

Pastoral Letter: Pentecost 2010

Finding Home in Jesus

Bishop Christopher Prowse
Catholic Bishop of Sale

“In you, O Lord, all make their home”
(Psalm 87)

1. OUR CATHOLIC VISION

Jesus Christ declared “I am the way, I am the truth and life” (John 14:6). In true conversion Jesus reveals to us the way in repentance to God, the Father of all mercies. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, “the Lord, the Giver of Life” (Profession of Faith).

This on-going conversion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is truly an experience of FINDING HOME. In encountering Christ, “the pearl of great value” (Matthew 13:46), we discover our deepest humanity.

We encounter Christ in His Body – the Church – especially in our Catholic Sacraments. Our Blessed Mother, Mary, and all the saints – with Mary of the Cross MacKillop – inspire us to praise and serve the Lord. Our Pope, Bishops, priests and deacons guide and serve us all.

Being drawn up in the Trinity, we experience being sent out into the world as missionaries. We JOURNEY TOGETHER as we witness to the Life, Death and Resurrection of the Risen Lord. We do all we can, by prayer and example, to assist our distracted world in FINDING HOME IN JESUS.



2. PASTORAL INITIATIVES

The Catholic Diocese of Sale’s Pastoral Plan (2003-2007) was known as JOURNEYING TOGETHER. There was much discussion and consultation for some years before its publication throughout the diocese. So many were involved. Its enduring contribution has been to place the diocese in a growing missionary awareness.

Some of the fruits of this initiative are as follows: the development of our Youth Ministry, greater regional co-operation, the strengthening and establishment of more Parish Pastoral Councils, special “projects” (e.g. youth, family), parish based sacramental programs. Others have commented on a greater sense of “welcome” deepening in our communities. Our schools, too, developed a Religious Education Curriculum called Journeying Together in Hope. Then some have spoken of a more expansive understanding of a “diocesan and universal perspective” to faith. Some just were delighted to be asked for their opinions on matters of our common Catholic belief.

We are very grateful to the Holy Spirit for these substantial pastoral initiatives of JOURNEYING TOGETHER. As a diocese we need now to move and plan pastorally for the next period of time.

Of course, the wisdom of Pope John Paul II on such matters is forever true. In *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001) ¹ he wrote:

“It is not therefore a matter of inventing a “new programme”. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem.” (n.29)

At the same time, in his Apostolic Letter, Pope John Paul II advis-

es us: “But it must be translated into the pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community.” (n.29)

So the task at hand now for the Catholic Diocese of Sale is to identify a detailed pastoral focus for the years ahead. This would include:

- goals and methods
- formation and enrichment of the people involved
- the search for the necessary resources which will

- Enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people
- Mould communities
- And have a deep and incisive influence in bringing gospel values to bear in society and cultures.” (n.29)



3. OUR MISSIONARY PEOPLE

A heightened missionary focus in the Diocese of Sale is not a recent initiative. Indeed, the frontier days of the diocese offer ample evidence of priests and families as true Catholic missionaries and evangelists.

Over 170 years ago Irish Catholics first established themselves in the Pakenham area. Their family names included Bourke, O’Connor, Hennessy, Mulcahy and Smith. Their priests who visited them included Fr Daniel McEvey and Fr Patrick Bonaventure Geoghegan.

In the late 1850s Catholics in the Tarraville area petitioned for a Church presence in the Port Albert and central Gippsland area after a visit from Fr Philip Kavanagh. Interestingly, the remarkable pioneering priests that followed (e.g. Frs. Verling, Holohan, Courtney, Niall, McGirr, Hayes and Hegarty) described their regions as the Gippsland MISSION. They were required to travel huge distances to visit their parishioners. We hear also of the Bairnsdale and the Warragul MISSIONS. These frontier priests and families worked together to build up the Catholic presence in the diocese. We are so grateful to the Lord for their pastoral efforts. The Irish Catholics were joined by Scottish, Dutch, Italian and Maltese and many others.



Schools have been established in abundance as the diocese has grown. Today over 15,000 students attend our primary or secondary schools. No matter whether the parish is established in the urbanised West of the diocese, or the large regional centres, or the remote rural townships, we can find strong families still very keen to work in with their priests to mature the Catholic presence in a given area.

