

PARISHES OF  
**ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH**  
**AND**  
**SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW**  
**WEEKLY REFLECTION**

**Sunday 19th April 3rd Sunday after Easter**  
**Err.... How can Jesus have said that? (8)**

***“Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.”***

The above is Jesus' response to the young man who kneels before Him and asks: *“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*. Subsequently Jesus says that the young man knows the commandments, and spells out those of the 10 commandments which are aimed at loving and respecting our neighbour (i.e. not including the first 3 which focus on loving God). The young man replies that he has observed all these from his youth. Jesus looks on him, loves him and says: *“You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me”*. The young man goes away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. [Mark 10:17-22, Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 18:18-24.]

Why does Jesus ask why the man calls Him good, adding that God alone is good? Some use this to argue for the heresy that Jesus is not God. This is erroneous and it is important to understand why. By way of context, there are noteworthy aspects of the young man: (1) He was probably a Pharisee, since the Pharisees believed in eternal life, whereas the Sadducees did not; (2) He believed that eternal life could be earned by his own efforts alone; (3) He knelt before Jesus, thereby showing Him reverence, but he called Him *“Good Teacher”*, thereby not appreciating Jesus' divinity.

What are the important features of Jesus' reply? He does not say that He is not good and not God. He asks why the young man calls Him good when God alone deserves that epithet. He challenges the young man who recognises some goodness in Jesus without appreciating His divinity. It is inconceivable that he would go away sorrowful at the end had he believed that he was talking to God. The use of the word *“good”*, together with his kneeling before Jesus, implied intense reverence but no more. But Jesus does not accept from Him the title

of goodness without the title of Godhead. Jesus does not say, “*No one is good but My Father alone*”, but “*No one is good but God alone*”. On this occasion He therefore does not draw the distinction between Himself and His Father that He makes elsewhere in the Gospels. Jesus is thereby asserting His own divinity rather than denying it. Jesus’ question to the young man is intended to encourage him to recognise that He is divine, not just an admirable teacher.

The remainder of the incident then falls perfectly into place. The young man says he has observed those commandments aimed at love of our neighbour. The crunch comes when Jesus tells him to sell everything and follow Him, that is to follow the Divine Jesus and open himself to His saving grace. Thus, Jesus shifts the focus to the first 3 commandments which He summarises elsewhere (e.g. Matthew 22:37-38, cf Deuteronomy 6:5): “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment*”.

Stephen S.