

Lent 2008

Seek The Lord

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Next Saturday, many people will be gathering in the Cathedral to celebrate the Rite of Election. This is the moment when all those who are candidates or catechumens enter the final stage of their journey into becoming members of the Catholic Church. Some will have already been baptised in other Christian communities, which makes them “candidates”. Others are coming new to the Christian faith and will be seeking Baptism; these are the “catechumens”. All will be coming into full communion with the Church through baptism or profession of faith, confirmation and Eucharist at the celebration of the Easter Vigil in our parishes and we welcome them all with great joy.

All are, in different ways, seeking the Lord and this is a crucial moment for the whole of our diocesan community. They are making a journey of faith and they are joining with all of us as we too journey in the faith. For the candidates and catechumens, it is the beginning of the end of a stage of the journey, but it is a journey in which we are all involved.

The journey into faith is a journey into Christ; it is a journey in which we seek his face and seek to conform ourselves and our way of living more and more to the model that he himself puts before us in the Gospels. Today’s Gospel – Christ’s teaching of the Eight Beatitudes – gives us a wonderful example of what we are seeking.

Christ is poor in spirit; he is gentle; he shares our sorrows and sadness and comforts us; he hungers for justice for his brothers and sisters; he is merciful; he is single-minded in his service and love of God his Father; he brings peace and is crucified for his pains; he suffers persecution and rejection but rejoices because that is the will of his Father in heaven. This is what he taught his disciples. As I write these words, I am particularly conscious of the fact that when you read or listen to them, I will be visiting our suffering brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe. I do implore you to keep them at the heart of your Lenten prayers and sacrifices.

Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, so this is the way of living to which he calls us. We follow him because we have nowhere else to go – “he has the message of eternal life”.

To be a follower and a disciple of Christ is an extraordinary ambition. As St Paul writes, “At the time when we were called, how many were wise in the ordinary sense of the word, how many were influential people or came from noble families?” Hardly any of us, if the truth be told - and even if we were, it would not be of any great significance because God chooses the weak and the frail; he chooses “tax collectors and sinners”; he chooses those in need of the one who can redeem and transform life.

As Lent unfolds and as the Lord continues to teach us of what it means to be his disciples, we will see him tempted, we will see him transfigured and transformed, we will hear him call the Samaritan woman at the well who was the sinner; we will see him curing the man born blind; we will hear the story of how he raises Lazarus from the dead. As we seek him

out and seek his face, we find ourselves in all these people – tempted, forgiven, healed and transformed and enlivened. We will experience his love, his forgiveness and that newness of life which makes it possible for us to say with Martha: “You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

When Christ asks us whether we believe in him, we will be able to say with the man who had been born blind and who had been cured, “Tell me who he is that I may believe in him.” We will experience that life-transforming forgiveness that led the Samaritan woman to become a witness to the redeeming love that Christ poured into her life.

As we seek to become poor in spirit, relying solely on God and on his love, we will be gentled and enriched. We will become compassionate comforters who are merciful and kind. We will be passionate for justice for all our brothers and sisters; we will become peacemakers, no matter what the cost may be and if we are persecuted and ridiculed and ignored or patronised because we believe in Christ, then we can rejoice and be glad. We will be seeking integrity and holiness, and in that search we will find the Lord who is constantly searching for us that we may see his face.

This Lenten journey is for all of us and it is a great joy and encouragement - as well as an immense responsibility - to be joined by so many for whom the search is new. In so many ways, they will be asking us, who are perhaps older in the faith, to take them to Jesus, our way, our truth and our life, As we all stand before the Lord, he says to us: “I am the Resurrection and the Life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” The only response to these words, which we make together, must be, “I believe, Lord; help my unbelief.”

May the Lord bless all of us as, together, we journey in faith to the wonders and joys of the new life of Easter.

May God bless you all,

To be read and made available at all Masses celebrated in the diocese on the weekend of the 4th Sunday of the Year, February 2nd/3rd 2008.