

Homily for 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C.)

Question: what car does Pope Francis drive? Answer: a Ford Focus. Question: what car does Fr Dominic drive? Answer: a Ford Focus! Question: does this mean Fr Dominic's car has papal approval? Answer: you bet it does! It was just a few weeks ago that the Pope was seen being driven in a blue Ford Focus. This was soon big news. The car maker Ford was quick to say 'the Focus is the best-selling car in the world so it's not surprising to see so many people who love it.' The Pope's choice of car is in keeping with something he said recently to a group of seminarians. He said, 'It breaks my heart when I see a priest with the latest-model car. A car is necessary to do a lot of work, but, please, choose a more humble one. If you like the fancy one, just think about how many children are dying of hunger in the world.'

No doubt since he was seen in a Ford Focus sales of this particular car have gone up as loyal Catholics rush to their nearest car dealer. Last year global sales of the Ford Focus were 1,020,410. Having long been the owner of just such a car I can tell you it is lovely to drive but just before you think of joining the Pope, your departing parish priest and millions of other Ford Focus owners, just sit awhile with the word 'focus.' It is a good name for a car, easily remembered and easily said in most languages. It is also a word we might use today to reflect on the readings from our Sacred Scriptures. In these divinely inspired texts the Word of the Lord seems to me to be saying: focus on what's important. Focus on Jesus who is ready to be your trainer and constant companion and who is always and everywhere your Saviour.

In the Gospel this Sunday when we focus on Jesus we see him caught up in a crowd. (Lk 12) From within it a man manages to get his attention wanting Jesus to intervene in a legal dispute over a family inheritance; 'tell my brother to give me a share.' He must have been surprised when Jesus replies, 'who appointed me your judge?' Jesus then focuses the man's attention on what probably caused the dispute in the first place which was greed. He tells everyone in the crowd 'be on your guard against greed of any kind' and then makes his point with a parable. As you know he likes to use parables as a way of driving home his message. In this one there's a man who's forgotten what's important in life; he has got into a habit of focusing on material possessions and this has got so bad God has had to step in to teach him a lesson. The parable remains relevant because we are often like its foolish man. We focus on what's not really important and thereby neglect to make ourselves rich in the sight of God.

If someone asked you, 'how do I make myself rich in the sight of God?' what would you say? One reply would be to say focus your mind on where Jesus is found. The apostle Paul says as much in today's second reading; and I said it a few Sundays ago when I invited you to go God-spotting (Col 3). Some of you emailed me to say we tried it at home and spotted God in some

surprising people and places. That's been my experience too. The more we focus our minds on Jesus who St Paul says 'is everything and is in everything' - an astonishing claim when you think about it - the more we go looking for him the more we see his face and hear his voice. The psalmist prayed that each morning the Lord will fill us with his love so that we can exult and rejoice. (Ps 89) I sometimes think the Lord must shake his head and say, 'but I do this every day; the trouble is, you don't always see it because you are preoccupied with trying to have more of everything.'

Prompted by the Word of the Lord this Sunday let us resolve to focus our minds in the days ahead on the things that reveal Jesus; and if that means we have to put off old behaviours to start new ones then so be it. A daily diet of prayer is a good behaviour to get into and to maintain; it helps to reveal Jesus here, there and everywhere. Another is to try and see Jesus in anyone's face. I admit this one isn't easy but if Jesus is in everything then he is in everyone - even the miseries we sometimes meet on our way to work or coming out of the bathroom first thing in the morning! When we focus our minds on looking for Jesus we are making ourselves rich in the sight of God.

This Sunday is as you may know my last here as parish priest. On Tuesday I move to Portsmouth to go and live with the Bishop so I can look after his cathedral and the people of that parish. In leaving you I will take with me a lot of memories of times when you have shown me the face of Jesus; and of when he has used your voice to say to me things I might otherwise not have heard. My faith has grown stronger because of the witness of your faith; this has been your gift to me and it is one I treasure. But don't rest on your laurels. My friends, keep finding new ways to share your faith and treasure the old ways which have over time proved their worth. Stay focused on what is important and each time you see a Ford Focus passing by remember that's a car which has papal approval, a car driven by someone who used to be your parish priest and a car which today reminds us to stay focused on Jesus, our trainer, our Saviour!

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Note: I will be seeking to have my Sunday homilies available online at the website of St John's Cathedral, Portsmouth but this may not be immediate. Please pray for me as I move to my new parish.