

Third Sunday in Lent

1st Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm: 19

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Gospel: Matthew 27:27-38



This painting is part of Fourteen Stations of the Cross that adorn the walls of the Roman Catholic Church at Daly River Mission in the Northern Territory. They are the work of Aboriginal artists, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr. The paintings were done in 1974-75, with the artist using acrylic paint on Burnie board. Miriam-Rose wanted to express the feelings of Aboriginal people when faced with the sufferings of Christ our Saviour. I feel she demonstrates how Aboriginal spirituality can enrich the traditional of Western Christian understandings of our Lord's passion.

To understand her depictions of Christ, you need to look at the whole series and then you gain a sense of the power, suffering and journey that Jesus takes on his way to Calvary. You begin to understand the lines on Jesus' person are symbolic of the trial he endures and the colours of the sky darken and deepen towards the crucifixion and the deposition.

The Bible does not recount that Jesus falls under the weight of the cross, but it has become part of popular devotion for as long as devotions have centred on the Way of the Cross. So why does it find resonance for Christians?

For me, it's a reminder of the importance of faith in our journey. While our physical attributes and our personal gifts enable us to go so far, we can only achieve with faith in God.

Jesus would have been physically strong enough to carry the weight of the cross. Historically, we know that the condemned carried only the cross bar and were attached to the upright post when they arrived at the place they were to be crucified. While it would have been heavy, it is most likely that Jesus was involved in some kind of manual labour – whether or not it was carpentry we don't know, but men of that time were primarily employed in trades, like building, fishing or transport. We also know that Jesus and his disciples walked everywhere and so it seems most likely he was a physically fit man, capable of carrying the weight. Emotionally and spiritually, we know that having spent the time in the garden of Gethsemane in prayer the evening before, he has accepted his 'cup'. It is unlikely that falling or stumbling was a desire to step back from the task at hand. Even so we have this story of Jesus falling or stumbling on his way.

The story reminds me that even when I feel I have all the necessary skills, training and preparation for ministry there is still something missing... faith in God. The extent to which any one of us can actually achieve what we have been called to do depends almost entirely on our faith that God will give us what we lack. There are many times over my journey towards ordination and onto being parish priest in this place when I have felt either completely unprepared, unqualified or simply unable to lead the parish. I'm sure I'm not alone in wondering "why me?" when it comes to ministry. But what I have learnt, and I know many of you have also, that whatever we feel we are unable to achieve in our strength, we can achieve when we

trust God.

Who would have thought that last year our parish would have been able to increase the income – through giving on Sundays and donations – enough to not only cover our anticipated expenses, but invest in our rowing programme. I certainly wasn't convinced that as a parish we would be able to raise \$15,000 more than we budgeted for!

What about our rowing programme? Who would have thought that our parish, with a very high proportion of retired people would have something to offer to young people in our community. But we do! Over the past six months, we have been able to work with 14 teenagers to help them develop some skills and confidence they wouldn't have received without our parish. Who knows how many others have also been helped through their improved confidence... and who knows where those 14 teenagers will be in 20 years time because of a simply rowing programme?

It would be possible for us to look at either of these situations and see that we had the ability to do it all along. One could dismiss the doubts and uncertainty in the beginning as simply a lack of courage. I would prefer to look at it as us learning to rely on God. When we know we don't have the skills to do something, we have to rely on God.

In the account of Jesus falling, we see that even when we do have the skills, we are called to rely on God. And we are called to trust God in all things, knowing that he will keep his promise and will be there for us all the time... no matter whether we feel confident or not.