

# Along the track

## Making Room

I recently read a short reflection by an Irish Jesuit who offers Mass in one of the local prisons. The congregation is usually made up of three groups he wrote. "The first are the 'cradle Catholics', the second are members of various reformed traditions who didn't make it out of bed in time for the Anglican service; the third are people who look like they may never have been inside a church in their lives. "Maybe the third group come out of curiosity, just to have something to do. They have no idea where they are or how to behave, but they are also the ones who listen the hardest," he wrote. "I used to wonder why until one of them, said to me: 'Father, coming into prison is a pretty clear sign in anyone's life that Plan A isn't really working. And if you have a Plan B that might work, they may or may not believe you, they may or may not agree with you, but they'll always give you a fair hearing.' That's the moment when I thought to myself, 'Yes, that's why I got up this morning. I knew there was a reason.' He added this word of wisdom: "There is something very humbling in knowing that the people you are preaching to may well be hearing the Gospel for the very first time."

Hearing the Gospel for the first time may include us! I suggest that many of us might know the Gospel, almost by heart in places. It has been read to us, and we may have read it, we may have been lucky enough to study it in some depth. But how many of us have really listened to it, how many of us have heard it?

I think that one of the gifts that the late Pope Francis will always be to the Church and to the world was to show us what the Gospel looked like. That is not meant to be disrespectful to other popes, but Francis was different. "We need to avoid the spiritual sickness of a Church that is wrapped up in its own world," he said shortly after his election. "If I had to choose between a wounded Church that goes out on to the streets and a sick, withdrawn Church, I would choose the first." And he did.

Pope Francis proclaimed that the church is for everyone: *Todos, todos, todos!* He envisioned a church that embraces, heals and welcomes, teaching us by his own example to see everyone – not just a select few – as the image of God. And he went to the ends of the earth to do that. "An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral," he wrote. He certainly didn't give that impression!

He wrote: "In Revelation Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks. Obviously, the text refers to his knocking from the outside in order to enter, but I think about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out."

He often reminded Catholics to go out into the world, sharing their faith "with enthusiasm and vitality" by being living examples of joy, love and charity.

Millions of words have been written about him, so I won't add more except to say that it is worth looking at what is emerging now about his daily examples of the living Gospel – how he rang the parish in Gaza every Sunday over the last months of his life, how he had lunch with the workers in the Vatican almost every day, standing in the queue like everyone else, the letters he wrote to people when he heard of their distress, on Easter Sunday when he had given his last blessing from the balcony as a very sick man, he asked to be taken down to square to be among the people and there are many more examples. Just little examples, I know and there are literally thousands of others. He was a man of the people and a spreader of the Good News we call the Gospel. Francis had a different way of helping others hear the Gospel.

Francis brought humility to his leadership. Some thought he should focus more on doctrine and give us certainty in an uncertain world. That hasn't always worked out all that well in the past. "Christianity cannot be lived as a fortress surrounded by high walls, one that raises the ramparts against the world," Pope Francis said. "There is room for everyone in the church and, whenever there is not, then, please, we must make room, including for those who make mistakes, who fall or struggle."

If others are to hear the Gospel, the best way is to help them to see it in action.

Regards  
Jim Quillinan

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)