

DAUGHTERS OF DIVINE ZEAL – 1959-2009

50 YEARS IN AUSTRALA

ST IGNATIUS' CHURCH, RICHMOND, VIC., AUSTRALIA
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HOMILY

By

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“And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them”

These expressions from St Matthew’s Gospel beautifully express the apostolic motivation in the heart of the Saviour in reaching out to others.

Feeling “sorry” for others is an expression that can be so easily misunderstood. In Australia feeling “sorry” for someone can be a very negative motivation – it can be patronising. This is not what the bible means by “sorry”. It is feeling compassion for someone. More than that, biblically it is a feeling coming deep from within someone – it starts not only in the heart but can also affect the bodily reactions. It is being deeply moved for others in a desperate situation.

This is closer to what is happening in the Gospel today. Because the people were “harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd” Jesus “felt sorry for them”.

In the depth of his grief for them – from his heart - he said to his disciples, “Ask / pray / “rogate” the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.” It is not a limp wish or suggestion. It is more of an urgent request of the disciples / a command, if you wish.

In 1868, praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament, Saint Hannibal di Francia, receives what he calls “the understanding of the Rogate”. He interprets today’s Gospel (also in Luke 10/2) as a biblical command to him to make a response for his time and age. In 1887 he founds the Congregation of Divine Zeal. Soon afterwards the young Nazarena Majone joins the young Congregation devoted to the poor in Messina, Sicily. She becomes the co-foundress of the Daughters of Divine Zeal.

Their apostolate is to enter the Holy side of Jesus, to live within this divine Heart, to experience its love, interests, pains and to share in its sacrifices. They are to console the Divine Heart through their own sacrifices. They are to be “harvest workers” in fulfilment of today’s gospel of sending workers into His harvest. They are to be active in prayer and prayers in activity. Today, about 64 communities are to be found throughout the world.

And so, 50 years ago, in 1959, they arrived here in Richmond, Victoria, in acceptance of the Italian chaplain of the time, Fr Nicola Tornese s.j. They offered pastoral care to the Italian communities of the diaspora here in Melbourne. Later on they establish communities in Shepparton and later in Chatswood, and the Diocese of Broken Bay in New South Wales. Their apostolate has included: missions for the people, operating a nursery school, Italian classes and a kindergarten. Also, there has been the ministry to parish communities, vocational awareness, and providing accommodation for female university students.

I am interested to read the present Superior General message for this 50th anniversary. She writes: “ From the history of our annals we know that in the beginning it was not an easy mission – nothing was clear and precise. The only certainty was the answer of God’s sure design of calling us to be at the side of so many Italian immigrants who were alone and in difficulty – especially the children, orphans and neglected ones”. She goes on to say: “Yet our mandate was the same: to be God’s witnesses, with incontestable faith, hope and charity that becomes visible in the holiness of a life totally offered; to be the light that shines in the darkness of a society marked by lacism (secularism) without direction, and to stir up evangelical labourers for the immense harvest of the Australian land.”

Yes, Australia is a tough mission ground.

We are such a young nation. We are a young people in an ancient land. Only a little over 200 years ago the Europeans first met the first Australians – our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples. Only a year ago we officially offered a national apology to them for the pain we have caused them since our arrival.



Already this year we have experienced the worst natural disaster in our history – the Victorian Bushfires. At the same time torrential floods were occurring the north of this Island-continent. We are a land of contrasts – like nature – we are capable of great beauty and serenity and we are capable also of tremendous greed and insensitivity.

Into all this immaturity and youthfulness has come the Daughters of Divine Zeal. I really appreciate this most beautiful word “zeal”. In Pauline literature, zeal can denote both a positive Gospel attribute (cf. Titus 2/14) or negative (Gal 5/20). But for the Sisters, it is DIVINE zeal – it is a expression of divine love – it is a flame of love – that energetically burns up all falsity and pride and leave only pure missionary holiness in place.

I thank all the Sisters of divine zeal who have laboured hard in this complex vineyard, the ones alive and the ones who have already met the Lord in heaven. On behalf of the Bishops of Australia, thank you for all the holy flame of God’s love you have given us.

We look forward to the next 50 years of your apostolate among us. What will they be like? Only the merciful Lord knows. But I am sure that the zeal for God will continue in all that you do in Australia in the future.

May you continue to be the ROGATE Daughters of Divine Zeal. Continue being the contemplatives in the active world for us. The ones who imitate Our Lady of the Southern Cross and magnify the Lord for all his mercy lavished upon us.