

THE ‘NEW’ EVANGELISATION

THE THIRTEENTH General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome (7th – 18th October, 2012) was concerned with the ‘New Evangelisation’.

In the message of the Synod at the conclusion of their Assembly the bishops explained that the new evangelisation is not new in every sense. We proclaim the same message but in changed circumstances. It is evangelisation that is ‘new in its ardour, in its methods, in its expressions’.

All human beings thirst, they affirmed. We all experience ‘a longing, an expectation that awaits an adequate response’—even in the most bitter forms of atheism and agnosticism we can recognise this phenomenon. The thirst is for the living water: ‘There is no man or woman who, in one’s life, would not find oneself like the woman of Samaria beside a well with an empty bucket, with the hope of finding the fulfilment of the heart’s most profound desire, that which alone could give full meaning to life.’

The other day I was invited over to our parish primary school to speak to Year 5 and answer their questions as part of their Religious Education course. They were studying the Sacraments and were up to the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and needed to ask some questions of their parish priest. I was happy to oblige.

One of the questions was, ‘What’s good about being a priest?’ My reply was: ‘I love assisting people to discover how much God loves them’.

I could have told them that St Paul was my role model in this. St Paul’s whole mission was energised by his knowledge of the love of God in Christ Jesus. God in Christ Jesus gave his all for us—‘for me!’ as St Paul wrote: ‘the Son of God loved me and delivered himself for me!’ (Gal. 2:20)

Furthermore, St Paul proclaimed, Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). We do not merit God’s love—God loves us despite our unworthiness. We cannot merit God’s love. Far from being a worry to us that is a further reason for our confidence, trust, hope—‘we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom 5:11).

St Paul was eloquent about the power of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? [...] Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [...] For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-32, 35, 38-39)

My answer to the question put to me by Year 5, upon further reflection, could also be the answer to the question, ‘What’s good about being a member of the Body of Christ?’ The ordained priest, after all, is just one of the chiefurgers in the challenge of spreading the Good News. He is the one, unless there is a deacon present, who tells people at the end of Mass to ‘Go out and announce the Good News’.

As the Synod of Bishops stated in their message at the conclusion of their Assembly, ‘...whoever receives new life from encountering Jesus cannot but proclaim truth and hope to others.’ What the summons to a New Evangelisation asks of us all is that we proclaim our message in a way that is ‘new in its ardour, in its methods, in its expressions’.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor