

Teresa's BAMfest Talk

To be a People

(The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be my witnesses.)

Good morning! etc....

I'd like to begin with one of my favourite passages from scripture. It's from the first letter of John, and it goes like this"

*This is what we proclaim to you:
What was from the beginning,
What we have heard,
What we have seen with our own eyes,
What we have looked upon
And our hands have touched –
We speak of the word... the word that is life.*

I love this passage. I read it for the first time when was an 18 year old Antiocher, and I have always loved its earthiness. The idea that our Christian faith is something so tangible. I've seen, I've heard, I've grasped it with my hands. It's real.

Doesn't each of us here understand the truth of that passage as a result of our experience of Antioch? We've seen and heard amazing things. We've felt and touched the power of God's love at work in our lives.

- How many times have we seen people walk into an Antioch w/e on Friday night and walk out transformed on Sunday night?
- Seen people open up in share groups...
- Discover gifts they never knew they had....
- Undertaking leadership like never before...
- Haven't we heard the voice of the Lord through all the beautiful music we've made together, and in all the wonderful affirmation of cheers and applause and 'thank you Lord' and palancas.

These are beautiful things to witness. This is life. This is the Word who is Life.

And yes, we've seen and heard and touched the painful things too. The hurts, the fights, the mistakes and disappointments. What family doesn't have those? And yet, even in the face of those wounds, we've seen hope and forgiveness and the courage to try again. In Antioch we meet Jesus crucified and risen.

I remember on the first weekend in Australia that there was a boy who had a severe social impediment; he hardly spoke; he kept to himself; he had few friends. Lots of kids went to school with him, but no one knew him. At the skits on that weekend, this boy got up with his guitar and in front of 60 of his peers — including some of the toughest peer leaders in his year — and he played and sang a solo... beautifully. You could have heard a pin

drop. Everyone was stunned. And as he sang, one by one we spontaneously reached out for the hand of the person next to us, until the whole room was touching hands. This quiet, shy loner had just united the whole room as the body of Christ. Extraordinary moment. And I was there. I saw, I heard, I felt, I touched.

And it's because of moments like this that no one can ever tell me (or you) that Jesus Christ is just a sweet ideal or that his church isn't worth dying for. Because I have seen him, I've heard his voice, I've felt his presence, I've touched him in his body, the church, in so many ways, and in a very real way through Antioch.

And so have you! Together we share this tangible experience of Jesus, this movement of the Holy Spirit, of the Father calling us to be one body, one body in Christ.

(music starts, softly)

This week of WYD we will see, hear and touch something special about the risen Lord: the witness of cultures. Catholics coming together from all over the world, different lands, languages, histories, yet our stories are mysteriously united; because at the heart of it, we know we belong. We worship the one God, we are saved by the same Jesus, sent forth by the same Spirit. Together we are one body of Christ.

Song: We are one body, one body of Christ ...'

II. What does it mean to be one body of Christ?

It means Community. Family. Relationships.

We all know how important it is to have friends, real friends, who know and love us. We all know how devastating it feels when we don't have friends, or when we feel left out.

Every human person has such a deep desire to belong.

And God understands this desire. God put it there. We are designed/built that way.

And our heavenly Father wants to respond to this desire by calling us to belong. That's why he calls us to be a people. He doesn't call us to be a bunch of holy individuals. He calls us to be a *holy people*. A true family united in the love of Jesus.

And when Antioch is at its best, this is what it offers, doesn't it? Real, loving, faith-filled friendships, where we don't have to be afraid of being criticized for being a believer. We are free to be ourselves, and to offer our gifts for the community.

How beautiful. What a precious gift.

But it's not just for ourselves, it's a gift to be shared. God calls us as a people, as a community, so that everyone may be welcomed into this circle of love.

On the night before he died, this is what Jesus prayed for his disciples: 'Make them one, Father, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'

Belonging to one another in the love is at the heart of what it means to be the body of Christ.

I wonder if we realize how deep this belonging goes? Sometimes we look upon Christianity as if it emerged out of the blue with Jesus. We forget that Jesus himself came

from a people, already 2 thousand years old. There would be no Jesus without the Jewish people. We are Catholic Christians, yes. Yet in some spiritual sense we have Jewish hearts.

There is a (true) story told about a Jewish scripture scholar (named Amy Jill Levine) who was presenting a talk in a Catholic hall full of Catholics. And she said to the audience: raise your hand if you know personally a Jew. About 8 people raised their hands. Then she turned and pointed to the crucifix on the wall behind her and she said: ‘Ah, but you all know this Jew, do you not?’

Funny how we can forget that Jesus was, and is, a Jew. And so was Mary, and all twelve apostles, and St Paul and the holy women, and in fact most of the early church.

