
“TURN AWAY FROM YOUR SINS AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS”



As we are getting ready to sign the Christian community with ashes, the liturgy invites us to “Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return,” to remind us that humans are sinners and mortal, or to “Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News,” words of Jesus from the first chapter of Saint Mark’s Gospel. While not dismissing the first formula, I much prefer the second one which is a powerful invitation to truly live the 2004 Lenten season. We shall befriend this piece of Good News, this Lent.

WORD OF GOD

It was Vatican Council II’s desire that all Christians have ready access to the Word of God, and that the Scriptures be better known and proclaimed. Saint Jerome, who translated the Greek Bible into Latin, declared that to be ignorant of Scripture is to be ignorant of Christ. It seems that the Lenten period is a very special time for paying greater attention to God’s Word, listening to it, studying it, and sharing it with others. As I did last year when I reflected with Danny and Carrie on the first level of the family- and parish-based religious education programme, this year I want to reflect on the second level. Last year we were invited to discover God and to marvel at His creation, and to learn about the Gospel of Jesus; this year we are urged to welcome Jesus’ friendship with us and with our brothers and sisters.

PEOPLE OF THE WORD

The Word of God as passed on to us through Church tradition is a major source of knowledge concerning the thoughts and activities of Jesus’ friends. In the context of Lent, the Word will refer mainly to religious education, but I also acknowledge all the people who help me understand this Word of God: they are truly People of the Word, people who not only pass it on, but who truly abide by it. It is important to show respect and gratitude to the parents and teachers who so generously and faithfully hand down this Word of God, and the priests and bishops who are charged with proclaiming the Word according to the authentic teaching of the Church. Besides, there is also the multitude of Christians who are daily nourished by the Word of God and who are its outstanding witnesses, day by day. These are people who, despite their limitations and weakness, strive to live according to the will of God and His commandments, and according to the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ. These witnesses of daily life are very precious to us. They reveal to me how the Word of God takes flesh even today. And so, in our meditation on friendship it will be important for us to keep our eyes fixed on the “friendship of the daily grind.”

OUR PEOPLE

We can rightly enjoy and appreciate the homilies given each day or each week by those who preside the Eucharist and who are serious about giving the faithful the Good News of each Gospel. These are like beautiful gifts which God offers His people. God speaks to us in a very special way in the liturgy and the sacraments. And so, we must welcome the Word of God with all the attention required by this divine initiative. There are, also, all the baptised and confirmed people who, while not having college and university degrees or official titles, pass their faith and holiness on to us as by contagion: they, too, deserve to be listened to. A friendly gesture is often worth several attempts at explaining oneself. A single real act of forgiveness is often worth more than a tonne of learned discourse on renewed friendships. The love of parents for their children is often a love without words, discrete and affectionate, and one that does not need explaining.

A NETWORK OF FRIENDS

Even if we say that real friends are not easy to come by or that they can be counted on the fingers of one hand, there is a reality in the Church that needs consideration, the reality known as the “communion of saints,”

the reality of the Church itself. We are all united to one another in a wonderful way that goes beyond appearances. We do not even have an inkling about how much we form one body, one communion, together. Saint Paul compared this union to that of the human body. This is a wonderful comparison which we shall never tire reflecting on. All members without exception together form one body. Together we form the Body of Christ, thanks to the grace of God which binds us to one another. It is by pure graciousness that the same life courses through our veins, and this divine life is way beyond any kind of friendship.

“TAMING” THE WORD

The Little Prince could not wait to befriend Fox, but Fox took the time to show him that befriending takes time, that there are rites to be followed, that there is no such thing as an “instant friend.” “Tame me,” said Fox to the Little Prince, “and we shall become friends.” Lent of 2004 can be a special time for “taming” the Word of God. By way of seven articles I shall reflect with you on the Word of God as it is offered to the children at the Second Level of their religious formation. The reflections will be uncomplicated, life giving, and conducive to contact with the Lord himself. We can already have a better grasp of what love is about through the simple question posed by Danny and Carrie: “What is a friend?” And the answer: “Someone we talk with,” “Someone who eats with us,” “Someone who plays with us,” “Someone we console,” “Someone who lends us his or her things,” “Someone who invites us into his or her home,” “Someone I smile at,” “Someone with whom I share my secrets...” And if I take the time to jot down the names of those I consider my friends whatever their age, nationality or colour, I realise that I probably have more friends than I can count on the fingers of my hands. I carry these friends in my heart like a blossom in a beautiful garden. That was how the Little Prince befriended a rose, and this is why the rose became so important to him!

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