

Let us pray:

Come upon us now, O Holy Spirit,
and give us holy thoughts which are translated into
prayer,
holy prayers which are translated into love,
and holy love which is translated into life;
for the sake of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

(Uniting in Worship II)

All of us are evangelists.

I was reflecting on a conversation we had in the
pastoral team this week about evangelism, and also
the evening prayers that Julie and I zoomed.

While babysitting our grandchild in Greystanes, we
attended Christ Church Cathedral in Newcastle. The
preacher was speaking on the feast of Mary
Magdalene. She said that Mary told others what she
had seen and heard.

I would add, and what she had experienced.

Mary Magdalene was perhaps the first evangelist.
Mary told others what she had seen and heard and
experienced.

In the Scripture from Romans, Paul speaks of the sufferings of the present time. The reference to the sufferings of the present time, refers back to chapter 5:3 to boast in our sufferings.

Christian suffering raises questions for us.
How do we reckon with suffering within the framework of religious belief? (Brendan Byrne, 275)

It was John Wesley on his death bed who said as his farewell words,

The best of all is God is with us.

And to make the point, he repeated the statement.

The best of all God is with us.

God is with us.

God is for us.

Not only is that a core message of Matthew's Gospel, it could well be said it is the core message of Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

If God is for us, who can be against us?

No separation from God, from Christ's love
from earthly trials,
or the spiritual powers behind earthly trials.

All is caught up in the final victory in Christ in God
at the end.

Genesis 1: God created a good creation.
At the end, all will be enfolded in the love of a good
God.

In the intervening time, the church has a role to
proclaim God's love,
to proclaim in words and deeds that even in times of
uncertainty and tribulation,
God is not removed; God is not unmoved.

God is close, but more than that,
God empathises with our predicament.
What confidence do we have to say that?
Is it just a theory?

It seems to me the answer is a resounding, 'No!'
The Easter death and resurrection of Jesus is God's
yes to the world. It is God's bearing our pain.

The Christ event is not *an* expression of God's love;
it is *the* expression of God's love
and it is God's commitment to the whole creation.

God gave up God's son, not to appease God's anger,
No!
but to deal with human anger, human pride, human
malice.

Humans battered and beat God's prophets and messengers.

Even putting some to death.

Surely not God's son? Surely they won't do the same to God's Son?

Yes, even God's Son was treated with disrespect, tortured and crucified.

I suppose God could have kept back the Son, but love does not hold back.

I suppose an angry God could have destroyed the world, but a loving God would absorb the anger, and embrace the world even deeper than previously.

And according to the scriptures, a marvellous thing happened.

The Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead as the Christ of God.

And in so doing, signalling the beginning of the end of human treachery and violence,

which has not yet ended but begun,

and in its inability to tame God signals that in Christ the end is nigh, and the end is peace in God.

Nothing will prevent God achieving the goal.

Notice that verse 8:37 begins with the great “but.”
But qualifies everything that has gone before.

But, in all these things we are more than
conquerors through the one who has loved us.

The presence of the Spirit of God intercedes with our
spirits.

Of course, we must be alive to God’s Spirit at work.
Our pride can block out the work of the Spirit.

Speaking for myself, it is pride that prevents morning,
midday and evening prayers.

Pride that charges forth oblivious to the Spirit’s
leading, or warning.

It is pride that can prevent us from saying sorry,
from apologising, from forgiving.

It is pride that skims over the pray of confession,
or even rejects it outright.

The promises of Jesus,
the theological affirmations of Paul can only speak to
the humble.

Because only the humble listen.

St Augustine wrote much about humility.
I want to quote Augustine from one of his letters.

It is a long quote, so I will read it slowly.

