

HOMILY AT HASTINGS ON OCCASION OF PROMULGATING NEW PASTORAL PLAN

25 August 2019

You have named the vision for your pastoral plan: “Living as Christ”, and flowing out of that vision you have named your mission which involves welcoming attitudes and actions towards all comers, willingness to engage with them, loving as Jesus loved, and serving as Jesus served.

Well, since this mission flows out of ‘living as Christ’ we could hardly look further than the Gospel chosen for this Mass. It is a beautiful illustration of how Jesus lived. He and his disciples had come upon a funeral procession. They quickly learned that the one being buried was an only son, and his mother was a widow. They didn’t skirt around the procession on the grounds of “minding their own business” or “respecting the grieving people’s space”. They engaged. Jesus entered into their situation and their sorrow.

I am reminded of that other occasion when Jesus engaged a woman in discussion – quite against the custom of the time – when his disciples had gone on ahead to get food. He knew her circumstances were unusual – women usually came to the well for water in groups, and usually in the evening. She was alone and it was the middle of the day. Gently he opened up a discussion with her. At first she was coy. After all, she didn’t know who He was, and was entitled to her own privacy. Initially she was reluctant to tell him anything, but eventually she was glad he knew everything, and couldn’t wait to go back to the village to tell everyone about the man she had met. It’s what you do when you know what Jesus is like.

On the occasion in today’s Gospel as well, they didn’t stop at mere polite conversation. Jesus’ compassion for that mother made him want to do something. And since his mission was to give hope and life and joy, that is what he acted on. He had entered into their lives, and this enabled them to enter into his life. That sums up what happens to us when we go to him; he draws us into his own life.

After his resurrection his disciples discovered what it was like to share in his victory over sin and death, his destiny, and his joy. That’s what led them to realize that being disciples involved becoming channels of his love, his power, his peace and his joy.

But notice: this was the calling of the *whole* community of disciples. Within that community, some are called to the sacrament of Holy Orders, and their role is to help form the community for its mission. They become shepherds through whom the Good Shepherd continues to do what only He can do for us. But the mission itself is for the whole community. I’ll come back to that, but just a word about the calling to priesthood: a young man recently said that the Church’s problems of today, far from putting him off, only made him want to get more involved and help make a difference. There are generous young people who are like that. They just need to know that they are welcomed and supported by all of us. For my part, I assure you that taking the road with Jesus of Nazareth is a great experience; sharing his journey really is special.

Back to the point I was making: the role of good shepherds is to help form the community for its mission, but the mission belongs to everyone. Historically, this is what got lost to sight when the

shepherds took over the mission reducing everyone else to a rather passive role. This is the narrowed down perception of the Church that we call “clericalism”. In our own day, we are restoring the ancient perception of the Church, which is based not on Holy Orders but on Baptism/Confirmation/Eucharist. Mission flows out of these sacraments.

And so we live at a time of renewal. This involves looking back to how it was in the beginning – not to merely imitate the past, but to learn from it. A Maori proverb teaches us to move into the future with our eyes on where we are coming from: ka titiro whakamuri kia anga whakamua. The Second Vatican Council had its own term for this – “resourcement” – back to the sources. Rediscovering what the Church was like in the very earliest decades and centuries gives us ways of breaking out of some of the moulds we had become bogged down in. It shows us the way out of clericalism.

That’s what lies behind the Council’s teaching that

- all the baptized/confirmed/eucharistic people are a “consecrated, priestly people” (Letter of Peter);
- all are “set apart to proclaim the wonderful things God is doing” (same letter)
- all are called to holiness and the heights of holiness, even in the most ordinary circumstances of life (there is not one class of holiness for some and a second class for others);
- all are anointed for the prophetic role of manifesting God’s reign and purpose;
- all together constitute a sign of God’s life-giving, reconciling, healing power, and power over evil;
- all are celebrants of the Eucharist as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* insists; (it’s not that the priest alone celebrates and everyone else “attends”).

That’s what being the Church looked like at the beginning, and needs to be like now.

Just as the Council looked back to the Church’s beginnings to resource the Church’s renewal, so too, we can look back to the beginnings of our own diocese in 1980. It was by popular consensus that we consecrated the diocese to the Holy Spirit (and there is a copy of that prayer of consecration in every parish.) For a mission statement, we didn’t write our own, we adopted the one written by St Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – the Acts of the Apostles. That’s where the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested

- in the way those first disciples’ entire focus was around the person of Jesus;
- in the joy and enthusiasm their faith gave them;
- in their desire to share with others what gave them that joy;
- in their often coming together for prayer - not just on Sunday’s;
- in their commitment to the poor;
- in their sharing responsibility for the mission of the Church.

So, as you pick up your pastoral plan and run with it, I say to you: ka titiro whakamuri kia anga whakemua.

And at a very practical level – given especially that the parishes have increased in size because of amalgamations, within every parish people need to come together in smaller groups for sharing the word of God in the scriptures, praying together, and identifying the poor and needy in your area. Doing this will give your parish’s vision and your mission more flavor and more umph! In that way the vision and the mission are more likely to become a reality.