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BISHOP'S CATECHESIS: TOWARDS A HAPPIER PEOPLE

- Ascension Sunday –

We often hear that Australia is a 'progressive' society. Whether people agree with this depends upon their vision of an ideal Australian society. Progress is assessed against an end point.

Most of us don't need the news or the internet to recognise the growing unhappiness in Australian society. We know family members and friends with well-being issues and psychological challenges and relationship and marriage breakdowns.

And who does not recognise anger and division in society, and also great loneliness. Many feel lost and uncertain about who they are and the meaning of their lives. Self harm and suicide, drugs and other addictions are becoming increasingly common.

Jesus came to bring peace

Jesus came to offer inner peace and peace with others. The angels sang at his birth: 'Peace on earth'.^[1] During the Last Supper, Jesus promised: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you – not a peace of this world but my own peace I give you'.^[2]

When the people in Jerusalem would not accept Jesus' path to peace he wept over the city, saying: 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes'.^[3]

Jesus weeps

Today, we celebrate the completion of Jesus' Resurrection. His ascension meant he returned to the Father, while remaining with us – and in us – in the ways he foretold before his death.

Jesus metaphorically still weeps today for children who are being scarred emotionally because they do not enjoy stable parent relationships; teenagers who are angry and confused; the neglected frail and sick; those treated unjustly; those in prison for drug offences – the list goes on. He weeps too for those who reject him and so suffer life-hurts, grief and disappointments as a result.

^[1] Luke 2:4

^[2] John 14:27

^[3] Luke 19:46

God never wishes loss of peace or suffering to anyone. But, respecting their free wills, ‘God leaves to their own devices’ those who do not accept the guidance and help which could change the paths of their lives towards inner peace and peace with others. ^[4]

From a Christian perspective, an increasingly unhappy society follows the decline in religious practice across Australia, as night follows day.

Christ’s peace and those we love

The inner peace or ‘peace of soul’ that God planned originally for every human being was destroyed by the Fall of our first parents. They broke the original human relationship with God.

Then Jesus, who has now returned to God the Father, came to offer his path towards restoring this peace to everyone today. Out of love for troubled loved ones and others we know, we need to help them consider to take this path.

The foundation of this path is a personal relationship with the Risen Jesus who has now ascended to from where he came. It is he who can restore the peace lost by our first parents in each one of us through the Holy Spirit.

The growth of a personal relationship with Jesus

If someone wants to promote relationships between the one they hope to marry with their family, three steps are needed. The first two are to introduce their loved one to their family and to draw them into family life so that relationships deepen. When the loved one and family members have developed initial relationships with each other, all can deepen these relationships further independently within the family.

Leading others into personal relationships with the ascended Jesus who remains present follows the same path – introduction, drawing into Christ’s family (or Church) life and then leaving them to continue to deepen their relationship with the Risen Jesus within the family.

But we can only lead others into relationship with the Risen Jesus as the peace giver if we have personal relationships with him ourselves.

Introducing others to the Risen Jesus

Jesus began his ministry by introducing himself with miracles to show he offers divine power to help people in their lives. They were visible signs, but his power is not limited to the physical.

^[4] Psalm 81:12

Do we seek his power ourselves?

Do we draw upon his healing power for the hurts in our lives. These can be from childhood, rejection by friends, a marriage which has not worked out – the possibilities are endless.

Are there hurts in our personal lives we have not talked about with the Risen Jesus? Or if the hurt remains, have we asked him why? And if he leads us to see that we need psychological support, do we share with him if we need help with fears about this?

Jesus gave sight to the blind so do I talk with him about when I cannot see in my life? We can be blind, for example, to our own goodness; how to respond to relationship problems; whether we need to change jobs; the best way to respond to an addicted family member; whether I should move to a retirement facility?

Jesus revealed his power to free from whatever cripples efforts to change a dominating emotion, a vice or a habit; a racist attitude. He can cast out evil, restore us when life seems difficult. He can forgive all sin and free us from guilt.

Freedom and empowerment

Jesus freed or redeemed us from the consequences of the Fall of our first parents. Do we seek his power as Redeemer when human weaknesses hamper efforts to be the person Jesus calls us to be?

Jesus empowers us spiritually as Saviour. Do I pray that the divine life within me since baptism will help me to live a teaching of Jesus that I find more difficult? Do I pray that the divine love within me will help me to forgive an enemy who has hurt me gravely? To remain faithful in my marriage? To be patient with someone annoying or demanding?

Is there any teaching of Jesus I find hard to live and I fail to seek his power by talking about this in prayer?

Repent and believe

Is my life fully committed to Jesus and to doing my best to live all his teachings? In all of us, the answer will be 'no'. When in my life, therefore, that I need to *repent* but rationalise or ignore because I find repentance too difficult, despite my best human efforts. Do I show my relationship with Jesus by *believing in him* and seeking his power to help me repent?

Introducing others to the Risen Jesus

We introduce others to Jesus as he introduced himself - by encouraging them to seek his power for their lives. Opportunities include when they share with us their worries and confusions or when we can share with them how he has helped us.

We encourage them to talk with Jesus as fully as possible about life events, feelings, physical reactions and emotions in prayer daily, persisting as Jesus taught and not giving up.

Drawing into the life of Christ's family, the Church

Jesus introduced gifts which are means for drawing upon his power within the life of the community of his Church. These include the sacraments and the Christian way of praying.

If we are married, for example, do we draw upon the gifts of matrimony? ^[5] Do I ask Christ to purify my love when I realise I am being sinful? To forgive if my spouse has hurt me deeply, or even been unfaithful? To strengthen me to help my spouse in a difficult time, despite having troubles of my own? To renew the tenderness of our married love if our relationship has become stale?

Do I know the gifts Christ offers through each sacrament – especially the Mass? If I don't, I can't draw upon them and deepen my relationship with our Risen Lord.

We help others to deepen in relationships with the Risen Jesus by helping them appreciate how they can draw upon the gifts which relate to whatever are the challenges and problems in their lives.

Our Christian Mission

Let us take every opportunity to help others appreciate that

1. the Risen Jesus offers his power to help them with life needs so they find greater peace
2. they need to talk in detail with him about whatever might be their need, reminding them of his teaching that prayer needs to be persistent for they may need to grow in faith required to receive what he offer
3. each sacrament is a means through which we can draw upon Christ's power, depending upon which relates to our need.

21st May 2023

^[5] Catechism of the Catholic Church 1641-1642