



WITH HEARTS BURNING

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

A spiritual reflection on the Emmaus story for us in our time (Luke 24:13-35)

JESUS' RESPONSE A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

Ko te minatatanga o Hehu Kerito, a tinana, a wairua, a hinengaro hoki

Once again we return to that first Easter morn, the day of resurrection, the day Cleopas and his companion walked away, heading to Emmaus...

'Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him.'

Jesus' first response to those who walked away was a ministry of presence. Jesus joined them in their walking away. So what does this ministry of presence entail?

Some years ago, Air New Zealand had an advertising slogan, "being there is everything". "Being there is everything" is at the heart of Jesus' life and mission. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. As he began his ministry he didn't stay in one place. He visited all the towns and villages. The more he did this, the more people came to him. And as he went out he "found" more people; fishermen cleaning their nets, a tax collector up a tree, a leper on the road, an adulteress about to be stoned, people possessed with devils, a blind man, a Pharisee called Simon who thought ill of him, a woman at a well, a thief on a cross and two despairing disciples walking away from Jerusalem.

If "being there is everything" is at the heart of Jesus' life and mission, then

it also needs to be at the heart of the life and mission of his Church and all her members, especially His priests. The heart of the spirituality of the Diocesan priest is to be the living and transparent image of Jesus, amongst the people of God. Going out to people and being with the people is a fundamental aspect of priestly ministry. We are to meet with people, where they are on the

road, where they are on their spiritual journey.

In his 2013 Chrism Mass homily, Pope Francis reminded priests of the importance of the ministry of presence, and the joy their relationship with the people of God can give them. We need to "go out", then, in order to experience our own anointing, its

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power and its redemptive efficacy: To the “outskirts” where there is suffering, bloodshed, blindness that longs for sight, and prisoners in thrall to many evil masters... the power of grace comes alive and flourishes to the extent that we, in faith, go out and give ourselves and the Gospel to others, giving what little ointment we have to those who have nothing, nothing at all.

Going out to people and being with the people is also an essential aspect of the parish community and all parishioners. Jesus sent out the 72 disciples to all the towns and villages he was to visit. As Christians and Catholics, we are called to be visibly present to others in our workplaces, clubs, schools and community.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us, the parish can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. If the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch

with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few (EG28). His clear focus is ‘the Church’, meaning, our parishes, communities, agencies, parish schools and colleges; who in their people, have to be present in the midst of the homes of the community as the presence of Christ.

Already we try to do this in many ways as we face many challenges. There are less priests and less people willing to give time and to commit to ministries. As people become less church-ed it becomes more difficult to engage with them and take them on the journey. The temptation is always the same, not to go out, because there are so many other things to be done. The challenges of society are huge and sometimes we feel the temptation not to get involved. We might have become burnt out giving ourselves to a person or a group of people and have not got the response we felt was worthy of our efforts. We might be a Sunday Mass-goer and think “faith is a private matter” and this doesn’t involve me. We might get caught up in the busyness of life or tasks of management or administration and excuse ourselves, believing that we do not have time to get out there and do the people thing. Maybe we are just so busy we find it easier for people to come to us. We run events, some come to them, but what

about the folk who don’t. Our church buildings are places we come to, but the Church by its nature is a Body that goes out! It is the going out which gives the most life!

At the same time, we also know the joy of going out there. All of us, whether lay or clerical, have had the experience of being tired and not wanting to go and visit someone or have the hard conversation, but when we have had it we come back feeling energised. Pope Francis reminds us why this happens. He said, the Lord never tired of being with people. On the contrary, he seemed renewed by their presence (Chrism Mass Homily, 2013). When we go out, when we are with people, we imitate Christ and Christ himself is with us. We go out, being living signs of his presence in the midst of our homes, communities and the world. We are like those first disciples, who after the Lord was taken up to heaven, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it (Mark 16:20).

We remind ourselves of this every Sunday, when we reaffirm our belief in the Church that is apostolic – that believes what the apostles believe and like the apostles goes out to the world. That Church is you and I. The challenge as always is to live what we believe.

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+ *Steve Lowe*
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BISHOP OF HAMILTON

WISDOM OF POPE FRANCIS



Perhaps the Church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas, perhaps the world seems to have made the Church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the Church could speak to people in their infancy but not to those come of age. It is a fact that nowadays there are many people like the two disciples of Emmaus; not only those looking for answers in the new religious groups that are sprouting up, but also those who already seem godless, both in theory and in practice.

*Reflecting on the Emmaus Account
Address to the Brazilian Bishops, 2013*

The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelisers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented (EG 28).

Evangelii Gaudium - The Joy of the Gospel, 2013

There is what we can call "the weariness of people, the weariness of the crowd". For the Lord, and for us, this can be exhausting - so the Gospel tells us - yet it is a good weariness, a fruitful and joyful exhaustion. The people who followed Jesus, the families which brought their children to him to be blessed, those who had been cured, those who came with their friends, the young people who were so excited about the Master... they did not even leave him time to eat. But the Lord never tired of being with people. On the contrary, he seemed renewed by their presence (cf. EG 11). This weariness in the midst of activity is a grace on which all priests can draw (cf. EG 279). And how beautiful it is! People love their priests, they want and need their shepherds! The faithful never leave us without something to do, unless we hide in our offices or go out in our cars wearing sun glasses.

There is a good and healthy tiredness. It is the exhaustion of the priest who wears the smell of the sheep... but also smiles the smile of a father rejoicing in his children or grandchildren. It has nothing to do with those who wear expensive cologne and who look at others from afar and from above (cf. EG 97). We are the friends of the Bridegroom: this is our joy. If Jesus is shepherding the flock in our midst, we cannot be shepherds who are glum, plaintive or, even worse, bored. The smell of the sheep and the smile of a father...

Homily for the Chrism Mass, 2015

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Reflecting on the sign we give

How are we present to our people? When we meet someone we make an impression. So how do people see us as Catholics? As parishioners? As religious, deacons or priests? As teachers in a Catholic School? As a parish or school secretary? Are we seen as people who go, who are happy to be with people, and who have a radiance of faith; or are we officials that do a job whom people come to when they need something from the Church?

Understanding how people see us, encourages us to be better images of Christ.

Discuss these questions in a parish leadership meeting, school staff meeting, BOT meeting, home group, youth group, or even at the dinner table. Firstly, **identify your personal response**. Secondly, dialogue with your parish and parish school. Thirdly, at a Diocesan level, please share your thoughts, initiatives, and questions in the **SHARING** section of the website: whb.cdh.nz

1 This is a question for every Catholic... Am I a person who goes out of myself? How many pastoral visits or outreaches do I make each week beyond those of meeting a specific need? For example, do I meet a new person at Mass each week? For priests and deacons, do I make a home visit which is not need-driven?

2 What is the response when I do go out to people? When an outreach goes well, what does it do for me? When it doesn't go well, what do I learn about myself?

3 What stops me from reaching out to others? How can I change this?

4 How does our community welcome families wanting baptism, marriage, a preference certificate, or a funeral? How does it reach out to the sick, the lonely and the lost? How does the parish's presence in the home continue after the "event"?

5 How do our schools reach out to new students who have little or no faith background?

6 How much time is spent on parish administration and management and by whom?

7 How do we reach out to families where there is someone in prison, suffering from drug or alcohol addiction, sickness, domestic violence, poverty, parenting alone or unemployed, etc?

8 We all see the social ills in our community. How present are we as a Church to these families?

9 Are we Catholics who smile? Are we attractive people of faith?

10 How as a parish community or a school can we become more present to people not practicing their faith, so we are able to share our faith and pray with people?