

PROCLAIM
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On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes



**OASES OF MERCY:
PARISHES WHICH RADIATE CHRIST**

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Introduction: Parishes as Oases of Mercy

There are some parishes which really are oases of mercy. I can think of one in Rome. It's called *Sant'Egidio*. It was a normal parish for centuries until, in the 1980s, some of the young professionals who worshipped there began to meet each day for prayer after work. After a while, they felt they should be helping the poor whom they passed on their way to church.

They began to feed them with a soup kitchen which then developed into a night shelter. They attracted a large number of Eritreans whose real need they realised was help with literacy; so they organised themselves to educate them as well as providing them food and shelter. Meanwhile, the parishioners offered to serve food to countless homeless people. On Christmas Day, the church is transformed, after Mass, into a great dining room. And not just on Christmas Day. I had supper with a young woman who works full-time as a hospital secretary but is allowed by her boss to take a two-hour lunch-break one day each week to serve in the soup-kitchen. "How many people came there today?" I asked her. She reflected; and then said, "Well, a good two hundred, I'd say." You can imagine it's one of Pope Francis's favourite places. Because it's an oasis of mercy.

I use the phrase deliberately, oasis of mercy – because it's his. He used it in the Letter which he wrote for the Jubilee of Mercy and which he called *The Face of Mercy*. There he said, "Wherever there are Christians everyone should find an oasis of mercy... The Church is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy" (25). As soon as I heard it, it reminded me of something which St John XXIII had also said about parishes: he said a parish should be like a village fountain to which all have recourse in their thirst. A parish should be like a village fountain to which all have recourse in their thirst. Pope Francis gets even closer to this vision when he says, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, that he hopes a parish will be "a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey"; "a community with an endless desire to show mercy" (28)

If Francis gave us the image *Oases of Mercy*, it was Blessed John Henry Newman who inspired the idea of *Radiating Christ*. It comes from a poem of his, *Radiating Christ*, which we shall hear shortly. Newman was one of greatest intellects of 19th century England. He made the journey from Anglican ministry to becoming a Catholic – first a Catholic layman, priest and eventually Cardinal. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI beatified him when he visited England in 2010. *Radiating Christ* I find so striking that I believe it bears hearing in full:

Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go.

Flood my soul with Your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Yours.

Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others; the light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be mine: it will be You shining on others through me.

Let me thus praise You in the way You love best: by shining on those around me.

Let me preach You without preaching, not by words, but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You. Amen.

These words are powerful in themselves. I think they derive their force from the fact that they're a prayer. The fact that Newman offers them in worship to the Lord emphasises his belief that it's only with the Lord's help that we can begin to communicate Christ to others.



1. Parishes Radiating Christ

The reason I start in this way is that I am convinced that the way to proclaim Christ in 21st century England and Australia is to make of our parishes oases of mercy which radiate Christ. Pope Francis is clear as well that we are about radiating Christ. Because the face of God is Mercy; and Christ is that face. When he calls us to be missionary disciples, he means to be “missionaries of mercy”. In order for parishes to be truly missionary, he believes they need to rethink their approach: rethink the goals, structures, style and methods they employ to be more missionary. I think the rich young man of Matthew’s Gospel can help us here, with his question, “What more must I do?”

This is the question we’re being asked to consider by Pope Francis in each and every parish: “What more must I do?” Already, Pope St John Paul had urged us to put out into the deep at the start of the new millennium. And I’m sure you responded with great generosity in your dioceses and parishes.

Then Pope Francis came calling us to embark on another new chapter of evangelisation. The way he expresses is that he asks each particular church to undertake “a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform” (EG 30). He makes clear in the opening sentences of *Evangelii Gaudium* that this is about creating “new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” (EG 1). To anyone who is tempted to say, “But we’ve always done it this way” (EG 33), he begs them to think again; to put out into the deep once more.

