

Scripture Reflection. October Readings: God's Love

Recently I was reading a beautiful and inspiring book called "Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle from the Masai" by Fr Vincent Donovan.

He was a missionary to the Masai people during the 1970s and 80s. His experiences of respecting the deep cultural life of the pagan tribes whilst undertaking evangelisation, that is introducing them to the gospel message, transformed later missionary activity and its approach. One sentence from his book stood out to me immediately. Confronted with the failure of previous missionary activity Fr Vincent says, "At this point I had to make the humiliating admission that I did not know what the gospel was."

What would any of us answer to the question of *what is* the gospel message?

What is the message, which each of us as Christians are bound to go out and spread and are we doing it?

We are all baptised as priest, king and prophet. What are we doing about it and do we even know what in effect it means?

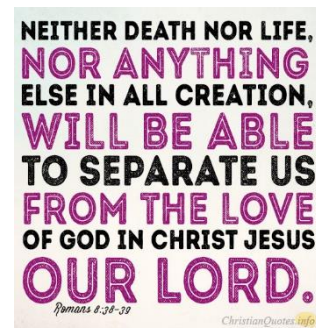
Fr Donovan saw a direct link between the Masai tribes and those pagan communities which St Paul travelled to in the first century. He was inspired by Paul's approach of doing nothing but spreading the gospel message: no hospitals, schools or food handouts. Vincent's was a revolutionary approach, which brought the essential message of God's enduring love for his people, which has been there from the beginning of time.

In God's continuing work of creation, he became man in order to show all men what God is like. God's nature and work is love. His appearance as Jesus shows us he cares not just for the rich, as the Masai thought their god did, (and the Jews of Jesus' time too) but for poor people as well, especially poor people and the sick and dying. His love is with each of us. Fr. Vincent told the Masai the stories of Jesus in terms of their own experience and culture in a way they could relate to. It reminded me of school liturgies where stories such as the Good Samaritan are broken-down to involve situations of bullying and help from people outside friendship groups. God's love is made real and understandable.

Having no ordained priests the new Masai communities took responsibility for all aspects of Christian life using the talents and gifts of their communities. It is really synodality in practice. It reflects the newly evangelised first century Christians and has much to say to the western Church today. Synodality is a call to restore our common roots as the People of God journeying together, on Safari (as the Masai would say), following the way of Jesus. We all have talents and gifts which we can offer to the journey. "Christ has no other body but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with Compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world." St Teresa of Avila.

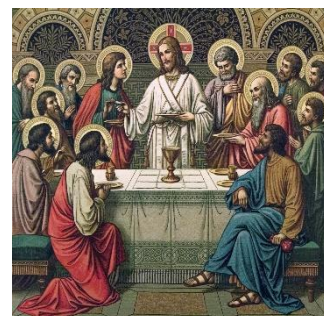


Masai Christians walking to evangelise new tribes



Vincent J. Donovan, C.S.Sp.
15 August 1926–13 May 2000

The first Eucharist



"I believe that the gospel is the door to true human development" Fr Vincent Donovan.