

Faith and Time - by Catherine Herrick

Like all journeys, my faith journey, is enriching but far from smooth; subject to adaptation and never perfect. As with most Catholics, faith sustains and comforts me but also presents many surprises, demands and challenges along the way.

I remember as a school child, at St Brendan's school in the 1950s, learning and singing the hymn, 'Faith of Our Fathers', even then an especial favourite of older Catholics. It looked back to earlier centuries when harsh penal laws against Catholics in England and Ireland were in force and solidarity in faith essential for the survival of Catholic practice and identity. Even today, we hear of Christians and other religious groups who are being persecuted for faith. The old hymn and the sentiments it professed, though, were 'of their time' and lost relevance to younger Catholics who grew up in a multi-faith Australia with its more inclusive culture and anti-discriminatory laws.

From the received faith of parents, teachers and Church community in primary school years, an exciting new development in faith came to me and to my contemporaries in 1962 with the advent of the Second Vatican Council. As the changes introduced by the Council were implemented over the next few decades, faith, once underpinned by stricter devotional practices, made way for a more communal and personally liberating faith. Catholic life was transformed. The Church became more open to the world and we were asked to follow in large and small ways of thinking and being. Faith education and discussion on Church matters and the larger issues of society were encouraged. Lay engagement in liturgy, ministry and administration became accepted practice. Exploring more fully Christ's command, 'Love one another as I have loved you', found deeper meaning in an emphasis on social justice in schools, parishes and Church organizations throughout Australia. An engagement with ecumenism and a deeper understanding of other faiths and beliefs enriched and broadened the lives of Catholics and their fellow Australians, without diminishing Catholic identity and values as had been feared by earlier generations.

Faith for me is about that sort of hope and renewal. It promises that the Spirit will always be present to us in our Sacramental and everyday lives. Although my faith has certainly been tested at times, its promise remains with me. I see it exemplified every day in the lives of so many in our own Parish and wider communities, both young and old, who act 'in good faith'. I am encouraged to take the 'long view' and trust in a faith that develops and sustains through life. I hope it will always challenge me to be better than I am and give a rich meaning to the rest of my journey.