

There's a slant on today's readings that may not be comfortable, but that is worth thinking about, if we are serious about following in the footsteps of Christ, and living out the full implications of our Baptism. I'll admit at the start that I don't come up all smelling of roses either.

Most teachers recognise what I am talking about by the second week of classes. Good coaches spot it by the second practice. Most managers pick up on it in the first week of work. The serious student, and those who are half-hearted about education; the serious athlete, and those who just want to be part of the team; the serious worker and those who only want a pay-cheque. Half-heartedness is much like a plague. It has resulted in slum buildings, run-down neighbourhoods and collapsing communities. It creates inferior production and undermines the economy. It makes for a terrible waste of talent, broken homes, dead-end careers, boredom, loss of morale and zest for life. In not a few situations half-heartedness has even given religion a bad name.

Half-hearted people disappoint, even annoy us. It frustrates parents to see their children waste valuable talents. It is aggravating when we are talking with someone about some important matter and we realize that they are only half listening. It can be particularly vexing to have to take a car back for servicing again and again because repairs weren't done properly in the first place. And all of us have experienced irritation at someone who promises next-day-delivery only to have us waiting for days. We don't respond well to half-hearted people. It's a wonder we tolerate half-heartedness in ourselves.

This was a particular problem for Jesus. He cautioned his followers that God prefers us hot or cold, and that he, Jesus, becomes nauseated when we are lukewarm. Also, Jesus claimed he did not come to bring peace to the world, but the "sword". He expected to cause "divisions" with his teachings. Entering the Kingdom he spoke about required whole-hearted conversion to a new way of life. There could be no compromise between God and mammon.

In the first reading from the first Book of Kings, the prophet Elijah asks a poor widow for some of her food, Even though she is at the point of starving to death, she gives it to him. In the Gospel, we see another poor widow giving her last penny to the temple treasury, "her whole living." Jesus commented on it with admiration, not for the

money donated, but for her attitude of soul. These are full-, or whole-hearted people, giving of all they had.

It makes the point that happiness goes hand-in-hand with whole-heartedness. If we want to be happy, "Give it all you've got." Half-hearted, wishy-washy efforts in anything we do, rob us of energy and effectiveness. That was why our parents told us that if we weren't going to do a job right, we shouldn't do it at all. Half-way measures are often worse than if no measures are taken in the first place. This applies especially to the way we live. If we love life, we should expect to live it to the fullest. If we love people, we should love them completely, as they are, not in bits and pieces, or for this quality or that. If we believe in our children, we should believe in them all the way, with no reservations. If friends mean a lot to us, we should cherish them as treasures and work to deepen our relationships. If we have a job to do, we should put ourselves into it with full attention and care.

So, let me give you a check-list. When it is time to eat, do you eat, or carry on family arguments? When it is time to sleep, do you sleep, or stew over unsolved problems? When you are involved in conversation, do you listen and not think about how you are going to respond? If you go on holiday, do you enjoy it thoroughly, or continue to worry about things at the office? Whole-heartedness is one of the simplest formulas that allow us to live joyfully. You need to be where you are, heart and soul, in the grace of the moment, giving it all you've got.

On this centenary of the Armistice which finished the fighting in the First World War, it is good to remember the wholeheartedness wherewith so many young Australians volunteered to come to the defence of the British Empire. Our of a population of less than 5 million people, nearly 420,000 men enlisted, - that is nearly one person in 10, and 39% of all males between 18-44 of age.

Of these, more than 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed or taken prisoner. That is out of every 100 men 15 were killed, and 40 wounded or otherwise put out of action.

That was an incredible sacrifice, which skewed the balance of the Australian population, women vastly outnumbering men, for decades. It demonstrated, if nothing else, the futility of war, for not 21 years later the same countries were at war again. It had solved nothing.

However, it showed the tremendous willingness of the average Australian to stand up for what they believed was right. Of that wholeheartedness we can be justly proud, and hold up as an example to be followed by and for generations to come.