

3C

When I was ordained it was the custom to have a few hundred little cards printed on the occasion of my ordination which were then distributed among family and friends. Written on the card was a verse of Scripture 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 good marriages don't surface overnight – they take time to mature. Preaching the Good News of the gospel as a priest also has to be worked at. One missionary priest described it as 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration.

Since the gospel is '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 shy about living 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 not the same as being spiritually impoverished. The poor in the Gospel sense are aware of their need of God. Some people on the other-hand come across as preferring to leave God on the side-lines. Some even regard this as a positive step in their lives. But they are mistaken.

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 being". Repression in any form is bad. Sigmund Freud told us as much. Repressing our religious sense will have negative effects for us both 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 as it did for Jesus. 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? Am I up for it?

Well, the first thing He wants me to do is what Jesus himself did at Nazareth - close the bible, sit down and then listen and reflect on it in silence. Then there's a better chance that God's Word will come alive for me even as I listen.