

Homily for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

Well, we're continuing our journey through this beautiful Easter Season
and if there's one thing our Scripture readings do each week during this Season
**it's that they ask us to reflect on what it is to be an Easter people,
what is it to be a person who is baptised,
what is it to be a Christian?**

Not a bad question to ask ourselves.

And I think we get a quite powerful insight
into the answer to that question

from one way that the very word 'Christian'

is so often misused.

And it's when we hear that statement about another person

**'that they're not very Christian',
or that 'they're unchristian',
or that their behaviour is 'un-Christian.'**

Now there are all sorts of problems with that,

not least Jesus' repeated reminder to his disciples not to pass judgment.

But there's a more important and a more fundamental problem with it:

because lurking within it,

is the implied definition that a Christian

firstly, is a perfect person;

and that every time they fail to be perfect,
they fail to be a Christian.

And **secondly** it implies that Christianity *is defined by moral behaviour*.

I think that those are two very very big problems.

When we're baptised we don't cease to be a human being,

when we make our own decision that we want to live as a Christian

we don't suddenly lose all our faults and failings and weaknesses.

We remain the person that we were.

We simply say that we want to make God central to our life,

and that we recognise that our meeting place with God is in Jesus.

*When someone does make a mistake,
when someone makes a choice that's unloving,
when someone's actions fall short of the Gospel*

they're not 'unchristian':

they're human, they're a sinner,

hopefully they're trying; and on that occasion, they got it wrong.

And God still loves them.

And, if we're disciples of Jesus so do we.

So that's the first problem
inherent is using that word 'unchristian' when people sin.

*But the much bigger problem is that it implies that what **defines us** as Christians
is our ethical, our moral, behavior;
that Christianity, first and foremost is an ethical system.*

*But we all know plenty of people who **aren't** Christians,
but who **are** good.*

We don't have a monopoly on goodness.

And so it can't define who we are.

You don't have to be a Christian to be good.

We're certainly called to be *trying* to put our faith into our living,
to live by a moral code that flows from the Gospel.

That's a *consequence* of our faith. But it's not what *defines* us.

Otherwise we get that equally common and equally silly statement

that when someone who has no faith or interest in God,

but is a good person,

that people say of them 'they're very Christian'.

Well, they're not very Christian:

simply because they're not a Christian!

But they **are** very good,

and no doubt very much loved by God.

It's not a judgment to say that they're not a Christian.

Just a statement of fact.

To be Christian is to be a spiritual person.

(And hopefully that means also a *good* person)!

But the starting point, *what defines us*

is that faith shapes our life, **that God is our great goal and source of life,**

the God we believe that we encounter in Jesus,

that prayer and spirituality are important to us,

that feeding the soul is important to us.

But those two things: to call a person a Christian simply because they're good,

**and to call a person *unchristian*
simply because they've done something bad**

is to miss the point entirely.

So this Season of Easter

as it takes us back to our baptism

invites us to consider again what is it to be a Christian.

To be a Christian is not about perfection;

But it is about trying.

And it's not – in the first place – about what we *do*:

the doing has to come from being, from who we are:

and so in the first place what we're called to **be is a people of the Spirit,**

a spiritual people,

a people who give our energy first and foremost to our own spirit,
to its growth and flourishing,

a people who value prayer, silence, reflection.

The people flocked to Jesus because they were stunned and attracted
by what they saw of his relationship with the One he called 'Abba': Father.

**And they'll only be drawn to us who are Christians – '*Christ – ones*'
if they see the same.**

Fr Colin Blayney