy Spirit we trust that we will avoid finding ourselves casting our nets in the wrong place or opposing what God has initiated.

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