In more recent years a renewed missionary focus is evident when newer Australians move into the diocese. We can all witness this change in parish life, especially in the Western region of the diocese. So many wonderful Catholics from lands like Sri Lanka, India, Philippines, Africa and Mauritius, and so on, are making a contribution to our Catholic life. They are bringing with them their deep Catholic faith and culture. Zeal for evangelisation and missionary activity is natural to them. For some, their Catholic faith was born in lands where our faith was suppressed or in the minority. So many too are part of various new ecclesial communities and are profoundly devotional in their piety. We have much to learn from them about newer types of evangelisation.

We are blessed to continue our tradition of welcoming priests from overseas. At the same time, we pray fervently for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life from our own local soil.

Finding Home in Jesus



4. A CONTINUAL PENTECOST

The word “new evangelisation” ought not puzzle us. It simply means “to propose once again to human society the entire gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.” (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 18ⁱⁱ). It is Jesus who is the first evangeliser.ⁱⁱⁱ His saving events, culminating in the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, frees us from sin and evil. We are gifted with grace and mercy. We are immersed into the Kingdom of God.

We read our scriptures and immediately notice the difference in the disciples after the Pentecost experience. It is a true conversion experience for them. They become courageous and fearless in professing their faith. They join together in deep communion with each other as the Church grows. In FINDING HOME in the Church community, they are sent forth in the power of the Trinity to assist others in FINDING HOME IN THE RISEN JESUS. They are most attentive to the needs of the poor and suffering. They see the suffering Christ in them.

We can see here inseparable links between personal conversion to Jesus, sacramental life in the Church community, and evangelisation.

We ought pray for a continuous Pentecost in our own lives too for our need is so great.

5. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF CATHOLIC EVANGELISATION

We are living in a golden age of magisterial teaching on evangelisation. We have the treasures of the Vatican II Council documents, the insights of Popes John XXII, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

We witness the examples of holiness in Our Lady of Perpetual Help, our diocesan patroness, and Mary of the Cross MacKillop. We are learning much of evangelisation at the local level via new Catholics involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Various types of prayer groups have much to offer us. The conversion experiences we witness in our youth through the World Youth Days are encouraging.



Through all this, and so much more, we can see the Spirit of the Living God helping people in FINDING HOME IN JESUS. We want to be part of this wonderful movement of the Holy Spirit in our times. We want the Holy Spirit to use us. We want to become real witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus – evangelisers in our Catholic Tradition for our time. This is the Church’s deepest identity.^{iv}

Here are some characteristics to be found in Catholic evangelisers.

1. ALL BAPTISED ARE TO EVANGELISE

Relying totally on the Holy Spirit, all baptised are called to evangelise. This witness varies according to one’s state in life.

As successors of the Apostles, the Pope and Bishops continue the apostolic tradition of teaching, sanctifying and governing the People of God. Priests are their closest co-workers in this task. The Religious Brothers and Sisters are eloquent evangelisers in their consecrated life.

We recognise wonderful lay leaders in our parishes. At the same time, it is the laity whose prime task is the evangelisation of the world. They are “to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility, latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world.” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70^v).

2. WE EVANGELISE ON THREE LEVELS

2.1 TO THE ACTIVE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

All of us have a responsibility to deepen our Catholic faith. Continual Adult Education can help us. To deepen our relationship with the Lord in prayer and our love for the Sacraments and apostolic works requires careful attention. Many opportunities are offered. Even the internet and media can provide us with helpful Catholic websites.^{vi}

Our life in parish communities is rich in opportunities to participate in the life of the Church. We can witness our common faith by participating fully in the liturgical and devotional life of our communities. Our schools also are enriched by the contribution of parishioners. We find there many opportunities for evangelisation and leading people in FINDING HOME IN JESUS.

Practical works of mercy are an essential part of our missionary life. Our outreach in works of justice and mercy are expressions of our love of Jesus who comes to us in the guise of the poor, hungry and unemployed. Strengthening marriage and family life in our troubled times is of particular importance.

2.2 TO THOSE WHO ARE NO LONGER CHRISTIANS

In our secularist world, growing numbers argue today that happiness in life is not dependent on faith. They might be people who grew up in our Catholic life but are now estranged from the living springs of salvation that Christ offers. We may find them in our families, parishes and schools. Often we find them in our workplaces and sporting groups.

By proposing rather than imposing our faith, we are to reach out to them afresh. It may simply be by inviting them to participate in our Christmas or Easter liturgies or faith groups. We hear that many are looking for such invitations and gentle encouragement to come back from unbelief to belief.

