

16 February

On Tuesday night, we celebrated the opening School Mass of St Brendan's School and had the commissioning ceremony for new student leaders. I shared with them a thought that came to me on Sunday afternoon; I was watching the frightening television coverage of the unfolding bushfire crisis sending text messages to friends who live in the areas affected by the fires. I thought to myself how lucky our community is that in the face of a potential disaster, we have leaders in society who step up and do what is required in a calm, cooperative and professional way to protect the community. Police, CFA volunteers, emergency management, state government authorities and agencies, health services, local government and charitable organisations like the Red Cross swing into action immediately to do what is necessary to keep us safe and prevent disaster. They are people who lead. They are people who take responsibility. They are people and organisations in whom the general public has great confidence, especially in a time of crisis. Good leadership is important at the national, state or local level of a parish school.

I mention this because as we continue to read from Matthew's Gospel, we keep getting snippets about the call to discipleship. Jesus calls his disciples in order for them to lead, to inspire confidence in others, to work together to build up the community of faith, to be people of prayer, people of service, witnesses of the Good News and servants who love those entrusted to their care. At times we scratch our heads when we realize that Jesus probably didn't call the most successful candidates or the most intelligent or the most theologically qualified. But in choosing his disciples, Jesus was looking for those who could lead with compassion and fidelity, those who could inspire in others something of the joy of the good news. Jesus was shaping in his disciples a capacity to lead, to go out and proclaim the good news.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is shaping in his disciples the values of God's kingdom, a wisdom that comes from the Gospel the call to service, a mindset of servant leadership. Each of us is entrusted with this vocation in Baptism. I have often mentioned that one of the greatest gifts of the Second Vatican Council celebrated fifty years ago was this sense of rediscovering the dignity of Christian baptism; through baptism and

confirmation each of us receives from the Lord a 'universal call to holiness', a holiness that each of us shares in and not a holiness reserved only for priests and nuns. This is the holiness of family life, growing in faith, being part of a parish community, serving those in need, celebrating together, praying together, nurturing each other on the journey of faith, especially when our faith is challenged.

Our faith is certainly challenged when members of our family face serious illness; our faith is challenged when people we know face the cruelty of losing their job; our faith is challenged when people return to their homes after a bushfire emergency and find a heap of blackened ruins that used to be their family home, property destroyed and massive stock losses; our faith was very much challenged this week when we heard of the tragic death of Luke Patty and his father in Tyabb. In today's second reading, St Paul describes this gift of wisdom that comes from God, 'we teach what scripture calls: things that no eye has seen, no ear has heard'; that capacity to see widely and to see with the eyes of faith, even when we are challenged.

The disciples in the early Church certainly had their fair share of challenges. But they still had the capacity to lead, to inspire others, to grow in their wisdom and love of God, to nurture the lives of others, to see widely and to love powerfully. They understood the power of their baptism, the wisdom of God's word and the nourishing strength of the Eucharist. Today, we are called to do the same.