

FOUNDERS DAY 2000

Feast of Apostles Phillip & James

Phillip had said to Jesus “show us the Father you have spoken of so often and so fondly, and this will be enough for us”. To this Jesus had replied: “Phillip, do you still not realise that when you look at me you see the Father?” Was St John reporting this as a one-off incident in the life of Jesus, just to fill out his gospel? Or, was this a conversation that still takes place? And where we would expect to find Jesus’ reply still being echoed and still tangible and audible to ourselves? And what might all this have to do with the event that brings us together today: the opening of Holy Cross College by Bishop Verdon 100 years ago?

Over that last 100 years, our Catholic faith has been embodied in a Catholic “culture”. It has been made identifiable and tangible through all the things that make up what Catholics do. These included

- all those Catholic devotions and Catholic practices by which we knew, and others knew, that we were Catholics;
- that sense of being different from others;
- the high profile we gave to certain ministries and roles, especially the ministry of Pope, of priest, and the role of religious sisters and brothers;
- those features of Catholicism that we had inherited from Ireland, France and Britain; and even our failure to inculturate properly was an aspect of the Catholic culture we grew up in;
- the strong loyalties that bonded us all together;
- the high profile of our Catholic schools and the huge sacrifices made by parents and religious sisters and brothers – these, too were part of the “Catholic landscape”.

All these things converged to form the experience of being Catholic; what Catholics do; what its like being Catholic; God was present in all of this, and we were on holy ground.

It was for that model of Church that Holy Cross College trained New Zealand priests, and we have so much to be grateful for.

Our recent experience of one century giving way to another, and of one millennium about to give way to another, has put us in the mood to imagine outside the box of our limited experience. We have been led out of the last century by a truly great Pope. Even allowing for the high priority he has given to unity within the household of faith, he has never allowed his own prophetic vision to be cramped by small horizons and familiar ways, by fear or exaggerated prudence, by mere routine or a sense of just filling in the time, or by what people think of him.

Whenever this Pope has urged us to “be not afraid”, he has not been asking us to be braver than he himself has been. So is this a time for not just relocating our National Seminary, and not just re-naming our National Seminary, but of re-founding what Bishop Verdon originally founded 100 years ago? Do we need to re-image what might yet be?

An image recurrently used by Pope John Paul II is the “community of Jesus’ disciples”. He has described “the Church” using that image, and he has described “seminaries” using that image. I realise that Holy Cross Seminary is conscious of adopting this image as a model for formation. But have we all fully explored the vision contained within that image? What does it really mean to say that the Church, the seminary, our parishes, are the community of Jesus’ disciples. The Pope’s own answer, if I may paraphrase his words, is that it means experiencing the Church, experiencing the seminary, as a “community that re-lives what the first disciples experienced”. Not anachronistically, in some pseudo first century way, of course, but by reproducing in our own day the core dimensions of discipleship, and letting these determine **the experience of being Catholic.**

In the experience of those first disciples

- Jesus was the focal point of their lives, their thinking and their desiring; he was the one they thought of at the beginning of each day and were probably still thinking of him when they fell asleep.
- Their relationship with him was the essence of what we now call holiness, and it was the equal calling of each member.
- It was their relationship with him that created a new kind of relationship with one another.
- To belong to him meant belonging with whom ever else he chose, and he seemed to go out of his way to choose people that no one else expected.
- Following him meant going his way and accepting his vision; following him meant following his teaching.
- After his resurrection the first disciples listened to him **still speaking** to them when the scriptures were read in the assembly.
- The community’s creed was what those disciples wanted to say together, in praise, thanksgiving and wonder, about God’s involvement in human history.
- They still surrendered to him in the Eucharist where their union with him committed them to being the *body given up for others, and blood poured out for others*; a community given up for the life of the world.
- Their experience of being his disciples didn’t allow for any split between their “religious life” and the rest of life, because discipleship could never be part-time.

- As for talking about him to others, that must have seemed the most natural thing in the world to do, because that is what you do when you've met someone who makes the world of difference – like when Phillip went off and said to Nathaniel: “Guess whom we have found!”

These, then are some of the core aspects of discipleship that need to become predominant in the experience of being Catholic; the basis of a renewed Catholic **culture**; of what makes us, us; a culture that embodies Jesus' revelation of the Father.

What God wanted us to know from the beginning, could not be adequately expressed in the beauty and power of nature; it could not be adequately expressed in those echoes of God's word that were present in pre-Christian religions; it could not be adequately expressed in statements and doctrines. It could only be spoken in the form of a Person, the Word made flesh. In this *person* God's word is spoken to us. In knowing this person we come to know what God is saying, and be transformed by it.

We come to know him in the ways that we come to know a living person – by being with, present to him, looking at him, listening to him, growing fond of him, seeking his company, discovering we can really trust him, growing into his way of seeing and his way of being for others.

WANTED – by the world in which we live – a community that knows Christ personally; a community that re-lives what the first disciples' experienced. That is the kind of community in which the conversation between Jesus and Phillip still comes to us “live”. That is the kind of community which spread itself out with dynamism, conviction, power and joy. That is what is implied when Pope John Paul II calls the seminary or the Church or the parish a community of Jesus' disciples. This is what **re-founding** Holy Cross Seminary could mean. And this is how we might honour those who originally founded our National Seminary 100 years ago today.