

EASTER 3 2008 YearA

“Yours eyes are full of hate... 41. That’s good. Hate keeps a man alive. It gives him strength”

So said Jack Hawkins as Quintus Arius after he had laid the lash on Charlton Heston’s back as Judah Ben Hur in a Roman Galley prior to a battle with the Macedonians.

The lasting impression of that first film I ever saw on the Big Screen at ten years of age was the chariot race, where Stephen Boyd as Massala and Ben Hur slug it out in a none too gentlemanly fashion and Massala gets fatally wounded eventually dying in a state of unrepentant hate for his erstwhile friend.

But having seen the film again scores of times, the lasting impression is how Quintus Arius describes Judah Ben Hur as he bends shackled over the oars of the Roman Galley as he had done as a slave for three years...41...41... a number; a thing, a number, not a person, a number; a lump of flesh and muscle who existed only in order to enable to a battle ship go either faster or slower; a number who only assumed a

name when he saved his inquisitor and did something different from the usual machine like duty of enabling a ship to move forward.

Judah Ben Hur was a human galley slave who existed for the sake of a wooden ship, and who by being given a number seemed to make the inhuman complete.

It is actually very easy to depersonalise anyone; it is very easy in an extraordinarily busy world to see a person only as a function, to unwittingly shackle that person to a role; to identify the person only with the role... and not as the unique individual personality that God has created.

It is very easy for the unique God created personality of the individual to dissolve into no more than a function...and the more we try to be successful in what we do, or indeed are driven towards that elusive “success” by others, the more functional and less human we can become.

Mr Lucas was my Headmaster at Grammar School; and just before my first degree finals, one evening, I happened to meet him with no academic gown and an open neck shirt... in our village pub.

He suggested I should have been revising... never the most engaging occupation for the now Canon Precentor at the best of times.

But, I was speechless, not because of what he had said, but because I thought he should have been in his cupboard labelled Headmaster somewhere in my former school. Afterall, it was after hometime!

That was the problem of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Here they were so blinded by their grief, sadness, mourning, and the things that had happened to them in their recent past, that the “person” who joined them, on the road became little more than a function, an ear to be bent. Whether the appearance of the Risen Christ was different or not I suspect the self possession of the two disciples would have been all consuming. This other traveller was just another anonymous traveller on a well trodden road, just a pair of ears with whom they could rehearse paradoxically the greatest event of all of creation’s history!!!

This fellow traveller had in their eyes lost what made him the unique person he was...he had in their perception lost that which made him a unique human being, the Risen Jesus, the Saviour of the World.

I am often quite concerned about how society sees its fellow creatures in that way, at best a fellow anonymous traveller on the road, and at worst a function.

Even in the Church there is alas the temptation to see the function of an individual as dominating the personal.

Furthermore, the higher the role, and the more that is to be done by an often thinner “work force”, the greater the expectancy of the function and often to the detriment of the personal.

Much better would it have been for the disciples on the road to Emmaus to have recognised Jesus the person first and the function of a fellow traveller second...to have recognised the uniqueness of the Saviour of the World first before an anonymity with a bendable ear.

But it suits Luke’s theological stance to suggest that “their eyes were kept from recognising him.”

Recognise “him” or in this following case “them”...

Geraint Evans that great welsh bass/baritone, famous for instance, for his role as Papageno in Mozart’s Magic Flute. When I was in the chorus at the Colliseum he endeared himself to me no end, not because of his great voice or his extraordinary acting ability, although both were huge,

but for the fact that spying two very young basses on the back row of the chorus in a pre-stage rehearsal, he came over to us.. he somehow already knew our names, and simply asked:

“Stephen Gerry, how’s it going, boys?”...and what is more he meant it.

The best leaders of all sorts it seems to me are those who recognise the individual at the level of the individual... and in every sense possible know them by name.

They are those who despite all the demands and pressures are a person first and a function second; they are those who see in the other a person first and a function some way down the line; they are those who seem to have the time to make you feel unique in their eyes; they are those who in spiritual terms are able to see the “you” in “you”, and like Christ himself love you for it.

Such a quality is always remembered, leaves a lasting impression and is intensely Christ-like.

Lastly to return to where I started... Judah Ben Hur on the way to the galleys moored at Tyrus, under searing sun and lash, goes through a place unknown to him called Nazareth.

A young carpenter offers him water to drink.

Some years later in Jerusalem he follows the procession of a young rabbi to his crucifixion. The penny drops... "I know this man" he says and returns the favour as Jesus falls to the ground under the weight of the cross.

To recognise the uniqueness of the other person and their needs... to look for, to find and to love the Christ-like in the other first of all is to head off the temptation of a person becoming a function, a means to an end, an exploited.

May our eyes never be kept from first recognising the other person and the risen Christ within them.