2. Resolute Process of Discernment

This doesn’t mean parishes starting from scratch, though. In most parishes, there is already a great deal going on which is evangelising. Part of what we should be about in this “resolute process of discernment” is to celebrate what we already do; but then to ask what more the Lord may be calling us to do in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Where I come from, parishes have found it helpful to review their evangelising activity under four headings: Prayer, Caritas, Faith Formation and Marriage & Family Life. Simply to ask themselves: if, for instance, prayer is our parish’s gift, how might we deepen the parish’s prayer-life and somehow un-tap its evangelising potential? Our Masses may be good but we may have lost sight of what Pope Francis calls popular piety. By popular piety, he means popular devotions like processions and praying the rosary. We need to give deep consideration to how we meet the prayer-needs of our youth – to ask ourselves, “Do we need to invest more resources in Children’s Liturgy of the Word and Masses for Young People? Do we need to invest in Youth leaders?” Ask yourselves what you do well; and what more, in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Lord may be asking of you.

Ask yourselves the same questions with regard to what you do in the parish under the other headings of Caritas, Faith Formation and Marriage & Family Life. Taking Caritas, for example, your parish may be strong in its care for the elderly, in organising food for the hungry but may have given little energy to the inclusion of people with disabilities, to catechesis for people with learning disabilities, to access for those who are physically disabled. You may feel the time is ripe to explore the possibility of setting up a *Faith and Light* group; organising signing for deaf people at Mass; organising better disabled access. Take stock. Ask yourselves what you do well already; and what more, in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Lord may be asking of you.

To these four categories – of Prayer, Caritas, Faith Formation, and Marriage & Family Life - I would suggest adding a fifth, namely, new Evangelistic Outreach. This I add because there will always be a danger that parishes evangelize inwardly without looking outside of themselves sufficiently. Recent research in England and Wales suggests that the majority of converts to Catholicism already have a Christian background. We need to ask where we need to go to meet those who have not yet met Christianity. Some of you may have experience of *Night Fever*, which is literally about standing on the highways and byways near your church and inviting people into your church. It may be that the place to start is with a Welcoming Group to give a



deep welcome to those who do cross the threshold of the parish. Meanwhile consideration needs to be given to how the parish reaches out to those who come nowhere near the threshold.

Once you have discerned and agreed your Evangelising Initiatives for the next three years or so, decide which activity you will pursue over the course of the next eighteen months to two years in support of your parish's mission. This way you won't be overwhelmed by novelty but, at the same time, you will have a sense of where you want, as a parish, to be getting to next.

3. Forming Evangelisation Teams

This whole process of discernment presumes you have a group to lead it. We discussed the make-up of such a group in my workshop on Forming Evangelisation Teams. The discernment about Evangelisation in the parish can begin either before or after you form a Parish Evangelisation Team. But to have a Team is essential. Pope Francis is clear about this, when he says, in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory... The important thing is not to walk alone but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and pastoral discernment" (EG 33). We should remember, the Lord himself needed a team to help him carry out his mission. Like his, ours should be, ideally, about twelve: this leaves you room to retain a critical mass even if some withdraw from the group.

Prayer is essential before choosing the group; and once the group is chosen. They need all to be people for whom prayer is at the heart of their lives. The priest should most certainly be a member of the group but does not need necessarily to lead it. The team should represent the diversity of the parish – the diversity of ages, occupations, ethnicity and everything in between.

Belonging to the team should be their main parish role – not just an additional one. It doesn't mean the team members will be the evangelisers: the purpose of the team is to help the parish be mission-focused; sometimes the team is described as the "mission conscience" of the parish. Theirs it will be to discern new evangelising initiatives for the next three years or so; and to come up with strategies to resource them. For this they will need formation and clear terms of reference.

4. The Meaning of Evangelisation

This whole process of discernment to which Pope Francis calls parishes will lead them almost inevitably to ask themselves, "What exactly do we mean by evangelisation?" I would always want to stress that everyone is entitled to express it in their own way. You know, it says in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "There are as many ways of praying as there are people who pray" (CCC 2664) Well, it's the same for evangelisation.

I like to suggest that evangelisation is, at heart, about the communication of a relationship, a relationship with Christ – in word and deed and in such a way that causes people to ask, "Who is this Jesus whom you love and worship?" Evangelisation is, at heart, about the communication of a relationship, a relationship with Christ – in word and deed and in such a way that causes people to ask, "Who is this Jesus whom you love and worship?"

And this is where I think the Year of Mercy is such a gift to us. Mercy acts like a lens through which to make our evangelising endeavours all the more Christocentric. Because if we proclaim mercy we proclaim Christ. It is striking the force with which Pope Francis urges upon us both the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. He warns us they are the criteria upon which we will be judged: and urges us not to "forget the words of St John of the Cross (that) 'as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of (them)'. 'As we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love'.





