

## WATCH OUT FOR FLATTERY

<sup>26</sup> Woe to (alas for) you when everyone speaks fairly *and* handsomely of you *and* praises you, for even so their forefathers did to the false prophets. Luke 6:26.

Quite recently this verse stopped me in my track. This chapter is Luke's record of the sermon of Jesus. Luke does not stop with, "Blessed are you .." verses but also writes about, "Woe unto you.." verses. He records Jesus also calling woe on those who are rich, who laugh, who are well fed and who are praised/flattered.

This is quite uncomfortable for all of us, but these statements are spoken by Jesus Himself. But we want to be comfortably rich, have good food, laugh much and want to be praised by everyone. Why is Jesus against all the "blessings" of life? As I sat thinking, it came to me that when we have much of these, our heart and mind tends to become puffed up and slowly pride seeps in and God is slowly dethroned from our lives.

That is the reason why many of the monastic communities imposed poverty as a lifestyle. Too much of anything will slowly turn our hearts away from God. When we know we have enough food supply for our life time, we don't need to receive anything from the hands of God. We become gods of our own life. This is precisely why many developed nations who have all their material, physical, health needs met, spurn God and so have become so empty and hopeless. The joy of life is gone. This is why Jesus warns us to be beware of all these.

He asks us to be wary when someone praises us. But how we long to be flattered! How we long to hear how good we are, how helpful we are, how generous we are! I know of a person who feels so happy that when she enters the room all those present in there shake with fear☺

My father always told us many stories, stories which had an important truth of life. Though I heard it probably when I was seven, I still remember it vividly. It was about a man who flatters everyone. After flattering each person and having had his way, he used to tell himself that he has put a cap on him (a metaphor for succumbing to flattery). Everyone knew about him and so avoided him. Then there was a man who thought he was above flattery. So our flatterer goes to him and surrenders saying, "Sir I had flattered everyone in the country, but only with you I failed." The man departed with a knowing smile. After he left our flatterer remarked, "there goes my cap on him." I hope you understand. The person who thought he cannot be flattered was in fact made to feel good by this nature of his, which was in fact a clever disguised flattery. He succumbed to this flattery that he cannot be flattered.

Most often we are like him. We think others can be flattered, but not me. But let me tell you, your cap is already put on your head. You are already deceived into thinking you cannot be flattered.

That is why it is so important to acknowledge the work of hand in every little of big work that we do. But with little money, little property, little friends, we strut around with outstretched necks , totally opposed to this Jesus of the Bible.

I recently finished reading Hillary Mantel's two historical novels, *Wolf Hall and Bring up the Bodies*. It is the life of the most formidable king of England Henry VIII, whose lifestyle, steered the Catholic England to the Protestant nation. His life is seen through his faithful courtier, Thomas Cromwell. Henry VIII was married without a male heir and he fell for the charms of a knight's daughter who is so calculative, cunning and crafty and knew how to hook the king. He trusted her to be true and honourable and executed all those who crossed her way. He crowned her Queen Anne. And after 10 years he finds out that she had been continuously unfaithful to him, a fact everyone knew and a fact which he never wanted to believe. Then he looks to Cromwell and asks in disbelief how did I trust such a woman for a decade! It's really sad.

Because of a woman's flattery a great king lost the best ten years of his life and lost the best people forever. I am not sure how much of this story is true, but nevertheless even today we see the best of people, corrupted by the worst, because they loved easy flattery, because their ears loved a lie and loathed the truth. When Henry came to his senses he was appalled at the carnage left behind, heads rolled, families destroyed... all because he loved her flattery and chose to believe it to be true.

Read the words of Jesus again, <sup>26</sup>Woe to (alas for) you when everyone speaks fairly *and* handsomely of you *and* praises you, for even so their forefathers did to the false prophets.

What will you do in the end? After the flattery is gone, after the true friends are gone, after the calling is gone..?

My dear friends I know most of you who read are very young. Keep your heart strong in the love of Christ. Do not love to hear words of praise from those around you. It will lead you to pride, pride will deceive you and in the end your way would have slowly departed far away from the heart of the Father.

Listen to this song. Our God is a King, but He is a King who came to serve, not to be served or flattered. A very meaningful song by Graham Kendrick : Servant King.