

3C

When I was ordained it was the custom to have some little cards printed 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 was 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 but have to be worked at. Preaching the Gospel Sunday after Sunday also has to be swatted over. One priest described it as 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration, and I think he's right.

Since the gospel is 'good news', shouldn't people be overjoyed on hearing it? Not necessarily. The Gospel is not everyone's cup of tea, especially for those who shy away from 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 the opposite of being spiritually impoverished. The poor in the Gospel sense are aware of their need of God. But our overly secularised world tends to leave God out of the equation. Or as one politician famously put it "we don't do God".

A few years ago Pope Benedict wrote, "Driving God from the landscape of our lives and indeed wider society is a form of repression which causes harm to our souls". Repression in any form is bad. Sigmund Freud told us as much. Repressing our religious sense will also have negative effects for us both spiritually and mentally.

He also said: "smugness or complacency 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, he says, 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 us today even as we 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? What new thing is God asking me to do in my present life situation? Even though Pope Francis is well into his 80's his energy knows no bounds in opening up new vistas for the Catholic Church in our time.

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