

Bishop's Reflection for March 4th, 2020

As I tour the diocese, I am struck by the many things that we have going for us. Even though times have been better, we are still blessed with many things that are necessary for our Church to thrive. What may be lacking, at times, is a purpose going forward, "What is God's intended purpose for all of this? What is the mission to which we are being called today?"

How easy it is to get caught up with maintaining our buildings, raising the required funds, running the basic programs and offering the various sacraments, and no longer challenge ourselves with the Mission of Christ. Yet, Jesus' great commission to his Church is clear, "Go therefore and make disciples..." (Mt. 28: 19), he tells his followers. "Go", in other words, "and do what I have done".

But how do you make disciples? That's what so many of our parishes and missions are asking. It isn't as easy as it once was, when both the family and the local community were our allies and children were exposed to the faith almost by osmosis. Sure, we can continue to baptize children and do our best to teach them; we can even remind them of their obligation to come to church. But we all know there is more to it than that. We need to lead our people to Christ, and that isn't very easy if we have not made the journey ourselves.

Maybe that is why Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain. He wanted to open their eyes, to see for themselves and to understand on a deeper level. In doing so, Jesus didn't leave anything to chance. He "personalized" his ministry to them and to us, mentoring them into greater and deeper faith. And, let's face it, that's what we need in our Church today, an encounter with Christ, to be led up the mountain with Peter, James and John and to behold his presence.

St. Paul speaks of the result in his invitation to the early Christian community. "Join with me in suffering for the Gospel," he begins in today's second reading, "relying on the power of God". He is asking them (and us) to draw on the example of his life and to heed the call of Christ once more. "Join with me...", they are also the words of Christ. Discipleship is not so much a matter of going to church and fulfilling some minimum requirements, as it is a whole hearted response to Christ, who leads us up the mountain, despite the sacrifices and sufferings this may entail, and reveals himself as both crucified and risen.

“Making disciples” doesn’t begin by knocking on our neighbour’s door or nagging our children to go to church. “Making disciples” begins with taking the time to climb the mountain of the Lord, with all the effort it may entail, out of a true desire to know and love him above all things. Only then will we encounter him in our liturgies, as he reveals himself in both suffering and glory, and where we hear the Father’s voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased, listen to him.” Only then will we understand Abram’s response, to leave it all behind at age 75, and move to a land he hasn’t seen. Only then will we understand why St. Paul left a life of comfort and privilege to be persecuted and harassed for the sake of the Gospel.