

19th Sunday after Trinity, Year C

2 Timothy 1.1-14

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

I remember this woman who was a patient at Cabrini hospital. I was 'doing the rounds' visiting all the Anglican patients across three wards. Usually the conversations didn't go all that far, but she cheerfully engaged in conversation talking about her faith and her daily prayer life. I was impressed. Here was this woman saying she led a rich life of daily prayer, morning and evening. She even read the scriptures daily!

Then I asked her about what prayer book she was using, amazed at her dedication. "It's a Jewish prayer book," she said, "I'm so attracted to their way of life: their fasting rules, their dietary laws, their purity laws..."

I was gobsmacked. My jaw nearly fell in surprise. I was too polite to comment. I was utterly astounded that she'd taken this bizarre path. There was a deeper story of course, but I held back from asking her if she'd ever heard of morning and evening prayer in the Prayer Book; if she'd ever heard of the Christian practice of fasting; if she'd ever heard of strict moral code of the New Testament. Over the course of the conversation it seemed not, but the reason I remembered this event so vividly was that it raised a number of the chief objections people have against Christians – not Jesus or the gospel per se – but Christians.

The first charge is that we don't live out the faith beyond Sunday morning, if at all; that the gospel lays a huge claim on us and we ignore it, behaving however we feel. The second charge is that there's nothing distinctive about living as a Christian; that there's nothing that we do that makes us stand out from the rest of society.

But I want you to strongly consider rekindling the gift that's been given to you. There's a depth to Christian life that we simply skim over unaware of the life that is available to us. 2 Timothy 1.1-14 points us in the direction of a whole of life orientation towards Christ: That the faith and religious and spiritual character of the family is vital; that it is the family where the primary teaching and practice of the Christian faith occurs; that we learn our faith primarily from our parents and then pass it on to our children; that the maintenance of tradition must be practiced not only in the church but also in the home.

It asks us to rekindle the gift that the Holy Spirit has given us; to hold fast to the story of Jesus; no matter how embarrassing it may seem; to keep the faith in the midst of suffering; to preserve the truth of the gospel; to not be ashamed of the gospel; to see it as vital to our lives; to be faithful to the teaching of the church.

With each passing year, it does get that bit harder to live openly as a Christian. Sometimes that's the fault of the church. Sometimes the trouble lies at the feet of a rapidly changing culture that develops values that are counter the gospel. Sometimes it's the product of hostility to or even plain apathy about the faith from those whom we count as colleagues, or neighbours, or friends or even family.

Let me challenge you. Pray three times a day. Pray morning, noon and night. Pray with familiar words or pray with unfamiliar words. But pray. Pray like your life depended on it. Read the bible. Set aside some time, five minutes, ten minutes, half-an-hour, whatever you like. But set aside the time. Get a translation that's easy on the eyes; get one that challenges you, whatever you like. But read. Finally, fast. Fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. Give up something in your day-to-day life that you'll notice, that you'll find tough to do without. Fast so as to reduce your dependency on the things of this world. Fast so as to become disciplined in your life. Fast so as to create space for you to rest in the presence of God, to hear the voice of God. If you're up to the challenge, if you do all this, pray three times a day, read scripture, fast, I promise... I'll do it with you. I'll do it with you.

But I'd also like to encourage you. God loves you. You come from God. You belong to God. You go to God. God knows you. God loves you. God has a use for you, now and forever. God is with you now and at all times; closer than breathing; nearer than hands and feet.

Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.