

Homily for my 80th birthday (April 2017)

Come as you are that's how I want you
Come as you are feel quite at home
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven
Come as you are, why stand alone,

No need to fear, love sets no limits
No need to fear, love never ends
Don't run away shamed and disheartened
Rest in my love, trust me again.

I came to call sinners, not just the virtuous
I came to bring peace, not to condemn
Each time you fail to live by my promise,
Why do you think I'd love you the less?

Come as you are, that's how I love you
Come as you are, trust me again
Nothing can change the love that I bear you
All will be well, just come as you are.

Opening Prayer

Father, in the sacrament of baptism you called each of us to be an instrument of your love in our world by sharing, each in our own unique way, in the life and ministry of Jesus your Son. At our baptism we were consecrated priest, prophet and king. We share in the life and ministry of Jesus the priest by mediating your love to one another and to our world. We share in the life and ministry of Jesus the prophet by listening to you in prayer, and from this communion of prayer by speaking the truth to each other in love. We share in the life and ministry of Jesus the king by living our lives in such a way as to help bring about the reign of your love in our world. Today as we recall your gift of life, we renew our consecration to be your heart in our world. We know that you continue to share your life with us. May we always be sensitive to this gift. We thank you through your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Homily

This morning I want to integrate my reflections with the Readings. Jesus' public ministry began with his Baptism. There he had an overwhelming experience of being loved by God: "You are my Son. I love you. I delight in you." This experience of being loved was so powerful that he felt the need to go into the desert to ponder its meaning, not only for him personally, but for others. It was in the desert that he discovered his mission. People were living such depressed lives because they didn't know how loved they were by God. God was calling Jesus to radiate out to others the love he knew because of his communion with God. Jesus wanted people, as he said once, to 'live and live to the full' (John 10:10). He wanted, as he said on another occasion, to set the world on fire with love (see Luke 12:49). He called people to join him in this mission for they, too, were capable of enjoying communion with

God, and from that communion to radiate love to others. This is the meaning of Christian Baptism. Every baptised person is graced by God to share in Jesus' Baptismal experience. At our baptism God said to each of us: "You are my son/daughter. I love you. I delight in you." As we prayed in our Opening Prayer, every baptised person is anointed a priest (to connect others with God), a prophet (to speak truth from their heart) and a king (to bring about the reign of God in the world). Each Baptist person is graced to share in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Early in his ministry Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth where he lived as a child and a young man. He was asked to read and he chose the following passage from the Book of Isaiah (61:1-2; see Luke 4:18). It sums up Jesus' mission and goes to the heart of the mission which each of us is called to live, according to our life-circumstances.

(I have asked James, the first of my many nephews and nieces, to read the passage for us, on behalf of Brian and Mary's family.)

The First Reading is from the Gospel of Luke

'When Jesus came to Nazareth he went to the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the following Text:

**"The Spirit of God has been given to me,
For God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
God has sent me to liberate those who are unfree,
to enlighten the blind,
to bind up hearts that are broken,
and to proclaim a time of grace from God."**

The Word of the Lord

Jesus was able to carry out his beautiful mission because of the intimate communion he experienced with God. He was filled with God's Spirit, God's love. Our calling, too, is to love. But there is much more to this than our loving just with our own sometimes small and distracted and unsure hearts. Through baptism, the Risen Jesus is living in us. We experience the intimacy of his prayer, his communion with God, and it is out of this communion that we love with his love.

As a Response to the First Reading let us listen to a prayer Jesus Himself would often have prayed. It is Psalm 63. *(I have asked Nancy to pray it for us on behalf of her and Gerald's family.)*

Responsorial Psalm

Our response is "My soul clings to you, my God."

**O God, you are my God, for you I arise at dawn.
My whole being thirsts for you; for you my body pines,
like a dry and weary land where there is no water.**

**I gaze on you in the sanctuary,
to behold your power and your glory.**

Response: My soul clings to you, my God

**Your love is worth more than life,
my lips will sing your praise.
I will bless you as long as I live.
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.**

Response: My soul clings to you, my God

**My whole being is filled as with a banquet,
and I praise you with joy.
I think of you as I lie awake,
meditating on you throughout the night.**

Response: My soul clings to you, my God

**You have been my help.
In the shade of your wings I sing for joy.
I cling to you with all my heart.
Your right hand holds me fast.**

Response: My soul clings to you, my God.

In the **Second Reading** (Philippians 2:1-5) Paul describes what it means to live a Christian life. (*I have asked Deidre to read this for us on behalf of Peter and Connie's family*).

Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

If there is any appeal in Christ,
any consolation from love,
any communion in the Spirit,
any movements of compassion and feelings of love,
make my joy complete:
be of the same mind, having the same love,
being of one soul and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition.
Do not strive after or seek to find your value
in things that are worthless,
but in humility regard others above yourselves,
so that not everyone is focused on themselves,
but each is looking to the interests of others.
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord

Paul is asking us to look at things through Jesus' eyes. Today there is a growing list of people who call themselves atheists. Part of the reason is that we are increasingly aware of people who call on a God who makes no sense. We tend to project onto the one we call 'God' our fears, our bigotries, our desire for power, and our inability to see the good in people who are not 'like us'. Some find it easier to block off all thought of God and just get on with life. Of course, it is important that we reject false gods. It is important that we continue to purify our images of God, but to reject the religious project altogether is to ignore too many experiences that are mysterious, but beautiful. There is much more to creation, much more to life, than we can fit into our scientific categories. We need to rediscover a sense of awe and wonder, for reality is much more wonderful than what we can measure or control.

