

PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE – *'Priests and People – All Shapes and Sizes!'*

26 / 27 June 2010

Dear Friends

In the last few weeks, we have been celebrating the Ministerial Priesthood – Golden Jubilees of Frs Joe Walsh and Peter Hayes in May, the Ordination of Fr Tan on 4 June, and his First Mass in St James' Parish last Sunday. Whenever a group of priests get together, one of the striking things is the variety of shapes and sizes! Very few sport tattoos, though I've met a couple with tattoos from a previous life, and there is the occasional ear stud and unusual hair style. In general, they're a group of men committed to service of the Gospel, passionate about the Church, celebrating the Sacraments, social justice, making a difference in the world as disciples of Jesus.

Priests come from different career backgrounds too. The Archdiocese of Brisbane has a couple of former electricians who became priests. In Victoria, I met Fr Owen Doyle, ex-teacher, widower and grandfather. Fr Michael Tate (Hobart) is a former Federal Senator and Government Minister, and Fr Frank Brennan SJ continues to use his skills as a lawyer in service of the Gospel. Augustinian Provincial Fr Tony Banks was a merchant banker, Fr Abel an apprentice butcher, and our own Fr Tan a fully qualified nurse. In the seminary I met some former US Marines and in Rome last year I met an Augustinian who had worked for US Government intelligence, probably as a spy! Add to this list such diverse occupations as actors, teachers, sports stars, engineers, bus drivers, even chefs, and you have the Catholic Priesthood.

Are we really surprised? Priests are drawn from the rich diversity of ages, nationalities and cultures in the Body of Christ, each living out their priesthood in distinctive ways, yet always focused on the Gospel of Jesus. This richness in the Church is reflected too in the Communion of Saints and the great variety of men and women whose holiness has been recognised by the Church over the years. Whatever our vocation, the saints are our companions and models, and don't they come in different shapes and sizes? Think of people like Rita of Cascia, widow and Augustinian nun; Augustine, sinner, convert and Father of the Church; Elizabeth of Hungary, princess, widow and Franciscan tertiary; Ignatius of Loyola, soldier and Jesuit founder; Philip Neri, confessor, founder and eccentric; John Henry Newman, scholar and archbishop. Then there are the 'saints' in our own personal and family – my mother is certainly one of them. What an exciting gallery!

As a priest, I find incredible strength in this great array of holiness. Indeed, in the lives of the Saints, in their faith, commitment, joy, great love, strong and lasting friendships, and acceptance of the Cross too, we find ways of passing on the divine gifts to others. As I said in my homily last Sunday, we priests need to remember that the lofty truths and theological gems of our formation do not perfectly coincide with the messiness in our lives and the lives of those we serve. But then, Jesus has

made holy our humanness and the gift is here, in our lives, amidst the everyday grind. It is here that we find Christ, here where we come to understand, live and love this gift of Priesthood.

Fr Dave