

*40 years ago, Saint Pope John Paul II visited Alice Springs and spoke **these** words to gathered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders: *“The Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.”* Like the words of Scripture, these words were spoken to a particular people at a particular time, but they continue to speak to us today. Our parish, and the communities within her, will not be what Jesus intends them to be until **we** have joyfully received the contribution of not **just** first nations people, but all cultures in our parish.

Now, I’m not sure if we have any first nations people here today, but if we do, I humbly thank you for the privilege of walking on this land and invite you to make yourself known so that together, we may actively pursue **unity** and **wholeness** – attributes **of** God which Jesus himself prayed for: *“that they – us – may be one.”*

In the Gospel 4 weeks ago, Jesus sent his disciples out to *“proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.”* Their ability to proclaim **what** the Kingdom of Heaven was, and **how** it had come close, was **intimately** and **inseparably** connected with their experience of friendship with Jesus and witness to the spiritual meaning of his miracles. Friendship with him mended their broken lives, as did Jesus’ healing of the blind, the deaf, the lame and marginalised. Today, **unity** and **wholeness** continue to be **fruits** of Jesus’ living presence in human lives and it’s these things – and more – which Jesus gave thanks to the Father for hiding from the learned and the clever.

Let's listen, once more, to **exactly** what Jesus says in today's Gospel because it bears repeating: "*I bless you, Father... for hiding **these things** from the learned and the cleaver and revealing them to mere children.*" When I read this at the start of the week, my mind was drawn to another place in the Gospel where Jesus says, "*Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*" We're very clearly in the realm of metaphor and it begs the question: what is a little child **like** – or what are we called to become **like** in our spiritual lives?

The phrase, "*hiding **these things** from the learned and cleaver,*" refers to the sometimes hidden truths about **who Jesus is and what he offers**, which is to say, the **arrival of God's Kingdom**. In the preceding text, **John the Baptist** had sent messengers asking whether Jesus was truly the Messiah (the Saviour); Jesus then speaks about the coming of God's Kingdom, before denouncing the towns of **Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum** because they witnessed his mighty works yet refused to change their ways. **These things**, then, are not secret pieces of information but the reality of Jesus the Saviour healing and restoring broken human lives – something that's happening to different people in our parish at this time.

The irony in the Gospel is that the people who considered themselves wise and religiously competent often failed to recognize what God was doing in the person of Jesus, while the **little children** – the humble, the receptive, the dependent, and open-hearted – were able to both perceive and receive. This theme runs throughout Matthew's Gospel wherein spiritual understanding

is less about intelligence or education and more about humility and receptivity to what God reveals. The ***learned and cleaver*** are the blind because they are self-sufficient – they don't understand what God is offering – while the humble and open are compared with ***little children*** because they are open and teachable.

So how can we apply today's Gospel in our own lives? Well, it's challenging stuff for life-long Catholics because it forces us to confront the reality that God has something more in store for us than we currently realise – something good. It challenges comfort and familiarity and invites openness to participating in the life of the parish in new ways. It certainly challenges a *'that's not for me'* attitude.

Today, I invite you to stand before the Lord with empty hands and an open heart and pray: *"Lord, show me what I cannot yet see. Teach me what I do not yet know. Reveal to me the gifts I have not yet received."* Perhaps that's also why Saint Pope John Paul II's words still matter forty years later: because God's gifts can only be received by those humble enough to recognise them.