

Fr Justin Driscoll - Homily for the 16th Sunday of the Year [a]

July 18th – 19th 2026

5.00pm Ballarat East, 9.00am Gordon (B), 10.30am Ballan

" a spark of light, a core of love, life-giving leaven in the mass"



Last year I made a daytrip to Morocco. That's not as outrageous as it first sounds, as I was in Gibraltar and took the ferry to Tangier, across that narrow 14km stretch of the Mediterranean that provides a link between the southern tip of Europe with the northern coast of Africa. Morocco had been on my bucket list for many years, and it didn't disappoint! Its exotic culture, food, unfamiliarity and proximity to the Sahara fascinate me and a day wasn't enough!

The population of Morocco is around 36 million, with 99% being Sunni Muslim. In their midst are also 30,000 Moroccan Christians, many of them from sub-Saharan Africa. They're a very small minority who have long been ostracized, sometimes rejected by society and closely scrutinized by the state. They're not officially banned from churches, but to practice their faith openly is to invite harassment and threats, even — or especially — from relatives.

In 2019, in keeping with his desire to go to the margins, Pope Francis visited Morocco. The visit was yet another opportunity for Pope Francis to build bridges between Christians and Muslims, urging us to foster the "culture of encounter."¹

¹ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-03/pope-francis-arrives-morocco-first-to-maghreb-papmar.html>

The Pope urged the tiny Catholic community in Morocco to engage in a dialogue with Muslims in order to stamp out extremism. *"In this way, you will unmask and lay bare every attempt to exploit differences and ignorance in order to sow fear, hatred and conflict."*² He said *"For we know that fear and hatred, nurtured and manipulated, destabilize our communities and leave them spiritually defenceless".* He made it clear that their number is not a problem because *"Jesus did not choose us and send us forth to become more numerous! He called us to a mission. He put us in the midst of society like a **handful of yeast: the yeast of the Beatitudes and the fraternal love** by which, as Christians, we can all join in making present his Kingdom."*

He encouraged them by reminding them that *"our mission as baptized persons, is not really determined by the number or size of spaces that we occupy, but rather by our capacity to generate change and to awaken wonder and compassion."*³ This is what caught my imagination – **our capacity to generate change to awaken compassion, our mission as the baptised. The potency of leaven and the influence of the mustard seed.** On a Sunday when we've proclaimed these parables of the Kingdom from Matthew's Gospel, the images of the kingdom are the grain that's scattered and sown, a tiny mustard seed and yeast taken by a woman and mixed in with flour.

Pope Francis said, *"we do this by the way we live as disciples of Jesus, in the midst of those with whom we share our daily lives, joys and sorrows, suffering and hopes."* *"The problem arises not from being few in number",* he said, but in being *"salt that has lost the flavour of the Gospel or lamps that no longer shed light."* *"Our lives are meant to be 'yeast,' wherever and with whomever we find ourselves, even if this appears to bring no tangible or immediate benefits."*

One of the challenges for the churches is to accept joyfully and humbly, a minority role within a plural society, the role of being salt and leaven. While we

² <https://www.dw.com/en/pope-francis-signs-jerusalem-declaration-in-morocco/a-48135530>

³ <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/03/31/morocco-pope-francis-explains-what-it-means-be-christian-majority-muslim-land>

might be greater in number here than the Christians in Morocco, our mission is the same. In our context where institutional religion is in decline, the churches are in the position where we may recover the ancient and earliest expression of the church as a community which serves as a sign of contradiction to every established order. As we find ourselves on the margins of society, we will inevitably discover that we are not there alone, that there are many who are marginal who have been so for a very long time and our very being there could in itself be prophetic, an opportunity to be in genuine solidarity with the poor and the powerless. The rediscovery of our weakness and apparent powerlessness is a painful but possibly a therapeutic and redemptive experience for the church which has often thought of itself belonging in the corridors of power rather than in the vulnerability and poverty of the margins.

It strikes me as a fantastically practical, deeply biblical way for Christians to see ourselves in the world today, embodying these parables of the kingdom.

When Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council, he expressed his hope that:

"Every believer in this world must be

a spark of light, a core of love, life-giving leaven in the mass:

and the more they are so, the more they will live, in their innermost depths,
in communion with God."