

MISSION IN HORSHAM

St Michael and St John's Parish, Horsham recently welcomed back Fr Richard Leonard SJ for a three-day mission. Fr Richard had given a mission two years ago which was very well received so we invited him back to speak again. This year the mission was just prior to the beginning of Advent so we were challenged to reflect and be prepared.

Fr Richard also facilitated a school closure day for teachers from St Patrick's Nhill, St Mary's Warracknabeal, OLHC Murtoa and St Michael and John's Horsham. Approximately fifty-five teachers attended the day. Fr Richard spoke on the topic '**Catholic Identity: Jesus, Choosing and Mission**'.

The heart of the gospel is love, sharing of God's love with all. Love of God, love of self and love of neighbour. We must be connected to those around us, to encourage people to come to church we must be connected to them. Students need to have hope.

Fr Richard spoke at the Masses over the weekend and then began the Mission each morning with Mass. There was a session in the morning and a repeat session in the evening. There was a great attendance with about one hundred and twenty people attending each day. Fr Richard spoke on the following themes.

Living the Gospel of Joy

Pope Francis calls all the church to live our faith, hope and love with joy. This is not a supercilious joy that pretends that we don't have a care in the world. It is the assurance of a faith that calls us to go out to the world confidently because we know where we have come from, why we are here, and where we are going. This parish mission explored the essential need that we go out with faith, hope and joy.

Day 1: "Jesus Christ for us and with us right here, right now"

A sane approach to Jesus. Without Christ there is no Christianity. As we witness to Christ, however, we need to make sure the Lord we proclaim is not pious or fundamentalist. We explored how rich our tradition is in regard to Christ and how we are sent out as members of his family. We began by exploring the genealogy of Jesus in quite a unique manner and learning about the many interesting people in his family tree. The gospels paint four portraits of Jesus. Jesus in action is to see God in action.

Day 2: "Why bother Praying?"



This session explored how our tradition is endlessly interesting in naming the context, images, types and styles of praying. Catholic schools are meant to be prayerful places where we teach others how to pray, so we better get clear on how deep and rich Catholic prayer can be. (Based on the book "Why Bother Praying?") In the Christian spiritual life, one is called to be on a pilgrimage of faith. "Prayer is asking an unchanging God to change me." "Prayer is making space for God to love us, for us to hear that, and then through the community of faith, to have the courage to return the compliment". It changes lives! The best prayers engage our vivid imagination. One size does not fit all. We need to explore all of the diverse ways of praying. Some prayer is better than no prayer.



Fr Richard shared the following prayer written by Rev Dr John Bell, Iona Community, Scotland

“Light looked down and saw the darkness.

“I will go there,” said light.

Peace looked down and saw war.

“I will go there,” said peace.

Love looked down and saw hatred.

“I will go there,” said love.

So he,

the Lord of Light,

the Prince of Peace,

the King of Love,

came down and crept in beside us.”

Day 3: “What are we doing on earth for Christ’s Sake?”

Going out to the world is not for the faint-hearted. These days many people think we are nuts for believing in the Father, Son and Spirit. How do we hold and proclaim a sensible and joyous religious faith, and confidently impart it to our friends and neighbours, even in the face of serious, secular opposition? (based on the book of the same name).

We need to take God out to the world. We need to engage with and have dialogue with the world. Seek the common ground. We must practice what we preach; love and care for the poor. We were challenged to “do something for someone!”

Over the three days we laughed, we cried and above all we were challenged.

Lesley Price – Horsham Parish