



Pray not to be put to the test

By Br John Verhoeven fsp

I am a Patrician Brother, working in Wyong Hospital with CatholicCare as a Pastoral Care Practitioner. I also volunteer in a few roles at OLR Parish, The Entrance. A few weeks ago, my fellow Patrician Brothers and I buried Br Mark Ryan. He was the one few expected would ever die. Often, this is the expectation of those I meet in hospital, death is rarely expected and plainly unwelcome. I notice that the readings for Palm Sunday suggest the same is true for Jesus.

I find myself in a privileged position at Wyong Hospital. The task of listening finds its fulfilment in the role of a Pastoral Care Practitioner. It is not simply being a pair of ears to hear with, but a soul and voice to assure the other that they are both heard and are in a safe place. Not everyone is in a frame of mind to immediately trust the stranger arriving at their bedside, yet when the trust flows I am not the only beneficiary. On those occasions I believe I get an insight into how God feels when people give themselves over to him in prayer. Paradoxically this sustains me, even when the process of dealing with many forms of grief is a draining one. We are indeed complex creatures, are we not?

Over the past 46 years my ministries (jobs) have varied a lot. I trained to be a Maths/Science teacher. Then a few Year 9 students revealed that I do not have the skills to manage a group of teenage boys. So, Parish work became a key part of my ministries from then on, mostly in a voluntary capacity.

Along the way I found further satisfaction in roles as diverse as labourer, Video Production Assistant, Pastoral Associate, Resource Centre Librarian, Vocations Adviser and Pastoral Carer. A life of prayer, within a dedicated community has remained the constant ground which gave purpose to these diverse activities.

In reflecting on the readings of Palm Sunday it is easy to miss the little things that make the journey of Jesus into Jerusalem different. Even when I remember how the cries of praise turned vicious, the reasons can be missed. Basically, the crowds, including many of Jesus' own disciples, wanted to use the miracle worker, Jesus, in a way that served them. How bitterly disappointed they were when Jesus led them in a significantly different direction.

Can I cope with this type of leadership? When Jesus leads me to a life significantly different to the one I expected, will I too turn on him? This is the question every holy week throws up for me; and most times I change the subject. Undoubtedly, Jesus would like too as well, he was not finished with his temptations in the desert, which we heard about four Sundays ago. During today's Passion, Jesus struggles with his fears to the point of sweating from grief (Luke 23:44) before his prayers afford him the grace to follow his Father's will to the full.

I sometimes wonder if my prayers have the power to overcome the fears which abound in me. To let me do the good God gave me the opportunity to carry out. If I could see God's

guarantee, the risk of committing myself to following Jesus, would be a lot less daunting. Yet no one I know of, ever, has that level of certainty. In Gethsemane, it seems Jesus was tempted to take a less painful, less risky, path for changing the world. All very rational, perfectly logical too, I suppose: but clearly not what God wanted.

In the middle of these prayers, Jesus returns to his (small) community, for affirmation. If others were important to Jesus' prayer, how dangerous is it for me to overlook them in my prayer life. The role of Church community is a sacramental one, and I seek it out whenever I feel the need. If we all followed this practice of Jesus, I believe it would improve the quality of our Church community. It certainly couldn't hurt. At least fewer people would pray alone.

Living with complete faith that the God of miracles will do something completely mysterious to make good out of this deeply flawed creation is a risky proposition. Yet Jesus insists on it, by word and action, and is the way God has shown himself for millennia. The temptation to quit is a daily issue for me, thank God for the simple of ways in which he shows his blessing when I stop to listen for his grace. Pray today not to be put to the test.