

Project Compassion : Week 5 *Tawonga, Malawi*

Dominic, forty-seven, is a father of six from Papua New Guinea. In 2016, he became involved with Caritas Australia's partner, Centre of Hope, which runs safe house and family anonymous programs and turned a difficult life and an unhappy relationship around. Now a community trainer, he works with other men to help them to change their behaviour and build more harmonious family lives. Domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and limited employment opportunities mean that many in PNG struggle to meet their basic family needs. Forty percent of its population live below the poverty line. In 2016, Caritas Australia and its PNG partner, Centre of Hope, invited Dominic to join its Safe House program. It provides Gender-Based-Violence prevention training, counselling services and safe accommodation for women and children survivors of violence. It also provides support for income-generating projects and life skills for young people. By opening himself up to the process of counselling with Christophylda, his wife, he was able to learn new ways to manage his behaviour and attitudes, bringing new life to his family where there was once fear and darkness. "After entering the Caritas program, I have actually changed some of my bad attitudes. It has really opened my mind and heart to see where my weaknesses are and I'm trying to improve," Dominic says.



Suffering

It is amazing to me that the cross or crucifix became the central Christian logo, when its rather obvious message of inevitable suffering is aggressively disbelieved in most Christian countries, individuals, and churches. We are clearly into ascent, achievement, and accumulation. The cross became a mere totem, a piece of jewelry. We made the Jesus symbol into a mechanical and distant substitutionary atonement theory instead of a very personal and intense at-one-ment process, the very reality of love's unfolding. We missed out on the positive and redemptive meaning of our own pain and suffering. It was something Jesus did for us (substitutionary), but not something that revealed and invited us into the same pattern. We are not punished for our sins, we are punished by our sins (such as blindness, egocentricity, illusions, or pride). In this time of suffering we have to ask ourselves, what are we going to do with our pain? Are we going to blame others for it? Are we going to try to fix it? No one lives on this earth without it. It is the great teacher, although none of us want to admit it. If we do not transform our pain, we will transmit it in some form. How can we be sure not to transmit our pain onto others?

Richard Rohr

St Joseph's Catholic Church Rozelle

Palm Sunday of Lent 5th April 2020

Thoughts on the Gospel

In the journey of faith we should always be on our guard against being part of a manipulated crowd. The unchecked enthusiasms of a crowd can carry us away to places, people or things we would not ordinarily choose and should not embrace. If we are vulnerable, a gifted guru through his or her version of eternal life can whip us up into a frenzy. We only have to look at the power of the media and advertising to see how susceptible we are to becoming a slave to fashionable ideologies, dress codes and what and who is in or out. Every time we buy something because someone else has it or because we convince ourselves that our wants are really our needs, the crowd has won. The story of Passion Sunday is that manipulation of a crowd, even by legitimate authorities, can be the beginning of spiritual death. Hype often distorts priorities, blurs good judgment and can choose expediency over integrity. So what's the remedy to being manipulated, to regaining a sense of what really matters, to standing up against the crowd for the values we know are right? Jesus shows us in Matthew's Gospel. It starts with silence. It's being a contemplative in a manic world and praying for the courage to dissent from the crowd's hyped-up madness. As we process into Holy Week, this annual rite of passage for our faith, may we model our lives on Jesus in every way by creating the silence we need in our lives to sort out our priorities, by using silence powerfully in a world that loves words but has very little to say about our meaning and destiny and allowing our sacrificial love, even to the point of death, to do all the talking.

