

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

On Wednesday last I was part of a wonderful celebration. Virtually all the staff who serve in Catholic schools throughout South Australia were there along with most of our clergy and parish pastoral workers. There were five and a half thousand of us gathered in the Entertainment Centre for a day of prayer and renewal. The day began with a spectacular rendition of Amazing Grace and then a rather lengthy and very beautiful welcome to country and smoking ceremony. The morning prayer seamlessly followed.

We listened to the same gospel that we have heard this evening/morning proclaimed and then echoed back to us. But the echoes were not just the same words that Jesus had quoted from the Prophet Isaiah. They were fleshed out by other words that could describe some ways that we could be like Jesus continuing the mission that he was just beginning.

With music and symbols were reminded that it was only through the power of the Spirit first given to us at our Baptism, that we could do what Jesus was doing. The prayer had begun with the chanting of the Veni Sancte Spiritus, calling upon the Spirit to come and anoint us as Jesus was anointed. Water was brought to the prayer space and poured into what looked like Baptism fonts. On the huge screen behind all this, water was flowing

everywhere. The time of prayer prepared us to listen well to the presentations that were made during the day. Fr. Philip Marshall teamed up with Kent Hoffman who was speaking to us via a video link from the United States where he said it was snowing. They broke open what it means to know that we are the centre of the Universe in the hands of a gentle loving God. Neil McGoran took us through the history of Catholic Education in South Australia to launch us into a future where Jesus was at the heart of all that we were doing.

I do not think that any of us were ready for the afternoon session when Robyn Moore talked about the Power of the word with a host of stories and great humour. Robyn is the voice of Blinky Bill and an Ambassador for The Make a Wish Foundation. She is the most in demand female speaker in Australia. But what came through as she inspired us to use the Power of the Word, to teach and to heal and to inspire others, was that it was her deep faith in Jesus that moved her to do all that she was doing.

The day concluded with prayer that commissioned us to go renewed by what we had heard and seen. We listened again to how others had reflected upon the words of today's gospel and what it meant for them to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives. We heard what it meant for students, teachers and pastoral workers to give new sight to the blind, to set the

downtrodden free and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. In that time of prayer, we were given some time to quietly think for ourselves about what we were called to do in our own particular situation. Bishop Greg O'Kelly then blessed us and sent us out to do what we had reflected upon.

When I was reflecting upon this gospel in the light of what I had experienced I was struck by the context of the gospel story. Jesus had gone back to his home synagogue, to the place where, as a child, he had listened to God's Word proclaimed to him. I read that a synagogue could be built wherever there were at least ten families who wished to gather. The synagogue was more than a church. It was a school and a community centre. Jesus would have felt very much at home in the synagogue of Nazareth. That is where he grew up. That is where his relatives and friends would meet often. It was in this very familiar place where he was handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, and he unrolled it until he found the place where Isaiah had described his own mission as God's servant. "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." And Jesus went on to say, "This text is being fulfilled even as you listen."

The very words that he had read from the prophet Isaiah were being fulfilled in him. He was the Prophet that God had promised he would send. He was the one to whom the Spirit of God had been given. Over the next three years of his life people would see how that Spirit would be at work in him. Those who were open would hear him give good news to the poor, see him unburden those who had been weighed down with sickness, and watch him give sight to the blind. Those who were open to him would come to know God's love through him.

Now it is our turn to do something of that. Now it is our turn in our particular situation to let the Spirit of God work through us to continue the work of Jesus. What we need to remember is that God does not call us to do extraordinary things to allow that to happen. No, it is in the ordinary things that we say and do that God is at work. As Robyn Moore reminded us, every word we speak to others has the power to break or make others. Everything we say can be a word of encouragement and healing and hope for others. The simplest thing we do in love has God's name written all over it. May the name of Jesus be generously proclaimed this week.