5. The Corporal Works of Mercy

Just to remind ourselves what the Corporal Works are:

Feeding the hungry

Giving drink to the thirsty

Welcoming the stranger

Clothing the naked

Caring for the sick

Visiting those in prison

Burying the dead

Before we consider how we harness these to our discernment of evangelising initiatives, it's important just to note the context into which Pope Francis places them. One story more than any other seems, to me, to capture the spirit of the Corporal Works of Mercy. It's the story of the Good Samaritan. Pope Francis is keen on this story too. He urges us to recall that Jesus told that story in response to a question. It was the question of the lawyer, who dared to ask, "Who is my neighbour?" Pope Francis says Jesus is wanting us to understand that our neighbour is not just someone in a far-off land; our neighbour is more often the person we meet close at hand and whom we find to be in need.

It's no coincidence, therefore, that, when we study the literal meaning of mercy, we find it means having a heart for the poor. We learn this from Cardinal Kasper who reminds us that both St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas point out that the Latin word for mercy, "misericordia", means precisely that: having a heart (cor) for the poor (miseri): "Misericordia", mercy. Cardinal Kasper explains this more fully by going on to say that mercy is not just affective but also effective; that's to say, it seeks to relieve the plight of the poor. All of this needs to inform our discernment of how to make our parishes oases of mercy, places which have a heart for the poor.

In terms of how we harness the Works of Mercy to our discernment of Evangelising Initiatives, I suggest this can be quite straightforward. For instance, we may take for consideration the category of Marriage & Family Life. We should ask ourselves, what do we do well already in this area; then what more may the Lord be calling us to do in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*? Having done this, then to take prayerfully the Works of Mercy and ask what more we might do in the light of these – can lead to all sorts of possibilities.

6. How to Teach the New Evangelisation

The United States' Bishop Conference website gives us a taste of what we might come up with.

It has several very down-to-earth and feasible ideas, in a section titled, "How to teach the New Evangelisation". It takes each of the Corporal Works. Under Visit the Sick, for example, it has several suggestions:

- Give blood.
- Spend time volunteering at a nursing home.
- Take time on a Saturday to stop and visit with an elderly neighbour.
- Offer to assist caregivers or chronically sick family members on a one-time or periodic basis. Give caregivers time off from their caregiving responsibilities so they can rest, complete personal chores, or enjoy a relaxing break.
- Next time you make a meal that can be easily frozen, make a double batch and give it to a family in your parish who have a sick loved one.



One can see immediately the relevance for Marriage & Family Life. Doubtless, families in some of your parishes are doing a number of these things already. But a systematic review of how we might organise ourselves as a parish to help many more families take up such ideas could lead to a much louder proclamation of mercy.

7. Visiting Mr Flood

My father showed me at an early age how such acts of mercy can become an ordinary part of family life. And, by the way, I take no credit for this story since I was simply doing as I was told. My Dad was a schoolteacher and, in those days, he taught on a Saturday morning as well as Monday to Friday. Then, on his return from Saturday school, and before going off to referee rugby, he'd say to me, "Come on, Nick, get the shepherd's pie"; and we'd take it down the road to Mr Flood, me sitting in the front of the car with a hot pie balanced precariously on my lap.

Mr Flood lived in the barest flat I've ever seen – either then or since. But his smile filled it. And we used to look out for that smile as he sat, day in day out, at his window, waiting to give me and my brothers the heartiest of waves as we wended our way to and from the sweet shop! I realise now that he radiated Christ. Of course, it's only the Lord who knows the number of families in your parishes who are meeting Christ in similar ways through living out such Corporal Work of Mercy. They will tell you, if asked, that they receive more than they give to such lonely housebound people. What Pope Francis is saying is, "Yes; and let's do more of it"; "Let's organise ourselves to do more of it."

8. L'Arche

Viewing our Evangelising work through the lens of these Works reminds us Evangelisation doesn't need to be difficult. You can begin to evangelise just by doing it. I learnt this from getting to know the communities of L'Arche founded by Jean Vanier. He says the best way to proclaim mercy is just to start doing it.

