

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

In today's Gospel we see Jesus after his Baptism driven to the desert in the power of the Spirit to consider his call by prayer and fasting in the wilderness. His fasting of course makes him hungry, but he does not fast to make himself physically hungry so much as to put him in touch with his deepest hunger for God and the things of God, and his overwhelming hunger for God triumphs over the temptations of the devil. So, at the outset of his mission Jesus takes upon himself the condition of one who hungers and thirsts. Put to the test in the desert He confesses that the deepest longing and essential need of the human person is for God and his Word. Hungering, thirsting, longing fills the heart of Jesus: "I have longed to eat this Passover with you", He says in St Matthew's Gospel. The Last Supper and so the Mass is His hour and it is so full of His longing for you and me and for all. And Jesus throughout His ministry and right to the crucifixion is consumed by the deepest hunger and thirst. "I am thirsty" is the final cry of Jesus from the Cross. Jesus hungers for God and hungers for you and me.

This week we are making the Novena of Grace to Saint Francis Xavier. Francis became a man on fire with the love of God and his people, filled with passion and longing. He hungered to set the world on fire with the very love of God. From his earliest childhood he had been deeply drawn into friendship with the Lord. His parents and family truly were the first teachers of the faith to Francis. He was particularly influenced by his sister, a Poor Clare Nun who communicated such a strong and loving Passion for Jesus and who had such a strong and positive influence on so many people in their country.

When he went off to university in Paris, he was already well rooted and grounded in the love of God. Paris was the place to be, a place of great opportunity and possibility for a young man of great ambition like Francis, a place too where a young person could easily go off the rails and ruin his life.

One of the first persons Francis met in Paris was an older man Ignatius from Loyola a town only a few miles from where Francis was born. They both became lifelong friends. Both were from noble and wealthy families, assured of comfort, success and fame. But Ignatius was already well on the road to being a pilgrim for God, devoting his life to helping souls.

At first this was not a calling Francis shared. But Ignatius' persistent and gentle taunting, "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world but forfeit his life? eventually claimed Francis as his 'friend in the Lord.'

Francis life was transformed when Ignatius finally managed to persuade him to make the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius little book of exercises of the spirit awakened a tremendous passion for Jesus in the heart in the heart of Francis Xavier and set him on fire with the love of God. Francis was able to see that the Lord who had been drawing him deeply to himself from his earliest childhood was now calling, calling, calling loudly and insistently, inviting him to a life of greater intimacy with him and loving service of his people.

“What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What more will I do for Christ?” Francis prayed in the Exercises.

His opportunity to do greater things for God came in 1539 when at the request of King John III of Portugal, he was sent by Ignatius to Goa. The rest is a wonderful history and he became in the process in Goa and southern India, in Japan and within sight of mainland China the greatest evangelist in the history of the Church since Saint Paul.

But what does all this hungering and longing of Jesus, what does this passionate desire of Francis Xavier have to do with us, here and now in our parish?

“A Church which doesn’t have the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ as the foundation of its life and purpose will be swept away like grains of sand” said Pope Francis at the time of his election

Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. Matthew 28

Jesus calls us first and foremost to **make disciples**. The *going*, the *baptising*, and the *teaching* flow from the mission to *make disciples*. For Jesus, ‘Making Disciple’s is the priority and lies at the heart of the *Great Commission*.

A missionary disciple is someone like Francis Xavier who has a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, who loves him, desires to grow in love for him, and joyfully shares that love for him with others.

In the words of Pope St John Paul II: *‘Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep Him for themselves, they must proclaim him.’*

It’s the Lord who calls us to be missionary disciples. If we’re not doing that – if we don’t have the making of missionary disciples at the heart of everything we

do and are, then we're not doing the one most fundamental thing that Jesus Christ asks of all of us who bear his name.

Pope Francis in his beautiful letter the Joy of the Gospel is very concerned about Jesus at the heart of our lives and experience. *"I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal meeting with Jesus Christ. I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord". The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace". With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!"*

How do you feel when reflecting on Pope Francis' invitation to have a personal encounter with Jesus every day? What is your response? What is my response? What is our community response?

