

1 February 2015

It only happens very rarely but it happened on Friday; a double whammy; two funerals in one day, one at St Brendan's, the other at Holy Rosary. Both were long-standing parishioners remembered, celebrated and mourned by their loving families. Journeying with these families from the moment of death to the funeral preparations and then the liturgical celebrations, I became conscious of the power of faith and how it works in our lives even in the sad and tragic moments to lift us up and take us beyond the human reality of death. The lives of the two women being celebrated spoke a great deal about the love of God made manifest in the love and devotion of family, in the generosity of these women towards others, in the way the challenging lives of these migrant women has left a wonderful story and legacy for their family especially grandchildren. And in our Christian tradition how we pray in the hope of the resurrection that one day we shall see our loved ones again and enjoy their friendship, that even in death the bonds of communion and life are not broken and yet are strengthened precisely through gift of faith.

Faith; in today's Gospel, we hear how the teaching of Jesus made a deep impression on those around him because he taught with authority. But Jesus lived in a time surrounded by scholars and teachers and religious authorities. What was it about him that made such a deep impression? Because Jesus is drawing the people to faith, he is touching something deep within them that draws them into a true relationship with the living God. Jesus does not simply teach religion or doctrine; he is moving the people to faith, helping them to see the beauty and grace of God at work quietly and gently in their daily lives. This gift of faith shapes people's vision, it transforms their lives and sets their hearts free.

Jesus does not perform miracles simply to entertain or perform for the crowds. He performs miracles in order to move people to faith, to touch their hearts by his grace and call forth the gift of faith or strengthen the gift of faith already present. That's why his teaching makes a deep impression, that's why people respond to his word. We gather here because of the call of faith; we gather here because we need God's word, because we are hungry for the Eucharist, because when life is not going so well and we feel ourselves struggling, we are strengthened by

the faith and prayer of this parish community. Faith sustains us and transforms our lives.

Time and again in the Old Testament God raises up prophets who speak his word and who call forth the gift of faith and hope. There are times in the Old Testament when the people are literally hanging on to life by a thread and yet God never abandons them. Even in the darkest moments, faith and hope come to life. Faith helps us to see our lives and the reality around us with different eyes. So often in the Old Testament, the people feel abandoned, they have lost all hope and seem to have reached the end of the road. In the darkness, there is silence and death. But God speaks a word of hope and light and moves the people to faith, he raises up prophets as we hear in today's first reading and these prophets set a new direction, they give people hope and strengthen within their hearts the gift of faith.

There is something quite compelling about today's responsorial psalm, 'if today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts'. God's word changes our hearts. Only this week Pope Francis called for parish communities to be 'islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference'. The Pope calls all Christian people to be near the suffering of others, not to lock ourselves away in worlds of comfort and security, but to go out of ourselves and to give of our lives. Faith is not some prize for the great, the perfect and the comfortable. Faith takes us out of ourselves in order to encounter the Christ who suffers in the face of the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and those treated unjustly.

And here in the Eucharist we meet the one who is our life, our faith and our hope. The risen Lord who never ceases to call us out of darkness and into his own wonderful light.