

HOMILY FOR THE BLACKTOWN COMMUNITY OF SCHOOLS END OF YEAR MASS

19th December 2016

Judges 13:2-7,24-25, Luke 1:5-25

When we met at the beginning of 2016 I spoke of the term that a visiting archbishop from had used some months before in addressing a meeting of pastors and principals. He talked of the Catholic Church being in a *Franciscan revolution* since the election of .Pope Francis In the context of this revolution I went back to the writings of St Francis to see what he might have said about learning and teaching. St Francis had great reservation about learning. In thirteenth century formal learning was only available to an elite. Knowledge could be power which was the antitheses of the humility for Francis.. Finally, in a brief letter to Anthony of Padua, he agreed to study, on condition that it was in the context of prayer and devotion. The Dominican tradition similarly insisted on a learning underscored by *a search for truth*.

Now if we thought we were living in the *Franciscan revolution* with Pope Francis, the arrival of Vincent Long, O.F.M Conv, that Franciscan revolution has become a *Franciscan tsunami*. Vincent is a breath of fresh air. The totem poles have shifted and the restorationist spirit of recent years, with it penchant for pomp, or as I sometimes call it the *Latin and lace, smells and bells* high Church, has given way to a simpler pastoral emphasis.

When we met as the Blacktown Community of Catholic Schools at the beginning of the year we committed ourselves to learning in the richness of our Catholic tradition. Yes there are spiritualities—*mercy, presentation and patrician*—but what binds us together is the Catholic tradition. A strive to build catholic environment, an environment of faith here the barren world of secularism is nourished by learning that seeks truth.

At the end of this year do you realise that much of what you have been doing has been counter-cultural? Now I am sure that you have all had students who don't want to learn, student who weren't particularly interested in the truth of issues. Sadly as 2016 has unfolded seeking the truth in learning as become more and more counter-cultural. The Oxford Dictionary has declared *post-truth* as the word of the year. It describes this phenomenon as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” The expression first used in 1992 has increased by around 2,000% in 2016 compared to last year.

The classic example of post-truth can be found in the rise of Donald Trump Ironically, as the USA railed against globalisation, the post truth phenomenon went global! Some would say that technology has disrupted truth. “I read it on face book... it must be true”. Journalists speaks of fake news and in this new world everyone has their own facts. Pauline Hanson takes a half hour dive at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef and declares that all is well, no bleaching! 97 % of scientists are convinced that climate change and global warming are real deniers in national leadership declare *coal is king!*

We live, teach and preach in barren fields of secularism and unreflectiveness. But today the Word shows us that God can break through that barrenness when there are people of faith and an environment of faith.

In the first reading we meet Manoah and his wife and the Gospel gives us Elizabeth and Zachariah, both childless couples. Of course in the ancient world barren women could be something of a social outcast. Even today among the Bantu peoples of East Africa, I found, that in the event of the death of a childless woman, her body could not be taken out the door of the house to be buried. Rather it had to be passed through the window. There is the sense that she is a lesser woman.

Over the years of ministry I have been privileged to share the stories of many couples who live with infertility. In the past eight years in Blacktown I have shared the pain of one couple who have waiting nearly twenty years for a family. They are people of faith, here in prayer week by week. Imagine the joy when this year they welcomed twins, a boy and a girl. There is no other type you can have! I ran into them at Kmart on Saturday night with the double pram wadding through the toy department. Like Manoah and his wife, and Elizabeth and Zachary, where there was barrenness, there is life in abundance.

Surely 2016 will flow into 2017. This *post truth* phenomenon may well be a BBQ stopper in this holiday break. As educators and leaders, ours is the task of being counter cultural Labouring in the barrenness of this post-truth world to encourage young minds to seek the truth of issues.

Ours is the privilege of helping young people prepare for a world where the jobs that many will have, have not been invented yet. To encourage fertile minds that brings life to barren parts of our world. And then to give them the tools to make that longest journey of life, from the head to heart and in the context of faith.

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