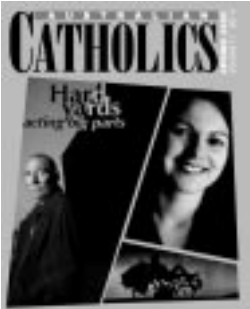


# A U S T R A L I A N CATHOLICS

## Notes for teachers



Spring 2003

### Odd places to pray: A child's guide to interactive prayer

#### REFLECTION

Most of us have stories to tell about the experience of taking small children to Mass, or at least enduring their interruption to the solemn moments we treasure so dearly. Celia Conlan's article certainly evoked some memories in me. Her account of her mother-in-law's experience of the censorious comment of a devout parishioner: 'I don't know why you bothered coming' was entirely negative and a complete denial of Jesus own words: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven'.

My own memories are of acceptance and, occasionally, amusement at the comments and inappropriate behaviour of my five youngsters as we struggled to do the right thing by coming to Mass together every Sunday as a family. I blush now when I think of how often we must have destroyed the moments of devotion of the people around us. The approach of bringing one child at a time and being able to understand the questions and puzzles theology presents to our individual offspring seems much more sensible.

#### ACTIVITIES

The class could begin with a discussion in which students recall and share memories of their early experiences of attending Mass. Students might then read Celia Conlan's article, *Odd places to pray: A child's guide to interactive prayer*. A general discussion of what children and young people contribute to the life of a community, especially by their presence at Sunday Eucharist, could follow.

#### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- 'I love the sound of children during Mass. They bring life, laughter, hope and a real sense of community to the service'.
- What is the value of communal liturgy to the life of a parish?
- 'This is boring. I don't like church. When can we go?' How can we find new meaning in the old words and actions of church rituals?

Asking questions about a text can be a kind of interactive prayer. Students might be given a copy of the Preface to Eucharistic Prayer 2 and, in pairs, ask three

questions arising from their reading to the words. The class as a whole could then share the questions, which the teacher may feel able to answer.

### Living the dream

#### REFLECTION

The idea of pilgrimage or the journey as a metaphor for life is an enduring one. Perhaps it is an indication of the restlessness which seems part of being human, or to quote St Augustine in *The Confessions*: 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee'.

Taking time out of one's normal life to travel creates a kind of solitude and apartness conducive to self-examination and to asking the big questions of life. It also, especially when the chosen mode of travel is less than luxurious, gives an awareness of the unnecessary excrescences which modern living convinces us we cannot do without: a sort of paring down to essentials.

Recently, there have been several documentaries on the most famous of all pilgrimages, the pilgrimage to Compostella and it is interesting to hear the comments of the pilgrims, especially those who choose to travel the whole distance on foot, on the alteration to their perspective and understanding of life and their place in the universe.

#### ACTIVITIES

An introduction to this article could be a discussion and sharing of experiences of travelling with the family. This could include a look at the process of packing and the selection of articles to be included in the luggage and a listing of some of the 'valued' things that had to be left behind.

This discussion could be followed by a reading of the article, *Living the Dream*. Members of the class could then share with each other some quotes from the story that impressed them.

#### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- 'The best way to deal with problems is to laugh at them'
- 'I think that if you are following the path in your heart, then everything works out'
- 'It is important to live the dream'
- 'Life was supposed to be difficult'

A period of journal writing could follow in which the students consider their own dreams for the future

and the obstacles they think might impede them from following their dreams.

## **On-site understanding + It's just not cricket**

### *REFLECTION*

For many years now we Australians have prided ourselves on the way in which we have become a multi-cultural nation with comparatively little prejudice and difficulty. Some of us would say that we have enjoyed the process and are delighted with the way our country has developed.

However, there are undercurrents of prejudice and xenophobia beneath the surface. Unfortunately, we now live in a country among people who often believe any lies or distortions that are suggested. As a result, Australia's reputation as a tolerant country, which believes in a fair go for everyone, has been replaced by an image of a people without pity, that locks uninvited newcomers up.

### *ACTIVITIES*

It was a delight to read the article about the coming together of the Holy Child parish community with their Muslim neighbours and the riches and friendship they found together.

The class might begin by a general discussion that seeks to answer the question: Why are Australians so afraid of foreigners? A look at how the Australian Government welcomes asylum seekers, the detention centres, the Pacific solution.

The two articles *It's just not cricket* and *On-site understanding* could now be read.

### *IT'S JUST NOT CRICKET*

Chris Carolan says of the young Timorese members of her cricket team, the Croca Roos, some of whom were facing possible repatriation to East Timor: 'It's funny watching them play sport and listening to the Australian accents... you can't help wondering what is going on in the minds of our politicians. These kids are young Australians and their families have established new lives in this country.'

This leads to the question: What is an Australian? What does a person have to do in order to be accepted as an Australian citizen? These questions could be discussed in pairs and a quick reporting back to the class.

### *ON-SITE UNDERSTANDING*

The second story relates to how members of a Catholic parish came to meet formally with the neighbouring Muslim community. In a way it could be said that it began as sharing of differences, however, these were not differences that divided them from one another because of the willingness of both sides to accept the other as people like themselves. It was on the level of friendship and good neighbourliness that bonds were formed. The whole experience challenged them to be open to other people and to their values and beliefs.

A discussion of this experience might focus on difficulties that individual class members may have in relating to people who are different from them. They might ask themselves how they feel and behave towards new students arriving in the school mid-year.

It might be fruitful to examine the darker side of belonging to a group by some role-play in which the students explore how a new person is welcomed into their group.

## **On the track to ecological conversion**

### *REFLECTION*

The desire to meddle with nature seems widespread among the human race. It is as if we were afflicted by a kind of blindness that renders us unable to appreciate what is there in the natural world before we can get our 'improving' hands on it.

It is a mystery why this kind of enhancement makes us feel at home. However, I suspect that the reason lies in a desire to control the environment, not only plants but birds, animals, insects, and spiders. But many of us have been completely overwhelmed by the beauty of some of the wild places we have visited: a rainforest, an unoccupied stretch of coastline, a river not yet polluted by human activity.

### *ACTIVITIES*

The builders of the retirement village near Coff's Harbour are to be commended by their decision to preserve the natural environment around their village. Students might like to share with the class a description of their favourite wild place. A few suitable posters might act as a stimulus for this.

The class could then read the article, *On Track to Ecological Conversion* by Anne Henson. A look at the prayer form of the Stations of the Cross including a check on whether students can recall the traditional stations. Students could be asked to produce a poster in groups for a modern set of Stations of the Cross that centre on the environment. These might cover the following topics:

- Tree felling in rainforests
- The damming of rivers
- The growing of crops unsuited to the Australian environment
- The destruction of land through unsuitable agriculture
- The overuse of power and water for domestic purposes.

The posters could then be hung in the class room and used as a stimulus to prayer at a later date.

These notes are written to accompany *Australian Catholics*. *Australian Catholics* is published five times a year by Jesuit Publications, PO Box 553, Richmond, Victoria 3121. Tel (03) 9427 7311. Fax (03) 9428 4450.