

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

### **A Culture of Giving:**

Over the last couple of weeks there have been various references in the newspapers to Prime Minister John Key's hope that, as New Zealanders, we will become more like the USA and develop a 'culture of giving'. As Christians, this resonates with us because we too talk about giving to those in need, and having compassion for those in our society who are less fortunate than we are. We need to think carefully about Prime Minister Key's dream, however. It could become a step away from the right of all people to enough money to live on, and access to health care and education, which we have assumed to be the rights of all New Zealanders since the days of the great social reformer Michael Joseph Savage. The welfare system he bequeathed to us he called Christianity in Action. As Christians we proclaim the value of each person, and the right of all people to enough to live on. Christianity does not proclaim that the needs of the poor should be met from what is left over after the needs of the wealthy have been met. This is demeaning and does not promote the dignity that we seek for all peoples. So while we say 'yes' to an attitude of generosity and sharing we need to take care that we do not slide away from the question of how we as a society care for those in need collectively, and not just as individuals. We need to ensure that communal wellbeing does not become dependent on individual generosity.

### **Symbols in Action**

Symbols are things that point us toward ideas and values that we hold at a deep level. They can be things such as the silver fern, a kiwi, the national flag, or our Christian cross. They speak volumes without saying a word. Each of us 'knows' in a cluster of thoughts and feelings what they represent for us. Actions can be symbolic too. Sailing a small boat across the bow of a submarine, or singing hymns in places they would not usually be heard. In the next few weeks we have the opportunity to join with people from around the world in two symbolic actions that express our deep concern: 1) Turning off all lights and unnecessary appliances in our homes and places of work at 8.30 pm on Saturday 28th March, and 2) sharing in the 'biggest coffee break'. Oxfam is inviting people to help fight poverty one cup at a time. St Columba is registered as a participant and committed to raising money for this. So you will be asked to pay for your coffee after church if you can during May...start saving now! If you would like more information about either of these initiative speak to Susan.

**'Giving up' that we might have more: a paradox**

We are familiar with the phrase “those who lose their lives will gain them” Henri Nouwen writes “this paradox becomes visible in ordinary situations. If we cling to our friends, we may lose them, but if we are not possessive in our relationships, we will make many new friends. If fame is what we seek and desire, it often vanishes as soon as we acquire it, but if we have no need to be known, we might be remembered long after our deaths. When we want to be in the centre , we easily end up on the margins, but when we are free enough to be wherever we must be, we often find ourselves in the centre.’ Henri J M Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: Reflections for each Day of the Year*. In Ward and Wild, Resources for Preaching and Worship.

The pressure to be busy and in control, and managing things is valued highly in our society. This makes it very difficult for us to ‘let go’, to ‘go with the flow’. Clearly there is balance to be sought between putting in enough time and effort and being over controlling and managing. Without responsible commitment friends feel uncared for and jobs just don’t get done and people feel let down. Too much and we feel pressured and we resist. Relationships are a two way dynamic that require care and balance

## **Evolution and ‘truth’**

This year is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Charles Darwin’s death and 150 years since his book Origin of Species shook up people’s thinking. His theory of evolution, as explaining differences between species and how life developed over time, is in sharp focus during this year. For some, various views of creation by God are seen to be in conflict with evolution. For others, the two stand side by side; one as a scientific explanation based on evidence, and the other as an imaginative story suggesting a way of looking at life and its origins. These represent different ways of thinking about ‘truth’. Over the last 200 years we have come to think that ‘the truth’ is about what actually happened or just the way things are: the facts, that which can be verified. For longer, and alongside that, we have understood ‘truth’ as that which provides insight or resonates with our experience or points to values we might hold. We know that when we say of a novel that it’s ‘true’ – meaning that it reflects something important about life, not that it corresponds to historical facts.

Most scientists and the vast majority of ordinary people now accept evolution; because the more the world is explored the more evolutionary theory is confirmed by data. We can fit God and creation into that, so long as we recognise they are telling us different kinds of ‘truth’. Just as we can also note that some ‘creationists’ take a long view, recognising each ‘day’ of creation could be millions of years, while others stick with the literal six 24 hour days. The latter is hard to reconcile with Darwin’s view; progressive Christianity, however, will tell stories of both evolution and creation, understanding them as presenting two different kinds of truth.

**Thoughts on Prayer for today.**

Prayer is on my mind a lot as a parish priest who is also engaging more and more with the spiritual life of the wider community. Some say prayer is laying our concerns before God and relinquishing them into God's grace. Others say prayer is active engagement: they directly express our intentions and hopes and are uttered in order that some change will come about and that we too will be part of that changemaking. Prayer is an expression of faith that things are not lifeless or inevitable but viable and able to change and be realigned with the positive power of the network of energies and spirit that flows through and connects all beings and things. Prayer is an act of creative confidence. For Christians that confidence is in the promise of God to be amongst us and to be in partnership with us in our endeavours to live well and be a positive influence in our families and communities. This approach is not contra to but is differently expressed from those who declare that that all things are interdependent and what we do, including invoking the power of our mind to bring into awareness our deep concerns, affects all other things. What do you think prayer is? Lent is a great time to slow down and take time to practice prayer if it not part of your daily routine.