Jean was the son of Georges Vanier, Governor-General of Canada. But, at the age of fifteen, Jean felt called to cross the Atlantic to join the Royal Navy. After ten years in the Navy, he left to study Philosophy at the Sorbonne. He soon began teaching Philosophy. It was while teaching that he met a priest who took him to meet some men he had befriended in the local psychiatric hospital. It was an asylum. As he got to know these men, Jean began to feel a deep call within him to share his life with them. He bought a little house which he called *L'Arche*, the Ark, Noah's Ark. And he gave a home to two men with significant learning disabilities called Raphael and Philippe.

It's interesting to hear Jean say he had no idea whatsoever that he was starting a movement. Now there are L'Arche communities in 58 countries across the globe and spanning every continent. All he knew was that he was doing something irrevocable. He began by just doing it. He often says the easiest way to start evangelising is just by doing it.

The vision of L'Arche, the heart of L'Arche, is to be found in words we find in the Gospel of Luke:

"Jesus said to his host: 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again.'" (14, 12-14)

A few moments later, Jean comments on that text. And he says something which is important for us to hear. He reminds us that Jesus says, "Do this and you will be blessed." Jesus doesn't say they will be blessed. He says you will be blessed. Why? Because, in the poor person to whom you give a welcome, you welcome Jesus. After all, Jesus said, did he not, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat; sick and you visited me"? Words which are echoed powerfully by Pope Francis when he says, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, when you



reach out to the poor, you touch the wounded body of Christ. In other words, you meet Christ, as well as proclaiming Christ. You meet Christ and proclaim Christ.

I say that. But when I reflect on all of those years of Dad and me taking shepherd's pie to Mr Flood, I wonder if he knew we were Christian? I believe we met Christ in Mr Flood and that he met Christ in us. But it seems a shame we never spoke to him about our faith. It takes us back to that earlier question of what Evangelisation is about. If it's about communication of a relationship in word and deed, don't we need to focus a little more on the words too? Pope Francis is keen for us to take this on board. That's why he gives a significant part of *Evangelii Gaudium* to discussion of how we communicate who we understand Jesus to be.

Telling people who the Lord is for us is vital, too, if we wish to be parishes which radiate Christ. I don't believe we even said grace with Mr Flood. I would now. I'd begin with that; and see his reaction. What I'd say next would depend on the way he responded. If he joined in, I might ask him if he'd like to pray a little more. If he didn't join in, I might ask him if he minded us praying. Either way, we could begin a gentle conversation – never to proselytise – but to lovingly enquire and perhaps provoke questions.

9. Spiritual Works of Mercy

It's very striking, in this context, to hear what Francis has to say about the Spiritual Works of Mercy specifically. Because they are principally about expressing our faith in words. Just to remind ourselves again of what they are:

Instructing

Advising

Consoling

Comforting

Forgiving

Bearing wrongs patiently.

Reflecting on all of these, Pope Francis speaks very strongly. He issues words of warning:

“We will be asked,” he says, “if we have helped others escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer.”

What we are being asked to realise is that we shall be selling the Works of Mercy short if we focus only on deed; we need also to focus on word – including our telling people who we believe the Lord to be. Successive Popes, from Paul VI to Francis, have been clear about this. Pope Francis even goes so far as to say, “There is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed.” (EG 22)

10. The Kerygma

Pope Francis uses that word “proclaimed”, deliberately. Because it's the word they used in the first years of the Church. The actual word they used was kerygma. Because kerygma means proclamation. Pope Francis sums up this kerygma succinctly and powerfully. He likes to call it the core proclamation; and he explains that it's simply telling people, “Jesus loves you; his self-emptying death on the cross saves you from selfishness and sin; now he walks with you every day.” (EG 164) “Jesus loves you; his self-emptying death on the cross saves you from selfishness and sin; now he walks with you every day.” He makes it even simpler sometimes – saying that all we need to proclaim is that “Jesus loves you ... (and) walks with you every day” (EG 164).



This we need to hold onto, as we reflect on the evangelising needs here in 21st century Australia, that the key to evangelisation is proclaiming who Jesus is for you in a way which leads others into a relationship with him. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI put this beautifully when he told the Bishops of the Philippines: “Your great task in Evangelisation is ... to propose a personal relationship with Christ as the key to personal fulfilment.” Those words are no less true for us than for the Bishops: “Our great task (too) in evangelisation is ... to propose a personal relationship with Christ as the key to personal fulfilment.” In other words, to announce the kerygma.

