

**TALK GIVEN BY
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NISHI GALLERY IN NEWACTON**

We give thanks to God for the many blessings he has given Catholic Care over the last sixty years of its existence here in the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. We also look forward to the next sixty years! The Archdiocese is geographically very big. It goes from Lake Cargelligo right down to Eden and then from the big rural towns of Goulburn and Yass down to the Australian Alps. In so many places in the Archdiocese Catholic Care is making a real difference to the battlers here in this part of Australia.

I commend the wonderful leadership of Anne Kirwan. She is such a blessing to us all and provides great enthusiasm and expertise to Catholic Care in these difficult times. I also commend her two hundred and seventy staff for the many acts of kindness that they offer to the needy. Every year about ten thousand people are helped very practically by the Catholic Care of the Archdiocese.

Mind you, Catholics caring for those on the fringes started two thousand years ago! Jesus made it quite clear in his preaching here on earth that we were to give the greatest priority to the strugglers. Not only that, he identified himself personally with those who are on the fringes. We recall how he said that when you feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned...you did it to me! Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta often said in her lifetime that the Gospel is on our five fingers..."you did it to me". This is a great summary of our mission.

So the context of Christianity going out to the periphery is not new. What is new is the historic context of this outreach today. Particularly in the western world and very secularist countries like Australia, new challenges emerge. These challenges are fresh and were probably not there in such a great intensity sixty years ago when Catholic Care started in this Archdiocese.

I believe that western democratic countries, especially places like Australia, tend to ask religions three major questions.

The first question they ask is, "Are you really needed to bring us happiness?" The secularist argument is that we don't really need God, we can get through life on our own. It proposes the following. "Yes, those who want to have a religious aspect to their lives may go ahead. But the great engine room of finance, economy and success really is delinked altogether from a religious sentiment."

The difficulty with this argument is that it avoids asking the big questions of humanity. When people wake up at 2 AM quite alert in their mind; when they perhaps are walking along deserted beaches; or if they're in the waiting room of a big hospital casualty ward; other questions come to mind that the secularist can not answer. Questions like: Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? These and

others are all primal questions that philosophers throughout the ages have all said are intrinsic to human identity. The thing of great interest is that these three questions cannot be answered truthfully without a religious anchorage. To buy into the secularist argument is ultimately to live a somewhat short sighted humanity. It encourages a more robotic humanity to evolve which focusses on what I can do but refuses to answer the questions "Who am I? and What am I to BE?"

The second big question that western democracies tend to ask the religions of today is "Do you cause violence?"

This is an understandable question when so many terrorist acts, which are somewhat new in their intensity and number around the world today, are often prefaced by the use of religious language. But there is an enormous difference between true religion and people who cowardly enact terrorist acts invoking theological terminology. Let it be said clearly once again: true religions in the world promote peace and are the opposite to any form of violence.

Third question asked of religions today, and particularly Christian churches which includes the Catholic Church is "Can we trust you?"

This question has been asked in the light of sex abuse of minors, and some personnel of the church have clearly been found to be perpetrators of these atrocities.

The Catholic Church is very grateful for the Royal Commission, at the moment, into child abuse which is moving towards finality. It has really helped us to focus on this issue and to assure future generations that these criminal acts will not happen in the future, please God. There is the assurance that, churches and their institutions are safe places for people, particularly the innocent and young.

One of the great gifts of this troubling time is the immergence of victims and victim support groups. They have had the courage to articulate their grievances. I see them as real wounded healers who are moving from the margins into the centre of church focus.

With these three questions and other questions the church seems to be a very vulnerable institution these days in many aspects, including social welfare activities.

Yet in the midst of our vulnerability we align ourselves to the wounded side of our Master crucified on the Calvary Cross. From a point of asking forgiveness and healing we then humbly ask the western world one fundamental question. The question coming from Christian churches to the western democracies is this..."Do you realise that Jesus loves you and has made you in his image and likeness?"

Jesus has come into our world. We are not made of rubbish. There is a spark of the divinity in our humanity. As a result, through the coming of Jesus into our humanity in all things but sin, there is a fundamental human dignity that every human being possesses.

It is to every human being regardless of their background, orientation, colour, nationality or what ever, that the Catholic Church extends God's loving hand towards them.

Here in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, as we minister to the battlers who we see as Jesus coming to us in fragile situations, we offer love and caring in their needs.

In Catholic Care here in this Archdiocese this provident care is particularly directed toward the homeless. Homelessness in this beautiful city of Canberra is far more entrenched than one would think. There are many different levels to homelessness, not just ones that are glaringly visible. But the Catholic Care also reaches out to those with mental illness, with relationship challenges and counselling needs, to drug and alcohol victims, to those that struggle with disabilities, to the rolling out of the NDIS, to aged care and their particular needs and so on.

In all of these needs we see the dignity of the human person – the spark of God’s life, in those who are needy.

The Catholic Church’s social welfare arm is not just one philanthropic organisation amongst others albeit with a pious level. No, we are here because we see Christ in the needy and we minister to all humanity no matter who they are in the name of Christ.

So I do commend this new strategic plan of the next twelve months for Catholic Care and this awareness raising program today to let everybody know that we are here to serve the needy at all times.