

Catholic Parish of the Good Shepherd

Hurunui District, Catholic Diocese of Christchurch



Third Sunday of Advent

11 December 2016

prophets give the

As I write (7 December) I'm celebrating my 31st anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. I have two reasons for mentioning this, firstly I need all of you to keep remembering me in your prayer, and secondly it will explain why I'm a bit more personally nostalgic and reflective in this column.

When I left school I had given priesthood some thought. I understood that a seminary was not a place where people went knowing that they were going to become priests, but rather a place of discernment - a community of faith where young(ish) men were given every help to discover their purpose in life. This was my seminary experience living in a community of 30+ men and women who were all seeking to live their lives abundantly, knowing that the only way to achieve this earthly abundance was in relationship with Christ.

To be honest I had spent some time (mainly on the encouragement of well-meaning family and friends) resisting the thoughts I had about the possibility of going to seminary, so when I finished school I found a job in a government department in Timaru. I had noticed that people who might have ten years earlier encouraged a young man to consider seminary were now instead beginning to promote money-making and travelling careers more than encouraging school-leavers to serve God as a priest.

Perhaps the pendulum needed to swing back from the earlier equally unhealthy extreme when some were pressured into priesthood with every family expected to produce a priest in every generation resulting in many becoming priests whom God might have been calling in different directions.

the limitation of secular definitions

i have noticed too that about the time I went to the seminary, many priests felt pressured to define their lives and explain their ministry in purely secular terms. This seemed to arise from an emerging secularism in NZ with people no longer understanding the value of one who served as a doctor of the soul. Priests were renamed community leaders, social workers, co-ordinators of parish life, counsellors. and they were encouraged to be nice approachable guys who did little more than co-ordinate the diverse opinions of parishioners about what a parish should be and how this should be celebrated on Sundays.



In my seminary years I loved that the Mass and the Sacraments were the heart of priestly life, but I later often found myself trying to explain my life as a priest in terms that seemed to make more sense to a secular mentality. However I knew too that this was an unsatisfactory reduction that missed the whole point of priesthood.

Man of mystery

A few years ago I read a very helpful little book entitled "Your Parish Priest, a Man of Mystery." The title had caught my interest and the book began with a parishioner challenging a priest with the line "besides saying Mass every day and going to the hospital once in a while what do you guys do all week anyhow?" I was asked a similar question here in the Hurunui a couple of years ago when I had failed to do something I should have done. While I was trying to work out how I had slipped up a parishioner reprimanded me with "what do you do all day anyway?"

busyness of abundance

I realised at that moment that there was no point in giving a defensive response. This parishioner did not understand that busy-ness is most often a distraction and an escape, and that a full life is not a life made up of many things but a breadth and depth of experience that is the fruit of reflection which happens most often when I am alone up a mountain or in silent prayer on a week-day visit to a church.

are you happy?

I know that thirty years ago many people saw priesthood as a difficult and non-essential life. Their choices for marriage and career certainly seemed to be wiser by world standards. But today I hear many of my contemporaries express regret at having made life decisions based on limited criteria. Many of them have been to the top in business life and have families, but when I ask if they are happy they rarely give a straight answer. They are understanding that nothing on earth, not even a combination of all of the best things, can deliver the degree of happiness and satisfaction that we are created for.

the prophet

This brings us to the heart of the ministry of the priest, who is, if he is doing his job, a prophet. In fact as baptised Catholics we all share this prophetic ministry, and in today's gospel Jesus gives us an introduction to the ministry of prophecy. A prophet is not one who predicts the future. Instead the prophet is the one who shifts our gaze beyond what is simply tangible. The prophet is the one who responds adequately to the question "there must be something more to life?"

the prophetic parish

Unfortunately this prophetic voice unsettles us. We want to think that the happiness we seek and the success we strive for is within our grasp. This is usually the reality even in a Catholic parish. It is easy for parishioners to slip into thinking that a

parish is simply another form of organisation where people who seek to do good are united in a particular geographical area. We forget that by definition a parish is a community of people who know that all they can earn, achieve or produce is not enough for a life. There is more. Healthy parishioners know that they are weak and vulnerable. Healthy parishioners know that they are sinners in desperate and daily need of salvation, and only God is able to save.

