

Proper 15, Trinity 10, 2009

- Joy and delight of being human at Barlow carnival.
- Joy and delight of being human at the wedding. Wedding at Cana, water into wine, new life. The place where Mary was the first person to intercede with Jesus on behalf of humanity. Mary whose feast day it was yesterday in the western church.
- But there's a down side to human nature: Baby P's mother in whom we see a most extreme manifestation of something that we all possess: the ability to ignore the needs of others through our own selfishness. Yes, we all have them, and maybe, just maybe, that woman allowed them to grow unchecked to a degree that we can call evil, even inhuman.
- But the seeds of evil are within us all, as Paul well knew when he reminded us, as he often did, to be on his guard: For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
- The high places in our minds that we fool ourselves are palaces of light.
- Wisdom vs folly. The pursuit of wisdom. Resisting seduction by folly, by falseness, by emptiness, by vanity (futility, emptiness).

Once upon a time there lived an emperor, who thought so much of new clothes that he spent all his money on them; his only ambition was to be always well dressed. He had a coat for every hour of the day; and he cared for nothing else.

One day two swindlers came to his city; they made people believe that they were weavers, and declared they could manufacture the finest cloth to be imagined. Their colours and patterns, they said, were not only exceptionally beautiful, but the clothes made of their material possessed the wonderful quality of being invisible to anyone who was unfit for their job or unpardonably stupid.

"That must be wonderful," thought the emperor. "If I had a suit made of this I should be able to find out who was unfit for their places, and who I could dismiss." And he gave a large sum of money to the swindlers, in advance, so that they should set to work without delay. They set up two looms, and pretended to be very hard at work, but they did nothing whatever on the looms. They asked for the finest silk and the most precious gold-cloth; but they stole this for themselves, and worked at the empty looms.

"I should very much like to know how they are getting on," thought the emperor. But he felt rather uneasy when he remembered that he who was not fit for his office could not see it. Personally, he was of opinion that he had nothing to fear, yet he thought it advisable to send somebody else first to see how matters stood.

The Emperor's minister went to see the swindlers. "Heaven preserve us!" he thought, "I cannot see anything at all," but he did not say so. "Oh dear," he thought, "can I be so stupid? I should never have thought so, and nobody must know it! Is it possible that I am not fit for my office? No, no, I cannot say that I was unable to see the cloth."

"So, what do you think?" said one of the swindlers, pretending to be busily weaving.

"Oh, very beautiful," replied the old minister looking through his glasses. "What brilliant colours! I shall tell the emperor that I like the cloth very much."

"We are pleased to hear that," said the two weavers, and described to him the colours and explained the curious pattern. The old minister listened attentively, so he could tell the emperor what they said.

The swindlers asked for more money, silk and gold-cloth. But they kept everything for themselves, and not a thread came near the loom, but they continued to work at the empty looms. From time to time the emperor sent others to check on progress, but it was as before.

At last the emperor wished to see it himself, while it was still on the loom. With a number of courtiers, including the two who had already been there, he went to the two clever swindlers, who now worked as hard as they could, but without using any thread.

"Is it not magnificent?" said the two old statesmen who had been there before. "Your Majesty must admire the colours and the pattern." And then they pointed to the empty looms, for they imagined the others could see the cloth.

"Good grief" thought the emperor, "I do not see anything at all. That is terrible! Am I stupid? Am I unfit to be emperor? That would indeed be dreadful."

"Really," he said, turning to the weavers, "your cloth has our most gracious approval;" and nodding contentedly he looked at the empty loom, for he did not like to say that he saw nothing. All his attendants advised him to wear the new clothes at a great procession soon to take place.

The night before the procession, the swindlers pretended to finish the garment, and said at last: "The emperor's new suit is ready now." The emperor and all his barons came to the hall; the swindlers held their arms up as if they held something in their hands and said: "These are the trousers!" "This is the coat!" and "Here is the cloak!" and so on. "They are all as light as a cobweb, and one must feel as if one had nothing at all upon the body; but that is just the beauty of them."

The emperor undressed, and the swindlers pretended to put the new suit upon him, one piece after another; and the emperor looked at himself in the glass from every side.

"How well they look! How well they fit!" said all. "What a beautiful pattern! What fine colours! That

is a magnificent suit of clothes!"

The emperor marched in the procession under the beautiful canopy, and all who saw him in the street and out of the windows exclaimed: "Indeed, the emperor's new suit is incomparable! What a long train he has! How well it fits him!" Nobody wished to let others know he saw nothing, for then he would have been unfit for his office or too stupid.

"But he has nothing on at all," said a little child at last. "Good heavens! listen to the voice of an innocent child," said the father, and one whispered to the other what the child had said. "But he has nothing on at all," cried at last the whole people. That made a deep impression upon the emperor, for it seemed to him that they were right; but he thought to himself, "Now I must bear up to the end." And the chamberlains walked with still greater dignity, as they carried the train which did not exist.

Government initiatives. The attitude that something must be seen to be done, even though it is of no lasting value. Vanity, folly, as destructive and harmful as any addition.

We need to be on our guard, seeking wisdom.

The example of Mary: faith, service, joy, sadness—that's life

The example of Jesus: faith, service, joy, sadness—that's life

Regular attendance at mass to remind ourselves of this as we take the spiritual nourishment, and arm ourselves to resist the evils of vanity