

## 11.07 21 2 Samuel 6 1-5, 12b-19, Mark 6: 14-29 – Keeping up Appearances.

**Let us pray:**

**Lord we ask that through these words and all of our thoughts we will**

**Open our minds to love you better and our hearts to love you more**

**Amen**

After a hard day at the office there is nothing I like more than to get home, where there is a nice cup of coffee waiting for me, sometimes with a spot of Baileys in, depending what the day has been like. Cosied up in my comfy chair, coffee in hand, feet up, television on. I think I am in heaven.

I have to confess .....I love watching television. Around the time I get home there have been lots of old series that I have tuned into. All Creatures Great and Small, Are you being Served (how on earth did they get away with it!), Hi De Hi ( ho de ho !) and most recently Keeping up Appearances. Dear Mrs Bucket, oops Mrs Bouquet, doing her best to be something she is not and Richard her long suffering husband trying , but most often failing, to live up to her expectations. Her friends and family, and even the vicar, are drawn into her world as she tries to keep up her appearance of the lady she believes she is.

Keeping up appearances can be hard work. It's like being on your best behaviour all of the time, never being able to let your hair down, never let your guard down. It's not just hard work, it is very tiring.

In our readings today we have two kings who fall foul of keeping up appearances in one way or another.

Two leaders, with very different leadership styles and backgrounds.

One a leader chosen by God at a very young age and one a leader motivated by political ambition.

Two men, a thousand years part in history. A million years apart in their theology and ideology.

And in our readings, both men are in a party mood

- David is part of a carnival atmosphere with singing, dancing and music. Celebration.
- Herod is at his birthday party where all the guests had celebrity status. No doubt the gourmet food of the time was being served and there was entertainment in the form of dancing. Celebration.

But both events are marred by situations, in which revenge and bitterness rear their heads in the most ugliest of forms to leave a nasty taste in the mouth. Both of them end up in trouble at home with their wives, wives who have clear expectations about appearances. And each leader handles difficult situations in different ways.

We pick up the story of David's leadership today, where he has consolidated his earthly power, he has defeated the enemies of Israel and developed the nation into a kind of small empire. Jerusalem is transformed into the capital of the country and in bringing God's ark to Jerusalem, politics, worship and pilgrimage are together in one place.

What is this ark of God? It's the special box that was made according to the instructions God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The ark itself is not God and God is not in the ark. But still it is very special. God is above all. The ark is a symbol of God's presence with his people. David is God's king, and he needs God's presence to be with him in his new city.

The event warrants serious celebration and so excited is David that he is leaping and dancing, singing and offering sacrifices with great abandon, in fact he is so excited that we are led to believe that he dances nearly naked. And it is this which upsets his wife.

*"she despised him in her heart."*

Mical, the daughter of Saul, is challenged by David's public display of emotion. He is not keeping up the appearance of a King. And so she misses the importance of the event, the kingdom's life being re-focused on God. It is not included in our reading today but it is when he gets home that David gets the real telling off- *"How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"*

She doesn't mince her words!

What does Michal care about? Not God. Not God's holiness. No Michal, like her father Saul, fears people. Michal had once loved David for his power. She loved the strong David, the warrior, the one who went out and killed the enemies, the one who gave her prestige and respect. But this new dancing David—she's not having a bar of it.

How does David react?

He shows what he cares about

*"It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD. <sup>22</sup> I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes."*

He stands up for God. And he doesn't care about how undignified he has looked. Appearances aren't everything. Here is a leader willing to serve God, even to the point of looking ridiculous. Here is a leader who is not worried about keeping up appearances.

Then we have a second model of leadership in our gospel reading. Herod.

Herod Antipas has taken his brother's wife, perhaps a shrewd political move, perhaps a passionate romance because it seems that Herodias also wants Herod. But as soon as Herod has her, she loses her power over him and so when she wants revenge, she resorts to underhand means to get it.

You can predict the reaction of the wild man from the river, John the Baptist, and Herod knows that he is in trouble. Perhaps he has imprisoned John to keep him safe. Herod recognises John as righteous and holy, he likes to listen to him but he is worried about what he hears. Then comes the birthday party: the wine, the guests, the girl, the wife looking for vengeance, the disaster.

It is a dance that seals John's fate. Dance that had expressed freedom, intensity, joy and desire (though the seven veils is not to be taken seriously!) and it took possession of Herod. One rash promise *"Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you."* Herodias finds a way to fulfil her vengeance and Herod is left a puppet at the hands of his wife. He is torn between what he wants to do and what he feels he has to do. Can't you just feel his panic, the hot sweaty hands, the desire to run but no place to hide.

#### **How does Herod react?**

In the name of keeping up appearances, he has to honour his promise. In the name of keeping up appearances, he can't say no, he does not want to look ridiculous in front of his elite guests

So despite being *"greatly distressed, (but) because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her"*. One rash promise and John is dead.

Keeping up appearances matter more than the life of a righteous and holy man.

Two very different leaders

one who didn't mind looking ridiculous in the name of the Lord, who worshipped with such abandon that appearances were the last thing in his mind

One who minded very much about looking ridiculous and losing face in front of his guests, who keeping up appearances mattered very much.

Does this hit close to home for us? How much time do we spend trying to keep up appearances? To look strong in the eyes of others? At work, at home, among our peers, our family. Do we care too much about what people think about us and end up hearers of the Good News and not doers.

They are hard questions to ask ourselves but when we chose silence for the sake of convenience, whose life becomes expendable? When we decide that justice is just too messy, costly or chaotic to pursue, who suffers in the long term?

God has a specific calling for each of us, individually and corporately, as Christ's Body in this unique time and place. Even if it's not obvious, God's will is both real and present. So what are we going to do – deny ourselves and our calling, content with keeping up appearances or dance with unfettered, unselfconscious joy before the Lord and fulfil our destiny?