

3c

When I was ordained it was the custom to have a few hundred little cards printed in remembrance of one's ordination - to be distributed among family and friends. The card had a verse of Scripture written on it associated with one's future ministry as a priest. Well, the verse of scripture which I chose is taken from today's gospel - *'He sent me to bring good News to the poor.'*

I ask myself from time to time how I am fulfilling these words. Just as the Spirit anointed Jesus to spread the Gospel, priests, on the day of their ordination are also anointed to do the same. Last week I spoke about the vocation of marriage and how a relationship has to be worked at. Preaching the Gospel as a priest also has to be worked at. One gifted preacher described it as 95% perspiration and 5% inspiration.

Gospel means 'good news'. Shouldn't people be overjoyed to hear it? Not necessarily. The Gospel is not everyone's cup of tea, especially for those who are unwilling to live it. The good news is about a message of salvation for the poor in spirit. But not everyone wants to be poor in spirit which is the exact opposite of being spiritually impoverished. The poor in the Gospel sense are aware of their need of God. Some people on the other-hand feel smug and self-sufficient and prefer to shut God out of their lives. Some even boast about it. The temptation to which our first parents succumbed was precisely that – to be God's equal and thereby make Him superfluous.

The book of psalms puts it like this: "my soul is thirsting for God the God of my life'. A few years ago Pope Benedict wrote, "Driving God from the landscape of our lives and indeed our wider society is a form of repression which causes harm to our innermost selves". Repression in any form is bad. Sigmund Freud told us as much. Repressing our religious sense won't do us any good, spiritually or mentally.

He also said: “smugness can also be a stumbling block to us hearing the gospel’. He goes on: “It causes our hearts to be closed and insensitive to the novelty of God”. Getting to know God is like climbing a mountain – there are always new vistas to be seen the closer you get to the summit.

Another aspect of the Good News is that it needs to have an immediate efficacy and resonate with my present life situation. Old news is no news.

God wants His Word to come alive in me today even as I listen. If the gospel is good news, it's not only the **good** part of the news which is important but also the **new** part. We say in the 'Our Father' "Give us this day our daily bread" - not 'leftovers' from yesterday. So it begs the question: "What is Our Lord saying to me today in this Mass after having listened to His Word? What new thing is God asking me to do in my present life situation?

Well, the first thing He wants me to do is what Jesus himself did - close the bible, sit down, listen and reflect on it in silence. Then pray that God's Word will bear fruit in my life.
