

Homily – St Ignatius Church (Toowong) and Holy Spirit Church (Auchenflower)
Weekend 25/26th November 2017

After working in Ministry in Townsville and Palm Island as a young priest in the 1980s, I went further west of Brisbane in the 1990s, more than 4,000kms, to live in the Aboriginal community of Balgo in WA and minister to the remote Aboriginal communities of that region of the western desert.

There I learned many things. For example, I found there is no simple word in Kukatja for ‘hello’ or ‘thanks’ or even ‘goodbye’. When asked why there is no word for ‘goodbye’ they would simply say: ‘saying goodbye is too sad and painful’. So what do I say, I would ask, when I am leaving? They replied, ‘you simply say: yanirparna’, ‘I am going along now’ and we reply ‘yara, go along!’. A very simple, dignified farewell always open and hopeful of meeting up again. It does not deny the sadness of parting but prefers to emphasise the freedom to let the other go with hope for the future and coming together once again.

In every significant farewell, as in the one we are expressing this weekend, we face the sadness of loss but we also share hope in what might lie ahead. The feast of Christ the King, which we are celebrating, is about end-times but it is also about our deep need for God’s care. There are times when we can feel like sheep who have strayed, been injured and are weak. This is possibly one such time.

It does not seem very long ago when this parish was blessed with the energetic presence of Peter Quin along with John Reilly, Greg Jordan and Vince Hurley.

How quickly has the reality of our aging and declining Province numbers touched and affected us! The poverty of our numbers means we will also leave one further parish in 2017, and others will necessarily follow. Since Peter Quin's death, the first anniversary only a few days ago [22nd November], we have had 9 further deaths in our Province. In many ways we are like other religious congregations in the west who are facing decline but also living in hope that something new will emerge within ourselves and the church.

The decision to leave this parish was not an easy one. In the context of gratitude for all we, as Jesuits, have received in this parish over more than a 100 years, it also brings with it a sense of our human frailties and our reliance on God to light the new path we all now must take.

When we hear the gospel this weekend, Matthew's description of the final judgement, we are reminded that choices always lie before us, sometimes things we do, sometimes things we fail to do. We live in times of change and where important choices affecting our world, church and society continue to face us. Whether it be the State election this weekend, the Federal Government response to the results of the same sex plebiscite, our treatment of those on Manus Island and Nauru, recent Victorian legislation regarding euthanasia, whether we can change our Constitution and respond to our First Peoples ... and so on ... we need our God as shepherd to lead and guide us along the journey ahead.

This gospel reading reminds us, despite our weakness and uncertainties, to keep our eyes uplifted and hearts open to those most in need and see the poverty of the world

around us. Pope Francis, in his message for the First World Day of the Poor last weekend and which he wishes to link with this weekend, describes our present world of poverty as ‘faces marked by suffering, marginalization, oppression, violence, torture and imprisonment, war, deprivation of freedom and dignity, ignorance and illiteracy, medical emergencies and shortage of work, trafficking and slavery, exile, extreme poverty and forced migration’. The poverty that presently exists in our world is immense and often out of our sight.

I believe our past relationship with this parish, and this farewell, signals an invitation to ourselves as a Province, as it does to each of us, to consider carefully how we approach the path ahead. What is God now asking of us? How, again to quote Pope Francis, does this experience of our own poverty ‘create the conditions for freely shouldering our personal and social responsibilities, despite our limitations, with trust in God’s closeness and the support of his grace’? We, as Jesuits, need to face our personal and social responsibilities to our Ignatian charism.

Let me now acknowledge those who have gracefully journeyed and accompanied us to this day:

- Charles Costello and the Parish Council along with David Slater, Bernard Rush and the Parish Finance Group have done much to smooth the transition for the incoming PP, Fr Wrex Woolnough, currently PP at Caboolture;
- Sr Libby Rogerson IBVM, Province Delegate for Parishes with the advice of our Province Task Force, including Louise Wellington from this parish;
- the support of Archbishop Mark Coleridge and VG Peter Meneely in this challenging process of change;

- the care this Parish gave Peter Quin during his time as PP and when he was so ill;
- the efforts of Stan Lim and Gaetan Pereira to continue ministering in the parish this year, along with the support of Parish staff;
- the Faber Centre who is ready to accompany and support people who wish to further develop their Ignatian spirituality.

Finally, and above all, let me thank you the parishioners who have journeyed with us, over many years, for your faithfulness, generosity, forgiveness and faith. Let us on this feast of Christ the King continue to pray for each other that we may face the journey ahead in hope.

And so, with your kindness, let me finally say ... yanirninparna ... and invite your generous reply ...yara!

Brian F McCoy SJ
Provincial