

2nd after TRINITY 2011: YEAR A: Proper 9

I am gentle and lowly in heart...my yoke is easy, and my burden light.

Well, the Flame has been fanned, and we've bidden farewell to Fr Philip and Fr Charles. To those who came and joined in all or some of the sessions I have to say that I won't be able to match the jokes. To those who weren't able to participate, I would have to emphasize that it wasn't all jokes; there were serious invitations to listen again to God's particular call of each one of us by name, and His call of our community here at OSM by its name and thus to our particular mission and witness in these days... to be baptised, as it was expressed, into the needs and joys and sorrows of our city and neighbourhood. The visual presentations which are still in place remind us of this personal, baptismal call (blue): of the challenge to be, like Mary, open to the gift which is grace, in 'Graceland', as Fr Charles put it, enabling us to say 'yes to God', and to point others to Jesus (orange). There was the call to penitence, individual and corporate, the laying of the burdens of sin and resentment at the foot of the Cross of Calvary whose effects sweep from that day through the whole of time: with this came new encouragement to realise the potential and the joy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (purple). Then, on the green hill, we saw the cross draped in white, symbol of the Lord's resurrection, and promise of his healing and living presence with us in all circumstances and in all aspects of our lives. Finally, we gathered around the altar to 'become what we are', the Body of Christ, open to His Word, and receiving the gift of His sacramental presence, our future citizenship of heaven breaking into our present.

To take up the image from today's gospel of the children in the market place, there was, we might say, in 'Fan the Flame' some piping...a summons to share the joy and fun and freedom, the dance of the gospel; there was wailing, in the sense of acknowledgment of the pain and the sin, the suffering and the needs which are all around us and often within us. But what are the feelings with which we are left at the end of such an experience? And what, as Fr Charles put it forcibly more than once, what is to be done?

What are our feelings? Well, clearly only the individuals who participated can say; but, from what I've heard, many were deeply moved, and touched by a very real sense of the Lord's healing presence. Others, perhaps, may have felt some resistance to the style of the teaching, and that's probably inevitable, as all of us are different. But whatever our reactions at the time, in the intensity of the particular moments of the 5 sessions, there's always, I suspect, some sort of question as to what has changed...or, perhaps, to put it another way, whether the experience, positive or negative, encouraging or disturbing, is going to last. And that's why, for us as individuals, the question 'what is to be done', is so important.

- Are we going to look at our prayer life, to see whether we allow ourselves to go on hearing the Lord call us by name?
- Are we going, if you like, to enter the school of Mary, so that we may say with her 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, and point others to Jesus her Son'?
- Are we going to come, not just at special moments like Tuesday evening, to lay burdens of shame and weakness at the foot of the Cross...are we seriously

considering the practice of personal Confession, use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

- Are we going to be open, not just now in the aftermath of Fan the Flame, but day by day, to the healing, saving presence of the Risen Lord?
- Are we going to let the Mass be at the centre of our lives, and perhaps not just on a Sunday, but an ordinary day of the week, and when the Church celebrates a great festival?

What is to be done by each one of us in answer to these questions? During Fan the Flame, our visiting priests, and members of our planning team, were available at the end of the evenings to offer prayer, encouragement, counsel. That's often what we continue to need as we grapple with the questions I've set out, a conversation with another. Because it can be easy to find that it was all very well to be moved while the special event was running...but to get stuck where we were before as the memory of it fades. So let's not be afraid to seek counsel, to talk with one another, to retain that honesty before God which Fan the Flame encouraged.

And what's to be done, corporately? Our visitors made it clear that they see exciting opportunities for OSM, *both* as witnessing to the beauty of holiness (look at the message on that arch) through a liturgical tradition rooted in a deeply sacramental faith...God using the material as living sign of His presence...*and* as responding to the needs of a local community caught up with new buildings and developments and the 'shopping experience...but surely also a deep need to be shown the love and the life and the values of Jesus Christ. Here, inevitably, we are brought up once more against the potential excitement, but also the hesitations and frustrations related to any development of our buildings. . Somehow, again, we *want, desire, long*, to fulfil our potential, just as we want, as individuals, to be human beings fully alive with the life of God...but there's a nagging doubt, a reluctance. So again, we need to keep open all possible lines of communication, keep the vision alive.

On Friday, the day after the Teaching event ended, we kept the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Ah! I hear some say: another of those Romish excesses...illuminated statues, light bulbs round the beating heart. But no! The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the expression of the Divine Compassion, of the ever-present love which says, 'I am gentle and lowly in heart...my yoke is easy, my burden is light'. Behind and beyond any human counsel which we may seek as individuals, or in our corporate undertakings, is the Divine Compassion of Jesus, bearing with us, suffering with us, encouraging, loving...piping with us in our joys, identifying with our frustrations and failures. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Divine Compassion, have mercy upon us.

Fr. Andrew Greany