

# Gospel Activists

## Scripture's calling

Working in education and often with children and young people I find a thirst, even longing for something that is worth living for. It is not that they haven't heard the messages of scripture. In fact, many are very able to quote and refer to scripture passages with ease. So, one asks, why is there such a marked disinterest. I wonder if it is not as Pope Francis points out "We need credible witnesses."

The Word, who is life, must be something that energises, even enflames us into action. As Christians we are called to proclaim the Gospel in all its challenges and radicality. Yet as G.K Chesterton points out "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried." Living the Gospel is about action. Taking risks is not comfortable, or easy, but if we are to be those Gospel activists that Jesus called his friends to be then our young people will not see scripture as something belonging to the past with little relevance for their lives today, but as the driving force giving meaning and purpose to life.

Knowing our story, where we have come from and where we are headed is essential if we are to find a 21st century expression of who we are today. So much of the Old Testament is dramatic, plain scary, romantic, inspirational, and full of awe-inspiring stories of how God works in and through the most unlikely characters. Retelling these stories, as a passionate narrative in true storytelling style, rather than just read from a page, or worse still with little or no expression, hardly audible and lifeless, does much to engage the listener. It helps to light the spark of interest and desire to discover more.

Finding a place in the story is critical. A great place to begin is the account of the Ascension. That moment when Jesus turns to his friends and says, "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation" (Mark 1:15). Notice it is the whole of creation, an amazing statement. What Jesus is calling his friends to is action. Speak yes, but words alone are far from enough. Witness to the person of Jesus Christ is the mandate. Without this radical witness down through the ages would the Church exist today one wonders. So, the baton has been handed down from the first apostles and friends of Jesus to us today. For St Paul the imagery of running in the race serves to emphasise that we are all called to take part in a gigantic relay race, each taking the baton from the one before, doing their bit heading for the ultimate goal.

Recently I was meeting with a group of primary school children reflecting on Pope Francis's Six new Beatitudes to confront today's injustices and suffering. As we discussed how to respond to the many injustices in their area today, I was both delighted and saddened at the depth of understanding of these beatitudes that nine-year olds were demonstrating. Their passion for action did not remain just words. One young girl said, "If the grown-ups won't do anything, then we will." Shortly after that I saw them and their teachers on twitter lining the streets with banners and placards demanding change. Sadly, I also noticed the number, albeit small, of negative tweets condemning such actions. Children are ready to be Gospel Activists if we let them.

Most people love a good story. Jesus used this technique to perfection. So, let's follow his example and reflect on how well we know our own scriptures and how important are they really to us. Some time ago, I came across one of those interesting short passages on the internet which challenged the reader to consider what might happen if we treated our Bible like their mobile phone.

Imagine, the story goes, never leaving the house without it, referring to it every few minutes, constantly looking at it for guidance. Even going to bed with it just a few inches away. What indeed would happen I wonder?

Sr Judith Russi SSMN

## THE GOD WHO SPEAKS