

Homily for St John's College Closing Mass 2011

Tonight we gather to mark the end of the School year and to celebrate the achievement of a significant milestone in the lives of the Year 12 students of 2011. This last week has been in their minds increasingly over the last 12 months. But also from the very day they first entered High School. Graduation has been like a beacon always inviting them forward. As such, Year 12 of 2011 tonight also represent the hopes and dreams of all the students, as well as parents, and teachers who watch their children grow and learn. To see the excitement and the relief of the Year 12 students tonight is for parents and teachers alike to witness a kind of miracle! I do not mean by that it is a miracle that they got this far! Far from it. But rather in the sense that the energy and enthusiasm that they have brought to all their struggles both in their work and in their personal growth is before us a wonder no less than the wonder and miracle of their birth. It is a wonder to rejoice in tonight.

So it is with gratitude, I am sure that they come before us. Gratitude to you their parents, their teachers and their peers. They have entered into serving the spirit of the College generously. They have been prepared to wash each others feet, as it were, to ensure this community stays strong and committed to its ideals. But, I am also sure that they, and all of us, young and old, are very aware that one thing we all share in common is our capacity to fall short of our ideals and become less than we could be by sin. That is why St Paul in our reading tonight speaks so eloquently to the people of Colossae asking them to remember who they are and how much they are loved. It is because we are loved unconditionally by God that we can be at peace with ourselves and achieve so much. If we forget that we can take many wrong turns in life.

In a few years time, 2019 in fact, our Parish of St Joseph here in Nambour will celebrate the centenary of its foundation. It is not very old in the great scheme of things perhaps. Not even as old as Ipswich Parish, one of the parishes I served in which was established in 1848. I want to read to you a short paragraph describing some of the activity of the first priest in the Ipswich mission, Fr Eugene Luckie in the year 1849 well before Queensland was a separate State. The population of Ipswich was about 103 at the time. From October to December 1849 he undertook a major tour of his mission area. "It really was major tour in terms of hours on horseback, but also in terms of distance. He would have covered at least 1000km if he had had our present roads to follow. On the road that he actually had to follow – mud marked by wheel ruts and blazes on tree-trunks – it could have been much longer, even if he never got lost. He would have to sleep in the bush or make use of whatever accommodation was offered to him at large stations. Most stations at the time gave itinerant clergy a good welcome and some even organised for shepherds and other workers to assemble for services" (*St Mary's Ipswich, The Luckie Parish*, John R Kane, Ipswich, 2011, p6). We know the areas he visited on that trip baptising and celebrating weddings today by the towns that grew up around the stations such as Toowoomba, Warwick Stanthorpe, Tenterfield, Inverell, Inglewood, Dalby.

What makes a person take on such arduous travelling? I often think of the work and vision of people of the past and wonder what motivated them to do so much. To a great extent it is the very same sense of service and compassion that many students of the past and you here tonight have demonstrated. No less than Fr Eugene Luckie in 1848, it is the priestly service of Jesus that we are all given to share in by our Baptism. We were anointed to give priestly, prophetic and royal service like Jesus himself to God and our neighbour. So you have shown that you have what it takes to be a priest and shepherd to one another. May you choose a future life to continue doing that.

We are celebrating the end of this year and this era with this uniquely Catholic thing we call the Mass, or the Eucharist. The Eucharist tonight, while it looks back to the Last Supper and Jesus death and resurrection, it equally also looks forward. The action of every Eucharist models and helps bring about God's dream for the world: That everyone might one day be united in love, justice, peace and joy. It enacts God's heavenly banquet here tonight as we put aside our differences and share in the one loaf and the one cup at Mass. It is Jesus' pledge to us that God is always with us on our journey.

I am also conscious as we celebrate this Eucharist that there may be some who would sincerely claim they do not believe in God or the Church or that they have serious doubts about it all. Doubt is always a part of a healthy searching faith. Let us keep searching. I also think that many of the gods that people say they do not believe in do not in fact exist. So I share that atheism. The kind of god some people imagine we Christians believe in does not exist or bears little or no resemblance to the God Jesus revealed by his life of loving sacrificial service. A God Jesus showed is also revealed in the ordinary, struggling, lives of each person who tries to love as he loved.

For me personally, then, one of the most convincing reasons for believing in God is to witness the loving service that people like you, parents and students, give with such generosity. But of course that love and that generosity will be severely tested as time goes on. And that is why with St Paul we remind ourselves of who we are, where we have come from and where it is that we want to go. That is why we pray in this way to be nourished and strengthened by the Word of God and the Bread of Life for the journey ahead. We can certainly travel physically much further in a day than Fr Eugene Luckie ever dreamed possible in 1848. But how far are we prepared to go spiritually for love and justice, compassion and forgiveness.

F Graham