The invitation is to let Jesus be at the heart of our lives. Always to seek him and welcome him and let him in and have a real relationship with him that He will continue to be our way and our strength and our all.

Here in St Anselm's we are blessed in so many ways. In this community there is to be found a deep and heartfelt love for Jesus amongst so many. Truly we may say Jesus is everything to us.

Many of us could say what Father Pedro Arrupe SJ said of himself: *"Take Jesus Christ from my life and everything would collapse--like a human body from which someone removed the skeleton, heart, and head."* That is true for so many here

And yet the Popes letter, the Joy of the Gospel, points to a problem in the Church. The Great Problem which the letter points to, is the almost complete lack of missionary zeal on the part of Catholics.

This absence of missionary zeal, the near rejection, or forsaking, or lack of acknowledgement, of the apostolic character of the Catholic faith by the great majority of Catholics is the great problem

Ask a Catholic, “What have you done this week to spread the faith?”, and he or she might look at you as if you were quite mad. The Evangelization, which recent Popes have so fervently desired, will go nowhere unless the faithful are engaged in spreading the good news—which they evidently are not.

This is what Pope Francis wants: “Today, as the Church seeks to experience a profound missionary renewal, there is a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbours or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching which takes place in the middle of a conversation, something along the lines of what a missionary does when visiting a home. Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.”

And yet the members of the parish over the years have considered seriously what the call to be an evangelizing community might mean for us. A few years ago, the parish went through a discernment process in which we prayed and reflected on the same questions which moved Francis Xavier in the Spiritual Exercises: “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What more will I do for Christ?”

Our answer is expressed in the Parish Mission and Vision Statement:

We will cherish our vibrant, warm and welcoming community in our prayer and in the liturgy. We will seek to build it up. We will strive to show a personal care and concern for each and for all.

We will continue to celebrate life and faith and hope and share our joys and sorrows in a constantly changing situation

We will seek ways of contributing more energetically and imaginatively in Southall particularly in serving the poor and vulnerable and powerless.

We will strive to become a more missionary parish and support efforts to create a vigorous Churches Together in Southall and let the light of the Gospel penetrate the life of the wider community.

We will actively support efforts to establish a Faiths Forum for Southall and work for the common good of all the people of Southall.

We shall do our best to harness the potential of our buildings for apostolic purposes.

We will grow stronger through active lay leadership and involvement in the community.

To this end, parishioners actively participated in the diocesan and national initiative, 'Proclaim 15', looking at life in the parish and how it might speak to others of God. Since then, yet more parishioners attended two conferences on developing missionary disciples. Following the Jesuit Parishes Conference in June 2017, a small group of parishioners studied Sherry Weddells book "Making Intentional Disciples" and are now looking at ways of integrating her ideas into the life and work of the Parish

A group of parishioners then attended a course, offered in the diocese, last July, looking at the Alpha course which is aimed at those outside the Church or indeed anyone, who has questions about faith in Jesus in today's world. At the present moment more than a hundred young people in our confirmation programme, are completing Youth Alpha. The Parish has appointed Sue Cawley as the Parish Evangelisation Coordinator, whose aim is to help make us increasingly more 'missionary' in our outlook.

Sue will speak at all Masses next Sunday about Evangelisation and Fr Thayriam will further develop this theme at all Masses on the Third Sunday of Lent.

Like ourselves Francis Xavier and Ignatius lived at a time of very great crisis and scandal in the life of the Church. For them the crisis was an opportunity to help and serve the Lord and his people more generously. Our present-day situation calls for the same greatness and generosity of heart to do likewise. Let us use this Lent well as a season of grace, to appreciate more deeply the hungering and longing of Jesus and to seek the grace of knowing something of the Passion for Jesus of St Francis Xavier.

What have we done for Christ? What are we doing for Christ? What more will we do for Christ?

St Anselm's Catholic Church
In the Parish Centre

A Lenten Reflection



**What it
means
to
follow
Jesus
today.....**

Evangelisation@ St Anselm's

**Saturday 6th April 2019
10.00 a.m. -12.00 p.m.**