
**Homily for Mass for Commissioning of New Principals
at Horsham, 5.30 pm, February 19, 2014**

A few weeks ago I saw a show on TV with some replays featuring Ronnie Corbett. In one of the segments, he played an optometrist who had opened a restaurant but couldn't quite leave the habits of the optometrist behind.

The opening scene showed a couple sitting at a table in his restaurant and Ronnie coming up to them as the waiter. He has a towel over his arm such as we might associate with a waiter but he is still wearing his white coat from his days as an optometrist. The couple ask if they could see the menu. Ronnie says, "Certainly!" and he produces a large card that has the menu written on it.

Then he says, "I'll just take a few steps over this way now and we'll see how you go." He moves a few paces away and then he holds up the menu card and says, "Now, I'd like you to tell me which lines you can read from there." The couple strain to see the menu from a few metres away and they manage to work out the headings: Entrees, Main Course and Deserts. Then Ronnie Corbett says, "That's a good start. Now I'll gradually move closer and I'd ask you to tell me when you can read the lines under the 'Entrees' heading." As you might imagine, at that rate it took them quite a while to order their meal.

Why do I mention this story about Ronnie Corbett as the optometrist? Because it may help us appreciate the story in our gospel this evening.

In this passage from the gospel according to Mark, we read of Jesus healing a man who was blind. But it's not an instant cure. Rather, it's like a visit to an optometrist who tests the person's eyes and tries out various lenses to find just the right lenses so that the person can see clearly. First of all Jesus takes the blind man by the hand and leads him to a quiet spot outside the village. Jesus touches the man's eyes and lays his hands on him and asks "Can you see anything?" The man, who is beginning to see, answers, "I can see people, but they look like trees walking about." Jesus lays his hands on the man's eyes again and he begins to see clearly. Finally he sees everything plainly and distinctly. The fact that Jesus cures the blind man *gradually* is a key point of this story.

In the verses just before this evening's text we read of Jesus speaking with his disciples to help them understand the meaning of his miracles. But the disciples are slow to understand. Then we have this story of the slow healing of the blind man. In this context, it is an encouraging story. The message is: you might be slow to understand Jesus' teaching but don't be downhearted. Jesus heals the blind, even if it takes a while. Likewise Jesus will help you see clearly, Jesus will help you understand his teaching, even if it takes a while.

There are many things in our lives that emphasise doing things quickly, even instantly. There is instant coffee, instant printing, instant replay on TV. But of course not everything can happen instantly. Some things take time. Growing plants. Growing people. Growing in understanding.

This is a particularly important lesson for school principals and for all of us involved in various ways in education. Our aim is to foster growth and growth takes time.

This applies to the students in our care. It applies to the school staff. It applies to ourselves. The goal is that each one of us will grow in understanding, grow to see the world and other people and ourselves more clearly, but this takes time. This process calls for patience and perseverance, patience when progress is sometimes slow and perseverance in our efforts and in our prayer for God's help.

May this evening's gospel encourage us. Jesus took a while to heal the blind man but eventually he came to see clearly. So too with us and with those we serve. It will take time for us to grow in our understanding of life and of the message of Christ but God gives us the time we need. May the Lord help us to grow in our understanding and grow in our love day by day.

+ Bishop Paul Bird