

'AN EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY INSPIRES' – HOMILY - 22 OCTOBER 2017

**Today we need to face the challenges before us.**

Last week we reflected on the **deep shame of sexual abuse in the Church** and to **see Jesus in the innocent who have been abused and betrayed.**

And reflected on **possible actions.**

#### CLERGY PRAYER RETREAT

During the clergy prayer retreat last week, we used a **PROPHETIC IMAGINATION** to spend time before the crucifixion scene of Jesus.

Not only imagining Mary and others before the cross, but ourselves too.

**And around the cross, Jesus innocent, crucified, surrounded by innocent children and adults who have been crucified in their lives by sexual abuse by religious authorities.**

#### REFLECTING ON AN EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Today as Christians, we reflect on an early Christian community about 20 years after Jesus died and rose and ascended.

#### HOW DID THEY SURVIVE AND GROW, WHILE FACING RESISTANCE AND PERSECUTION BY ANOTHER GROUP IN THE COMMERCIAL PORT CITY OF THESSALONICA?

#### WHAT INSPIRED THEM?

#### TODAY'S SECOND READING – WHAT AN INCREDIBLE COMMUNITY

Today's Reading from St Paul's **FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS 1:1-5**, has challenged Christian communities for 2,000 years around the world.

**To be genuine and welcoming in our work of faith, our labour of love, our steadfastness of hope, not for ourselves, but in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

#### CHALLENGE AND INVITATION TO LIVE AS BELOVED OF GOD

Not only a challenge but also an invitation from God to live out our faith, hope and love in Jesus.

**An invitation to live as Beloved of God.**

The scripture passage reads:

*“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians  
in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

*Grace to you and peace.*

*We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers,  
constantly remembering before our God and Father*

*your work of faith*

*and labour of love*

*and steadfastness of hope*

*in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you,  
because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only,*

*but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;*

*just as you know what kind of people we proved to be*

*among you for your sake..”*

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians is Paul’s first letter that we have in the New Testament. In fact it is the earliest written book of the New Testament, around 50AD. Written by Paul some months after his time in Thessalonica in Greece. Possibly written while he was in Corinth.

#### **HOW DID THEY FACE HARDSHIP? WERE THEY A JOYFUL PEOPLE?**

Let us read on in 1<sup>ST</sup> LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS VERSES 1:6-8

*“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,  
for in spite of persecution*

*you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit,  
so that you became an example to all the believers*

*in Macedonia and in Achaia.*

*For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you  
not only in Macedonia and Achaia,*

*but in every place where your faith in God has become known,  
so that we have no need to speak about it.”*

Throughout the five chapters of this letter, we see a community loving others. Paul invites them to do more and more. (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

#### **THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS ACCORDING TO THE 2<sup>ND</sup> LETTER**

In the Second Letter to the Thessalonians, written some time later, it is still a wonderful faith community, though some have begun to slacken off in the daily living of their faith. It has not been easy for the community facing persecution and afflictions. Three quotes from the 2nd Letter bear out these points.

#### **THE 2<sup>ND</sup> LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS 1:3**

*“We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters,  
as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly,  
and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing.”*

## THE 2<sup>ND</sup> LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS 3:11

*“For we hear that some of you are living in idleness,  
mere busybodies, not doing any work.”*

## THE 2<sup>ND</sup> LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS 1:49

*“Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God  
for your steadfastness and faith  
during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.”*

## GOSPEL

In the Gospel today, **Matthew 22:15-21**, the Pharisees plan a trap for Jesus. They invite the Herodians to join them. Two groups take on Jesus. Jesus avoids the trap by his response,

*“Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s,  
and to God the things that are God’s”.*

## OURSELVES

As we ponder the Gospel advice of Jesus,  
and as we ponder the incredible lived faith  
of the Thessalonian community in both letters,

**WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEM THAT HELPS OUR COMMUNITY TODAY?**

## HOW DO WE FACE HARDSHIPS AND AFFLICTIONS

- IN A DEPRESSED AND NEGATIVE WAY
- OR IN A JOYFUL AND COMMITTED WAY?

**HOW DO WE SUPPORT OTHER CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES THAT FACE PERSECUTION FROM OUTSIDE?**

**HOW DO WE SUPPORT THOSE PERSECUTED IN THE CHURCH?**

**HOW ARE WE GENUINE AND WELCOMING IN**

- OUR WORK OF FAITH?
- OUR LABOUR OF LOVE?
- OUR STEADFASTNESS OF HOPE?

**NOT FOR OURSELVES, BUT IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

**DO WE LIVE OUR CALLING AS BELOVED OF GOD?**

## 2018 ANNIVERSARIES

Next year we celebrate the **40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY** of our school community. Not only the stories of building projects and physical changes. What are the faith stories of our parish school and wider community?

Next year is the **175<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY** of the Passionist Stradbroke Island mission, to Aboriginal People beginning in May 1843, and the arrival of priests in December for Brisbane and Queensland. 175 years of the celebration of Eucharist in Brisbane.

**WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT FROM OUR INDIGENOUS SISTERS AND BROTHERS?**

**WHAT IS THEIR CRITIQUE OF THE BRISBANE CHURCH?  
HOW WILL WE PLAN TOGETHER FOR 2018?**

In the light of the early Thessalonian community,  
**WHAT ARE OUR STORIES, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE?  
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT ABOUT OURSELVES?  
WHAT ARE OUR GIFTS?  
WHERE HAS GOD SUSTAINED, CHALLENGED AND HEALED US?  
WHAT ARE OUR SINS? WHAT HAVE BEEN OUR APOLOGIES?  
HOW WILL WE RENEW OURSELVES IN JESUS CHRIST?  
WHAT MODEL OF CHURCH NEEDS TO EVOLVE?  
WHAT NEEDS TO BE PRESERVED? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?  
HOW IS OUR MISSION TO BE LIVED IN 2018?**

In faith, hope and love, let us pray.

Fr Gerry

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – An Early Christian Community Inspires – 22 October 2017]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/102217.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook22102017>]



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