To have what Paul calls 'the mind of Jesus' is to see God as love, in fact as the source of all love, as the One who holds everything (including ourselves) in being, who is the reason everything is connected, who respects our freedom and the freedom of our expanding universe, and who is constantly filling creation with love. That kind of God is worth believing in. Moreover, without such a God ultimately nothing makes sense. Thanks to his experience of this God of love, Jesus lived a beautiful life, as do many people who call themselves Christians, and many others who are being graced by God even though they do not realise it. Jesus said that when he was lifted up he would draw everyone to himself and so to God. The world needs not only individuals who love, but communities that open their arms to welcome and to offer hope to the world.

The fact that there are people who call themselves Christians but fail to love is not a reason for us to give up on following Jesus and building a loving church. There are shonky electricians, but that's not a good reason to give up on doing a good job as an electrician. There are shonky politicians, and police, but thank God there are generous people who give their lives to build a better world and to keep our world safe. As the last of those born Fallons of my generation, I would love to encourage you all to explore the rich heritage you were invited into when you were baptized.

Finally, I have chosen a **Gospel** from Mathew (11:25-29), and have asked Father Steve Dives to proclaim it on behalf of my MSC family here at Saint Mary's Towers.

Reading from the Gospel of Saint Matthew

'At that time Jesus said,
"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
because you have hidden these things
from the wise and the intelligent
and have revealed them to infants;
yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.
All things have been handed over to me by my Father;
and no one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the Son
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
Come to me, all you that are weary
and are carrying heavy burdens,

and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.'

My parents (your grandparents) lived a simple, uncluttered life. They provided for their 8 children a secure childhood nurtured by a loving faith. We walked to the church at Northbridge for Sunday Mass, and every evening we would gather in the lounge room facing the picture of the Sacred Heart for the family rosary.

The first to leave home was Jim who, having completed the Intermediate Certificate at Randwick, went to Saint Mary's Towers, Douglas Park in 1942, seventy-five years ago. He wanted to become a missionary. The following year Brian joined the Air force. In 1945 John followed in Jim's footsteps, and I followed in 1950. In 1952 Brian married Mary. In 1954 Marie, the eldest, joined the Blessed Sacrament Sisters in Melbourne. Gerald and Nancy married in 1955, Peter and Connie in 1958, and in 1966 Margaret, the youngest, married Richard.

Half our family – Dad, Marie died at 48, Dad and John at 60, and Peter and Margaret at 71. I had the joy of celebrating their 80th birthday with Mum in 1980, Brian in 2005, Jim in 2006 and Gerald in 2009, and now that my parents and brothers and sisters have all died I am celebrating mine with you, their children, and my MSC brothers. Thank you for the love you show in being here today.

My deepest feeling as I look back on 80 years is one of gratitude. My adult experience has been as a priest for 56 years: 10 years teaching in Secondary Schools, 8 years as chaplain at the University of NSW, and 20 or so years on and off, teaching in the Seminary, then 20 or so years in parishes and now in the Retreat Centre here at Douglas Park.

It has been a very privileged life, spent sharing people's deepest thoughts and desires, joys and sorrows. People's gift of their lives has helped me come to know more and more the mysterious depths of the presence of God gracing us all with love. It has been a joy to share in the weddings and baptisms of you my family, and to be a Missionary of the Sacred Heart for the last 62 years. It has been a joy to share your life and your mission.

Offertory Prayer

Father, we offer you this bread and wine, symbols of our lives. We believe that you will return them to us in communion, transformed into a sacrament of the life and life-giving of your Son, Jesus. As you transform these gifts, transform our hearts and our minds, so that we will do what Jesus has done, and give our lives to others in love.

Come to the water, you who are thirsty
Though you have nothing I bid you come
And be filled with the goodness I have to offer. Come! Listen! Live!

Why spend your money on what cannot fill
The emptiness deep in your heart?
Listen to my word and you will enjoy

Goodness and peace in your heart (R)

Just as the heavens are high above earth
My ways and thoughts beyond you
Call me your Father and know I am near
I will be Father to you. (R)

Just as the rain falls to water the earth
Just as a seed becomes bread
My word upon you can never return
Until my longing is filled (R)

Final Prayer

Dear Father, thank you for the gift of life. Thank you for the love we share and for bringing us together. We thank you through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Woman of the Sacred Heart

In you our flesh, he had to come.
You grounded him upon our earth.
Your feet that walked, your womb that held,
your pain that brought this love to birth.

The Sacred Heart of him you held
can grieve and grow within the space,
of patient love and listening;
a mother's choice, a mystic's grace.

In your delight, in your despair,
the smallest choices of each day;
the cost to you, your hope-filled yes,
your courage lived shows us the Way.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
eternal sign of God's surprise,
in you we know the poor as blessed,
this world transformed before our eyes.

O Woman of the Sacred Heart,
you heard the words of Gabriel.
Pray we may hear the call of God
and come to meet Emmanuel.

His truth is witnessed in your face,
that he *became* and *was* and *is*
the Sacred Heart, the resting place;
our hearts forever held in his.