

It's been three weeks since the Easter Season concluded and Ordinary Time resumed. Today, we're finally back in green after Trinity Sunday and then Corpus Christi last weekend. And while green symbolises **growth** in the Christian journey, symbols are **only** effective if we understand and take heed of them. In the same way, seasonal changes in the church's calendar only become meaningful if we let them **affect** how we approach the practice of our faith. Today, I'm inviting you to commit to growth in your own Christian journey.

Now, if I was in your seat – which I was for the first 37 years of my life – I'd be asking the question: why do I need to commit to growth? Isn't celebrating Mass enough? It's a fair enough question **if** our understanding of Catholic faith remains rooted in childhood and **how** we were brought up. It reveals a practice of faith that's primarily grounded in what a person chooses to **believe**, and in what they faithfully **do**. It reveals that we're sometimes tied to a church culture that no longer exists – rather than seeking to intimately **know** the person of Jesus, risen and present in our midst, and then sharing what we've received with others. The culture of obligation and silence died last century, but I **certainly** recognise being tied to it in my own life. Our readings reveal the purpose and meaning of the Christian life at **this** time – twenty-six-and-a-half years into the 21st century.

Moses has been leading the Israelites – or we could say, **actively accompanying them** – on a journey from slavery into freedom. They've passed through the waters of the Red Sea, breaking from their past (*which is profoundly symbolised when an adult chooses the waters of baptism*) and, with God's help, they've fumbled their

way through the first couple of obstacles; namely, accessing water (*Moses struck the rock with his staff and water came out*) and then defeating a warring tribe (*as long as Moses held up his arms during the battle, the Israelites were assured of victory*). In today's reading, Moses is leading the people to a **special place** – the **very** place where he himself first **encountered** God in the Burning Bush in Exodus chapter 3, and was **sent** on a **specific** mission to free the people whom God was choosing as his very own. **He's led them to Mount Sinai**, to the place of encounter, where God says: "*If you obey my voice... you of all the nations shall be my very own... I will count you a kingdom of priests.*" Now this last word – "*I will count you a kingdom of **priests***" – is extremely important for **how** we understand our role and purpose as Christians.

When a person is baptised, they're commissioned like Jesus Himself, as **priest**, prophet and king. Most people here have been baptised – probably about 95% or more – and so **sharing** in the **priesthood of the baptised**, the overwhelming majority of us here were **set apart** at baptism and **sent** – not like a priest, but **as** a priest – **to mediate God's blessings to the rest of the world**. Our challenge today is that many of us have never realised the power and beauty of our baptismal priesthood because we were baptised as babies. The fruitfulness of our mission therefore depends upon each of us discovering Jesus' living and active presence in our lives, experiencing the power of His love, hearing His voice and what He is asking of us, and be empowered to actively accompany **other** people to encounter Jesus.

Friends, this is exactly what the disciples were sent out to do by Jesus in the Gospel – to lead people from slavery to sin and old

ways of thinking **into** the **freedom** of realising that God has not just chosen them, but calls them by name, loves them and has a life-giving plan for them. “*Proclaim,*” they’re instructed to do, “*that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.*” This is **exactly** what people experience when they encounter the Lord in ways that stretch them beyond their current practice of the faith – no matter where they are at, or how **long** they’ve been, on their faith journey.

And so, my challenge to you is this: commit yourself to growth in the Christian journey to which you were called at baptism – because there’s nothing static about a life lived in the transformative love of Jesus. Perhaps it’s committing to five minutes of prayer each day in stillness, silence and solitude; listening for the gentle sound of Jesus’ voice. Perhaps it’s committing to learning how to pray with Scripture, which one of the principal ways Jesus speaks to us. Or perhaps it’s consciously breaking free from old ways of thinking about our role and purpose as Christians. Baby or adult – when we were baptised, we were **chosen, named, set apart,** and **sent out** to share what we have received from God with other people. Our faith is not our own but **given** to share with those who do not yet believe. **Accept** this challenge and **take** this journey, because I can promise that you’ll **receive** infinitely more than it **costs**.