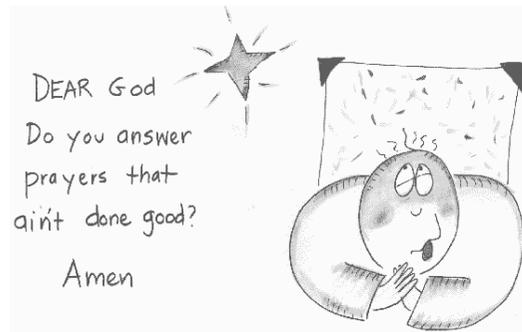


Richard Leonard

The Fundamental Truth of Your Identity

Jesus came to share his identity with you and to tell you that you are the Beloved Sons and Daughters of God. Just for a moment try to enter this enormous mystery that you, like Jesus, are the beloved daughter or the beloved son of God. This is the truth. Furthermore, your belovedness preceded your birth. You were the beloved before your father, mother, brother, sister, or church loved you or hurt you. You are the beloved because you belong to God from all eternity. God loved you before you were born, and God will love you after you die. In Scripture, God says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." This is a very fundamental truth of your identity. This is who you are whether you feel it or not. You belong to God from eternity to eternity. Life is just a little opportunity for you during a few years to say, "I love you, too."

Henri Nouwen



Feast Days of the Week

Tue 7th Apr **St John Baptist de la Salle** **1651-1719**

John became interested in the creation of schools for poor boys in Raven, where he was stationed. Though the work was extremely distasteful to him at first, he became more involved in working with the deprived youths. Once convinced that this was his divinely appointed mission, John threw himself wholeheartedly into the work, left home and family, abandoned his position as canon at Rheims, gave away his fortune and reduced himself to the level of the poor to whom he devoted his entire life. The remainder of his life was closely entwined with the community he founded, the Brothers of the Christian School (Christian Brothers, or De La Salle Brothers). This community grew rapidly and was successful in educating boys of poor families, using methods designed by John. It prepared teachers in the first training college and also set up homes and schools for young delinquents.

Living in the Day is Time-Tested Wisdom

As virus warnings have gone viral, public fears have spiraled. We scurry about devising defenses, hunker down against the invisible scourge and suffer from the helplessness of a stubborn unknown. Where will it end and what are we to do? Anxiety has plenty to feed on from the confusing reality, a mixture of sound information and vexingly unanswered questions. In this charged climate, it may seem simplistic to suggest that the best remedy for the scrambled brain and rumbling stomach is living one day at a time. Though I'm a poor example of what it means to do it. The spiritual variety of living in the day starts with two assertions. One, everyday distress such as anxiety cannot be overcome by personal willpower. Attacking it in the moment only makes it worse. Two, authentic spiritual search isn't about the ego's desires — either goals such as banishing anxiety or gaining future outcomes. As they say, it is what it is; living today is opening oneself to a Power Greater Than Ourselves that can reshape and heal souls that accept change. It is for me the Wisdom beyond our capacity to evoke or control on our own. Wisdom of this kind has been espoused by Buddha, Jesus, a host of Dalai Lamas and delivered these days by retreat centers and 12-step programs, albeit in different forms and emphases. All point to immersion in the present and expanding fuller awareness of that spiritual connection that gets buried under daily stresses. It's a plunge into what may seem the narrower way that paradoxically actually becomes the wider way. The promise is that the living spirit within us today provides for our deepest needs if we seek it and let it through our walls of fear and defensiveness. Not only that, those gifts of spirit can do the same in all our tomorrows we approach similarly. It entails letting in the spiritual nourishment that inherently prepares me to look at whatever happens tomorrow, with hope and serenity from beyond myself that change my outlook. When I'm wondering what to do, I don't expect explicit answers as to what sneakers to buy or which school is best for my child. I yearn to believe that spiritual suffusion of daily focus can nourish my inner being sufficiently for me to make sensible choices when the time comes. That I can have enough spiritual assurance and strength to encourage me to use my common sense to take precautions against coronavirus today and refrain from forecasting the situation next week. Mark Twain is quoted as saying, "I have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened." But a lot of my head is often in next week or next year, projecting imagined disasters, rewards and failures. The inner journey doesn't eliminate the future but steers us away from illusions. It's getting to know a Higher Power who enables us to handle our perplexities. It's not about perfection. It's about the direction we take, even in fits and starts.

Ken Briggs