If “kerygma” is a new term for us, we shouldn’t be at all put off by it: as I say, it simply means “proclamation”, the proclamation of who Jesus is – the core message of the Gospels. This core proclamation is what Peter and then Paul were about as they sought, in the time immediately after the Ascension, to help people understand who Jesus of Nazareth was. It’s what we find Peter explaining so movingly to the men of Israel when he stands up in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and tells them:

“Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you know. This man ... you took and had crucified and killed ... But God raised him to life ... Now raised to the heights by God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.” (Acts 2, 22-24)

They were professing their profound conviction, which is ours also, that Jesus who had been put to death now lives and is present to us through the power of the Holy Spirit whom he has poured into our hearts.

11. Opportunities for Kerygma

The question is how to begin to share this core message with people. Sometimes, the opportunity presents itself to us by surprise. The years I was living in Rome, I had two experiences of this. The first was when I was asked to look after three young women – the daughter of a family friend and her two girl-friends. They were all 19. I was taking them into St Peter’s Basilica when I thought I’d better just check how much they knew.

As we crossed St Peter’s Square, I reminded them about Peter’s relationship with the Lord; how, in spite of Peter denying him, Jesus made him leader of the disciples; how it was Peter who was one of the first to find the tomb empty; the Risen Lord spent forty more days with his friends and made it clear that Peter was to be shepherd of the flock; after the Ascension, Peter preached first in Jerusalem then eventually came to Rome, preached there for decades and was finally arrested and martyred here in Nero’s Circus.

We reached the *Confessio* at the centre of the basilica just as I got to telling of his death; and I was able to say, “And this is where he was buried. Right under this altar: three altars down”. One of the girls had tears in her eyes and said, “I just don’t understand why no one has ever told me this before. How come I’ve never heard this? I wish I’d known it before!” She was bright; they were all going to either Oxford or Cambridge; she’d been to a Christian school but this was a revelation to her. I also wondered why no one had ever told her.

A few months later we entertained the English World Cup rugby team - the ones who did rather well in a certain rugby match here in Australia in 2004! One of their number couldn’t resist having a go on the College organ. When they heard the sound of his playing coming from the church, other players came in. They began to look at the frescoes of martyrs from the time of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Soon they asked me, “What are these?” I told them the story of our martyrs’ heroism: how they refused to be part of a Church which broke with Rome; and were prepared to go all the way to death for the sake of Catholic truth. And one of them looked at me, with moist eyes, and said, “I don’t understand why no one has ever told us this before. This is all news to me.” How many of our own young people would say the same: “You never told us. There’s so much about Jesus and our history that no one ever told us”



12. Kerygmatic Catechesis

We needn't be downhearted – but it should be a wake-up call to us: to wake up to the need constantly to revisit this core proclamation in our catechesis and preaching. Fr James Mallon, in his excellent book, *Divine Renovation*, is clear about this: “This proclamation,” he says, “ought (actually) to be present in every homily, in every class and in every talk.” He means we should be making the story of who Jesus is and how others have testified to that a part of all the conversations we have with those we're catechising – whatever their age or stage of faith.

Since I began this episcopal ministry, I've had the joy of meeting a lot of young people preparing for Confirmation. And I've come to realise how easy it is to proclaim the kerygma to them. In meetings with them and in preaching to them, I talk with them about the promises they are going to make. But I don't just talk about the fact that these are promises which their parents and godparents made on their behalf and which they now make for themselves. I also tell them, and this is the kerygmatic part, when you make these promises, you are saying you believe Jesus is who he says he is.

You're saying you believe he was God made human; that he was a historical person; that he was born around 2016 years ago in Bethlehem; that he grew up in Nazareth; that, at about the age of thirty, he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and began a ministry of teaching and preaching and healing; he worked many miracles which proved he was divine; but, after three years, his people rejected him; they had him put to death by crucifixion. But he had promised them he would rise from the dead. When he returned to the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. And it is this same Holy Spirit who comes upon you and leads you into the fullness of life.

Now, that's the kerygma, the core proclamation. It's what we mean by kerygmatic catechesis.