Our silent witness of faith is never to be underestimated. As Pope Paul VI has said:

Modern man listens more to witnesses than to teachers, if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (*EN* 41^{vii})

We need to support new ecclesial movements (e.g. prayer groups, often led by migrants). They have special gifts in calling forth renewed faith in those yearning to find a home in Jesus and His Church. Let us learn from them and participate in their outreach. New types of “Missions” and “Retreats” are emerging in our midst. They are signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the principal agent of evangelisation (*EN* 75^{viii}).



Finding Home in Jesus



2.3 TO THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER BEEN CHRISTIAN.

We need new ways to express our Catholic faith – “new in its ardour, methods and expression”^{ix} to reach out to those who are not Christian.

Catholic evangelisation is noted for its subtlety of proposing and never imposing or proselytising. But we must never be afraid of proposing Christ in the new cultural circumstances of humanity. The content of our faith remains the same, but the context to which assist others in FINDING HOME IN CHRIST does change. As Pope Paul VI states:

For the Church, evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.” (EN 18 x)

6. OUR FUTURE FOCUS

The diversity of the communities present in Gippsland and beyond are as varied as our beautiful scenery. Geographically, our parishes are becoming mission centres once again. But now our efforts are directed towards dense urban centres in the West, rural regional centres and somewhat remote country towns in east, south and central Gippsland.

Then there are other levels of our shared humanity – social and cultural. We are to bring Christ to the worlds, for example, of sport, science, medicine, youth, finance, retail, entertainment, migrants, poor, communications, peace, meaning, business and so on.

According to the teaching of Pope John Paul in *Redemptoris Missio*^{xi} these areas are among the new fields of evangelisation emerging before us.

There can be no doubt that we are Catholics through the grace of God and the nurturing in the faith we have received from our families and so many others. For this we must be forever grateful. We have been evangelised by people. We are being evangelised daily because our need is great and Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, never stops drawing closer to us. Our Pope, Bishops, Priests and Deacons are forever present to us to guide and strengthen us in our missionary Church.

But this is only half the story. The evangelised are to take their part in evangelising. How has this taken place already? Although our terminology may be different to what we have been familiar with to date, the reality is surely the same. Namely, God is using us to assist people in FINDING HOME IN JESUS.

How can we open ourselves to allow the Lord Jesus, the first evangeliser, to use us more completely in the future? We are to serve the further opening out of the Kingdom of God in our midst^{xii}. But the world today seems so complicated and sophisticated. At the same time, recent Papal teaching and examples of evangelisation have opened new doors for us.

Jesus used the humble YES of the Virgin Mary to begin His entry into our world in the Incarnation. He has used countless saints and men and women of profound holiness, like Mary of the Cross MacKillop, to allow the Holy Will of God to come about. We pray that Jesus will continue to use us all. Pope Benedict XVI comments that it all begins with our fundamental encounter with the God of love, Jesus Christ.

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.^{xiii}

Pragmatic Australians may respond to this challenge by asking “What ought we do?” It is a good question and needs to be raised. But a deeper challenge may need to be asked simultaneously: “What ought we be?” This latter question requires a more contemplative response. Deep prayer is the soul of all true missionary action.

Over the next period of time, I ask all of us in the Diocese of Sale

to respond on both these levels. So the question becomes: “In the Diocese of Sale, what ought we BE and DO to respond afresh to the challenges of presenting the Good News of Jesus Christ in our times and in our place?”

Or again: “How can we co-operate with the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our times in helping people in FINDING HOME IN JESUS?”

The word “home” suggests such great inner yearnings in the human heart. The Psalmist says: “In you, O Lord, all make their HOME”^{xiv}. Our deepest stirrings know that to be true. By what methods and by what motivations can we make that inner truth more of a reality in our world?

So let us all discuss prayerfully the issues this pastoral letter raises. I encourage this to take place across the diocese in family, parish and schools, regional communities and work place, in the silence of our hearts and in our prayers.

You may find the questions attached to this letter a help in such discussions.

I finish with a prayer to bless our discussions in the times ahead.

Heavenly Father,

You are great and almighty.

Guide us and lead us.

We want to follow you in the Diocese of Sale as our leader in evangelisation.

Send you Holy Spirit upon our discussions as we follow humbly your promptings.

May Our Lady of Perpetual Help, our patroness,

Lead us to the Father of all mercies.

We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour.

