

BE COURAGEOUS

Archbishops Pentecost Letter 2017:

Dear young people,

We all watch movies and we all love stories.

Often they are great fun...think of your average action adventure film. Think Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible.

Often there is an action hero. Their usual mode of courage is inspiring, and noble, and fun to watch on the big screen.

The mark of this hero is that he or she rushes in and does something to destroy the evil that threatens. He fights the good fight and wins. He uses aggressive means and sometimes even violence, to achieve justice in the end. He is a rescuer, a problem-fixer, a fighter, someone who can do something about evil, and do it with his own physical strength and power.

But most of us soon realise, as we journey through life, that real courage and heroism does not usually work that way. Maybe we begin to see that there are other models.

We Catholics have the best role model of all in the courage of Jesus of Nazareth. Unlike the movies it's not make believe. It's the very real story of our Saviour who still lives among us...

Jesus was like us in all things but he chose to live a courageous life. Jesus found the courage to hear God's will for his life and not his own. He found the courage not to conform to what others - his family, his friends, and the system he grew up in - wanted him to do when they contradicted God's dream for him.

And what was that dream? It wasn't about making money or getting power or treating people like 'things.' Jesus lived and preached a way of living courageously that cared for the suffering and the poor.

Jesus insisted we must not use force but act with gentleness and be willing to sacrifice ourselves for others. That's real courage. Best of all Jesus, after he was crucified, rose and ascended into heaven, did not abandon us. He is close to each of us. He sent us his Spirit to live in us. His Holy Spirit is a spirit of courage and audacity to do great things for others and to love and support people.

Each of you, young people, has this Holy Spirit deep inside you, especially because you have received the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

Pentecost is the special feast - the birthday of the church - when we remember that this Spirit can't be held tight but must be given away to others who so need Christ in their lives. That's why the Church exists!

Being Catholic, therefore, is not membership in a 'club' but a call to go on mission and share the courage of Jesus that we have all been given. It's like being part of a 'life savers' team except our mission is to heal and save people when they are caught in life's difficulties. Even more than that, our mission is to point people to Jesus, the one who gives life and offers hope to those who are suffering.

So what does living courageously the dream of Jesus of Nazareth today actually mean?

First of all it means having the courage to pray and ask God to reveal his dream for you. Our culture values speed and action, but we can never really grow as persons until we have the courage to spend a little time each day in prayer with God. Go into your bedroom to pray or better still spend some time adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament regularly. It does make all the difference!

Then have the courage to be known as a Christian disciple of Jesus. It takes courage to be true to your identity as a baptised and confirmed disciple of Jesus when those around you are indifferent to the message of the Gospel. But sharing in the courage of Jesus is not about comfort or security. Courage is about taking risks. So boldly go out to others and take courageous Gospel actions!

- Take the risk of courage by befriending people in your lives who might be bullied or discriminated against. Look after them with strength and gentleness.

- Take the risk of courage by actively seeking out people in your neighbourhood who need support especially refugee families and the sick and the elderly. As Pope Francis says, avoid being 'couch potatoes'.

- Take the risk of courage to protect life - so don't just stand by and let our beautiful planet and human dignity be destroyed. Along with Pope Francis take courageous action with others to protect all of creation.

- Above all take the risk of courage by en-couraging others. Real courage means avoiding the temptation to be negative and hyper-critical of others. Many people - indeed most of us - need to be supported by kindness and love. Little actions mean a lot. That's a great way of living the courage of Jesus of Nazareth. As Pope Francis has said: 'Today what is required of us is courage to be alternative in the world, without ever becoming argumentative or aggressive. What is required of us is the courage to be open to all, without ever diminishing the absoluteness and uniqueness of Christ, the one Saviour of all.'

In taking these courageous Gospel actions, you can discover God's dream for you - indeed, his mission for your whole life. Whatever path God has in mind for you will ask of you commitment, perseverance and sacrifice, but do not be afraid for the Holy Spirit of courage is with you.

Dear young people, listen once more to the call of Pope Francis at World Youth Day in Krakow last year:

'My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk...Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths.'

My hope and prayer for all young Melbourne Catholics this Pentecost is that you open yourselves up to the Spirit of Jesus, dream big and act courageously as you set out on an exciting journey to live the Gospel anew. We need your courage and witness!



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