

Homily – Parish of St Ignatius Toowong (& Auchenflower) February 18th /19th 2017

Background

In 1979, at the age of 31 and ordained less than two years, I was missioned to work in Queensland. I went, along with another Jesuit, Pat Mullins, to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Townsville. We thought, at that time, that the real reason we ended up in Townsville was because our Provincial was biased being a Queenslander and preferred a Queensland option over the NT and WA! While living a long way north of Brisbane we formally belonged to this Toowong Jesuit community and would regularly visit the parish and community on our travels north or south.

I lived in Townsville for five very enjoyable years, completed Tertianship in Sydney in 1984, and then returned in 1985 to minister on Palm Island. I returned later in my life to work with Indigenous health researchers at James Cook University. I am blessed to have friendships that go back some thirty-eight years.

I am now quite clear in my own mind whom to barrack for during the annual State of Origin series.

When I first came to Queensland as a Jesuit there were three Jesuits at St Leo's University College and four here at Toowong. There were 319 Jesuits in the Australian Province.

There are currently only 125 men in the Australian Jesuit Province – less than 40% of the number of Jesuits when I first came to Qld. 25% are over the age of 80, 75% over the age of 60.

In our 9 Jesuit parishes, in five Australian States, we currently have 18 men assigned to serve in them, 25% over the age of 80, only one under 50. An average age of 71. One of them, who was at St Leo's when I arrived in Queensland in 1979 and has been working in the Sevenhill/Clare parish, Justin King, died in SA last week.

I mention my long and affectionate history of connection to Queensland, and the diminishing number of Jesuits in our Australian Province, to emphasise that personally I find it both sad and difficult to announce that we Jesuits will be concluding our ministry in this Parish at the end of this year.

Decision

On Friday night I met with the Jesuit community, Sr Libby Rogerson IBVM our Province Delegate for Parishes and leader of our Province Parish Task Force, and members of the Parish Council, Finance Committee, School, Stuartholme, Volunteers, Staff and the Faber Centre along with the Archdiocesan Vicar General, Monsignor Peter Meneely and confirmed this decision and its first public announcement. It comes after a long period of consultation and discernment.

I am pleased that we have been able to provide Fr Stan to work here until the end of the year with Fr Gaetan. The Archdiocese will be responsible for supplying a parish priest in 2018 and will consult the members of this parish in that process of appointment. I would emphasise that, while this decision is not based on the sad reality that Peter Quin died late last year, we all share in the loss and grief of his passing. At the same time, the wonderful farewell for Peter, brought to light the many graces we Jesuits have been blessed with in our time here at Toowong.

We were reminded us that, as an aging Province, we simply do not have enough men to take up the role of parish priests for all our parishes. That event also reminded us of the very rich life of this parish: the families, young and old, staff and volunteers, the rich music, spirituality and real sense of being an active Catholic community.

The Province Parish Task force, for more than eighteen months, has been involved in this wider Province discernment and helping to shape it. They are willing to assist this transition in any way possible. They have had a very challenging task to perform and I thank them for their courage and advice. This year, 2017, our Province will conclude its ministry in another parish as well as in Toowong, and it is quite likely we will withdraw from other parishes in the next two years.

Future

When Pope Francis met with us Jesuits at our recent General Congregation in Rome, held last October (24th), he encouraged us to reach out to new places, those new existential peripheries of our world that he has described as: *'the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery'*. An important element of our Jesuit charism is that desire and freedom to reach out to others most in need and as we can.

Currently our Province sends some of its best men to support our ministries in Asia-Pacific, South Asia and in the Jesuit Refugee Service. This year 11% serve on these various missions. Sadly, but realistically, we need to let go some of our present commitments to be faithful to our Ignatian call and these decisions.

The Word of God we have heard today in the Book of Leviticus reminds us that God wishes us to personally and deeply know that each of us is *holy* because our relationship with each other and in God is *holy* ... and in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians to value that we are *God's temple* because God's Spirit dwells within each one of us. As God's people, as Jesuits and a parish community we are called to hold confidence in that truth of who we are and where Jesus invites us to trust, have hope and *'be perfect ... as the heavenly Father is perfect'*.

However, no Jesuit is perfect, as you have well and truly learned over 100 years, nor is any Jesuit Province. Not everything Jesuits have done in this parish have been perfect or good. Yet much grace has been shared and enjoyed, and we on our part are very grateful for those graces, and for the many ways in which you have supported the Jesuits here over those years, and worked alongside them in the mission of this parish.

Does this mean we simply leave on December 31st, 2017 with no ongoing Jesuit connections here in Brisbane? I hope not. One thing we are committed to doing over the coming months – and confirmed on Friday night – is to see how Jesuit and Ignatian connections may continue and be further strengthened. The outreach and resources of the Faber Centre of Ignatian Spirituality will form a very important part of those discussions.

Let us be grateful for what we have received. Let us place our hope in Christ who calls us to grow into a deeper knowledge of that gift of *holiness* that lies within each one of us. Let us pray for God's grace and guidance for the journey ahead.