

Pastoral Letter: Pentecost 2011

Everything for the Gospel

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**“I do everything for the Gospel”
- 1Cor. 9:13**

Dear friends in Christ,

Last year (2010) I wrote to you a Pastoral Letter called: *“Finding Home in Jesus”* (see www.sale.catholic.org.au/bishop-prowse/statements). It outlined the basic Catholic principles of evangelisation. My aim was to place the Diocese of Sale on an even firmer missionary foundation. This was to be achieved ultimately by stating perhaps some pastoral/evangelisation priorities for the diocese for the years ahead as we move onto the next phase of our shared life in Christ Jesus. Whilst Christ himself is the center of all future plans we have, we do need to articulate these practical pastoral priorities together (see *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (John Paul II, 2001, n.29).

In my 2010 Pastoral Letter to you, I recapped aspects of our past diocesan missionary and pastoral history. Regarding the key characteristics of Catholic evangelisation, much reliance was placed on the teachings of recent Popes on this vital topic. I encouraged further discussion. My key question became: “How can we co-operate with the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our times to help people in FINDING HOME IN JESUS? A series of questions were added to assist in local discussions on my Letter.

I am grateful for the regional forums that have taken place over this last year on my 2010 Pastoral Letter. There was evidence of prudent pastoral leaders giving leadership in activating such discussions.



THE REGIONAL FORUMS

(March – May 2011)

Four REGIONAL FORUMS were organised. There was also a briefer meeting with some youth. They provided me with opportunities to listen carefully to your responses and thoughts. We attempted to gain insight into three questions:

1. Where do you see signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the Diocese of Sale?
2. Where do you feel that the Holy Spirit is leading us now and in the future?

3. Name three areas that you think are pastoral priorities for our diocese?

After these forums, the Diocesan Pastoral Council met to consider what we had experienced. Our initial observations were as follows:

- All the forums were well attended. Thank you.
- The forums were most prayerful and everyone was trying to listen to each other carefully.
- Various opinions and attitudes in our diocesan life were represented. There was the possibility of factions forming. However, this did not take place. Indeed, a deep spirit of unity, trust and respect for each other was manifest.
- People were keen to gather. We experienced the “bigger” Church by listening to Catholics from different parishes. The “family” of the Church was present.
- For some, it was the first time that they had stood up and “testified” to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- The first question above was answered fulsomely. Most of our time focused on this question. The second and third questions need further consideration and time.

My own observations were that the forums were not simply “events” but they became “encounters”.

At the start, we meditated on the Emmaus scene (Luke 24:13-35). We noted that there were two types of approaches after the resurrection of Jesus in this biblical scene. The first was captured in the sad scene of the two men walking with their backs to Jerusalem (the places of the death and resurrection of Jesus). They were dragging each other down with their faithless chatter. They had become the “we had hoped” people.

The second was the complete opposite to this. After their encounter with the Eucharistic Jesus, they ran back to Jerusalem to testify their Easter faith to the apostles. They had become the “did not our hearts burn within us” people.

We started our forums by deciding to become “did not our hearts burn within us” people of the Risen Lord. We would testify to our faith and refuse to drag each other down. That set the tone of the whole Forum. It was a true grace of the Holy Spirit. There was trust and respect. It became an **encounter** with the Risen Lord, rather than simply another meeting.

This encounter was exemplified in the types of testimonies of faith that were heard by us all. People spoke of what was important in their own personal Catholic faith. They spoke of what was important in the diocese for them in encountering Jesus.

We heard from “cradle” Catholics and from some “new” Catholic converts. Please read the summaries prepared from these Forums (attached).

We began to reflect on how the Holy Spirit was moving in the Sale Diocese through these beautiful testimonies of faith. As observed above, we became so animated by locating these signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the diocese of Sale, that the final two questions regarding the future were eclipsed somewhat.

Let us thank the Lord Jesus for giving us these encounters with the Holy Spirit in these Regional Forums.



