

## E-BULLETIN #65

*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)*

item 123

### the thief called Apathy

'**Habemus Papam!**' The white smoke rose, and all roared '**We have a Pope!**'. Catholics and others of good will had been glued to their sets waiting. Those standing in the rain wanted to be able to say, 'We saw him first.' What questions they had one can only guess, but the air was bursting with excitement.

History is full of examples where kings, emperors, leaders, with one gesture or one word, motivate the sinking spirits of their people. They seem to be able to change the impossible. Often however, and sadly, these changes don't last, just as the death of someone beloved is forgotten across time.



Something called *apathy* overtakes us. It comes stealthily, unnoticed, unassuming and unopposed. It eventually destroys the best of persons, the best of dreams, the best of organizations. Apathy is like a thief. Call it by another name – sloth, indifference, impassivity, sluggishness – it makes no difference!

Biblical history provides many examples of apathy. Israel forgot what God did and went back to their old ways. Think of the accounts of the destruction of people during the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of

Jerusalem. The people forgot they were a chosen race, a people set apart. The result was self-destructive.

Perhaps the best example is the prophet Jonah. Everyone but Jonah was concerned about the flood, everyone but Jonah was alert, everyone but Jonah was taking action. Jonah's apathy was the result of refusing to accept the responsibility entrusted to him, it was a futile project in which God had engaged him!

Jesus faced similar situations. "Don't trouble the master," they said, "the girl is dead." And again, "He is gone to eat in the tax collector's house."

The new Pope urged us to imitate Jesus, who became poor. Time and again Jesus reminded his disciples: "carry nothing for the journey" and "why do you worry about...?" Our own Pallottine Assemblies boldly proclaim the same ideal, that we favour an 'option for the poor' – but it is so often forgotten when we return back to the cosy comfort zone of our lives!

Francis's opening message of a poor church simply reaffirms Jesus' own values, written by his life and in his blood. It demands a spirit of perseverance which Pallotti advocated, without which the spirit of apathy will engulf us.



The French revolution happened because of the apathetic spirit of the church of that time. Thank God this period also brought fiery missionaries who gave up their lifestyles, homes and everything they had, venturing into an unknown world with total trust in God. The Pope's priorities are right – if the church is to be relevant it can only be so in this way. A poor church is a church for the poor, for all who are suffering injustice, and suffering brokenness. It's a huge task and there is so much to work for, to fight for, even to die for!

Let me recall an Irish story told by Martin Sheen speaking to youth. A man died and went up to heaven claiming his reward. St Peter welcomed him. "But before I let you in first show me your scars," said St Peter. "Scars! What scars? I have no scars," retorted the man. To which Peter replied, "What a pity! Was there nothing in the world worth dying for and worth fighting for?" We are not asked to do great things but we are asked to do things with great care. May each of us, as we welcome the new Pope, also welcome his message with enthusiasm and, like Jesus, be always on the alert serve the poor.

May we have a happy and a poor church!

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item 124

### **a gift and a challenge...!**



This Easter, I did not have any lecturing commitments or a supply so I went to the local parish for all the major ceremonies of Holy Week.

The ceremonies were good: prayerful, beautiful and spiritually nourishing. Sitting in the pews, I could not help noticing how many of my neighbours were Asian migrants.

I was reminded of a statement from the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants published in a document entitled, *The love of Christ towards migrants* [2004] in which it claimed that we are in the midst of 'the birth pangs of a new humanity' because of unprecedented levels of migration.

We are clearly in the birth pangs of a new and much more multicultural Australian Church.

Recent Australian Censuses have shown that the Catholic Church has been the major religious beneficiary of migration. In 2011 we made up 25.3% of the Australian population but we would have dropped if it had not been for the 300,000 Catholics who came to Australia between 2001 and 2011.

Migrants make up a large percentage of our Catholic population and especially our regularly attending Catholics. Around 40% of Mass attenders aged less than 65 were born overseas. Of the total number of Australian Catholics, only 52.2% were born in Australia and 25.3% are migrants and 21.6% are children of migrants.

The Australian Bishops' Commission for Migrants and Refugees in *Graced by Migration* revealed that based on 2001 Census figures four Dioceses: Sydney, Perth, Parramatta and Melbourne had one third or more of their Catholics born overseas.

As well, a significant number of our priests and religious are migrants. It is difficult to get accurate figures, but overseas born priests would make up more than 20% of the active priests in a number of Dioceses. And finally some of the most vibrant parishes in Australia today are ethnic parishes.

This is both a gift and a challenge for the Australian Church. Research and experience show that migrants are better Mass attenders; more traditional in their devotions; more accepting of authority; and better educated. Also ethnic communities seem to be an important source of vocations.

Migrants are not only going to change the face, life and practices of the Catholic Church in Australia but they could be a considerable force for mission, especially if we learn how to welcome, enable, support and encourage them.

But this will not happen automatically. There are too many possibilities for misunderstanding, hurt, isolation, neglect, discrimination and cultural imposition, if we do not reflect on our multicultural future and prepare and plan for it. If we do not prepare many Catholic migrants, who on arrival naturally look to their "mother" Church for welcome and support, may be disappointed and we as a Church may also miss out on the resources and richness they bring us.

It is my experience that one of the first steps in understanding new social situations is to see them in their historical context. We westerners, with our emphasis on the individual and on psychology and personal story, neglect history and sociology at our peril. While our emphasis remains solely on the personal, the tendency is to praise or blame ourselves or others excessively. What is happening in Australia today is the product of centuries of movement. From the beginning of the Sixteenth Century till the middle of last century we had the Great European Migration.

Between 1800 and 1925, 50-60 million Europeans migrated to the "New World". On the strength of this migration Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada were developed, Latin America was "Europeanised", slavery grew, India was colonised and indentured labour flourished. This migration was the foundation of Europe's economy and hegemony.

But since the 1960s, the movement has reversed. Europe and the West are now the destination of migration and not the point of origin. Because global capital now resides in the West or 'North' migration flows in that direction as people seek jobs and security.

Non-Western migration to Australia between 1960 and 1990 grew from 12-52%. At least 47% of Australians were born overseas or had a parent born overseas. The Church is mirroring Australian society and Australia is only part of or an unprecedented worldwide movement of migrants. In 2005 there were 191 million international migrants, 2.5% of the world's population or 1 in every 34 people lived as a migrant. 'The future isn't what it used to be.' We are at the birth pangs of a new multicultural Australian Church and there will be some pain but a lot of possibilities in that.



The pain will be less and the possibilities greater if we can welcome, support and integrate our migrant priests, religious and lay people into our Church, if we can enable them to settle in and to contribute their

gifts then we have a rich future. Many come from vibrant Churches with much to share. But more importantly their experience of crossing cultural boundaries has given them insights and sensitivities that people who have never lived outside their own culture cannot have. These insights and sensitivities are vital for the growth of our Church.

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**17.04.13**

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**you commented...**

**on # 64**      What a great article on the new international residential school in India. It should give us a PUSH to looking at the place of education in our new evangelization.

Here in the USA, we have closed so many schools! So, let's pray that the Spirit will lead us into the "education" aspect of new evangelization -- bringing people to Jesus and to the Gospel.

**cf      22.04.13**

The article about the school is impressive. I myself had an opportunity to serve in the school for few days.

**la      22.04.13**