

JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE-LENT

"I am just a poor nun who prays!"

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

We are now into Lent and trying hard to fast and do penance. I am trying to avoid eating sweet treats such as cakes and biscuits and to reduce the portions on my plate which is hard when you have a wife with a generous heart and who is a qualified chef and loves to treat people. But we are both trying hard to observe our Lenten fast. There is only one food I will never refuse. The food of life, The Holy Eucharist, The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our saviour.

I was reminded the other day of a man who, in the latter half of the last century, was a popular TV personality. Malcolm Muggeridge was a hard-nosed journalist, a critic and a satirist. He was not a believer and did not adhere to any religion but he was an intellectual and a very witty man and I quite liked him. Mother Teresa and her sisters were becoming well known at that time and Malcom took a film crew to Calcutta to make a documentary about them. They filmed the work these nuns were doing in the streets caring for every poor sick and dying unfortunate they found. Malcolm was astonished and asked how were they able to do what they were doing and still keep smiling. Mother Teresa invited him to come the convent early the next morning, she showed him through to the chapel where he sat and watched them celebrate Mass and receive the Blessed Sacrament. He found it very humble and holy but a bit boring. Afterwards, Mother Teresa said to him, "Did you see? The whole secret is here. It is Jesus who puts his love in our hearts and we simply go out and give it to the poor we meet". Malcolm Muggeridge was so impressed he later was baptised a Catholic. While reading about Saint Teresa, I began to think of my own life.

Every morning, I say a prayer by Saint John Henry Newman asking Jesus to stay with me. Part of the prayer is "teach me to preach without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, by my visible resemblance to your saints and the evident fullness of the love which my heart bears for you." In the gospel on Ash Wednesday, Jesus tells us to pray in secret and to not draw attention to oneself. At first, I thought the prayer and the Gospel reading were contradictory but when I reflected on it, I realised that when we pray, it is what is in our hearts that is important. I try to say my prayers slowly and with meaning especially at Mass, When I say the responses, I try, consciously to mean every word.

As I reflected, I became aware of how little I am. I have lived to a good age and my life has been very blessed. I grew up with five sisters and two brothers, I was the middle one of eight and while reflecting I came to realise that I am the least of my siblings for they all have attained more qualifications and have achieved more than I have. Even my own children and grandchildren have out shone me. I closed my eyes and thought of all the people I have known, both past and present, who have served this parish so well. What great faith they had. I felt humbled. I have been very naïve throughout my life. I have known that there were bad people in the world who did bad things but as far as I know I have never met anyone like that. I have met many people throughout my life, some have disappointed me but never to an extent to cause me to hold a grudge and I pray for their welfare. God has always been there to watch over me. I fear that I may be judged more harshly, not for what I have done but for what I should have done but failed to do.

O Lord, have mercy on me a sinner!