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INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

INITIAL THEOLOGICAL/PASTORAL OBSERVATIONS OF OUR REGIONAL FORUMS

Having attended all the regional forums, listened carefully, and since reflected in prayer, especially with the Diocesan Pastoral Council, I wish now to make some theological/pastoral observations. I hope these initial remarks will encourage further discussion as we move towards articulating pastoral priorities for our diocese. I wish to make three comments:

1. DEVOTIONAL LIFE LEADS TO ACTIVE MISSIONARY LIFE

One major recurring theme was focused on deepening the devotional life of the diocese.

Comments such as the following were common: the importance of silence, Holy Hours, the sacraments well prepared and celebrated, retreats and a retreat centre, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Marian devotion, importance of Sunday Mass and hymns beautifully sung, prayers for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, Masses with prayers for Healing, well prepared homilies, and so on.

Parish groups that should be encouraged further to promote our devotional life included: charismatic prayer groups, cells of evangelisation, rosary and Eucharistic groups, new ecclesial movements, parish and diocesan missions, scripture groups, Lenten/Advent groups, and so on.

I am delighted to see the emphasis spontaneously given to this foundational aspect of our shared Catholic life. We cannot imagine a Catholic Christianity without the Marian Principle in action. Namely, unless we “ponder and treasure”(Luke 2:51) as the Blessed Virgin Mary did on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, then our faith will have no heart.

But, may I make this observation? It was not self-evident to me in listening to the comments offered during the Forums how this vital devotional life was to be translated into developing a social conscience and expressing itself into works of charity, especially to the poor and oppressed. Our encounter with Jesus leads to an encounter “with the least”(cf. Matthew 25:40).

The teaching of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, can help us in making clear this connection. In his Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005, n.18), he writes:

“Love of neighbor ... consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings.” (n.18)

He then adds:

“Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave. Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbor ...” (n.18)

The Holy Father exemplifies this by drawing attention to the life



of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. We could say the same surely in reference to our own St Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

Let us reflect more deeply on this single commandment between love of God and love of neighbor in the times ahead. A strong devotional life in the diocese without equally strong practical expressions of *caritas* towards our neighbor will not do. Catholics are not members of a pious sect or devotional clique. We are the Body of Christ in the world today. We are missionaries “to the gentiles”.

We are not simply missionaries to our own parish or simply to lapsed Catholics alone. We are not simply part of a local Catholic parish. We belong also to the universal Catholic Church. In our Apostolic tradition of over 2000 years we have reflected together on the Holy Scriptures in so many ways as one Church. From this true devotion, guided by the Magisterium of the Church, history has shown us to be missionaries particularly in education, health and social services.

In Australia, and our own diocese, we can see some many examples of this. We thank the Lord Jesus for sending us so many courageous men and women of faith as priests and religious brothers and sisters. Now the baton of faith is in our hands. Let us be courageous in our thoroughly secular Australian culture. This imperative would challenge an honest comment I read on one parish’s response sheets at a regional forum: “I like to testify to my faith but only to friendly people!”

2. MISSIONARY LIFE LEADS TO ACTIVE DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Another major recurring theme in our Regional Forums was that active and practical missionary initiatives in the diocese ought deepen and increase.

These comments were often heard: outreach to those on the margins, sensitivity to aboriginal peoples, response to the political/ethical issues of our times, the forming of support groups for men, encouragement of marriage and family life, more linking of parish and school, outreach to youth, care of migrant groups, care of the dying and bereaved, welcome home the lapsed and people of no belief, and so on.

Appreciation of groups already functioning in the diocese that respond to these areas were acknowledged. Groups may be, for example, St. Vincent de Paul Society, adult education groups, parish outreach groups (e.g. RCIA and parish visitation), family groups, schools and school committees, diocesan agencies and initiatives, recruiting priests from overseas, youth groups, ecumenical groups, and so on.

These contributions indicate that the missionary impulse of our Catholic life is still present and alive in our diocese.

