



THE NEW SHOFAR

A new decade = new missionary beginnings

2020 challenge: a new decade of Evangelism

EPIPHANY - Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

In today's reading from Isaiah, we have the direction for our own lives as disciples, as well as having of a new decade set out before us, our parish community is also given its own fundamental pastoral goal. Here is our New Year question:

1. *are the peoples around us coming to the Gospel light we are offering to them?*
2. *do they see the Light of Christ shining out from us – from what we do in their midst – and come to our Church to have their lives lit up by the gifts of the Kingdom of God?*

But that is only half of what this new year of the Lord is asking of us. Clearly the “nations” are not coming to Christ through us. The world has been promised the gift of a Messiah and Saviour and we are the ones called to bring that offer alive within them and for them. The Feast of Epiphany is the feast of missionary renewal. Equally, the beginning of a new decade is a gift from God, allowing us to plan to put into action the many things of which we have spoken and planned in the past. If we do not transform our lives now – then when? If we do not take up our missionary mandate this year – then when? It is a wonderful and exciting time for all men and women of faith.

from oppression and violence He redeems us

Psalm 72 is a beautiful song of confidence in the love and power of God. It celebrates the commitments God has made to His people when they trust in Him. God will not allow His faithful people to be overwhelmed or fail as they undertake their missionary vocations. This is because it is all the work of God. We are collaborators and the measure of our faithfulness to our baptismal calling is the depth and breadth of our engagement with the “nations”. If we have this guarantee of divine support, grace and power, then there are no excuses for pastoral inaction or for putting pastoral initiatives off into the future. It is not a call to have a plan. It is a call to take up the divine plan already set down for us by Jesus Himself. Chapters five to seven of Matthew's Gospel, the Gospel we will be following throughout 2020, sets down our missionary agenda for us.

from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel

One of the great mysteries of the Bible is the divine reasoning in the choices God makes. God seems to have chosen some strange people to carry out His plan for the salvation of all men and women. Apart from the reigns of David and Solomon, the Hebrew people were more renown for being a defeated people, a nation ruled over by foreigners than for being the children of a Mighty God. There were more powerful countries and rulers, nations with greater wealth and larger armies – and yet God chose the Jews to be a people He was to make His own.

This same strange way of choosing ill-equipped servants for the missionary work of undoing the destructive consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve is repeated over and over again. He chose us.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghgod.com

He chose our parish – weak and sinful sons and daughters though we may be. There are no excuses permitted in Scripture for not “doing” our part, for not searching for new ways, for not being open to new experiences and renewed openings. Vocation is not primarily about us. It is about the works for which God has called us and for opportunities He is sending our way. He makes them fruitful.

If the people of our area are to hear the Good News of what God has done and what God continues to do in His Son, we are the ones through whom they will hear and experience that heavenly love and compassion. How will they hear if we remain silent?

Pursue your vocation in 2020

Matthew opens his Gospel proper with the Sermon on the Mount. This is because it sets down the agenda for the rest of the Gospel and for the Church. Throughout the Sermon there are two foci. Jesus stresses the importance of growing (a) in our personal faith and (b) in our life as missionaries of the Kingdom. One is inward looking and the other is about engaging with the world.

What do I need to be exploring this coming decade?

According to Matthew, Jesus saw discipleship as an ongoing, lifelong movement towards a greater intimacy with God. This is not a new insight. We have heard this often throughout our lives but at no other time for many decades has it been of such importance. With a decline in the engagement of the world with the Church; with the status of the Gospel among society’s leaders and decision makers in freefall and generations of people growing up without knowing Christ, God wants more of a missionary focus in the way we live our faith. We need to allow the Spirit to transform us, to free up our baptismal graces and be *salt* and *light* in a world that struggles. The question is – **how?**

The biblical answer is the same as it has ever been: (a) return to the Bible and biblical living as a priority. Find a way to engage in Bible study, either alone or with others. (b) Grow in our prayer life: the way we pray, how we pray and explore other prayer possibilities. (c) Engage with other members of our faith community in growing in my knowledge of disciple-living. (d) Grow my sacramental participation that I may be further infused with divine grace. (e) Engage in works of charity, serving God by serving those in need.

What do WE need to be exploring this coming decade as a parish?

The kind of things of which the Gospel speaks with regard to discipleship, apply equally and importantly to our own faith community. If our parish is not taking its missionary responsibilities seriously, how then can expect the world around us to respond in a positive way to the Good News?

More than likely, there has been much talk during the last decade about renewal, mission and outreach but how much of that has moved beyond talk? The opening of this new decade of the 2020’s is our chance to turn that around. The Bible gives us our missionary goals and objectives: (a) Become a Bible focussed community, actively shaping what we do in accord with the Word of God as found in the Scriptures. For this to happen we will need to grow opportunities for people to discern what it is God is saying in the Bible. (b) Grow as a community with outreach as a priority. (c) Assist individual believers to grow in their knowledge of the faith and their opportunities to better engage with the world. (d) Grow the unique and special characteristic of the parish. (e) Live the Gospel.