

Sermon for Sunday 11.9.16

I'd like to share with you something about the silent retreat that our student Chris and I attended last weekend.

The retreat is a yearly requirement for the students who are studying for ordination.

This year the retreat was held at St Terese retreat centre at Ormiston.

It is a most beautiful part of Brisbane and the retreat grounds are positioned overlooking the bay.

Bishop Godfrey Fryar was the retreat director, and Bishop Jonathan also attended.

My role as spiritual director meant that I was available to listen to the students individually, if they felt the need to talk about personal issues during the weekend.

A specific room was designated for spiritual direction and a list of times advertised on the door.

There were about 18 students in total, and Bishop Godfrey, Bishop Jonathan and myself. One of the administrators asked me if I was a Bishop. I said no yet, but I'm working on it.

The retreat began at around 10.30 on the Friday morning and after an introduction by Bishop Jonathan, we had lunch together and the silence began after the lunch.

We met together 3 times in the chapel on the Friday 4 times on Saturday, and twice on Sunday.

We met for prayers, the Eucharist and input sessions.

The overall theme of the retreat was the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The input sessions were introduced through selected gospel readings and explored related issues like, *our understanding of who had made sacrifices for us throughout our lives; our capacity for hatred and cruelty; our understanding of ourselves in the divine presence and dealing with a sense of unworthiness.*

Among the students were two husband and wife teams, and both had 3 month old babies. One family had planned to stay only 1 day, but the other family stayed for the 3 days and brought their dear little boy into all the sessions in the chapel.

The baby was a delight and seemed to enjoy every moment while soaking up the singing of praises to God, the prayers and scripture readings.

One morning in the chapel I pondered on how far the Anglican Church had come. In the scheme of church history, it is only in recent times that women were ordained to the priesthood and now 24 years down the track, 3 month old babies are welcome on silent retreats.

How wonderful!

The retreat ended after lunch on Sunday and we returned to our homes.

Sunday evening while I was still immersed in the mode of the retreat, I spent some time reflecting on the readings for today, and I thought how the love of God in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, had bought us into the present age of fulfilment - the present age of newness in Christ.

I make this point here about “the love of God” because I think we can get caught up in our “sin” and not realise the freedom of God’s love always present.

Today’s gospel reading, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, relate the way of love that powered us into this newness.

In these parables Jesus proclaims that none are to be lost to the love of God revealed in him.

This message delivered in a language that has a transparent simplicity, opens our eyes to the reality that God never gives up on us, never stops finding us wherever or whoever we are, inviting us home to life in him.

It opens our eyes to the vision that we are not only reconciled and acceptable to God but that God wants us close.

We see this very warm truth portrayed in the many images of the good shepherd carrying the lost sheep over his shoulders and wrapped around his neck. Or tucked into his tunic and close to his heart.

The images depicts warmth, tenderness, and intimacy.

Can we imagine ourselves in this position?

So close to God wrapped up and close to his heart?

To hold this vision in our hearts and respond to it, is to move towards our integration, our coming together within and our maturity.

For only the acceptance of such personal divine love in our lives will evoke our feelings of repentance, and therefore our transformation.

The negative within dissipates, because fear is overcome by love and consequently we begin to see things differently.

Our neighbour, who, deep down we have always had suspicions about, becomes visible in a more positive light, for she or he too is like us in God's eyes – reconciled, acceptable, wanted and loved by God.

We see our neighbour for who they are in relation to God, rather than in relation to ourselves.

Many things change for us when we accept the divine love that already dwells within us. We soften and are moulded in our uniqueness into Christ's likeness.

The readings to day bring us forward from a time of judgement and desolation prophesied by Jeremiah, to a time of divine love through forgiveness and reconciliation in the gospel parables, and into the new creation that we are - as Paul writes to Timothy through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

My prayer for us all is that we will with open arms receive the love and newness that we are blessed with through our Lord Jesus Christ.