

Opening Address - Bishop Pat

The first National Catholic Youth Ministry Conference (NCYMC) to darken the doorstep of Auckland has finally come along and it kicked off with an inspiring address from our very own Bishop Patrick Dunn. Throughout the talk Bishop Pat was referring to the uniqueness of acceptance within the nation, particularly in Auckland which is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world, being the home of around 150 different ethnicities; a diversity that stretches even into Holy Cross Seminary. We may feel that we are at the bottom of the world in New Zealand and somewhat forgotten but Bishop said that he feels that with this acceptance and diversity New Zealand is the beginning of a wave that is going to effect the whole world. The multi-cultural acceptance found in this nation was also noted at the Bishops Synod in Rome where bishops from around the world were greatly impressed by the NZ culture.

Bishop Dunn goes on talking about the evolution of the Catholic Church and how she is becoming less of a European Church and, with influences from various world cultures, is growing into something very different. This growth is blossoming out of the areas where Catholicism is becoming more and more prevalent, in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, USA and Philippines, and less and less from European countries. It is not just the countries themselves that are having such a profound effect on the Church, but the people and cultures within them. The Catholic Church is not merely institution and filled with dogmas magisterium and tradition. It is a people. If we pay attention to where the Church is growing we can see that she is going to be going through a time of change and we, especially in New Zealand, have front row seats.

After his initial address Bishop Dunn begins to comment on the theme of the conference:

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said here am I. Send me!” – Isaiah 6:8

Bishop Pat notes that Isaiah is the first example of someone actually volunteering to take on God’s mission for him, listing off various prophets from before him who either made excuses or actually ran away. Isaiah, is therefore a great example for Youth Ministers as it is something that often provokes a similar response from people within our parishes but is a ministry that needs to be done, and requires a volunteer. The reaction of running away, of avoiding volunteering for the role is quite understandable when we are presented with the next set of figures Bishop Pat produces. We are sent, but where? We are told from a recent census that 50.8% of NZ is of no religion and that is our audience... who we are ministering to. It is a challenge and the Bishop Pat does not shy away from this fact. He is fully aware of the task at hand, so how do we as youth minister keep ourselves nourished in such a challenging field? To answer this we are taken back to the Year of Hope, when the Bishop was asked to give a talk on the topic of hope, and instead of delving into the theology of hope he created a hope file on his computer and added things to it that gave him hope and shared these things at talks. He is still getting people that come up to him after hearing his talk and sharing their hope files with him.

Written by Dominic Malgeri