

# Along the track

## Towel People

*We are the towel people,  
Soothers, cleansers, healers  
Of feet tired and sore and cut from the journey.*

*Christ's sent people,  
Wiping away the dirt and blood and spittle  
Of the world's hatred spewed onto the faces of  
the weak.*

*On our knees before others –  
And in homage to them,  
for Christ is there. (Anonymous)*

Some years ago, I was visiting a school early in the year. I noticed a small boy in tears by himself in the playground at recess time. This lonely little person was talking into a stick, pretending it was a mobile phone. A teacher appeared from nowhere, took him by the hand and helped him to join others his age who were playing together. When I passed by ten minutes or so later, he was playing very happily. That small, almost instinctive action made an enormous difference to that little boy.

We 'towel people' are not always asked to do grandiose things, the dramatic, to cope with those who suffer from the world's hatred, to wipe away dirt and spittle and blood but we will find ourselves asked to be soothers when people are hurting or in trouble or suffering or in confusion. We may find ourselves asked to be healers for those we may know suffer from discrimination or racist behaviour. We will be asked sometimes to be healers of fights and divisions and cruelty among family or friends or at work.

To call ourselves Christian is to be one of 'Christ's sent people'. That is what Baptism means. Being sent is an expression that Jesus used often "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world", "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves." These are just but a few examples. To be baptised is to have a mission to our world, to be towel people as Veronica was to Jesus, the woman who was so moved by the plight and suffering of Jesus that she had to courage to step into the path of the soldiers, to push through and wipe the face of Jesus. A small gesture perhaps, perhaps even a futile one but we remember her for it.

Being sent. What that really all adds up to is love, not love as it is described in magazines or songs, but the kind of love exemplified by the teacher, by Veronica - affection, respect, encouragement, and support. Real love involves service. We do not seek to profit from it because real love is something unselfish and involves giving, in the words of St Ignatius, without counting the cost.

Baptism is about being sent, about mission, not just about one person's mission but we belong to the 'sent people'. We are not alone. We share this mission to others with others. Real mission, being sent, asks us to engender a social conscience, to seek out the wrongs which need attention, those circumstances which have made people poor and in need of help, the lonely who need companionship, the hungry who need food, those suffering injustice who need others to speak for them.

In the process, we may find ourselves dispirited and disheartened at times, with tired feet from trying and not always succeeding; sore and cut when things don't go our way. In his eulogy to his brother Edward, Ted Kennedy said:

*Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, that person sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.*

In these times as we ponder our future, it is worth remembering that the future does not belong to those who are content with today, indifferent to the common problems we all face, apathetic towards our fellow human beings. It does not lie with the timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and other ways of doing and seeing. *Christ is here with us and out there waiting for us.*

Regards  
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