

# Encouragement Encouragement

February 2016 – Issue 55

## REVITALISE AND REFORM

THE HOST APOSTOLATE

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Christmas is barely over and we are already anticipating Lent. Ash Wednesday falls this month and with it the necessity of a review of our lives, and an effort to revitalise our spiritual perspective and so do something extra out of love of God and neighbour. All too often we forget that we are ‘Baptised People’ – conjoined to Jesus and that this commits us to service.

At the start of the year our parish priest gave the following homily which neatly and beautifully expresses the significance of Baptism, and I quote it in full...

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The Baptism of the Lord is a powerful reminder of our own Baptism and the vocation to which we have been called and to live out in our everyday lives. Like Jesus, we have been called and commissioned to work for the salvation of the world. On the day of our Baptism our parents promised, on our behalf, that we should live our lives as followers of Jesus but that promise has to be taken on board by each one of us and lived out in our daily lives. Every day the Lord blesses each one of us with the grace and help to do that, provided we keep in daily contact with Him.

The reality today is that, sadly, most parents look for Baptism for their children and they even surround the Baptism with a big party and make it into a big social occasion, but too often there is NO spiritual ‘follow-up’ and we do not see them again until it is time for their First Holy Communion.

Through Baptism you and I were made sons and daughters of God, and brothers and sisters of each other. Hey! That is truly phenomenal, but does it register with us? Do we ever think about that?

Baptism not only brings us into a unique relationship with God, it also binds us together as a community AND it empowers each one of us to be Christ-like by doing good and by caring and by

being compassionate and forgiving to one another.

Through our Baptism we are *invited* by Jesus to continue His Mission in the world in which we live, and we do that by adopting His values and attitudes in our daily lives and by caring and dealing with people like He did. Those things are called the *Corporal Works of Mercy*.

But we are also called by Jesus to engage in the *Spiritual works of Mercy* which are all about *deepening our Faith and passing it on to others*. In today’s church we are not always too good at doing that.

As we have heard many times in the past, our faith, is not for keeping to ourselves, it is ‘for giving away’ to others and helping others to take the right path in life.

Today, more than ever before, we need to keep the Faith alive in our families, and we need to be encouraging our family members and friends who have taken a ‘holiday’ from the Mass and Sacraments. But we must do it with *kindness* and great love. These are the ways of Jesus when He was on earth.

Our Baptism calls us to look for the stray, the hurt, and the lost.

The Gospels are full of stories of how Jesus did just that and we today should do the same. At our Baptism Jesus gave to each one of us the graces and blessings to help Him spread the Good News of the Gospel to others. And doesn’t our country and world need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. And He Himself is depending on ordinary people like you and me to help Him to do exactly that.

So Baptism isn’t just for babies, it has lifelong implications for each of us here.

The words that the Father spoke to Jesus at His Baptism are exactly the same words that He spoke to us and these words are...

**“You are my beloved and it gives me great pleasure to look upon you”.**

“Don’t be afraid to go to the Sacrament of Confession where you will meet Jesus who forgives you” Pope Francis

We should all take those words home with us today and ponder and reflect on them because they tell us two very important facts. They tell us just *how much Our Heavenly Father loves us and delights in us*. And they also tell us just how much He needs us and *depends on us* to bring His Love into the lives of the people around us.

At the end of the day life is all about love and at our Baptism we receive all the grace and help we need to be loving, caring and forgiving people.

We have all got what it takes, to be the people the Lord wants us to be, but do we really believe that?

*And do we put it into practise each day of our lives?*

Fr. Brian Murphy

(Our Lady and Saint Thomas)

Those words that we are ‘the beloved’ and that Jesus speak these words to us are very important as we go about our daily lives. Our Baptism is an entry into a special relationship with God and the Church, the Body of Jesus and His people that we all are. As we enter Lent it would seem appropriate to also underline how often we fail to remember this and that we are all in need of God’s love and forgiveness. Lent is a special time for many forms of reconciliation. There are very few people who have not at some time either been hurt or have hurt someone else either knowingly or by negligence, forgetting to do or say something that was positive or inclusive. Families and marriages are in need of gentility and unity. We are also frail people inclined to sin and we fail to keep alive that Baptismal call which calls us to purity of intention and desire. We fail to do the things that we know in our heart are the ‘right things’ to do and as St Paul and so many Saints realised we strive to do the good things and end up doing the opposite. The Sacrament of Confession, so often ignored, and missed out these days, calls us to ask for forgiveness and allows us to grow stronger and more determined to do good to one another. So often it has become a sacrament of dread and fear whereas it is so incredibly freeing and a Sacrament, a blessing of God’s great love and generosity. Not only are we forgiven and given a fresh start but we grow stronger more positive and more loving. We can be filled with *Joy* and not just remorse and guilt. We all find it difficult to own our mistakes but surely it is worthwhile for the healing that this brings.

As we approach Ash Wednesday on the tenth of this month maybe we could do two special things for Lent. The first would be to *truly listen* to the ‘Word broken’ for us by our Priest and Deacons and let the Lord guide our thought and prayer. There is always something to be gained and learned from the homily, as the Holy Spirit inspires us. Secondly to resolve to make a good and thorough Confession, not a ‘skip through’ or a passing mention of a wrong doing but a moment of great Joy and Liberation from the things that trouble us and hold us bound. A fresh start. This after all is what Lent is all about.

Halina Holman.



### **Pope Francis and Sacramental Confession**

Through the Sacraments of Initiation, we receive new life in Christ. This life we carry in earthen vessels, however, and we still experience temptations, suffering, and death. Because of sin, we can even lose this new life. Jesus therefore willed that the Church continue his works of salvation for her members, in particular through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which flows from the Paschal Mystery. The forgiveness we receive is not the result of our own efforts, but is the gift of the Holy Spirit reconciling us to God and to each other. While the celebration of the Sacrament is personal, it is rooted in the community of the Church, in which the Holy Spirit is present, uniting us all in Jesus Christ. When confessing our sins then, we confess to the priest who represents not only God but also the community of the Church that accompanies us on the path of conversion. Though this Sacrament is a great treasure, we may be tempted to dismiss it, perhaps due to laziness or embarrassment, or because of a diminishing sense of sin and its effects. The Sacrament of Reconciliation calls us back to God, and embraces us with his infinite mercy and joy. May we allow his love to renew us as his children and to reconcile us with him, with ourselves, and with one another. Be courageous and go to Confession! Dear friends, celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation means being enfolded in a warm embrace: it is the embrace of the Father’s infinite mercy. 2014

### **Feast Days in February**

1<sup>st</sup> St. Brigid, 2<sup>nd</sup> The Presentation of the Lord,  
3<sup>rd</sup> St. Blaise, 5<sup>th</sup> St. Agatha, 6<sup>th</sup> St. Paul Miki,  
8<sup>th</sup> St. Jerome Emiliani, or St. Josephine Bakhita  
**10<sup>th</sup> ASH WEDNESDAY,**  
11<sup>th</sup> Our Lady of Lourdes,,  
17<sup>th</sup> Seven Servite Founders,  
22<sup>nd</sup> Chair of Peter,

**Prayer Intention:** That opportunities may increase for dialogue and encounter between the Christian Faith and the peoples of Asia.

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