

Conversation with Fr Marc Reeves SJ

29th July 2018

Fr Marc Reeves SJ has been spending time in Australia with nine other Jesuits from all over the world taking part in what the Jesuits call a “tertianship”. This “tertianship” for a Jesuit is a time of spiritual renewal and an opportunity to return to the school of the heart where he can set aside more time for prayer, make the 30-day Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, study the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, and reflect on his mission as a companion of Jesus.

After eleven years of Jesuit formation, then ordination to the priesthood, doctoral studies, and most recently eight years of ministry at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, Fr. Marc is very grateful for this time for spiritual renewal and for the opportunity to spend time in faith communities like St. Canice's. Fr. Marc will be with us at St. Canice's until July 7th.



Living here with us in the middle of Kings Cross for a month lets Marc become acquainted with our various ministries. But perhaps as interesting that is for him, we also have an opportunity to speak with him and draw from his experience in American parishes as to how we might go about building and enriching our own faith community here at St Canice's.

Q: What brought you to St Canice's, Fr Marc?

A: I liked what I heard about the nature of the parish and set about 'searching' online for more information. The message emblazoned across the top of your

Facebook page cries, 'St Canice's offers a welcome for all – without judgment'. That lead me to read your Facebook posts and become acquainted with your parish webpage. When asked where I would like to spend a month during my stay in Australia, I chose St Canice's.

It's this 'welcome' message that we should be shouting from the rooftops. Let people hear 'you are welcome', 'all are welcome', welcome home'. Easter, Christmas, Baptisms and Weddings are good opportunities to reach a much wider audience.

It's 'welcome' message of a loving God who never tires of forgiveness.

Q: So many Catholic young people are simply not interested in 'church'.

A: It's very disturbing to see that so many children leaving Catholic schools in Australia, including our Jesuit schools, have lost all faith. They may be formed in their faith and learn of God's love for them, but without 'role models' this formation can soon be lost. The best role models for children and young adults of course are the parents. So, if parents don't believe, or don't practice the faith, the children are more likely to fall away.

Recent sociological surveys conducted in the USA on the religious and spiritual lives point to three key factors that are helpful in supporting the development and active faith lives among young people: 1) some positive adult modelling, 2) regular and active participation in the ritual life of their respective faith traditions, and 3) peer friendships with those who also value and participate in the life of their own faith tradition.

Q: Evangelicals don't appear to have an issue in attracting people.

A: "I admire the work they have done to reach younger people and invite them to (re)discover Christianity. You could say that Evangelicals have developed a model that some may describe as 'Liquid church - pour it in any form you like'. It may not be worship even. It might be talks, social gatherings or outreach.

'Liquid church,' as I use it, is actually a positive attribute. That is, evangelical Christian churches have been better able to read the signs of the times and adapt themselves to rapidly changing cultural contexts than the Roman Catholic Church has. As a result, evangelicals have been able to shape their worship services according to their perceived understandings of the spiritual needs of contemporary Christians. Their active outreach and ability to meet younger Christians, former Catholics, and spiritual seekers where they're at has been extremely effective.

Q: How may St Canice's learn from this?

A: Catholics in every land and in every place ought to do their very best to 'welcome' all people. In welcoming we actively share the good news that Christ offers to the world. God's love and grace is extended to everyone created in the image and likeness of God.

Pope Francis also writes about the traits for effective evangelization. What he says includes, "certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental". Pope Francis believes that the world has forgotten what it means to be merciful and that being overly judgmental prevents us from showing mercy to others.

The Catholic 'tradition' has a lot to offer. The Catholic Church is unique. It's a place where all people can discover who they are. The Catholic faith supports the reverence for life, for creation and justice for the environment. Perhaps St Canice's can come from a faith perspective on a 'green' issue. It seems easy to attract people to 'green' causes. So maybe use 'Laudate Si'?

The most successful parishes throughout the world work hard to develop and grow in three important areas simultaneously (and when I say "parish," I mean the entire community, not just the parish priest and a few select staff members): 1) welcome and hospitality, 2) a strong liturgical music program, and 3) dynamic and well-prepared preaching. I firmly believe that when people are genuinely welcomed into their liturgical assemblies and are invited to fully and actively participate in the sacramental life of their church that they are more likely to return.

Q: What have you learned from your ministry among university students? How can the church engage today's youth?

A: It is so important to listen to the voice of young adults. The church needs to pay attention to their important insights and listen to their desires, interests and spiritual needs. And find ways to include them in our liturgies. It also bears considering just how relevant our liturgies might appear to young adults and others who might be at Mass for one reason or another. If they don't relate to what they experience, they won't come back. So, it would be ideal if the roles of various Ministers in the Mass were to include people of all ages.

The recent Same-Sex Marriage Plebiscite here in Australia along with Pope Francis' 'Who am I to judge?' pronouncement has shone a light on 'welcome' for LGBTQI Catholics into the mainstream of Catholic life. St Canice's prides itself as an inclusive and welcoming community for all.

Q: What might be done to encourage disaffected Catholic LGBTQI people living in our area of Sydney back into the faith community?

A: I admire the work that James Martin, SJ is doing in the USA and beyond. He is author of *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity,*¹ and consultant to the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication.

Jim is a Jesuit priest who issues an impassioned plea for Catholic leaders to relate to their LGBT flock in a new way, one characterized by compassion and openness. In this inspiring book, Father Jim turns to three virtues from the Catechism of the Catholic Church - "respect, compassion, and sensitivity" - as a model for how both the Catholic leadership and LGBT Catholics can move together on a "two-way bridge" toward reconciliation and love.

"As more LGBT Catholics are public about their sexuality and their identity, more families are affected, and as more families are affected, more parishes are affected," Father James Martin says. *"And as more parishes are affected, more priests and pastoral workers are affected, and in turn more bishops are affected."*

The inclusive and welcoming community of St Canice's could benefit from the experiences of those Jesuit outreach ministries in the US to welcome more of Sydney's LGBT community.

<http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201804/lgbt-conversation-sign-new-life-church-31352>

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/02/27/one-key-understanding-pope-francis-his-approach-judgment>

Conversation with Michael Musgrave, Sydney, 29th June 2018