

6 October 2013

As I was putting dates into my diary for this week, I remembered the anniversary of one of my priest colleagues who died 13 years ago. Fr John Rogan was a most interesting character, what we call a late vocation. He studied law at Melbourne University but had an interest in fine arts and antiques. For many years he worked at Kozminsky's in Bourke St, one of the leading firms in the country that sell fine jewellery, paintings and antiques. They have an international reputation. John used to joke that if you ever went into Kozminsky's and asked the price, you couldn't afford the product! For years, John was a senior member of staff whose expert advice was sought around the country. John was often invited to gala society events and sold jewellery to some of the richest families in the country, politicians, American movie stars and members of the royal family. But then something happened to him. John felt that God was calling him to be a priest. When people asked him how did he know for certain about his vocation, John responded, 'When I looked around the store and reminded myself that there is nothing I sell here that is essential for life. Even the most expensive jewellery in the country was just decoration'. John did his pastoral year and was ordained a deacon in the humble parish of All Saints, Fitzroy. He told me once that the most rewarding work he had ever done was visiting the people in the high-rise flats, meeting newly arrived migrants and visiting the sick.

I mention this because John was very conscious of the spirit of today's second reading of St Paul to Timothy – to fan into a flame the gift of faith that God has given us. In baptism, each of us receives the gift of faith. As our life unfolds and takes us down various paths, this gift of faith ought to grow stronger in our hearts and lives. Anyone who has had the experience of lighting a fire in a fireplace knows how the small flame needs to be fanned into something bigger in order to give warmth. I'm sure that some of us have had the embarrassing situation (especially when others are watching!!) of lighting a fire and watching it spurt and fizzle out to nothing. This is precisely not how our life of faith is to unfold. The gift that each of us has received in baptism must grow every day; the gift of faith we have received grows by God's grace, is strengthened by being together here as a community of faith, is nourished by the gift

of God's word proclaimed here every Sunday and the gift of the Eucharist which strengthens us and nourishes us.

In today's Gospel, the apostles ask Jesus, 'Lord, increase our faith'. That is, help us to go a little deeper, help us to understand and appreciate the gift that we have been given. To illustrate the point, often in the Gospels Jesus uses images and sayings such as, 'Were your faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea.' Jesus perfectly understands that before him are a group of apostles less than perfect in their faith, struggling at times, doubting at times, questioning the validity and logic of what Jesus teaches. The scriptures reflect something of life's journey of faith. Just like for the early church, so too in our lives, things come to us later, God's grace touches us at different times and through different people, in the confident times we feel our faith is growing, in challenging times we feel our faith is weak. Just like Fr John Rogan. At the peak of his career, when he had the best things in life at his finger-tips, he was called to leave all this behind and to fan into a flame the gift of faith that brought him to the priesthood.

Here we gather to fan into a flame the gift God has given us. Here we gather to ask Jesus to increase and strengthen our faith. Here we gather as fellow pilgrims on life's journey, always bearing witness to the God who calls us out of darkness and into his own wonderful light.