The prophet is the one who continually and even in the face of resistance and ignorance presents and represents Christ as the answer to all human longing. The prophet will constantly remind people that there is a bridge between human struggle and abundant living and that bridge is the person of Jesus Christ.

rebirth

During the week I asked someone to write a contribution for the parish Christmas newsletter. The writer began his inspiring reflection: "Advent and earthquakes seem strange companions but they share an important feature. Both present opportunities for rebirth".

That single line shifted my thinking about Christmas. Of course we know that Christmas is about God taking on human form in Jesus 2000 years ago. As we reflect on this we realise that Jesus is present with us, incarnate among us today. However it is easy to forget that Jesus brings each one of us the opportunity of rebirth, a new beginning, a fresh start if we acknowledge our need for the salvation he brings.

This salvation is the Christmas gift we need above all else, and it is ours for the asking. Any priest who can encourage parishioners to look beyond his own weakness and imperfection and to turn to Christ has served as a faithful prophet. J.O'C

a prayer for our diocese

God of Love

*Through our baptism you have called
each one of us into the
Church in the Diocese of Christchurch.*

*You have endowed us with new life.
You have enriched us with the joy of life
in your Son Jesus Christ.*

*You have poured out the Holy Spirit upon us.
As we build new buildings
and strengthen old ones,
may we also experience the deeper renewal
of ourselves as the Body of Christ.*

*Strengthen us in faith;
renew us in your love;*

*give us an unbreakable hope
in your promise of eternal life.*

*Help us to reach out to those
in every kind of need
and treat them with
compassion, dignity and justice.*

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

MEN'S GATHERING 14 DECEMBER 2016
 hosted by **JOSHUA FELLOWSHIP** 7.15 pm
 Wednesday, 14th December 2016, **St Gregory's Church**, 30 Cotswold Road, Bishopdale. Come and join like-minded Catholic men to grow your faith and be encouraged in your walk with the Lord. Faith sharing, praise and worship, prayer and fellowship over a cuppa. We conclude our year with celebration of the mass with Fr Jack O'Connor. More info Ph Chris 027-646-4138.

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST SCHOLARSHIP The Diocese invites applications from interested individuals who would like to undertake theological studies through Good Shepherd College [Auckland] or the programme at the Catholic Discipleship College [Auckland]. These scholarships provide some financial support for people looking to undertake formation in 2017. Successful applicants will be regular participants in parish life. For more information visit www.chch.catholic.org.nz/scholarship or Mike Stopforth 03-366 9869

EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY FREE Thanks Giving Celebration. Join us for a praise and worship evening to give thanks to God for all His blessings in 2016, and to pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Date: Tuesday 13th December, Venue: St Joseph's Papanui Parish Centre, Time: 7.15pm-9pm

DEAF MASS Mass with a NZ Sign Language interpreter on Sunday 11th December, 10.30am at Sacred Heart Addington. All associated with the deaf community are welcome to take part in this Mass.

THE CATHOLIC SHOP Advent & Christmas stock in store now! Advent candles & calendars, nativity sets, Christmas cards, 2017 Mass calendars, and more. Order now to ensure you don't miss out. 373 Manchester St catholicshop@chch.catholic.org.nz facebook.com/chchcatholicshop

SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF THE MISSIONS An opportunity is available to give gifts with a difference for Christmas by supporting missions and ventures overseas.

WOOMB NZ The Billings Ovulation Method www.billingslife.org.nz is taught throughout NZ. For more info contact Dr Cathy Black 03-3555 841 Joanne.woombnz@gmail.com.

THINKING DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD? Contact Vocations Director Fr. John O'Connor vocations.chch@gmail.com

Weekday Mass Timetable

Amberley Church
 Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri at 9.00am
 Community of the Beatitudes
Wednesday at 12noon

Confessions
 Tuesday 8.40am at Amberley
 Wednesday 11.30am at Beatitudes
 Friday 8.40 at Amberley
 Saturday 10.00am - 10.30 at Amberley
 & anytime by arrangement with a priest.

Mass times and other parish information is available on the parish website

THANK YOU to all parishioners and friends of the parish who regularly contribute to the parish through the planned giving direct payment or envelopes. Your support enables our parish to exist, and at present is enabling the increased number of Sunday Masses.

