

Lastly, at Saint Mary's we have the plans to renew our infrastructure and redecorate the Church in preparation for our bicentenary in 2027. We need this to be at the service of mission as well as a parish centre. How can we best help our local community and help lighten the burdens carried by those in our community? Two particular areas suggest themselves as particularly important:

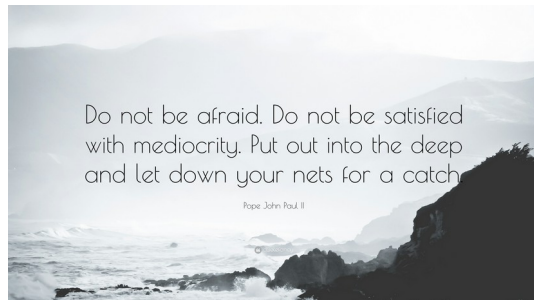
- Child poverty – both materially and spiritually.
- The need for people to find in our parish community support, a listening ear and healing.

So it is an exciting time – but everything is dependant on our own personal sanctity and prayer life. Without prayer, sacrifice and spiritual growth, there will not be a healthy return on the seed that is sown. Some people are older now and retired; or sick and housebound. But everyone can help in prayer.

Asking for money is always a difficult and sensitive area; but at the same time it needs to be done. Not only do we need to support the Bishop's mission appeal but we do need to increase our offertory collection which is too low and is not meeting the cost of our expenses. It is up to everyone to pray and discern about what they are able to give. But our generosity is greatly helped when we realise the great gift we have been given and then greatly desire that it be passed on to others. In the Old Testament, the people had a series of tithes that they made to the Lord – giving ten percent back to the One who had given all to them. St Thomas Aquinas said that if this is the case in the old then how much more is it true of the new covenant. Pray, discern and be generous. I think it was St John Paul II who said that no one is too poor that they cannot give and no one is too rich that they cannot receive.

Let us let Jesus have the last word:

“Duc in Altum – put into the deep.”



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Dear Parishioners

In the Liturgy today we see two different examples of an encounter with the living God. The immediate reaction is one of awe closely followed by a sense of our profound sinfulness in the presence of one who is all holy. This is a constant reaction throughout the bible: we see it on the Mount of the Transfiguration and in the Book of Revelation. Our immediate reaction is to throw ourselves upon our faces with a sense of great awe.

“Woe is me! For I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips.”

“Depart from me for I am a sinful man.”

If there is perhaps one thing most lacking and misunderstood today- it is to possess a healthy fear of the Lord. God is God. God is other. God is all holy. Fear of the Lord is so important:

'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.'  
Proverbs 9:10

'The fear of the LORD is to hate evil'  
Proverbs 8:13

Fear of the Lord does not mean that we are scared of God but as St John Paul II said, “The authentic and full expression of this fear is Christ himself. Christ wants us to have a fear of all that is an offence against God.” We may start by a fear that stops us from sinning because it will lead to hell but this is not enough; we must progress beyond this – we must loth sin because of what it did to Jesus. It was sin that led to Jesus’ torture and death on the cross. This fear is the true beginning of wisdom for we then understand the difference between the creator and the creature.

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We must pray therefore for an encounter with the living God and for his Spirit to purge us of our evil inclinations. This is why Bishop Patrick emphasises that the beginning of our spiritual journey must be an encounter with Jesus.

But God does not leave Isaiah and Peter in a state of fear and wonder but purifies them and tells them not to be afraid. Isaiah is cleansed by the coal from a Seraphim (a prayer that is adapted by the Church for the priest to say before he proclaims the gospel.) Peter is cleansed by the look and words of Jesus. Notice in the Old Testament there is more awesome fear whereas with Jesus it is gentle and invitational. But in both there is the same profound truth that we who are sinners need cleansing and purifying if we are to ever stand in the presence of God.



The good news is that this purifying makes us fully who God created us to be. We then discover that we are made for God and our hearts will be restless until we find him. “Behold this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away.”

The Liturgy then shows us that the good news that Jesus has come to redeem us, forgive us our sins through his death and resurrection is the most important news that there is. Without this news and without encountering Jesus, we will be left in darkness constantly lacking peace and never fulfilling our potential. This is truly good news that Jesus has the power to transform us into the image and likeness of God. We then start on our journey as disciples.

We see that after the encounter and cleansing, both Isaiah and Peter are commissioned now to take the message out – Isaiah is to proclaim conversion to the Israelites and to prophesy about the Messiah to come. Peter is to become a fisher of men.

It is this turning to Mission that Bishop Patrick is asking of us. To go beyond simply serving the people who already come but to reach out to those who need to hear the gospel. This is to be a missionary disciple. This requires a re-orientation and to see that we are all called to mission – each in his own particular way.

Much good work is already happening in our parish in this regard and it can be built upon. But Bishop Patrick has set particular goals for the parishes in his diocese:

- 1) To help children and young people encounter God’s love leading them to become active disciples of Christ Jesus in the life and mission of the Church.
- 2) To help form and support parishioners in their journey to become confident in their call to mission.
- 3) To help free up the clergy so that free from administrative burdens they can concentrate on their mission as pastors, leaders and enablers of mission.



Some of this requires funding and so the **Enabling Our Mission** campaign is a call to help raise funds to meet these objectives. The funds raised will support these objectives whilst also supporting the poor parishes in the diocese.

We will all hear more of these in the coming weeks. Forty percent of the funds raised will be returned to the parish to help their own mission.