There is so much “gospel energy” in the groups mentioned above. Catholics do become motivated and involved. Heroic priests lead the parish communities. The missionary heritage of the diocese of Sale continues today. New ideas and initiatives to spread the Gospel abound. Wonderfully committed Catholic lay people are to be found in our parishes and schools. Catholic evangelisation is a term more frequently used and understood. We seem to be in a “golden age” whereby Papal teaching on evangelisation has been articulated for us to digest and apply to our particular situation. Programs and resources, both nationally and internationally, are to be found on the missionary dimension of our faith. We thank the Lord Jesus, the first evangeliser, for strong evidence of missionary zeal in the Diocese of Sale.



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But, in contrast to what I stated above, the comments I heard in the Regional Forums on this topic left me with a question of immense consequence: How does all this wonderful missionary zeal lead us back to the well springs of our devotional life in Christ?

A missionary zeal without a profound contemplative foundation is bound to flounder.

Once again, I turn to the teaching of the Holy Father in *Deus Caritas Est*. He writes:

“It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work.” (n.37)

Earlier in his teaching he states:

“For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being”(n.25).

May I recommend you to return to my Pastoral Letter of 2010 (FINDING HOME IN JESUS). I have attempted there to outline the theological/pastoral foundations of Catholic evangelisation (n.1,4&5). It indicates how our evangelisation is a fruit of our devotion to the Trinity. It also articulates some basic characteristics of the “new evangelisation” required today.

Simply, may I make the following point? Let us ensure that our attempts at missionary activity in the name of the Church are deeply anchored in our Catholic faith. The enthusiasm to be a missionary people needs careful discernment and on-going formation. The wind of the Holy Spirit “blows where it chooses” (John 3:8). However, we belong in a hierarchical communion in the Church. We stand ready to discern what is of the Holy Spirit or what is not of God. Here the particular teaching and discerning role of the Pope, Bishops, Priests and Deacons becomes of service to our missionary activities in the name of the Church. We do not want a fragmented Church. As our Creed proclaims, in the Holy Spirit the Church becomes “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.811-865). Let us move forward in the unity of our faith in the years ahead.

3. “THE FAMILY” – BRINGS TOGETHER DEVOTIONAL AND MISSIONARY LIFE

Upon reflection of your responses, the Diocesan Pastoral Council considered the family as central to our future plans in the diocese. We know already that the future of society will come through the family. If we want a strong Australian society then we must work for strong Australian family life. The same could be said for the future pastoral priorities of the Diocese of Sale. Namely, the future pastoral priorities of the Diocese of Sale will come to birth through our family life.

Let us reflect a little on this observation.

We have agreed that we do not need to invent a new program for the Diocese of Sale: it is already given. As Blessed John Paul II stated: “it has its centre in Christ himself” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001, n.29). But he then says: “it must be translated in to the pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community” (n.29). Our initial regional forums seem to have located two pillars around which all future pastoral initiatives ought turn: the devotional and missionary dimensions of our faith.

The issue arises – how can these two pillars become practical in our diocese in the years ahead? The suggestion to consider is whether the family provides the focus from which we launch forward.

The word “family” needs a little definition. In the first and most essential meaning, it refers to the family of father, mother, children. They are to mirror the life of the First Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Here is where all devotional life finds a real home. It begins with the acknowledgement that God is our heavenly Father.

But there are derived meanings of the word “family” too. For example, there is the family of the parish, the family of the diocese,



and the family of the Catholic Church universal. If we approach the matter in this way, then surely we can start to talk, for example, about the need to bring the scattered back to the family (the home) of Jesus. Our priests would be understood more deeply as “Father” of the parish family. The poor become our “family” responsibility. Action for justice in the world that defends the dignity of the human life from womb to tomb becomes part of our response to the “global family”. Whatever “family”, there is a radical solidarity in Christ undergirding our attitudes and actions.

Let us discuss this in our next set of forums in the diocese. We will need to regroup again perhaps in a different formation around the diocese. The final question from our last gatherings will need to be the focus of our attention: Name three (3) areas that you think are pastoral priorities for our diocese. Let us answer this as a FAMILY united in the bonds of Jesus who is always our way, our truth and our life (cf. John 14:6).

PENTECOST IN A SECULAR AUSTRALIA

We are all aware of pressing difficulties in the passing on of the Catholic faith in our own time and place. The Diocese of Sale, along with all in Australia, know of this on a daily basis. When we look even briefly at Church history, however, we may not wish to change places with other times and places too quickly. There are always challenges to the faith in any place or time.

