

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last Sunday's gospel saw Jesus sending out the Twelve, two by two, on mission to proclaim his Good News of victory over sin and death. This Good News, or "Gospel" in Old English, was "Evangelium" in the original Greek of Saint Mark. Evangelium was a word recruited by the evangelists from koine Greek usage. In the ancient Greco-Roman world the word "evangelium" was the term used for the "good news" brought by a messenger or runner about a great victory of the Roman legions. In its Christian context, Evangelium referred to the great victory that Jesus Christ had won over sin and death. The missionaries were to bring this Evangelium or Good News to the people. They were to exhort people to take advantage of the victory of Christ by preaching repentance, anointing the sick, and expelling demons. This missionary project was launched after a period of rigorous formation by Jesus of his disciples. They were "disciples" because they were trying to follow Jesus in a disciplined way.

Geneviève made the point via Zoom in last Sunday's Evangelium that to progress in the spiritual life, we need a similarly disciplined attitude and approach. Saint Paul several times in his letters to the first churches uses the metaphor of athletes and their disciplined training as a model for the practice of the Christian faith. It never ceases to amaze me how we will accept the most disciplined of regimes from our teachers, coaches, tutors and employers in our academic, sporting, artistic and working lives, but balk at a similarly disciplined approach to that core part of our lives which endures for eternity, namely our spiritual lives. As Saint Paul says in his Letter to the Corinthians: They (the ancient athletes) undergo their strict training for a wreath of victory that will wither and fade: we do it for one which will last forever (*cf* 1 Cor. 9:25).

In this week's gospel, Jesus invites the disciples to "come away to some lonely place ...". However, when the people approach Jesus and the disciples (i.e. those who are not yet disciplined followers of his and may never be) his heart goes out to them. In fact, to say "he feels sorry for them" is according to scripture scholars a rather limp translation of Mark's Greek original. They seem to him like sheep without a shepherd and he is moved to the very core of his being for them. This is because Jesus is consumed by God's love for his human family because he is so habitually in touch with his God and Father and love for all his creatures.

By the very fact of our Baptism, we are called by God the Father through Jesus Christ and his Church to be missionary-disciples or disciple-missionaries, because we will not be effective missionaries if we are not already disciplined followers of the Lord. Both our parish RCIA and CLC groups offer systematic ways of becoming disciples and missionaries. Our weekly Evangelium meeting, organised by the Saint Peter's young adults, augments this more programmatic Catholic formation via presentations and Q&A on more topical Catholic themes. We also have based in the parish the Missionaries of Charity (the Sisters of Mother Theresa of Calcutta) and the Neo Catechumenal Way who are both radically missionary. A more recent missionary presence in our parish is that of the Mission of Saint Paul, a group of Coptic Orthodox young adults from all over Sydney, who have established a presence in Ward Park and who have made a very good impression on the local people.

At the heart of our missionary endeavours is the response of Jesus to the people who approach him in this Sunday's gospel: "He was moved to pity for them ..." Commentators say that "he took pity on them" or a "he felt sorry for them" are weak translations of Saint Mark's original Greek. Something more like "He was moved to the core of his being for them" would be closer to Mark's intended meaning. Mark is typically more concise than his synoptic colleagues. His synoptic colleague Saint Matthew adds "(the people) were harassed and dejected, like sheep without ..." (Mt.: 9:36)

If we are to have the heart and mind of Jesus in playing our part in the New Evangelization and the Go Make Disciples project of our shepherd (Latin *pastor*), Archbishop Fisher, we need to stay close to The Good Shepherd via his presence to us in Word and Sacrament. Even if we cannot presently receive the sacraments, we always have available to us Sacred Scripture through which Jesus Christ most definitely enters our hearts and minds. (Please see the attachment to this parish email or the parish website for this Sunday's Mass readings.)

And concerning the sacraments, as the Holy Father reminded us during last year's lockdown, are we taking advantage of having our sins forgiven by making an act of perfect contrition (with the intention of seeking sacramental absolution once it is available again)? Here is one act of perfect contrition which many of us of a certain age learnt when we were young:

O my God,  
I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins  
and detest them above all things  
because they deserve dreadful punishment,  
because they have crucified my loving Saviour Jesus Christ,  
and most of all  
because they have offended your infinite goodness to me,  
and I firmly resolve by the help of your grace  
never to offend you again  
and carefully to avoid the occasions of sin.  
Amen.

(Having made an act of perfect contrition, please see the parish bulletin for prayers before and after Holy Communion, which for nearly all of us for the time being will be a "spiritual communion".)

I also encourage you to take advantage of this hiatus in our parish liturgical life by listening to the teaching and preaching of our chief pastor/shepherd, Archbishop Anthony, via the website of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney.

With this Sunday's Mass offering, best regards and daily prayers for you all,

Fr. John