

KINDNESS, TENDERNESS AND MERCY

This week at our Mercy Partners Mission Leaders gathering, Fr Chris Gleeson SJ, through his amazing storytelling ability, used his favourite theologians, philosophers, mystics and fellow Jesuits to reflect on contemporary spirituality.

Fr Chris reminded those gathered of Ron Rolheiser's assertion that... *long before we do anything explicitly religious at all, we have to do something about the fire that burns within us.* What we do with the fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality. He went on to highlight the critical place of kindness, tenderness and mercy in how we respond to our world. Spirituality is a way of seeing our relationships with others and the world through the Gospel lens of other-centredness.

Pope Francis situates kindness in the words and actions of Jesus. *When Jesus wants to teach us how a Christian should be, he tells us very little, but he shows people by feeding the hungry and welcoming the stranger...* In the famous words attributed to St Francis – *Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words...*

A spirituality founded in kindness invites us to be apostles of kindness in our homes, workplaces and society more generally. Let's speak of kindness and with kindness. It is only through kindness that we can build a more compassionate and equitable world.

Hand in hand with kindness, is Pope Francis' call for *...a revolution of tenderness...Tenderness means to use our eyes to see the other, our ears to hear the other... to use our hands and our heart to comfort the other, to take care of those in need* (TED Talk, April 2017 in Vancouver). He asserts that it is *...God's tenderness that leads us to understand that love is the meaning of life. Thus we understand that the root of our freedom is never self-referential... If God is infinitely tender, we, who are made in the image of God, must also be capable of tenderness.*

These challenges of kindness and tenderness underpin a spirituality of mercy. As Fr Chris shared, *God loves us in this way, with compassion and mercy. Jesus does not look at reality from the outside, without letting himself be moved, as if he were taking a picture... This kind of compassion is needed today to conquer*

the globalization of indifference (M.Hansen SJ, *The First Spiritual Exercises – Four Guided Retreats*) and *only someone who has encountered mercy, who has been caressed by the tenderness of mercy, is happy and comfortable with the Lord* (Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church*).

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis explains, *the Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel* (#114).

Fr Chris shared his life and love with us and ensured everyone was warmly welcomed, respected, encouraged and heard. He role-modelled how we can humbly and graciously share what we learn from others and how we can find the truth through a multifaceted lens of influence, learning and living 'the good life'.

*Lord, help me to understand that
Kindness is not just a single act,
But what I do in word and deed repeatedly
to build a climate of love around me.
Kindness is a candle to keep burning brightly.
It is respecting and encouraging others,
standing up to defend them when they face bullying
and intimidation.
Help me to continue learning the lesson that
Life is about living generously in the service of others.
Life is about who I am and how I love.
May we allow the risen Christ to infuse our minds and
hearts with the grace of His kindness.
Amen*

(from C. Gleeson SJ, *Springboards – A Deeper Ignatian Way*, Michael Wilkinson Publishing, 2020, pp.6-7)



REFLECTION:

Which of the practical virtues of kindness, tenderness and mercy underpin your spirituality?
Where can you make these practical virtues a part of your everyday life?

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which our ministries exist and the Elders both past and present on whose land we walk, work and live. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.