
PRESENCE AT THE HEART OF EVENTS



One of today's most committed women, Madeleine Delbrel, states that the Lord Jesus makes himself known as well along our streets as in our daily problems; that he speaks as well in the midst of his brothers and sisters travelling along as in the terrible agitation of the assembly line. A diligent reading of the gospels bring out the fact of the Risen Jesus continually present to the life of his disciples: presence to Mary Magdalene and the other women who came to the tomb, present to the disciples at Emmaus, presence to the apostles, presence to hundreds of disciples. It is therefore not surprising that it be the same today. He himself had promised it: « *Remember that I am with you always, even to the end of time.* » [Matthew 28:20] All through time this presence of Jesus has been emphasised. Closer to us, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, following Pope John XXIII, acquainted us with the method of the signs of the times. Members of the Catholic Action movements know about this method, through the review of life exercise. « *You are there in the midst of our lives, and you it is who gives us life; you are there in the midst of our lives, filled with life yourself, O Jesus Christ.* » These words from a popular French hymn are a profession of faith that we can repeat, in the personal and community events we are part of, such as being involved in Sunday School programmes and the Sunday gathering, in the diversity of services to be rendered, in the future of our parishes, and in socio-political commitment.

PARISH-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

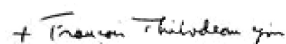
The gradual disappearance of religious education in the [French] schools raises a question: "What must we do today to ensure that the Gospel will be proclaimed tomorrow to young and elderly alike?" The example which the anglophone parishes of the diocese can pass on to us is an invitation to do as they do and adapt this religious education to our own milieu. During my pastoral visits to the Southern Victoria Deanery I was able to witness the remarkable devotion of parents-become-catechists to the children of their own milieu. What imagination! What regularity! Churches and rectories resembled beehives of activity as 50, 60, 70 youths spent Sunday morning involved in religious education. Through commitments such as these the Good News of Jesus reaches the children. In the French sector, one of the priorities is to prepare to take on religious education at the parish level. "And you, what do you say about Jesus, in your milieu?"

SUNDAY GATHERING

It came as a brutal shock to discover or acknowledge the fact that Sunday Mass attendance was only between 15 % and 20 %, in our parishes. Following the example of my predecessors, and in the wake of the Diocesan Synod, I reminded the people on several occasions of the importance and meaning of the Sunday Mass attendance. I am heartened by the fact that in a few parishes there seems to be a tangible increase in the those attending. The absence of 80 % to 85 % of a community raises questions, here as in other dioceses, regarding the maintenance of several services we are striving to maintain; this decrease can also call to question the very existence of one parish or another. It would be terrible if our beautiful churches were to become empty buildings, repositories of things past, while they are called to be, according to the prayer for the dedication of a church, "images of Christ." If the Sunday gathering does not constitute a unique expression of the faith of Christians, it nonetheless remains one of its most concrete indispensable signs. "And you, how do you celebrate your faith in Jesus with your brothers and sisters?"

VARIETIES OF SERVICES

I am pleased that in several communities there are more and more lay people, through the beneficial presence of pastoral agents, parish pastoral councils and different parish committees and organisations, taking an active part in the life of the parish. There are thousands of volunteers who devote themselves generously for the betterment of their community. We must truly rejoice that every parish has its own pastoral council; along with the pastor, the PPC is the main agency for coordinating all pastoral activities. The PPC must be "the eyes, ears, mouth, hands and heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd." This organism is the one that ensures that the spiritual and pastoral needs of the community are truly met. It also has as its primary goal ensuring that the members of the community's needs be genuinely fulfilled. It also sees to it that all the parishioners live together in harmony, that religious education is dispensed correctly, and that the liturgy be well prepared and celebrated. It ensures that its members be more and more responsive to transforming their milieu along Gospel lines, especially by showing concern and care for the most deprived and the suffering. "And you, how are you the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, for your brothers and sisters?"



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