

## **Easter 6 – “The Joy of Faith” – 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

**Readings: John 14:23-29**

**Acts 16:9-15**

### Introduction

In our faith journeying, who have been the faithful Christian people that have made an impact on our lives? Not the big names like Billy Graham, Mother Theresa or the like, but rather the ordinary, faithful, committed individuals that helped mould the faith we have today. Who are these people?

For me, as I reflected on this question, I realised that it was my mother who helped to form my faith from an early age. Mum died a few years ago but in many ways part of her legacy was the Christian faith she engendered into the family.

As a boy I remember going to church with the family. Oddly enough it was the 7pm evening services that are my first memories of church.

I remember them because I used to put my head on mum’s lap and somehow I’d wake up the next morning in my own bed! So much for the impact of the preacher person!

It was my mother who taught me to pray, who read me Bible stories at bedtime, who forced me to go to Sunday School even when I didn’t want to go there. It was mum who made sure that we said grace before meals, having of course washed our hands, else there wasn’t any food for us – quite an incentive to co-operate!

In later years it was mum who always had her devotional book and Bible either beside her bed or in the top drawer of the dresser by the bed. Mum kept up her prayer and devotional life far better than I’ve ever been able to – such was her faith.

While there were others close by at pivotal faith decision making times in my life it was the faithfulness of my mother that was a constant witness to me about the Christian faith. Oddly enough, we rarely spoke about faith issues as a family, maybe this was a generational issue, but I always knew the depth of mum’s faith.

As we celebrate Mothers’ Day, with all its commercialization to one side, let us remember and give thanks for the important role that mothers have, not only in child-bearing/rearing, but also the social and spiritual nurturing they offer their children. Naturally fathers, grandparents and others come into this as well but today we really do remember our mothers and give thanks for them.

### Middle

In our New Testament readings for this Sunday from the Common Lectionary, the Gospel points us towards the events of Pentecost Sunday in two weeks time. Jesus, talking to his disciples before his death and resurrection gives them words of hope about the future without him:

“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you..”

## John 14: 26

Jesus re-iterated similar words in his meeting with the disciples after his resurrection in John 20:21 & 22 where he said:

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

This is the beginning of the use of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church which comes in fullness on the Day of Pentecost. We’ll talk more about this in a fortnight’s time when this is celebrated in the Church Year. But for today let us see that the Holy Spirit gave new hope to a dejected bunch of disciples, apostles and followers.

The Holy Spirit gave the power to live out faith and to share that faith with others. It gave new joy, new possibilities that God through Christ lives on. Death is conquered, life goes on and we are called to praise God as the Psalmist did in Psalm 67 today.

But how do we encounter God?

I came across a lovely reflection by Aub Podlich in his book “Australian Images” (p 30) where he addresses this question in words titled “The Man Who Saw”. Let me share it with you.

‘Once there was a man who wanted to see God.

So he asked the wise men of his town where he might find God?

‘Go to the forest’, the wise ones said. ‘God is to be found there.’

For many months he tramped the forests in search of God.

He lifted every stone, turned every leaf, examined every flower.

But the more he searched, the more, it seemed, that God was hidden from him.

At last, greatly disappointed, he said: ‘I do not believe I will ever find God. I will content myself with the trees of the forest for they are more beautiful than anything I’ve ever seen.’

He went back to the forest, and no sooner had he sat himself down under a mighty spreading tree, and peered up through its arches and leaves, than he was struck as if by lightning with such an urge to thank someone for such a wonderful sight, that he was powerless before it.

At that very moment his eyes were opened, and the Creator of all stood before him.’

So often we fail to see God before us in nature, creation and in the people around us who care for us and love us. Our eyes are blinkered and we can’t see or don’t want to see God so close by us. In worship, in family, in friends, in relationships, in nature and in life itself! There is God, sometimes dimly revealed, at other times, very, very obvious.

Think again about those that have been crucial in your faith journeying, those that have inspired you, those that have encouraged you. In a real sense they have been God for you at those moments of need.

## Conclusion

The Apostle Paul, was a man changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. On the Damascus road he had an experience of God that changed him from a persecutor of Christians to an amazing Christian evangelist. In Acts 16 we read that he was led to Philippi, for an unknown reason. Yet as he faithfully responded to the leading of the Holy Spirit it became clear. He encountered Lydia, a God-fearing Gentile woman, who came from Thyatira in Asia. Lydia was a manufacturer of the purple dye, extracted from the juice of the madder root that was used particularly in dying carpets and was used until the end of the nineteenth century when chemical dyes overtook these traditional, natural dyes.

Lydia obviously came to the trading centre of Philippi to trade her wares. Hence it was a miracle meeting Paul, hearing him speak about the Christ and having ‘the Lord open her heart’ as Paul spoke. Such was her commitment that she and her household were all baptized.

Lydia became Paul’s first convert in that region, which is now part of Europe. Think today, how many Christians there are in that part of the world – tens of millions in a wide variety of denominational traditions. Such is the power of the Holy Spirit and the strength of faith given to us.

We often forget this – however today let us be reminded of it, encouraged in our faith and be prepared to share the joy of our faith as you never know where it may lead!!

## Prayer

O Holy Spirit, active, fertile, powerful spirit of the living God, blow upon us this day your breath of life.

When our spirits flag and our bodies droop, blow gently upon us, lifting us up, restoring us to your service.

When our spirits grow cautious and cowardly and we are hesitant to speak up and to speak out, blow mightily upon us, filling us with new determination to be faithful to you, giving us a fresh portion of courage, teaching us to step up and say things that we would never say on our own.

When our spirits are dry and dusty and we find ourselves alone and bereft in some desert of a place, blow your holy wind through our death valley, give life to our dry bones, knit us back together and send us again on your way, resurrected, newborn, and empowered for work for you and your kingdom. Amen