

The second reading in this Mass was from St Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi; he was in prison when he wrote it, and it contains some wonderful expressions of his own love for Jesus Christ. It was chosen for this Mass because it contains the line: "Be of the same mind as Jesus Christ Our Lord"; or, as an older translation has it: "let that mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus our Lord".

That line was the chosen motto of Bishop Owen dating back to the days he first studied the scriptures at Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, under the leadership of Fr Ronald Cox, whose love for the scriptures was infectious.

St Paul goes on to describe the mind of Christ, quoting from a hymn the Christians of his day were singing: "He did not cling to equality with God... He emptied himself, and became as we humans are..."

Owen, too, had a special mission, and he didn't make a bad fist of being as we all are. People loved him all the more for that. True to the mind of Jesus, he knew that being "set apart" for a special mission did not mean being set apart from the people to whom he was sent. He was never at risk of allowing his priestly identity to become smudged by clericalism. He allowed God's grace to flow through the nature God had given him; no pretences of any kind. Truly one of us.

That brings us to the picture of Jesus we see in chapter 21 of John's gospel that have just now heard, describing the third time Jesus appeared to his disciple after his resurrection. As it happens, the fishing episode was just a prelude to what was coming next. Jesus was about to solemnly confirm the mission He was giving to his church, and Peter's special place in that mission: "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep..."

What I am drawing our attention to is that these special moments took place while they were having breakfast together, on the beach. Of course, the gospels are portraits of Jesus, not photographs. And what chapter 21 give us is a portrait of the Risen Jesus' style, the warmth of his presence, his easy manner, his reassuring friendship (He called them "friends") - all so reminiscent of the Jesus whose company they had so loved during his life-time.

The post-resurrection appearances reveal above all the sheer undeniable reality of his presence, the more so because they had not been expecting it. But these appearances are usually prefaced by the disciples' slowness to recognise him. That is an important detail because it is scripture's way of saying his risen life is not a return to this life, and that we don't see him the same way. Often it was some word or gesture that triggered their recognition .

I suggest that if we are to recognise his presence in our own lives – I mean the same Jesus, just as truly present in our lives as in theirs – we too need to be familiar with his style; to be of the same mind.

Anyway, those disciples loved being in his company, and – wonderfully, He loved being in theirs. This love of human company was so characteristic of Owen. I have had emails from all over NZ, and abroad, and they all name the same lovely characteristics:

- His ever-ready openness to others, whatever the circumstances;
- always respectful of them; their situations; their view-points;
- his genuine interest in them: it was not just a passing interest. Parents speak so appreciatively of his asking after each of their children even years after he had seen them. Archbishop Paul Martin

told me that Owen always asked after Carmel Sorenson; she was a little girl at school in the parish where Owen was a young priest, and eventually became the mother of Paul - the tall one behind me! Owen's interest in others never faded.

The emails speak of his faithfulness, sense of justice, his normality, compassion, every-ready good humour, love of story-telling, and his strong support for refugees, migrants and missionaries. Owen's motto: "let that mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus our Lord", was not theoretical; it shaped him.

His journey was not without the cross. He was born on 30th Sept 1928, at their home in St John St, only three blocks from where we are now gathered. His mother died within days of his birth, and he was brought up by aunts in Hawera, which led to his lasting identification with Taranaki. His journey to ordination was not plain sailing: he had previously had rheumatic fever, and the seminary authorities considered his health might not be up to the needed standard. After a year out of the seminary, it was the cardiologist, and very saintly man, Sir Charles Burns who put him back to track to the priesthood.

As a priest, Owen served in many parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Wellington, which included several parishes in what became the Diocese of Palmerston North. Even after he returned from five years in Peru, he later re-visited other missionaries still there. He was Vicar General to Cardinal Tom Williams when he was asked to become my coadjutor. It was like a kind of home-coming for him, and the diocese of Palmerston North was to be greatly blessed by the presence and ministry of this sensitive, humble, talented and caring man, until his retirement in 2005, and then his priestly ministry continued locally right until his last days, like Pope Francis.

To his family here present, I extend on behalf of us all, our prayer support. I can assure you all that Owen was well prepared for his death, and more than ready to go.

What Cardinal Tomothy Ratcliffe said to his mother when she was dying, and what he suggested we say to Francis as we mourn him, we can all now say to Owen: 'you can go now, mission accomplished.'