

***We are first called and
Moved by the very Love that
Lives within us***

“The love of Christ overwhelms us”
(2 Corinthians 5:14)

Last Sunday, 43 Year 11 girls were anointed and commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist in our school chapel. During their preparation for this ministry, we spent much time reflecting on what lies at the heart of this, and in fact any ministry, and that is, a deep, sometimes unarticulated sense of God drawing us. The words above, written by theologian and poet, Edwina Gateley, and St Paul’s words to the people of Corinth so long ago, are really what it is all about. Whether we are able to clearly express it this way or not, it is this reaching–out of God to us, this grace, this outpouring of Divine love into our hearts that in fact does draw us to any form of service and commitment. Ministry is about responding to this when we become aware of it. We are moved and drawn to offer ourselves to serve.

We spoke about how being a Minister of the Eucharist is very much part of their spiritual journey. It is as much about who they are as what they will do in the carrying out of this role. Coming together in ministry it is important to become aware of our own ‘God-moments’, those experiences that have touched us and revealed to us that we are indeed living in the presence of a great Love, a Love that grasps us and leads us – if we will let it!

Edwina Gateley is a woman who has spent many years in ministry, from Africa to the streets of Chicago where she has worked with prostitutes. At the heart of her spirituality is a deep listening for God. At one point in her life she spent a year living in solitude in a forest in America. There she learned to really listen, to intimately know God’s love in the midst of all the struggles that can emerge in a life lived in solitude. As she quietened the voice of her own ego and was able to listen, she discerned God’s call to her, and from that emerged her ministry to the prostitutes on the streets of Chicago. Edwina’s words, in her poem *Memories*, speak so beautifully of something that is often difficult to put into words – that deep sense of being touched, awakened, called:

It was here, in this great and grey Cathedral
That you surprised and captured me –
A child in school tie and blazer
Held awestruck by the vast silence
And cool dampness of these pillars and
Frescoed walls,
Gold angels’ wings, set in rows against a
Thousand stars,
Virgins, saints, and martyrs clasping lilies and
Jeweled staffs ...

And there, hanging before me by the
Fourth pew,
The great silent crucifix bearing

Down and breathing upon me
Its lonely mystery.
Statues solid and secure, speaking
Calm and peace
To my staring eyes seeking to
Catch them out in movement.

Massive sacred altar for the blessed!
How I loved the ritual and the liturgy
Its incomprehensible movements and language –
Secret cult of which I was a silent part.
And this great grey cathedral
Was mine!
Mine to wander in and be amazed
Mine to cry and whisper in
Awed by a mighty sense of being.

It was here, in this great grey cathedral
That you surprised and captured me.
It was here
So young, so naïve, and so ready to love
That you stole from your shadows

Upon me
Clasped me
And whispered from the great stones and pillars
Echoing past the rows of angels' wings
And reaching out from the sacred altar.

Yes, it was here, here

That you broke through your splendid fortress
And bent to kiss
An amazed and wondering child.

Elsewhere, Edwina writes that, "We who have received the love of Christ through the spirit cannot contain it. It must reach out to others, spilling out and touching the world in which we live". This Sunday is the last Sunday of the Church Year, the Solemnity of Christ the King. As we will see this Feast speaks most powerfully to the heart of this ministry.

At first glance such a Feast may seem outdated and rather strange in a world which prizes democracy and is largely rather critical of the trappings of the monarchy where it continues to exist today. But this is no ordinary 'king' or 'kingship'! In fact, it is a subversive kingship. It turns the expected order of things upside down.

But first a little background to this Feast. It was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI at a time when the world was, as he expressed it, suffering under the false leaders of consumerism, free-market exploitation, nationalism, secularism and mass injustice. So the Pope wrote an encyclical, *Quas Primas*, in which he envisioned “dominion by a King of Peace who came to reconcile all things, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister”. Originally it was celebrated in October but was later moved to the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, the last Sunday of the Church year. So we end the liturgical year with a focus on the kingship of Christ and we begin the new Church year with the season of Advent, the time of waiting, the time of preparing our hearts to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, the expected kingly figure. The Hebrew word *Meschiah* (Messiah) is the same as the Greek term *Christos* (Christ) – they both mean ‘the anointed one’. Jesus, acknowledged by some of the Jews of the time as the Messiah, and later named the Christ, is the One they awaited, the One they believed God would send to save Israel from its enemies, from oppression and suffering. But Jesus was not quite the powerful political and royal figure they anticipated. The ‘saving’ Jesus did was from enmity, hostility, corruption, lack of forgiveness, violence, self-centredness, from anything that obscures love, from anything that is an obstacle in the way of relationships of justice, dignity, respect, fairness, life for all. The freedom this king brings is thus the lifting of the burden of wrongdoing, of wrong attitudes and practices. It is the freedom to live in the light of God’s love and God’s vision for the world. This kingdom is one of right relationships. It is a kingdom brought into being by those who day by day are born of God through living in love and righteousness.

