

Mass of Thanksgiving

Warrnambool - 8/12/74.

Fr. D. Dwyer, S.J.

HOMILY

Its a great privilege to be able to celebrate this Mass of Thanksgiving in my home town Warrnambool. Warrnambool has been for me, as it has for all of us who have grown up here, the place of God's special providence for us.

And as I reflect, in gratitude, on the ways God has touched me, with both His tenderness and His power, I give thanks firstly for my family. It is from them I received the security, affection and faith that has brought me to where I am today. Undoubtedly the most influential person in my life has been my Father. To me he has been both Father and friend, and I know that I have grown very much in his image, and that, I am both grateful and proud to be. My late Mother, Grace, like all good Mothers, often worried about her children and especially me, and I regard it as no accident that my Ordination fell on the 14th anniversary of her entry into the fullness of life.

I think in a way we Dwyer's have been spoiled, because we have been given a second Mother in Vera, who is as close and dear to us as our Mother, Grace. My Sister, Joan, and I are close friends, and she has been a great support to me. Since joining the Jesuits it has not been possible to see as much of my Brother, Jim, as I would have liked, but as boys we were always together, and he has influenced me in more ways than I know. As a school boy I never really settled down to study, but in my last year at school I remember him telling me briefly but sternly, that it was time I applied myself. I have never failed a subject since.

The second group of people to whom I am so deeply grateful, are you my relatives and friends, who have stood by me over the years and do so again today. Even those of you who find it difficult to understand what I am doing, have believed in me too deeply to let that interfere with our friendship.

The other people to whom I owe so much are my Jesuit Brothers. They are an amazing group of men, who manage to combine a profound spiritual vision with an active life, a plurality of life styles with community and an intellectual rigour with a compassion that has taken them to every country on earth. Even at this moment hundreds of them are in prisons around the world because they have sided with human dignity against governments who have institutionalized oppression and poverty. They are men who put themselves into the words they pray daily in the Lord's Prayer:

Thy Kingdom Come

though they recognize and celebrate daily the fact that the Kingdom is brought into being by God's powerful presence at work, and that it is breaking through in all men of good will.

And now I would like to share with you a few insights that lie at the heart of my priesthood.

A number of people have said to me: if only our faith was not so complicated. Well, as the First Reading suggests, it is really quite simple:

The word is very near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart.

Whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, we are either faithful to God as He reveals Himself and find life, or we reject Him and die. The repeated message of the Old Testament is - I offer you life or death. We either readily and simply receive God's life among us, or we settle for something less than God, some idol that we can live comfortably with, and that confirms both our prejudices and mediocrity. But when we open ourselves to the Living God we move beyond the stereotyped living of radical or conservative, old or young, management or labour, masculine or feminine, and recognize that whatever our temperament, age, job or sex, we live constantly from the creative power of God who is calling us all to new possibilities, and finally to the greatest possibility of all - Himself.

In the Second Reading we are told that in Jesus God has stepped into the confusion of life and loved us as we are never quite able to

love one another. And His presence in our midst is not some spiritual luxury for these with leisure and a retiring temperament, but it is a response prompted in those with a taste for the reality of their own lives and of the world.

Another way of looking at our faith is simply to recognize that we have no choice as to whether we will believe or not, it is simply a matter of what we believe in. To believe in Latin is *Crede* - which consists of two words *Cor* and *Dare* and means to give the heart. Thus it is simply a question of to whom or to what do you give your heart.

And if people, especially the young, find our God uninteresting it is usually because we have so tamed and domesticated Him that they rightly reject such an idol. So if we are to deepen and pass on the faith; and we are talking now of passing on life itself, for it is to this that priests and religious dedicate their lives, we do not need to be so concerned with defending our faith, but rather with being more faithful to it. For people can see in our faces the God we believe in, and we must show them the Living God who loves us without conditions.

I ask you all to pray for me as I begin my priestly life, that it will be a life fruitful for others. I know that it will require the same amount of sensitivity, generosity, self-discipline and love as does a good marriage.

And I pray for you all that the Lord will bless you and keep you, and that His face will shine on you, so that you will experience His peace and His love.