



GOSPEL GOSSIP

He came to Jesus by night...

John 3. 1-17

Sunday 1 March

This Sunday's reading concerns a leader of the Jews going to Jesus to ask more about the kingdom of God. This Pharisee clearly had heard Jesus teaching, and it had disturbed him, in that he wanted to know more. St John begins this section by saying that this man came to Jesus by night, and wanted to know how one could enter the kingdom of God. It seems that Jesus' teaching had an impact, and the Pharisee was now no longer certain that the strict following of the Jewish Law was in itself enough. For a Pharisee, a member of the sect that insisted on complete obedience to the rules and regulation of the Law, this was incredible.

And so was Jesus' reply, that you had to be born from above. This prompted further questions from the Pharisee who was genuinely interested and not just trying to find a way of tricking Jesus into saying something which could be used in evidence against him. What Jesus goes on to say is that to be 'born from above' means being reborn in the Spirit. Jesus seems surprised – or is he? – that the Pharisee doesn't know what Jesus is talking about, so goes on to explain further.

- Why should the Pharisee go to Jesus by night – fear of colleagues, or a troubled mind?
- How would he have known where Jesus was staying?
- What might he have found puzzling about 'the Kingdom'?
- Are you prepared to be open-minded enough to seek more from Jesus?
- Do you resist challenge in your understanding of faith?

The Pharisee got more than he bargained for. He recognises that Jesus is acting under the presence of God, and because of this, his teachings and miracles are possible. He effectively asks Jesus what is the 'secret' of being close to God. The answer surprises him, as Jesus makes it clear that it is not through human effort alone that this is possible, but through the activity of the Spirit. Jesus seems surprised that the Pharisee doesn't realise this.

Jesus adds further credentials to his teaching by declaring that he is only passing on what he has seen as he is God's Son. But he understands that if people cannot believe in earthly matters, how can they believe him in spiritual ones. Finally, in his conversation, he reveals the purpose of God: not to condemn to death, but to restore to life, and intimating what lay ahead for himself.

- How do you react to the expression 'born again'?
- Do you believe that you have been born again through being baptised?
- What are the signs of being born again?
- Are you prepared to believe what Jesus teaches?
- What do you think were the Pharisee's feelings or thoughts as he returned to bed?

Jesus outlines his Father's purpose in this passage, and demonstrates how he is its fulfilment. He welcomes the Pharisee, knowing that his party are intent on his being silenced. He gives the man time, food for thought, and also the opportunity to share in the new life of the Kingdom. He doesn't bully or coerce, bribe or threaten, but speaks openly and with authority. It is up to the Pharisee as to what he should next. In the same way, Jesus speaks to us, were we to approach him, and puts the onus back on us to respond, to believe and to follow.