But the particular crisis facing all of us in Australia regarding the transmission of the Gospel in our times is that we are evangelising in the context of secularism. This living a supposed happy life without any reference to God is the real challenge to the faith today. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, our master teacher of the faith, continually draws our attention to the fact of secularism in Western countries. He expresses the essential challenge in this way (from: *Light of the World* (2010, p.56)

“It is important for us to try to live Christianity and to think as Christians in such way that it incorporates what is good and right about modernity – and at the same time separates and distinguishes itself from what is becoming a counter-religion.”

As always, a continual Pentecost is with us on our pilgrim journey to the Father. We are never alone. The Holy Spirit is present to us in this moment of challenge no less than in the upper room of the first Pentecost. We are with Mary, the mother of us all, as she points out Jesus to us as she did at Cana.

Perhaps St Paul had the best attitude in responding to the challenges of passing on the Gospel in his time. He said: I do everything for the Gospel (1Cor.9:23). This is a triumphant shout of trust in divine providence. May it be our “shout” too as we go forward together. May whatever we “do” in the future in our diocese, be “for the sake of the Gospel”. Only then will it receive the blessing of the Lord Jesus who alone transforms the human heart into something truly wonderful in the sight of God, our merciful Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Questions for Reflection

“I do everything for the Gospel”
- 1Cor. 9:13

1. DEVOTIONAL LIFE LEADS TO ACTIVE MISSIONARY LIFE

1.1 Why is it true to say that: “We cannot imagine a Catholic Christianity without the Marian Principle in action”.

1.2 Describe a time in your life when you felt close to Mary.

1.3 What helps you to “ponder and treasure” (Luke 2/51) as the Blessed Virgin Mary? Why is it important?

1.4 How is it possible to have faith that has “no heart”? How would this be expressed?

1.5 How can you ensure that your devotional life can be translated into “developing a social conscience and expressing itself into works of charity, especially to the poor and oppressed”?

1.6 Describe someone you know whose life expresses “a strong devotional life” and “equally strong practical expressions of caritas” towards others.

1.7 Describe some of the “courageous men and women of faith” you have met or know about. Why was their faith “courageous”?

2. MISSIONARY LIFE LEADS TO ACTIVE DEVOTIONAL LIFE

2.1 Why is it true to say that “the missionary impulse of our Catholic life is still present and alive in our diocese”?

2.2 Describe a person in whom you see “gospel energy”.

2.3 How does missionary zeal “lead us back to the well springs of our devotional life in Christ”?

2.4 Why is it true to say that: “The enthusiasm to be a missionary people needs careful discernment and on-going formation”?

2.5 What can lead to the fragmentation of the Church?



3. FAMILY BRINGS TOGETHER DEVOTIONAL AND MISSIONARY

3.1 Why is it true that: “the future pastoral priorities of the Diocese of Sale will come to birth through our family life”?

3.2 How can the two pillars, the devotional and the missionary dimensions of faith, be expressed in our diocese in the years ahead?

3.3 What are some of the meanings of “family”?

3.4 How can the “family” provide the focus from which we launch forward?

3.5 How can: “action for justice in the world that defends the dignity of the human life from womb to tomb become(s) part of our response to the “global family””?

3.6 How can we ensure that: “there is a radical solidarity in Christ undergirding our attitudes and actions”?

4. PENTECOST IN A SECULARISED AUSTRALIA

4.1 What are some of the “pressing difficulties in the passing on of the Catholic faith in our own time and place”?

4.2 Name some of the challenges that the Church has had to face in times past.

4.3 Why is it true that: “There are always challenges to the faith in any place or time”?

4.4 Why is secularism “the real challenge to the faith today”?

4.5 Why is it important “for us to try to live Christianity and to think as Christians in such a way that it incorporates what is good and right about modernity – and at the same time separates and distinguishes itself from what is becoming a counter-religion”?

4.6 How can St Paul’s motto “I do everything for the Gospel” (1Cor.9/23) inspire your life?