

Good news to the poor

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 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 it has to be worked at, being heralds of the gospel as priests also has to be worked at.

Gospel means 'good news'. Shouldn't people be overjoyed to hear it? Well, yes and no. The Gospel is not everyone's cup of tea, especially for those who are reluctant 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. The temptation to which our first parents succumbed was precisely that – to be god's equal and thereby eliminate Him.

In the psalms it says: "my soul is thirsting for God the God of my life'. Those should be our sentiments as well. The Holy Father writes in one of his many books, pushing God towards the margins 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. Repressing our religious sense can cause mental instability.

Last year the Pope Benedict said that "smugness can also be a stumbling block to us hearing the gospel'. The Holy Father goes on: "This makes their hearts 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 it needs to have an immediate efficacy about it and resonate with my present situation. You remember that song: 'the streets of London' where it says: "have you seen the old man in the closed down market, carrying yesterday's paper telling

yesterday's news." Well, old news is no news.

God wants His Word to come alive in us today even as we 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? What is God asking of me to do in my present life situation?"

Well, the first thing He wants us to do is what Jesus himself did - close the bible, sit down and reflect on it in silence. Then pray that God's Word will bear fruit in our lives and be fulfilled even as we listen.

QUESTIONS

- 1. Do priests undermine their authority and effectiveness as ministers of God by being too familiar with certain parishioners or portraying himself as 'one of the boys'? Discuss*
- 2. The Pope emeritus said that 'smugness can be a stumbling block to us hearing the Gospel and facing up to its challenges. What do you think he meant? Discuss*
- 3. Why is the proclamation of the Gospel good news for some and not for others? Discuss*
- 4. Should lay people suitably trained be allowed to preach in church? Discuss*
- 5. There is a world of difference between 'poor in spirit' and being 'spiritually impoverished'. Discuss*