

WORKSHOP: PARISH, DEAD OR ALIVE?

We first need to look at what we think a parish is. Do you see it as a group of people with like-minded ideas of GOD, A loose association of religious people, a group we don't really know but that they believe the same things we DO, or we think they DO. *(Like the story of Fred and his friend was asking him at the pub one day what he believed...)*

or do we see Church as a community of faith, a family community of God?

Sometime in the recent past we often spoke of Church AS GOING to Mass, 'hearing' Mass or 'attending' Mass. But Vat 2 sees us not as spectators at mass but participants, who have FULL, ACTIVE and conscious participation.

You see if you see Church as a family community and work to make it that, then there will be no idea that it is a dead reality or that church is a cemetery adjunct.

You would never speak about your own family as attending it or being a spectator in it -no, you are a participating member, a fully involved member as a husband, father, brother..

(Cardinal Williams speaking about Church once said that the Greek word for Church is 'EKKlesia' and the word for home was 'ekklesiola' which meant a little church. So, our homes are so to represent the big family community of church.

If any of you have attended the 'Proclaim' conference in Sydney whereby Fr. White and his assistant from USA spoke about the parish he was assigned to that was basically dying and how it was resurrected 'from the grave' and if has now become a thriving Church community with a four-fold increase of parishioners.

What was the formula for success? Well when you read his book 'Rebuild'- and I sent a copy of it to all my priests in the Dunedin diocese- it basically came down to people appreciating that they were not individual church members who attended but a family community who supported each other, who worked together, who co-operated as a family of God. It was a triumph of community over individualism. At our recent assembly in Christchurch, Fr. James Mallon spoke about the transformation work in his parishes in Nova Scotia (based around the Alpha programme).

(You might like to think about the individualism we have in our society today)

The second point that comes out of this is this;

If we believe that our worship calls for full, active and conscious participation in the liturgy, then as members of the church it should also be full, active participation in our respective parishes (just as we would in our own families). You are not meant to be a part-time father, an associate parent, or one just on the mailing list- no, fulltime, active..

(Lex ordandi, Lex credendi)

If we believe in church family then it is vital that everyone has a role in the parish. This is a lesson from 'rebuild'- there were all sorts of groups, everyone or mostly had a role whether you were a reader, garnder, Special Minister, acolyte, car-park attendant, tea-MAKER, GREETER etc (people coming together); no one was to be left out.

This is always vital with person/people coming into the church- they are usually rearing to go and they need to be given a task, role so that they have a sense of mission that God calls everyone to.

The third point that follow s from this;

Pope Francis has again pointed out recently that everyone from their Baptism is called to be a disciple and a missionary disciple. This is essential from RCIA.. this is essential for every catholic. To be a fully, active Church family member we need to have evangelisation at the top of our bucket list. Jan heath has said "*The church is the only organisation that exists for those who don't belong to it*".

We need to remember that is why the Church exists- to bring in new family members. It is what the Gospel tells us the Great Commission

But I have to admit that I feel it is the weakest point of our church..it is our achilles heel. We are very poor at it. Look at the Jehovah Witness's or the Mormons who are out visiting. Have you ever had catholic evangelists knocking on your door?

Why is that? is it because we have basically inherited an Irish-settler church in NZ/ Whereby they had had such a stormy history of suffering persecution and discrimination that their rule of survival was to 'keep your HEADS DOWN and not raise them above the parapet' and has this rubbed of on Church. i remember reading about the case of 2 men who wanted to become CATHOLIC, but they found it very difficult to get in; no one seemed terribly helpful.

And in our overtly capitalist society built on an individualist and utilitarian philsophy we have the situation of

cultural catholics

Good catholics

Christian catholics (disciples)

(a discussable point?)

Coming back to RCIA, I recall in a parish when the advertising had gone out and a parishioner asking me "Have you got anyone for the RCIA, father?" "No, not yet, but have you?" The question surprised HIM, and he mentioned that since I was the priest, as it were the professional churchman, therefore it was my job.

"NO, NO, I replied, "My job here as pastor is to help form you people who are out there in the world..on the farms, in the offices, businesses, the market place; I can't be Christ's presence to THEM, but you can- that is where you are ". I don't think he went away that happy

Additional Points

Is Jan Heath exceptional in the Catholic Church today?

Cultural catholics

Good Catholics

Disciple Catholics

Holy name Society

Rule of Life.

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