

## Pastor's column 22nd Sunday Ordinary time 2020

*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* is a famous saying from Virgil's *Aeneid*. "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts!" It is one of those words of ancient wisdom warning against naivety and the reality of human deviousness. It was pronounced by the priest of Troy, Laocoon and the full quote is: "Equo ne credite, Teucri. Quidquid id est, timeo Danaos et dona ferentes." "Do not trust the horse, Trojans. Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks, even bearing gifts." We all know the fate of Troy; in recent times graphically retold by Hollywood with Brad Pitt as Achilles, Eric Bana as Hector and Orlando Bloom as Paris. Laocoon didn't make the cut for Hollywood, however he was immortalised in a piece of classic marble sculpture, unearthed in Rome in 1506 and now in the Vatican museum. It dates back 2000 years, assumed to be modelled on an even older original bronze. It depicts Laocoon and his two sons in their death throes, attacked by two giant sea serpents sent by Athena in response to Laocoon begging the Trojans to set fire to the wooden horse. Cassandra was another figure in this great drama. A priestess of Apollo and blessed by him to foresee the future. When she refused Apollo's advances, he cursed her, so no one would believe her prophecies. And so her warnings of Troy's destruction due to Paris' lust for Helen of Sparta fell on deaf ears. Troy was founded some 3000 years ago and its conquest is one of the great parables of history. The other great parable of history is that no one learns anything from history! Such is the story of the Church. Jesus' fierce reprimand of Peter, you are a "scandalon" a stone on my path, a stumbling block, because the way you think is not God's way, but man's, echoes down the centuries because it is always relevant. The irony is, that just before, Jesus called Simon, "Petros", the rock on which Jesus will build his Church. The Church throughout history has been tempted again and again, to think as man and not as God. The present version of this Typhon, (many headed snake), is called modernism. It is the Trojan horse of our time. It is the attitude "to go along, to get along" with the world. It is the theological version of the Wuhan virus, infecting every level of the Church. Its spin on language and its use is epitomised in Humpty Dumpties' response to Alice, in "Alice and Wonderland, "Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously." When I use a word, " Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, " it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." The question is, " said Alice," whether you can make words mean so many different things.?" Modernism's most practical expression is displayed in its rationalising of sexual misbehaviour. The modernist is a person who has essentially lost their Catholic faith, but remain in the Church out of sentiment or expediency. Their program is to conform truth to feelings, unlike the Catholic Tradition that challenges us to conform feelings to Truth. Discipleship of Jesus means to be incorporated into Him and to walk with him in his suffering, death and resurrection. It is a threefold program of a) conversion, b) radicalisation and c) action. 1) Conversion: changing our thinking and our lives to conform to the mind of Christ. 2) Radicalisation: as St Paul prays in Colossians: "may we live in vital union with Him, may our roots grow down into Him and draw up nourishment from Him, may we go on growing in the Lord and become strong and vigorous in the truth we have been taught. 3) Action: seeing what Christ want us to do, planning how to do it and executing it. The story of Laocoon and Cassandra is the story of the fate of all prophets of truth; disbelief, ridicule, violence and even death. Jesus says, " Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it - beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves.." (Matt 7: 13f)