AMEN



References:

- i *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Apostolic Letter, Pope John Paul II, 2001
- ii *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Apostolic Exhortation, Pope John Paul II, 2001
- iii *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Paul VI, 1975, 7.
- iv *Ibid.*, 14
- v *Ibid.*, 70
- vi *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 21
- vii *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41
- viii *Ibid.*, 75
- ix *Veritatis Splendor*, Encyclical Letter, Pope John Paul II, 1993, 106.
- x *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18
- xi *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, 1990, 37-38
- xii *Redemptoris Missio*, 12-20
- xiii *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical Letter, Benedict XVI, 2005, 1
- xiv Psalm 87

Finding Home in Jesus

Questions for Reflection

*“In you, O Lord, all make their home”
- (Psalm 87)*

1. OUR CATHOLIC VISION

- 1.1 How would you describe “our deepest humanity”?
- 1.2 When have you felt most strongly that you were sent out as a missionary to the world?
- 1.3 Explore what it means to “find a home in Jesus”.

2. PASTORAL INITIATIVES

- 2.1 What are you most grateful for about Journeying Together?
- 2.2 What “goals and methods” do you see as important means of achieving “a detailed focus for the years ahead”?
- 2.3 What “formation and enrichment of the people involved” are required to achieve and sustain these goals?

3. OUR MISSIONARY PEOPLE

- 3.1 Recall some examples from your own experience “of priests and families as true Catholic missionaries and evangelists”.
- 3.2 What differences do you think “the Catholic presence” makes to the area you live in?
- 3.3 What memories do you have of the Scottish, Dutch, Italian, Maltese and others joining your community?
- 3.4 In what ways has your family worked with priests to develop the Catholic presence in your area?
- 3.5 What can we learn about “being Catholic” from people whose origins are countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Philippines, Africa and Mauritius?
- 3.6 In what ways can you help to foster vocations to the priesthood and the religious life?

4. A CONTINUAL PENTECOST

- 4.1 How would you explain the word “evangelisation” to those who are not familiar with it?
- 4.2 Where do you see the Church being “most attentive to the needs of the poor and suffering”?
- 4.3 Think about someone whom you believe to be a Spirit-filled person. How does their life show this?

5. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF CATHOLIC EVANGELISATION

Think of someone you know who has had a conversion experience, or is seeking God in new and deeper ways. What do you think led to this change?

5.1. ALL BAPTISED ARE TO EVANGELISE

- 5.1.1 How can baptised people show that they take seriously, their call by God to evangelise others?

5.2 WE EVANGELISE ON THREE LEVELS

A TO THE ACTIVE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

- 1. How do you deepen your relationship with God?
- 2. Reflect on how engaging in practical works of mercy benefits both the giver and the receiver.



- 3. In what ways can marriage and family life be strengthened?

B TO THOSE WHO ARE NO LONGER CHRISTIANS

- 1. What do you think stops people from returning to the practice of their faith?
- 2. Recall an example of someone who returned to the practice of their faith. What brought about this change?
- 3. What do you think attracts people to becoming Catholics?
- 4. What is the difference between “proposing rather than imposing our faith”? Why is it such an important distinction?
- 5. Think of someone who influenced your growth in faith. How did their lives reveal their faith?
- 6. In what ways can joining a parish prayer group or making a retreat support your faith?
- 7. Why do you think more people do not take up these opportunities?

C TO THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER BEEN CHRISTIAN

- 1. Why is it true that we need “new ways to express our Catholic faith... to reach out to those who are not Christian”?
- 2. What are some examples these new ways “new in ardour, methods and expression”?
- 3. What are the new “mission centres” today?
- 4. In what ways can you “bring Christ to the(se) worlds”?

6. OUR FUTURE FOCUS

- 6.1 Why is it essential that we consider: “How can we open ourselves to allow the Lord Jesus, the first evangeliser, to use us more completely in the future?”
- 6.2 How can we follow the legacy of Mary MacKillop in our own lives and foster it in the diocese?
- 6.3 What is my response to the question: “In the Diocese of Sale, what ought we BE and DO to respond afresh to the challenges of presenting the Good News of Jesus Christ in our times and in our place?”
- 6.4 What is my response to the question: “How can we co-operate with the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our times in helping people in FINDING HOME IN JESUS?”
- 6.5 Reflect on the richness of the word “home.”
- 6.6 How can we lead people in our world to find their home in Jesus?