



THINK ON THESE THINGS.....

Reading: James 1:22-25

Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, ongoing away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act - they will be blessed in their doing.

Reflection:

The world of fiction can often lead us into reading stories that have an ethical message. Just like Jesus' parables, they tell us of events that didn't actually happen. However when we've read or listened to them, suddenly just like the crowds who listened to Jesus' parables, a message strikes us that speaks either to our own lives, or to issues in society at large.

'The Picture of Dorian Gray' is a short story by Oscar Wilde that has that sort of impact upon its readers. Dorian Gray is a young man with everything, by worldly standards, in his favour. He has good looks, a fortune, a grand house, a country estate, an engaging personality, and many friends. As the years pass, time is good to him too. For he doesn't seem to age much. In the story he commissioned a portrait of himself from an artist. When it's finished it's clearly the artist's best work. It truly captures not just Dorian's good looks, but his very essence.

Unfortunately, Dorian is led astray by an aristocratic friend. As a result he behaves very badly in the way he breaks off his engagement, with disastrous consequences for his fiancé. Dorian then noticed a slight blemish had appeared on his otherwise perfect portrait. So he moved it into store in an unused room at the top of his house. He then went on living a very extravagant, selfish and shallow life in which he behaved badly to many people. Occasionally he would go into that unused room to look at his portrait. Gradually the picture developed an ever more evil and ageing face. Dorian's behaviour eventually led him even to murder. He seemed to have developed a passion for sin. He died at the conclusion of the story, having lived a life that had no purpose other than his own pleasure.

The horror of the story is not just the evil things that Dorian did. It's also that Wilde's skill in the way he told the story makes the reader have to struggle to dislike Dorian. It's so easy when reading a well written story to like its main character, even though he's bad. That then even makes the readers feel bad about themselves!

The story has many ethical points to make, even if it does so in a very exaggerated way. For there can be very few people who actually wish to live their lives in as dissolute a manner as Dorian chose to live his. However, we can learn from him that if we do the opposite to him and live our lives for good and useful aims, our lives can, unlike his, have meaning. We can learn to beware of those who may have a bad influence on us. We can also appreciate the damage we might cause if we are a bad influence upon others. It is also clear that those whose lives are blessed with good fortune in whatever way, have a duty to use that good fortune for the benefit of others as well as themselves. Dorian is in fact an anti-hero, a person whose example should not be followed, as usually the opposite of what he did is right.

Breath-prayer for today: Almighty God, make us to think more of what we can give to life and less of what we can get out of it. May we be mindful that we hold our gifts, our talents, our possessions, our life itself, in trust for you and the service of humanity. Amen.