

## ADDRESS GIVEN TO THE PARISH OF BURNSIDE

SUNDAY 21ST APRIL 2024

First of all, I'm very happy to be given this unique opportunity to serve as your locum for a second time. The first occasion was during the period 2015 - 2017.

In this week's pew bulletin I have very briefly set out the way I describe my ministry this second time. It is because this is now my parish that during this interregnum period my contribution will be more discerning. I have the archbishop's licence until the 31st of December. I doubt I will see out this time as locum, but nevertheless I thought it wise to share with you what I hope to do and accomplish with your support.

Fundamental is the recently concluded Lenten study titled 'Mission Shaped Introduction - Rediscovering Missional Spirituality'. A definition of a Missional Spirituality is as follows: *"We offer ourselves in worship as living sacrifices to be and do God's mission."*

Those of us able to attend were also given this quote from Evelyn Underhill, *"Never let yourself think that because God has given you many things to do for him - pressing routine jobs, a life full up with duties and demands of a very practical sort - that all these need to separate you from communion with Him. God is always coming to you in the Sacrament of the Present Moment. Meet and receive Him there with gratitude in that sacrament; however unexpected its outward form may be, receive Him in every sight and sound, joy, pain, opportunity and sacrifice."*

I like that statement by her... *"the Sacrament of the Present Moment."* The present moment is always with us isn't it? Thinking of it as a sacrament may be new. But every Sunday we experience a Sacrament of the Moment when we approach the altar and receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the form of consecrated bread and wine. The real presence of Jesus is what we call that moment of reception.

What is a sacrament? *The Book of Common Prayer states that a Sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereby."* It's meaning is less complicated than it might sound in this dated expression.

The outward and visible sign revealed by Jesus - his dedication to the task, his teaching, his short three years of active ministry that led him to death on the cross, his resurrection fulfilled God's mission. The inward and spiritual grace given to Jesus to sustain him throughout was the supernatural assistance given to him by God. Grace can be understood as the supernatural assistance God bestows on all who give themselves to His mission. The sacrament of the Present Moment is the moment when the supernatural assistance - grace - is available to the followers of Jesus on missional duty as it was to Jesus.

We are confronted by the present moment considering, as we should, the shrinking ability of the parish to support God's mission in this place. Fewer people doing more work in the hope that God's mission continues. The shrinking ability of the parish to maintain the employment of a full time priest. The diocese believes we can only afford to employ a priest for 3/4 of the week ie. a stipend equivalent to .7 FTE.

This present moment confronting us has not crept up on us. It has been approaching for a number of years and we have to admit that we have been aware of it. We are not blind! Yes, other parishes and denominations have also reached this critical 'present moment'. Churches have closed and parishes cling on to life.

What are we to do? This is what we must do! We must believe in the Sacrament of the Present Moment. Believe it is available to us as it was to Jesus, and possess it. Make the outward and visible sign the product of the inward and spiritual grace given by God to everyone who shares the missional life of Jesus.

The present moment is not an occasion to take down our shingle from the front gate. It is the moment for turning. It is the moment when the inward and spiritual grace given to us by God reveals the outward and visible sign of our dedication to God's mission wherever that may take us and whatever sacrifices we may have to make. It is the moment for us to answer the doubts of the diocese. It is the moment to sacrifice aspects of parish life that no longer support the present moment and to give room to new ideas and concepts of Christian worship and life. Otherwise, why ask a priest to join us in consistent decline.

Fr John  
Locum