Moreover, this is a king who leads by serving. He washes his disciples’ feet, much to their astonishment. He invites James and John to drink from the cup of which he will drink, in response to their mother’s request that they be seated one at his right hand and one at his left. There is no granting of favour and privilege by this king. In his kingdom the privileged are the poor, the forgotten, the rejected, for love and justice will be shown to them. Those who bring about this kingdom are the humble, the peace-makers, the merciful, the righteous, those who feed the hungry, visit the sick, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger. This is a king who dines with sinners whether they be rich or poor, and who welcomes those who are scorned. His most sumptuous meal, the one he has left us with, is bread and wine. He was mocked and ridiculed and the end of his life was a degrading death, a death reserved for the scum, the law-breakers, the dissidents. He was stripped naked and publicly humiliated. This is hardly the profile of kingship as we understand it!

It is indeed a subversive kingship which invites us to make the same about-turn in our own lives. And this is where it has much to say to those who take on a ministry in the Church. During the ceremony on Sunday our new Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist were called by name, and were invited to make a significant commitment: not only to give their time by participating in our Friday morning Communion Services each week, preparing and leading them and serving in other liturgical ways throughout the year, but they were also asked to make a commitment to living a Gospel-centred life. They expressed their willingness to grow in justice and love, to care for the poor, to work towards right relationships, and so to be themselves the ‘bread of life’ given for others. They were asked to deepen their prayer, in the recognition of their need of spiritual nourishment, strength, guidance and the quiet listening to God’s whisper in their hearts as they live out this call in the daily realities of their lives. What a significant and beautiful step taken by sixteen and seventeen year old young women! As it is for any of us choosing to live a Gospel-centred life, we will not always measure up. We will make mistakes and take a few wrong turns from time to

time. But what matters is the 'coming-back'. What matters is our desire to grow into people of justice and love and service, and our willingness in the face of so much else that screams at us today, to make this our orientation.

The Solemnity of Christ the King also sets before us most powerfully the depths of our own human nature that we are called to plumb, to set free, to give life to. Both spiritual writer Ronald Rolheiser and depth psychologist Carl Jung have something to offer us here. In a reflection on Christ the King, Rolheiser elaborates for us on what this kind of 'good' king is: this is a king who is strong enough to be weak, who has a heart big enough to accept pettiness, cares enough to accept humiliation, is faithful enough to do what is right even when it is misunderstood. A good king is "selfless enough to absorb selfishness, loving enough to be gracious towards what's bitter, and forgiving enough to bless what's killing him". He "makes those around him feel safe ... carries others rather than ask them to carry him ... feeds others rather than feeds off them and ... affirms others rather than asking them to affirm him". And this particular 'good king' is right at the heart of who we are. This is what we are called to give life to and grow into if we are to fulfill our potential as human beings. Carl Jung said that we all need to cultivate this kind of kingly 'energy' in order to develop fully as human beings. He spoke of the so-called archetype of the King. Jung believed that the need to become authentic 'kings' is embedded in our human nature. In Jung's theory this energy is the foundation of our deepest and truest selves and the rest of our character is organized around this deepest self. This deepest self, this 'kingly' nature, is the source of order, security and well-being for the 'realm' over which we govern - all that makes up our lives and the people entrusted to our care. In other words, our very concrete choices and actions, our way of being present in the world, our relationships, our daily 'business', will all take shape from this deepest 'kingly' self.

This resonates with our Judaeo-Christian founding mythology. The primary understanding of human nature as expressed in the mythology of the Book of Genesis is that we are made in God's image. It is this image of God that we see come to full and undistorted expression in Jesus: "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19). And it is in Jesus that we are able to see the kingly archetype of which Jung speaks and the 'good king' described by Rolheiser. In the person and life of Jesus we see service, humility, love, forgiveness, faithfulness - all those characteristics of the 'good king', in fact all that we understand to be 'the face of God', the image and likeness of God in human form. When we ourselves attain a kingly nature we will look very much like the Jesus of our Gospel stories. We will, as St Paul counsels, take on the mind of Christ (1Corinthians 2:16), and think and act and make the same kind of life-giving and loving choices that we see him make. We will give expression to our deepest identity as made in God's image.

So this Feast asks us a most important question: are we willing to be fashioned in Christ's likeness? As Pius XI said in his encyclical, Christ is inviting each of us to become "instruments of justice unto God". This means healing the world, restoring broken relationships, working to alleviate poverty and deprivation, in other words co-creating with God to bring about the harmony of God's own vision. A world of love, justice, joy - a kingdom of life for all! It will not always be easy living this way. And this is where the cross appears. There was no kingly throne for Jesus, only the cross. And so it will be for us too. We will be judged, laughed at, seen to be foolish. But there is a desperate need for this foolishness in our world. As St Paul said, the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of this world! (1Corinthians 1:25) And that is why during our ceremony on Sunday the girls were anointed, blessed and presented with a cross. The cross calls us to be faithful in the midst of

struggle. When all around us may seem to draw us in other directions, the cross, as Edwina says, speaks its silent Mystery. It reminds us that we are called to open ourselves to the Mystery we name 'God'. It reminds us that deep within each of us is a bottomless well of love and goodness. And it reminds us that we are asked to give shape and form to this love and goodness no matter where it may lead us.

Let Your God Love You.
Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty.
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God loves you.
With an enormous love.
And only wants
To look upon you
With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.
Let your God –
Love you.
Edwina Gateley

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