

Called to be holy: Saved for service in the world (What)

St John 21:10: Jesus said, “Bring me some of the fish that you have just caught.”

The theme for our recently concluded Synod was: The Church: Called to live a holy life.” In his sermon at the opening service the Bishop defined holiness as the act of being set apart by God for service. Using insights from 1st Peter, the Bishop made the point that this call to live a holy life is patterned off the life of the people of Israel. The Israelites, as described in the Old Testament, was a community that accepted its vocation to live out its life in communion with God and with each other. Israel was to be a light to the nations, in that, they were expected to mediate God’s life of unconditional love to each other both within and outside the community of faith.

The bishop noted that the Church, especially as described in the New Testament, “is addressed as holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16). To this end, he continues, “Christians are “saints” by virtue of being “in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:1). “Their holiness,” he said, “(not to be confused with moral perfection) is in respect of God’s calling; they have a vocation as a consecrated people” (p.3). Holiness in this instance suggests a

state of being a member of the community of faith. As members of the Church we live out our lives in Christ. Holiness therefore is a life lived in the Holy Spirit.

Holiness as a life lived in the Holy Spirit calls us to see Jesus as he is in his resurrected state. The resurrected Christ holds for us the key to live out the life of holiness. Our Gospel reading earlier, from John 21 holds up the resurrected Christ as a very practical and pragmatic person. Preparing a meal of fish and bread and eating it with the disciples is part of what it means to live a holy life. For the writer of John's Gospel to think about the resurrected Christ is at the same time to have food as part of the meaning and practice of holiness.

I was taught that it is important to avoid using food as illustration in a sermon as people will immediately leave Church in their minds and go home as they think about what they will have for breakfast. I could not avoid this reference this morning. Fish and bread holiness is the life to which we have been called. There is no doubt this is a challenge in a context in which diabetes is an epidemic and we have to focus on gluten free foods. Yet, Jesus, as presented by John, is a very practical person. Feeding people and showing them how this is related to the life of holiness was vital to the life of the early Christian community. Two things follow as a consequence.

Holiness is about Belonging to a community

First, holiness is about **Belonging to a community**. This belonging is rooted in Jesus' question to Peter, **“Do you love me?”** Having had breakfast with the disciples Jesus then went on to address the matter of what it means to be holy as members of the Church. In St John 21:15 Jesus asks Peter the question, “do you love me?” This was a very easy question for Peter. However, when the question came a second and a third time Peter became flabbergasted and said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you” (John 21:17). Jesus said a third time, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). Jesus entrusted Peter and the other disciples the responsibility to build and maintain communities in which people feel a sense of belonging, and, more importantly, a place where fish and bread are served.

Recently I read an article¹ which illustrated this sense of holiness as belonging. It is the story of a Franciscan Friar telling the story of how he came to be a Christian. He indicated that he embraced atheism during his teen and early adult years, was a successful businessman, married and divorced and was searching for a sense of meaning in life. He said he was passing by Westminster Abbey one weekday afternoon just after a business meeting. The Verger met him just outside the gate and asked if he wished to attend the service of evening prayer. This man had no

1 Anglican Religious Life 2014-15 p.17ff

idea what was meant by evening prayer. He nevertheless took up the offer and he said he was transformed ever since. He said just to be a member of a worshipping community gave him a new lease on life. He attributes his commitment to the way of life of a Franciscan Friar because someone shared with him the importance of belonging to a community. Holiness is about belonging to a community.

Living with a sense of Purpose “Feed my sheep”

A second point to bear in mind concerning the call of the Church to a life of holiness is the need to live a purpose driven life. Some of us may be aware of the best-selling book by Pastor Rick Warren, entitled, **The Purpose Driven Life**.

Pastor Warren is of the view that people generally take a lifeless and mindless approach to Christianity. Pastor Warren attempts the reversal of this approach by inviting Christians to live and practice the purpose driven life. “Feed my sheep” is the way Jesus chose, prior to his physical departure from this earth, to emphasise the importance of vocation to feed people. Fish and bread holiness is not just about the food; it is not just about belonging to a community. Fish and bread holiness is about living out the reality of the Kingdom or reign of God.

A life of holiness means keeping before us the bigger picture of our lives. Life is not just about eating, drinking, breathing, having fun, resting etc. These things are

important to life, however, they are means given to us to embrace our purpose in life. To discover our purpose in life we must first be committed to be of service to others. Loving God and loving our neighbours as ourselves is at the heart of living out our purpose in life. Our purpose is both a gift and a task. It is a gift in that God has already designed a plan for our lives. Our task is to discover this plan and live into it. At the heart of discovering this plan, which is a gift from God, is a commitment to serve God and serve others.

Holiness is also a task each person of faith will have to commit to undertake on a daily basis. This task is both spiritual and physical. It is spiritual in that it requires daily devotion, retreats (such as the one we had earlier this year at Hilcrest), meditation, taking time to know ourselves as children of God, worshipping in community, tithing, and, a commitment to learn about the faith. The Life in the Spirit seminar is one of those ways to continue learning about God and the Church. The task of holiness is physical. It is about fish and bread holiness. It is to be responsive to the needs of the people around us. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, providing shelter; are all part of the purpose driven life and central to the task of a life of holiness.

Our involvement in mentorship programmes, providing meals and tuition grants for needed students, the fellowship shared with the students who meet in the Chaplain's office and those who share in the whatsapp group, the work being done at August Town Primary, Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Centre, the ATG outreach to the CBOs, NGOs and institutions in the Greater Mona Valley Area, and, the Open Arms Drop in Centre are all indications of what it means to live a life of holiness. As our theme for today suggests, we are saved for service in the world. This is what it means to practice a life of holiness.

Friends, the theme of the recently concluded synod calls each of us to live a holy life. This means accepting that holiness is a gift from God and a task we are to undertake for God's glory and the good of everyone. In the name of the Father...