

The Call of the Wild

AFL madness: I'm caught up in it. The cats and tigers: wow what a game. And last night's game: the swans versus the magpies: extraordinary.

But then in my cooler moments I reflect on it, and it really is a madness, a religion. Millions and millions and millions of dollars invested in this. When you get caught up in it you start to lose perspective. But after the delirium of the game has worn off, you catch yourself asking: Is this *really* that important. Does this really matter *that* much?

Our Gospel reading ushers us into a quiet space. We forget that these words of Jesus were uttered in the desert, in the wilderness. *There* you can hear yourself think. Suddenly, you can hear the elephant in the room trumpeting away as it does every day, every single day of our lives.

But normally we don't hear it. We're too busy. Who's really listening? Who's really paying attention? But the message is replayed day after day in the beating of our heart. And in that quietness it is clear: in our heart of hearts we know. One day, all this is coming to an end...

But most of the time Jesus' words fall on deaf ears. Mainly because we're too afraid to listen, too busy, too preoccupied; and also because we're not secure enough in God's love. Listen really listen in the quietness of the beating of our hearts this morning, as his words like silver and gold streaming from his lips connect with our hearts and minds, our deep inner self, the one Jesus created from the beginning:

²⁷ Don't work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

Of course, subconsciously we *all* know it, the uncomfortable truth that we are only after our own needs and wants at the expense of other people and other

needs—hence this desperate grasping attitude towards life. We see it all around us. We are so easily seduced by it. And on the edges of our mind, we know the inconvenient truth, that all things, including ourselves, have a use-by-date on them: our solar system, and indeed the universe as we know it.

We're tempted to think that this truth is too big for us. But it's not. We just have to take the first step, and that's to look at REALITY as it is, and embrace it: that all is vulnerable, all is perishable, all is mortal. But that's ok. It's never the last word.

Then the second step: to say the truth of what we really want; to spell out our true motives, the *WHYS* of our life. Because the one who loves us knows us as we are, knows the powerful seductive pull of these things on our lives:

“Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Jesus knows that not even miracles will do it for us. Knows that when the chips are down, as humans somehow we are hard wired to save ourselves first. That fundamentally, when push comes to shove, we are moved by our stomachs, not higher callings, not ideals.

But Jesus also knows that deep down inside us is someone who is so utterly thirsty and hungry, and it is to that person that he speaks, not the outer person who struggles, who is deaf and blind to his appeals:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

‘Don’t be afraid. I’m speaking to the real you, the imperishable you, the one that does hear, the one that does see, the one that does know what I’m talking about. The one who is better than your worst moments, better than your worst failures. That one.

Etty Hillesum, a cultural Jew deeply endowed with the sort of strong personal faith that Jesus is talking about, the one who gave everyone on the train

to Auschwitz courage to sing, she observes in her Diary written in 12 exercise books (1941-1943):

There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often, stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then [God] must be dug out again. (26 August 1941)

Such a graphic way of putting it. What we have to do.

Father Aloysius Mowe, the *International Director of Advocacy and Communications for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)*, recounts a legend. It is said that at a Headmasters' conference, a Benedictine headmaster was the final speaker. Others had said that at their school they prepared boys for life: at Eton, they prepared boys for government; at Westminster, for the armed forces; at Winchester, for the life of scholarship. And then Dom Paul piped up: "At Ampleforth, on the contrary, our mission is to prepare boys for *death*."

And therein lies a powerful truth, remarks Father Aloysius, that the task of true social teaching is not to amass information, or to satisfy curiosity, or to entertain, but "rather...to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering, and thus to discover what each of us can do about it." What that might mean is captured in one of his deceptively simple thinking routines that he tested on his class:

I would stride through the room, and take the lists of the most important people or things in their life from only half the students, at random, and then, in front of the class, violently rip the papers into shreds. You would be surprised by how emotional some of the children would get at witnessing this ripping apart of their lists. I would then say to them something along these lines: "This is the experience of the refugee, [and so much more]."

But what does it mean this task of true social teaching: *not* to amass information, or to satisfy curiosity, or to entertain, but

“rather...to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering, and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.”

Wow...what an enterprise, what a discipline we are all called to. And it might all have to start with a bit of digging into ourselves, which is not pleasant but necessary, with God to love us and guide us as we dig together with God, and God lovingly in Christ, heals our inner selves. Which is what happened to Etty who was chronically depressed, and was healed, not just for her sake, for the sake of the whole holding camp, and then later the whole train on its way to Auschwitz.

And then, when all is cleared out... What then? What do we do? Is it to pray? Is it to teach? Is it to raise awareness? To raise funds? To quietly work unseen, unrecognised... dispensing gifts of mercy? To help the helpless, the homeless, the poor? To speak for those who cannot speak for themselves? To help our farmers in the drought...financially, in kind. To follow the Holy Spirit's lead, and come alongside those who are in need: to help, to advise, to comfort, to defend?

St Francis named this kind of life ... **the path of descent**, otherwise known as “the way of the cross.” But also the way of freedom.