And it should be part of all the catechesis we do. It should be part of the discussion we have not just in RCIA – if we discuss these things at all; and we certainly should – but in all sorts of other catechetical moments: when we meet with parents who are asking for their child's baptism, when we prepare children and adults for their child's 1st Eucharist; in marriage preparation. Dare to ask, “When you say the Creed at Mass on Sunday, do you believe in everything we say there; or are there some parts you wonder about, would like to discuss, know more about?” After all, if we can't talk about these things in formal catechesis, then when can we?

It's what Pope Francis means when he says we need to revisit this core message at all different stages of faith development. In this, he is only reiterating what the General Directory for Catechesis said nearly twenty years before him – that catechesis, at all stages of faith development, needs to be evangelising. We begin by revisiting the core proclamation: communicating a relationship, a relationship with Christ – in word and deed and in such a way as makes people ask, “Who is this Jesus whom you love and worship?”

13. Changing the World

I'd like to finish with something I learnt in my first parish. Soon after I arrived, I saw a poster at the back of the church. It said simply this: “Ever thought of changing the world one heart at a time?” It was an invitation to join a community which welcomed some of the most marginalised of people. Changing the world one heart at a time. Because one heart at a time is how Jesus began when he called Matthew and James and John and Peter and Andrew to be his disciples. One heart at a time is how he first spoke to the heart of each

one of us here. One heart at a time was how my Dad taught me we proclaim mercy to Mr Flood. I do believe it's one heart at a time that we begin to radiate Christ – showing every person whom we encounter not just that our parish is an oasis of mercy but that they'll find an oasis of mercy in us, in each of us. I think this picture says even better what I mean. It is a photograph of Pope Francis greeting a man with a completely ulcerated head. We may like just to contemplate this image for ten seconds or so.





It's significant the Pope says he had no idea whether the man he embraced was contagious. He just wanted to embrace him.

Jean Vanier had no idea how embracing Raphael and Philippe would work out. You don't arrive at that sort of spontaneous generosity by accident. It's because you've been evangelised yourself. That comes from years of meeting the Lord daily in prayer. Then you begin to radiate Christ. And it's where we need start too: on our knees. If more and more people in our community are doing the same, giving themselves daily to the Lord in prayer, giving themselves daily to their neighbour through acts of generosity, self-sacrifice, charity and loving-kindness – then, little by little, our parishes *will* become something like what Blessed John XXIII and now Pope Francis were hoping they might be - oases of mercy which radiate Christ. And we will find our Church becomes missionary in ways we never imagined possible.



Reflection Questions

1. Do you consider your parish to be an “oasis of mercy?” Why or why not?

2. Blessed John Henry Newman inspired the idea of “Radiating Christ”. Using his poem of the same name, prayerfully engage in an exercise of *lectio divina*. What words or phrases speak to you as you meditate on the text? What connections do you make with your Christian vocation? To what actions are you being called?

3. Pope Francis believes parishes need to rethink their approach, goals, structures, styles and methods to be more missionary in focus. To those that say, “We have always done it this way,” Pope Francis begs them to think again; to put out into the deep. What goals, structures and styles should your parish revisit to promote a more missionary footing?

4. Bishop Hudson suggests it may be helpful to consider and review our evangelising activity under four headings: *Prayer, Caritas (outreach in love), Faith Formation, and Marriage & Family Life*. What might you do in the parish, at home, and in the workplace under these headings? What parish actions do you discern as most urgent? What is the greatest opportunity for parish renewal?

5. To these four categories, Bishop Hudson nominates a fifth, *Evangelistic Outreach*. He states there is “a danger that parishes evangelise inwardly without looking outside of themselves sufficiently.” In your parish, what is the balance between nourishing those within the parish and evangelising those beyond?

6. Bishop Hudson speaks of the importance of having an evangelising plan and forming evangelisation teams to support the mission of the parish; to be the “mission conscience of the community.” Do you have an evangelising team within your parish, and a plan for evangelising action?

7. Pope Francis impresses the importance of enacting the works of mercy. What opportunities within parish life present themselves for this outreach?

8. Bishop Hudson stresses the need to speak of who we are in Christ in word and deed. The essential and basic proclamation, the kerygma, discloses our relationship with Christ; our firm conviction in the faith. How might you naturally express the kerygma?

9. How have you been inspired by Bishop Hudson’s keynote? What words, images and actions are calling you to share your life in Christ?
