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2022 LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER

- Renewing Celebrations of the Eucharist in the Bunbury Diocese –

Dear Brothers and Sisters

As we begin the season of Lent, we focus once again on why Jesus came. He taught ¹ ‘I came that they may have life and have it the full.’

He was speaking about his divine or ‘eternal life’ as the Son of God. Each Easter, we celebrate that the Risen Jesus shared this life with each of us through Baptism. ²

How this life can change us

Before Baptism, we were fully human. After Baptism, we are divine also by adoption, becoming adopted sons and daughters of God. Jesus calls us to nurture this divine life ‘to the full.’ As we strive to do so, increasingly we grow to think, feel, see, hear and respond to others like Jesus. We grow empowered to live his teachings, especially those we find more difficult.

Christian faith, therefore, is an *empowering* faith as we grow in personal relationship with the Risen Jesus himself. This makes it different from other faiths: it is not just or even primarily a set of teachings and values.

Lent – the ‘springtime’ of the Christian life

The word ‘lent’ comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for ‘springtime’ when life-giving sap courses again through plants and trees. The beauty of flowers and leaves bursts forth.

Lent is the springtime of the Christian life. As we seek to renew our efforts to nurture the divine life within ‘to the full’, Christ-like inner beauty emerges.

We grow more Christ-like in love and forgiveness; mercy and kindness; justice and other Christ-like qualities. This affects how we relate in our marriages, families, work and recreation places, retirement centres and wherever else we spend our daily lives.

¹ John 10:10

² John 3:5-6

The Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving seek to discipline the human weaknesses which hamper efforts to mature in the divine life. It is these which undermine efforts to think, feel, see, hear and respond to others like the Risen Jesus.

The Eucharist

This Lent, we as a Diocese will focus on renewing how we nurture the divine life within through celebrations of the Mass. Jesus taught that the Eucharist is essential for nourishing the divine life he shares with us. Without it, we suffer spiritual malnutrition.³ ‘If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life ...’

Celebrating the Eucharist in our Diocese

In 2019, we celebrated a Diocesan Synod, but implementation of a number of its recommendations has been slow because of their complexity and Covid-related challenges. Also, we are a small Diocese and resources are limited.

The priests of the Diocese too proposed a pastoral plan. Their first priority was the same as that of the Synod: to renew the celebration of the Eucharist in the Diocese.

Practical pastoral concerns

Both pre-Synod consultations and Synod discussions identified a number of issues to be addressed regarding the Mass. They included the reality that young people are ‘switched off’ by celebrations which seem routine and ‘boring’; many give up worship because they think that the Mass offers nothing to busy lives; there seems to be a general lack of understanding of the Mass and its ritual; for some there is a loss of the sacred in how Masses are celebrated.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* outlines how Masses should be celebrated. It proposes many options to enrich Mass celebrations in parishes in ways to address these issues.

The purpose of these options is to assist celebrants to help parishioners to experience Christ and to cooperate with him as he seeks to enrich through the Mass their daily lives with spiritual gifts such as answers to prayers; guidance and answers to personal questions; freedom from personal weaknesses and sinfulness; empowerment to live as Christians in today’s Australia; deepening in personal relationships with the Risen Jesus himself.

What is needed to cooperate with Christ

To cooperate with Christ who seeks to share his gifts, we need to participate in the Eucharist with ‘the proper dispositions’ and attuned ‘minds and voices’. Otherwise, Christ offers these gifts ‘in vain’.⁴

³ John 6:53-55

⁴ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 17

All present need to be ‘fully aware of what they are doing’, (and) actively engaged in the rite’.⁵ To be so, they need to participate actively ‘both internally and externally’.⁶ This does not happen haphazardly and Masses need to be planned.

Liturgical options chosen need to take into account the congregation’s ‘age and condition, their way of life and standard of religious culture’.⁷

The changes in celebrations of Masses in the Bunbury Diocese

The following changes to how Masses are celebrated in the Diocese from Ash Wednesday seek to implement Synod recommendations by implementing fully the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. They seek to help parishioners cooperate with Christ lest he offer his gifts for their daily lives ‘in vain’.⁸

(i) Sacred silences

These are moments in which the community can converse briefly with Christ in their hearts about their daily lives. These moments need to be long enough for all present to do this. They occur in the Penitential Act, before the Collect Prayer, after the homily and after the Communion procession hymn.⁹ Sacred silences enhance the sense of the sacred and help those present to relate the Mass to their daily lives and needs.

Ideally, there will be a brief silence too before Liturgies of the Word begin to allow all to prepare to hear the Word of God. A meditative atmosphere after each reading will also be ideal.¹⁰

Before the Preface too, ideally there will be brief silences during which all can tell Christ within their hearts what they are thanking God for in their daily lives.

I ask that students in Catholic schools be trained in how to converse with Christ during each of the sacred silences in every Mass in which they participate.

(ii) The introductions

To help all present focus upon the purpose of each part of the Mass ritual, especially when many in the congregation normally do not participate, the celebrant can give prepared one sentence introductions after the Greeting; before the readings in liturgies of the Word; and before the Preface introducing the Eucharistic Prayer.¹¹ He can also remind all present at the end of Mass about the Word in the coming week.

⁵ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 11

⁶ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 19

⁷ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 19

⁸ Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy 17

⁹ GIRM 45; 51,54, 55-56, 88

¹⁰ GIRM 56

¹¹ GIRM 31

I ask that parish Masses for children in Catholic schools always include these introductions.

(iii) Bulletin insert catechises

Synod delegates and priests proposed that there be brief explanations of the parts of the Mass for weekly parish bulletins which can be repeated from time to time. These will be implemented first during the Sundays of Lent.

(iv) After Easter

Synod delegates proposed that there be a resource to enable Catholics to share faith in the Eucharist with family members and others who no longer participate in the Mass. This will be released after Easter.

Children and teenagers too need opportunities to participate in Masses which take into account their 'ages and condition, their way of life and standard of religious culture'.¹²

This means implementing the *Directory for Masses with Children* in all Catholic schools across the Bunbury Diocese. If we do not do all that we can to train young people in *how* to participate internally and externally in the Mass, the present decline in young people in our parish lives will continue.

Conclusion

I ask parishioners to be patient as these liturgical changes are implemented. Let us pray that the coming changes will help us all to grow more in the divine life the Risen Jesus shares with us and the beauty of Christ-like qualities within us will bloom in our lives.

God bless

Bishop Gerard
24th February 2022

¹² Constitution in the Sacred Liturgy 19