

## Homily, 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Year (B), September 6<sup>th</sup> 2015

Today's Gospel is beautiful, personal and intimate. It is a healing with touch, touch on the ears, touch on the very tongue of the man who is healed.

Like me, I imagine you have been very deeply moved by the image of the little Syrian boy, Aylan, who drowned in the waters off Turkey and was washed to the beach. In amongst the absolute and desperate sadness of that image, there was an extraordinary tenderness when the policeman picked up that little body and carried it out of the sight of the cameras. It was such a natural tenderness, and so very precious. In that particular tenderness, there is hope.

Today I would like us to be silent for a moment, in mourning for the thousands of people who that little boy represents. The thousands lost in the wars of the Middle East which rage on as we gather here. The thousands drowned in the Mediterranean. The tens of thousands living in refugee camps. In the silence, and as you picture the images you have seen on the news, picture Christ. Christ with his hand on the shoulder of the refugees; Christ in the crowd waiting at the barbed wire fence; Christ walking along the railway tracks; Christ sitting at the little fires where the refugees gather; Christ holding the hand of the person trapped in the rubble from the latest bomb; Christ tenderly picking up that small, drowned child and bringing him to eternal life.

And in the silence, notice yourself; notice where you also are battered, bruised, lost or alone. Christ sits next to you as well, he puts his hand around your shoulders, he caresses those parts of you that need new hope, new consolation, new life.

Rest, dear friends, with the touch of the Master's hand.

*Silence for a while.*

Jesus heals. Jesus heals the man who is deaf and unable to speak clearly; Jesus forgives, and loves, and strengthens, and gives hope. In fact, in every encounter in the Bible, with the most unlikely people, Jesus always transforms.

Practically, we know that we are helping. Over £2000 pounds raised, more than a hundred bags of blankets, clothes, toiletries. That is faith in action, and we can notice and celebrate the direct, practical transforming love that is so evident here. We know it is the smallest kindness in the midst of a tragedy affecting millions; but lots of small kindnesses add up to new hope, and such hope is the key to new beginnings.

Our hope is centred in Christ, and so today, here and now, we interweave that practical action with prayer; we have already rested with Christ and now, as a further spur to prayer to take into the days and weeks ahead, prayer for hope, prayer for transforming grace, I would like to share with you the lovely poem that some of you may be familiar written by Myra Brooks-Welch and called precisely, "The touch of the Master's hand." As I read it, please pray for the world, that the things which are dull and out of tune can once again shine with the grace-filled love of God; the love which is so personal and intimate that Jesus touches the man's ears, touches his tongue. Listen to this:

'Twas battered and scarred  
and the auctioneer  
Thought it scarcely worth his while  
To waste much time on the old violin  
But he held it up with a smile

"What am I bidden, good folks?" he cried  
"Who'll start the bidding for me?  
A dollar – a dollar – now two, only two,  
Two dollars and who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars, once: three dollars twice,  
Going for three – but No!  
From the room, far back,  
a grey-haired man  
Came forward and picked up the bow;

Then wiping the dust from the old violin  
And tightening up all the strings  
He played a melody pure and sweet –  
As sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,  
With a voice that was quiet and low  
Said, "What am I bid for the old violin?"  
And held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars – who'll make it two?  
Two thousand – and who'll make it three?  
Three thousand once, three thousand twice –  
And going and gone," said he.

The people cheered, but some of them said,  
"We do not understand.  
What changed it's worth?"  
The man replied:  
**"The touch of the Master's hand!"**

And many a person with life out of tune  
And battered and torn with sin  
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd  
Much like the old violin

A mess of pottage, a glass of wine  
A game and they travel on,  
They're going once, and going twice  
They're going and they're almost gone!

But the Master comes  
and the foolish crowd  
Never can quite understand  
The worth of a Soul  
and the change that's wrought by  
**The touch of the Master's hand!**

Myra Brooks Welch

