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Bishop of Broken Bay

Message for BBNeighbourhoods 30 June 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

One of my priests was recently told that there are no young people in the Church. When he shared this with me, he quickly added that he did not believe it. He soon set about his pastoral ministry and within a very short time; dozens of young people were connecting with the community of the Church. Thank God for that priest and his wonderful spirit of hope and clear vision.

On 22 October 1978, at the inauguration of his Pontificate, Pope John Paul II gave a special greeting to the young people of the world saying, “You are the future of the world, you are the hope of the Church, you are my hope.”

Since then, part of this sentiment has been repeated many times. I say part of it because the full impact of what the new Pope was saying was so challenging that many could not comprehend it and consequently, they devoted substantial amounts of time and energy trying to avoid it.

The temptation was, and is, to consign young people in the Church to the future and in the process, deny them a place right here and now. This is not what Saint John Paul II had in mind. He emphasised the charism “hope” not the chronological “future” - that is, he emphasised a strong and confident expectation that there will be a future, because young people are a vibrant part of the living community of the Church. The Church is the Body of Jesus Christ and as the letter to the Hebrews reminds us, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Heb 13:8)

There is another temptation, and that is to bury ourselves creating youth programmes in an attempt to keep them attracted to the Church. There is a fundamental problem in this approach, namely, that programmes are often institutional by nature. Most young people spend their time trying to avoid or even eliminate institutional dimensions from their life. That is not to say that they are anarchists, rather it is an acknowledgement of where our young people are during this stage of their lives.

So, you might be asking, what are we supposed to do for our youth when it comes to their life as Catholic Christians? I think that the answer is not really that complicated. What most people are looking for in life is security and stability in their relationships. Those relationships include the one with Jesus Christ, who is the most important relationship in the life of a Christian.



Programmes, activities, and gatherings, are terrific, if they are fundamentally about building and nurturing relationships with God and with each other. They will only be “successful” in as much as they normalise our relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. As individuals or united as a community of believers, our faith is real because Jesus is real. The experience of God’s love, mercy, and freedom is what draws our youth into the mission of the Church.

Young people are interested in anything that is good and they want to Instagram it, or Snapchat it, or even just talk about it. In many ways, they are natural evangelists.

Our young people are intelligent, vibrant, and energetic. They are a living instrument of the mission of Jesus and that makes them valued members of our community of the Church.

There is room for growing this vision in Broken Bay. If we make the investment now by listening to and accompanying our young people in the faith, then we have every reason to have hope for the future.

Blessings on your week.

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