We become free as we let go of our three primary energy centres:

our need for power and control,

our need for safety and security,

and our need for affection and esteem.

Are you free yet? Am I? Let us help one another to enter into that freedom. And as we find it in our Christian family, maybe we'll be able to share it with the world out there.

And lest we are tempted to think this is a joyless way, this way of Christ, this mind of Christ, this taking into ourselves the suffering of others, then let's dwell on this accredited story of St Francis into our hearts...

One winter day when he and Brother Leo were walking along the road to Assisi from Perugia, Francis called out to Leo in the bitter cold five times, each time **telling him what perfect joy was not**: "Brother Leo, even if a Friar Minor gives sight to the blind, heals the paralyzed, drives out devils, gives hearing back to the deaf, makes the lame walk, and restores speech to the dumb, and what is more brings back to life a man who has been dead four days, write that perfect joy is not in that." And so he continued with different enumerations of success and even spiritual enjoyment. And when he had been talking this way for a distance of two miles, Brother Leo in great amazement asked him: "Father, I beg you in God's name to tell me where perfect joy is then to be found?"

And Francis replied: "When we come to the Portiuncula, soaked by the rain and frozen by the cold, all soiled with mud and suffering from hunger, and we ring at the gate of our friary and the brother porter comes and says angrily: 'Who are you?' and we say: 'We are two of your brothers.' And he contradicts us, saying, 'You are not telling the truth. Rather you are two rascals who go around deceiving people and stealing what they give to the poor. Go away!' and he does not open for us, but makes us stand outside in the snow and rain, cold and hungry until night falls—then if we endure all of those insults and cruel rebuffs patiently, without being troubled and without complaining, and if we reflect humbly and lovingly that the porter really knows us. Oh, Brother Leo, write that perfect joy is to be found there!

"And if we continue to knock and the porter comes out in anger, and drives us away with curses and hard blows saying 'Get away from here! Who do you think you are?' and if we bear it patiently and take the insults with joy and love in our hearts. Oh, Brother Leo, write down that this is perfect joy! . . . And now hear the conclusion: Above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ gives to his friends is that of conquering oneself and willingly enduring sufferings, insults, humiliations, and hardships for the love of Christ." [2]

A Poem by Joel McKerron

An encouragement to freedom...

The Call of the Wild

As the tamed horse
still hears the call of her wild brothers
and as the farmed goose flaps hopeful wings
as his sisters fly overhead,
so too, perhaps,
the wild ones amongst us
are our only hope in calling us back
to our true nature.
Wild ones
who have not been turned to stone
by the far-reaching grasp of the empire

and its programme of consumer sedation,
 the killing of imagination.
 Where, my friends,
 have the wild ones gone?

Our spiritual father, Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), was **a master of making room for the new and letting go** of that which was tired or empty.

He was [always] ready for absolute newness from God and therefore could also trust fresh and new attitudes in himself. His God was not tired, and so he was never tired. His God was not old, so Francis, and we together remain forever young.

All Things New

Neale Donald Walsch [1]

*Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that.
 You cannot hold onto the old, all the while declaring that you want something new.
 The old will defy the new;
 The old will deny the new;
 The old will decry the new.
 There is only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it.*

And this invitation by *Christopher Logue*

‘Come to the edge’,
 He said. They said,
 ‘we are afraid’.
 ‘Come to the edge’,
 He said. They came.
 He pushed them, and
 they flew.

And this prayer, the prayer of St Francis...

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

[Exodus 16.2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78.22-28]

John 6.24-35

²⁴So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum **looking for Jesus.**

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, **you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.**

²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for **the food that endures for eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

²⁸Then they said to him, “What must we do to **perform the works of God?**” ²⁹Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

³⁰So they said to him, “**What sign** are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?” ³¹**Our ancestors** ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³²Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was **not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.**” ³³For the bread of God is that which ³⁴comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵**Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.**”

Ephesians 4.1-16

Unity in the Body of Christ

4 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, **bearing with one another in love**, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, “When **he ascended on high** he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

⁹(When it says, “He ascended,” **what does it mean but that he had also descended**¹⁰ into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹The **gifts** he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to **maturity**, to the measure of **the full stature of Christ**. ¹⁴We must no longer be children, **tossed to and fro** and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by **people’s trickery**, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But **speaking the truth in love**, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

2 Samuel 11.26-12.13a

²⁶When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

Nathan Condemns David

But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, **12** ¹and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.” ⁵Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

⁷Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that

had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. ¹¹Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. ¹²For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” ¹³David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan said to David, “Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. **Psalm 51.1-12**

Prayer for Cleansing and Pardon

To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to **your steadfast love**;
according to your **abundant mercy**
blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is **ever before me**.

⁴**Against you, you alone, have I sinned,**
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are **justified** in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶You desire **truth in the inward being**;^[a]
therefore teach me **wisdom in my secret heart**.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear **joy and gladness**;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put **a new and right**^[b] **spirit within me**.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me **the joy** of your salvation,
and sustain in me **a willing^[a] spirit.**