NEW BOOKLET MARKING AMBERLEY CHURCH 150th anniversary of opening. This booklet is a re-publishing of the 1966 centenary book with the addition of extra historical photos and brief articles on the past 50 years. This full-colour 30 page booklet is available for \$10.00 from the parish office.

THE PARISH WEBSITE carries up-to-date newsletters, Mass timetable for every week and other news and photos of events around the parish. www.catholicurunui.nz

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED remembering your parish in your Will? Traditionally it is these bequests that enable the parish to achieve projects and missions well outside what is possible through weekly giving. The wording for such a contribution is: "I give and bequeath to the Roman Catholic Bishop for the time being of the Diocese of Christchurch for the general purposes of The Catholic Parish of Hurunui in New Zealand the sum of \$__ and the receipt of a duly authorised office of the Bishop shall be a full discharge to my executor and trustee for this gift."

THE WEEKLY PARISH NEWSLETTER has become a significant form of communication with all parishioners and many others in the Hurunui and further afield. We are trying a new and cheaper form of printing and delivery which will begin in a week, and we need a drop-off point in Waikari to serve Hawarden. Any suggestions?

SUPPORT A YOUNG FRIEND of the Good Shepherd Hurunui parish who is raising money for a mission in Callou Peru where she will be working as a volunteer in 2017. You can contribute by visiting the givealittle page and type "getceline2peru" into the search space.

SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION will be offered in the parish next year (2017) and any young person of high school age (or older) is invited to begin this preparation. Please let Sarah know of your interest asap at the parish office catholicurunui@gmail.com

FIRST COMMUNION & CONFESSION. Earlier this month our parish celebrated these sacraments with children from the parish and these families. These Sacraments will now be offered every year for children aged 7+. If your children are of age please let Sarah know asap at catholicurunui@gmail.com.

AMBERLEY CHURCH is open every day from 7.00am until 9.00pm for prayer.

EARTHQUAKE INSURANCE. In 2013 every church community in the parish was asked by the then Parish Council to prepare a full photographic inventory of all sacred objects in the church. If objects have been damaged please photograph the damage and send with the original inventory photo to the parish office before Thursday 1 December so that insurance claims can be lodged. This has already been done for Cheviot and Waiau & Hawarden.

FUTURE MAINTENANCE PLAN Every church in the parish needs to have a future maintenance and restoration plan so that we a communal understanding of the needs and potential of our beautiful heritage buildings. To mark the 150th of the Amberley church an outline of future maintenance was presented and you can view this on the parish website. None of this work is urgent and it will be carried out over the next few decades as funding allows.

CULVERDEN. Morning tea after 10:00am Mass on December 18th. Food basket for St Vincent De Paul, any non perishable food item appreciated. Raffle tickets for sale at Hawarden 11th Dec Mass, \$2 a ticket or 3 for \$5. 3 Draws. Drawn at Hawarden. All proceeds to St Vincent De Paul.

CHRISTMAS CAKE & A DRINK TRADITION. There is a great tradition in some parts of our parish of sharing Christmas Cake and a drink standing outside Christmas Masses. Everyone is busy, and it takes a couple of people to organise, but with plastic cups there is no washing up and people delight in the opportunity to relax together after pre-Christmas busyness and catch up with people back home for Christmas. So, it is over to each of our church communities to organise this in whatever way you choose.

 Find us on **facebook**
Catholic Hurunui

 www.foodforfaith.org.nz
 read, watch & listen
 with Fr. John O'Connor
 & on Facebook & Twitter

Let us continue to pray for the happy repose of the soul of Bishop Barry Jones. Pray too that all those involved in the process of appointing his successor will be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

of your charity
 pray for the happy repose of those who have died especially
Tony Jarvis
 deceased family, friends & parishioners.
May they rest in peace



CHRISTMAS MASS TIMES 2016
Christmas Eve Saturday 24 December
 5.00pm Hanmer Springs 7.00pm Hawarden
 9.00pm Amberley
Christmas Day Sunday 25 December
 8.00am Amberley, 10.00am Cheviot,
 10.00am Culverden