THE NEW SHOFAR

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy."

January 25th

That the words of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:

What a week it has been! Only twenty-four days since we celebrated the fulfilling of the prophesies of the Old Testament with the birth of our Saviour, and already our New Year is challenging the disciples of Christ to be "out and proud". "*Proud"* because of what God continues to do in creation, in human history, and *"out"* because the voice that is so missing in the public arena is that of the Kingdom of God. Is this not what Jesus meant in today's Gospel, that God's promises are being fulfilled through the Spirit at work in us?

Silence is no longer an option – not that it ever was. The time for compromising the Gospel for the sake of avoiding conflict and in vain pursuit of acceptance has gone – not that it was ever a part of the Good News of Jesus. The world is looking for a Voice of Truth, living witnesses to what God wants for all men and women. People want to see and experience the difference faith makes in the betterment of our human condition. If not us, then who?

***And if not now, when*?"**

This week too we have heard the famous quotation from the Jewish Elder Hillel used in various forms to encourage our nation to take significant action in overcoming the evil of antisemitism in our communities and institutions…*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now,* ***when***?" This quote is often used to encourage action and taking opportunities in the present moment, but it is a sentiment in need of divine graces to make it possible.

Isaiah 43:2 would be a classic context for Hillel…"*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."* This verse is a powerful reminder of God's presence and protection amid trials and challenges. It reassures believers that no matter what difficulties they face, God will be there to guide them and keep them safe. It is a message of comfort and strength, encouraging faith in God's constant care and provision.

To this Jesus would add…**Matthew 10:19-20***: But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.* That is what makes Hillel's saying possible. Living the Gospel is not about theological knowledge, training, experience or technical skills. It is about allowing the Holy Spirit to do what the Spirit does best. The point there is the work of the Spirit of God. The courage we need is already gifted to us at baptism, renewed and invigorated each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our contribution? Persevering always.

Our contribution? – faith, hope and love

We have reached a decisive moment in the task of taking the Gospel to the "ends of the earth", a time Paul so eloquently outlined in his letter to the Ephesians: ***Put on*** *the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do*

not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, ***take up*** *the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to* ***stand firm****.* ***Stand*** *therefore, having* ***fastened*** *on the belt of truth, and having* ***put on*** *the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having* ***put on the readiness*** *given by the gospel of peace.* ... All of those powerful verbs! Here Paul is not writing theology. His letter(s) is a missionary manual, a reassurance that once we step out to live the Gospel, God is with us.

St Paul in his letter to the **Romans** puts our coming year into a very personal perspective…**10:14-15:** *How, then, can they (those who do not yet know Christ) call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?* ***15*** *And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*". Paul there opens us up for another very famous quotation, this time from **Edmund Burke***: The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.* In Gospel terms that translates as: persevere in faithfulness to Christ.

When we Christians vacate the public arena, false narratives reign

So far this summer our fellow Australians have battled with bushfires, cyclones, floods and brutal criminal acts of violence on our streets, and in them we have been given living examples of what happens when Jesus Christ, his life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension do not sit at the heart of our humanity. When individuals and groups live and promote an "alternative truth" to that of the Scriptures, tyranny and chaos reign. Without Christ and the Good News of God's reign on earth as a foundation, small "t" truths dominate the public forum, a place where the loudest voices capture the headlines and set the agenda. Abdel-Fattah, Louise Adler, Adelaide Writers Festival and those who boycotted it; the *theocratic* regime in Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; those hypocrites who continue to seek to impose their own political agendas on the wider community by weekly street marches opposing Israel while supporting Hamas/Palestinian criminals and yet do not march against the tyranny of Iranian oppression; the journalists for the London Times who came up with the headline… *Church faces certain death if it clings to its outdated views…* the list is endless. Even sadder, ***we*** rarely offer alternative Christian messages.

However, today we are challenged with magnificent, world altering invitations from God. In today's readings one thing is outstanding: there is a common purpose behind what God is saying to us. That purpose is the ongoing divine mission of redemption, and salvation, and with it the opportunity to participate with divine grace in making this world a better place in which we can live in peace and love. Coupled with this is the divine invitation to live eternally around the throne of God. This year should be the year of fulfilment, the year in which we commit ourselves to allowing God to fulfil his biblical promises through us.