

2018 15th SUNDAY

Reflecting upon today's Gospel brought back memories of a wonderful gift God gave to me in 1984 when I was sent with two other Marist Brothers: Br Camillus Aylward and Br Edward Danielson -to rescue a Catholic School in Kiribati which was on the point of collapsing.

Like the Apostles sent out into the Villages of Galilee, we went up to Kiribati with virtually nothing. We knew little about the culture or the language. We had no idea of where we would be living, of how big the School was, of how many teachers we had. All we knew was that I would be the Principal and that School would be starting in three weeks' time.

Yet when I boarded the plane which would take us firstly to Nauru and then on to Kiribati, I had total confidence that all would be well. What I was being asked to do was clearly work God wanted of me. I simply trusted in the Lord. Moses was a stutterer. The Apostles were uneducated and simple. And God did mighty works through them. So I was at peace. God was in charge.

On my second day there, two lovely ladies walked into my tiny Office- Pippa and Lorna. They were from England. They had just arrived in Kiribati and their husbands were working for the English High Commission in nearby Bairiki. They were teachers and wanted something useful to do. They offered their services free of charge. I accepted them on the spot. And what a blessing they were to us- they were both superb teachers who just loved the kids. Later when I had done up our timetable it became clear that without Pippa and Lorna we would have been in deep trouble. Yes, God was in charge. He fixed my problems before I even knew they existed!

Without any SOS's going out, gifts of books and stationery came up from our Marist Schools in New Zealand. Champion College was particularly generous as Br Camillus had been a Gisborne boy. Things would always arrive when they were most needed.

We lived today's Gospel during those early days. When Jesus said, "Don't worry about food, about money and about goods", He knew that we would need food, money and resources. What He was saying was: "Just go- get on with the job and trust in Me to provide what you need."

And He did.

As a Principal, I was a stickler for things happening on time. A couple of months after School began I found myself getting more and more frustrated over the fact that the School had no toilets. Three hundred metres to the East of the School was the open sea. Two hundred metres to the West was the lagoon. The boys would go to the open sea. The girls would go to the lagoon. And that was the way it was right throughout the country. Very few had toilets- it was a narrow country and the Sea was close to East and to West. But it was no way to run an efficient School. At break time kids would wander in 15-20 minutes late and you couldn't really scold them. The Bishop, Paul Me'a, was totally unsympathetic. He just smiled and shrugged saying, 'It's what happens in Kiribati!'

But God was on my side!! A Kiwi layman from Lower Hutt, Pat Clegg, came to stay with us for a fortnight. He was in Kiribati visiting the families of a number of Kiribati seminarians he was sponsoring through their studies in Fiji. Pat very quickly picked up on my frustration with the lack of toilets. And a week after he had returned home a cheque arrived from Caritas Aotearoa, from the New Zealand Lenten Collections, to fund the building of some very adequate toilets- for us and our Village. Thank-you, Lord! No more kids wandering in late for classes.

Jesus makes it clear in today's teaching that when people offer hospitality- to accept it- and not to go looking for something better. We took that to heart in Kiribati and lived with the local MSC priests and Brothers for the first year. Eventually a fourth Brother joined us- Brother George- who was a builder. He built us a simple home with funds from the Brothers and from Caritas. God provided.

Jesus' instructions to the apostles were also very practical. He reminded them to take staffs with them. They needed staffs to defend themselves from wild dogs, wolves and possibly robbers. While on Mission we have to take ordinary, sensible measures to look after ourselves. As Jesus also said, 'Be as gentle as doves but as wise as serpents.'

Jesus also reminded the Apostles to wear sandals. In Jesus' times only slaves went around bare-foot. The Apostles were to be conscious of their dignity as sons and daughters of God. If people rejected them or insulted them, there was no need for them to stay around to be further insulted. They were to quietly leave and go elsewhere, shaking the dust from their feet as a

sign of not taking any negativity with them but of reaching out anew somewhere else full of hope.

Looking back on my time in Kiribati I was ever so limited. I didn't know the language and went totally unprepared for mission work there. Yet good things were done. The School: St Louis High School is now highly respected in Kiribati and the Marist Brothers still staff it and deeply cherish it- probably because working in it so beautifully reflects Jesus' call to the Twelve- to trust in God and let God act.

And so it is with we Catholics here in Gisborne. We are not powerful or influential in the World's eyes. We struggle to renew ourselves as parishioners die or move from Gisborne. And we know that we are limited in resources.

But we do have Faith. We know that the Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us, calling upon us to be missionaries in our own neighbourhoods. We know, too, that we can look to Jesus for help when help is most needed.

Jesus rejoices in us when we step out in faith- just as He rejoiced that day in the excitement of the Apostles- when on returning from their time working in the Villages of Galilee; they described how they had been able to take authority over unclean spirits and heal people of their sicknesses.

Jesus says: Be bold. Trust in Me.