St Augustine Letter 118: 22. (A.D. 410)

To Him, my Dioscorus, I desire you to submit yourself with unreserved piety, and I wish you to prepare for yourself no other way of seizing and holding the truth than that which has been prepared by Him who, as God, saw the weakness of our goings. In that way the first part is humility; the second, humility; the third, humility: and this I would continue to repeat as often as you might ask direction, not that there are no other instructions which may be given, but because, unless humility precede, accompany, and follow every good action which we perform, being at once the object which we keep before our eyes, the support to which we cling, and the monitor by which we are restrained, pride wrests wholly from our hand any good work on which we are congratulating ourselves. All other vices are to be apprehended when we are doing wrong; but pride is to be feared even when we do right actions, lest those things which are done in a praiseworthy manner be spoiled by the desire for praise itself. Wherefore, as that most illustrious

orator, on being asked what seemed to him the first thing to be observed in the art of eloquence, is said to have replied, Delivery; and when he was asked what was the second thing, replied again, Delivery; and when asked what was the third thing, still gave no other reply than this, Delivery; so if you were to ask me, however often you might repeat the question, what are the instructions of the [Christian religion](#), I would be disposed to answer always and only, Humility, although, perchance, necessity might constrain me to speak also of other things.

Did you note Augustine say,
all of our good works are as trash if they are not done
with humility.

Only the other week we heard from the gospel of
Matthew 11:28, when Jesus said,
Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy
laden, and I will give you rest.

Those words are rubbish or nonsense to all who are
proud, and therefore unable to humble themselves.
Humbling ourselves is also about waiting. The
parables are about waiting on God. (N. T Wright, Matthew for Everyone, 168.)

Returning to Paul and his letter to the church in Rome, Chapter 8 ends on a note of hope.

The love of Christ and the love of God is in complete unity and continuity.

As Brendan Byrne said,

In Christ believers are grasped within the love of God and drawn into the Creator's design for human beings already manifested in the glory of the risen Lord.”

Brendan Byrne, SJ, Romans, Sacra Pagina, 1996, 279

Returning to where I started, evangelism is nothing more and nothing less than telling others what we have seen and heard and experienced about Jesus Christ.

It is not complicated.

Telling others what we have seen and heard and experienced.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.

We don't need to be big in worldly terms to tell others what we have seen, and heard and experienced.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that expands existence into life, vision. If we have experienced the leavening of our lives, we will want to tell others what we have seen and heard and experienced.

The kingdom of God is like a pearl of great price. Surely the Christian faith is more important to us than anything else in all creation.

If we have humbled ourselves and seen and heard and experienced the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, surely, we want to share that with others.

And surely nothing will prevent us.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net that catches all kinds of things.

As fishers of people, surely, we will want to cast a net far and wide.

Surely the kingdom of heaven is for all people.

And surely if we have seen and heard and experienced life in Jesus Christ, we would want that for everyone.

We are going through and will go through a lot in this transition of Parramatta Mission.

How could we not expect to go through transition when our vision is a church-based community transforming lives?

In setting that vision, and presumably we believe it, presumably we want to keep it, means we expect that we, ourselves, will be transformed.

Because we expect that before others are transformed, we will be transformed.

And at any stage along the pilgrimage of life, we can expect the transformation of our lives.

Our values also set us up for that transformation: Grace, inclusion, dignity, faith and hope.

Grace is God's grace that encounters us before we know it and before we deserve it.

Grace that picks us up and carries us forward.

Grace that is inclusive, that includes everyone.

Grace that respects the inherent God-given dignity of everyone and of the whole of creation.

Grace that in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, gives birth to faith and hope.

In God's grace it is safe for us individually to confess to God our pride, to seek the way of humility, to experience inclusion and dignity, and be given the gifts of faith and hope.

Matthew said, Jesus is God with us, not just in his earthly life, even also in his ascended life.

Paul said, that the Spirit of God in Christ is present in the whole of creation and every part of creation hearing the groans of creation, the groans of people and bringing those deepest things to God.

Paul said that there is nothing that can separate us in Christ Jesus.

That my friends is a message I hope we have heard, a message I hope we have seen, a message I hope we have experienced, and therefore it follows we can do nothing less than tell others.

Let us pray:

Lord God,
Open our ears,
so that we may *listen* attentively to your word.
Open our minds,
so that we may *discover* the paths you open to us.
Open our hearts,
so that we may *love* you more.
Open our lips,
so that we may *share* with everyone we encounter
the message of the Good News.
We give praise to God,
who has done such wonderful things for us,
and for all.
Amen.