We can forget that the very seedbed of Christianity is Judaism. That Jesus prayed Jewish prayers, worshipped in synagogues, was addressed as rabbi and proclaimed the Hebrew scriptures.

We forget this, and it’s understandable, because for the best part of our 2,000 year history as a Church, our Christian people have overlooked the Jewishness of Jesus. But we musn’t forget... This is what the Bishops said at Vatican II, in that great Council of reform in the 1960s, in one of the key documents of that Council. We must not forget our roots. The deepest roots of the church are earthed in the story of the Jewish people. And if we are to be God’s people, then we need to know from whom we have come and how deep and sacred this belonging goes.

You often hear of people who go to great lengths to search out their family tree. Or adopted children who search out their biological parents. Why? Because they know that these relationships somehow tell them something about who they are. At the core of aboriginal reconciliation too, there is the issue of respecting one’s ancestry.

And likewise in our Catholic Christian family. We need to be aware that our Jewish ancestry, in spirit if not by race, is something to be treasured, pondered and celebrated.

Now you might be thinking: why on earth is she going on about this Jewish stuff? I’m going on about it, here at Antioch, on the eve of WYD, because core to who we are as Antioch, core to WYD, core to the Church is to know that we belong to the body of Christ. To be the body of Christ means to be a people. And to really know what it means to be the people of God, we need to know that:

- * When Abraham looked up at the night sky and God promised that he would have descendents as numerous as the stars, we are among those promised descendents.
- * When his elderly wife Sarah laughed at the idea that she would bear a child, we are part of the fruits of that miraculous birth.

* When Moses led his people through the Red Sea, those were our ancestors in faith who went through on dry land; and that is a mysterious spiritual sense, we too ‘went through that Red Sea’, and were ‘there at Sinai’.

Our ancient links with the Jewish people are essential to our Christian identity. This is what the Bishops at Vatican II were telling us. And what subsequent Popes and church documents are telling: That: whoever meets Jesus meets Judaism. That *it is impossible to comprehend Christianity without reference to Judaism*. Strong statements aren’t they? They are not saying, ‘Look, if you have some spare time on your hands you might want to look this up.’ But rather: It’s *impossible* to be Christian without relating to the Jewish people: their story, their scriptures, their traditions.

And deep down, don’t we already know this as Antioch? Just think how many songs we sing in Antioch that are based on, or take their inspiration from, the Hebrew psalms. We sing the Old Testament psalms all the time! And we love it! Let’s hear some of them now as our music ministry leads us in this medley...

[\[Medley: psalms\]](#)

So these are just a few of the many Hebrew psalms that we sing so often. It’s amazing to think as we sing them, that they are based on the same psalms that Jesus knew and loved and prayed.

Even that Jesus song we love to sing:

(Alison sings: ‘Jesus, Lover of my soul. Jesus, I’ll never let you go.’)

Even this has a verse from the Hebrew Scriptures:

(Alison sings: ‘You’ve taken me, from the mirey clay, you set my feet upon a rock’)

That line which Alison just sang is straight from Psalm 40.

Okay, so much for the psalms. What about the prophets? Don’t the voices of the prophets of ancient Israel sing out in our Antioch meetings and parishes every week? Let’s hear some of them now...

[\[Medley: prophets\]](#)

And of course, as well as the psalms and the prophets, there are all those great, bedrock stories from Genesis and Exodus; from that part of the bible that the Jews refer to as the Torah. We’ve mentioned some already: stories of Abraham, of Noah, stories of Moses leading his people to freedom. Don’t we remember and celebrate them with zest and joy and with that particular brand of Antioch humour when we sing:

[\[Medley: Torah\]](#)

Okay! So you get the idea. These aren’t just ‘fun’ songs, although God loves us to have fun. These aren’t just ‘Antioch’ tunes, although God loves the fact that Antioch makes them their own. These songs come from Scripture! The ancient Hebrew Scriptures, or

what we call the Old Testament. They are gifts from the Jewish people, who gave us Jesus, and from whom we descend as the people of the Church. What great songs to connect us with our spiritual ancestors!

V. The Sh'ma

Now there is one more part of Scripture I'd love for us to sing. It's a powerful passage from Deuteronomy 6. It's a passage that Jesus himself held up as a key text. It forms a central part of Jewish worship, prayed at least twice a day by observant Jews. And it is core to the Christian faith too:

When the Jewish people pray it today, they do so in Hebrew. And it goes like this:

'Sh'ma Yisrael! Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echud'
'Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One.'

And it goes on...

'And you shall love the Lord our God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today, take them to heart. Teach them to your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest.' (Deut 6:4-7)

There is nothing wimpy about this scripture. Love the Lord your God, with a passion! The original Hebrew of this text suggests a love so powerful that it completely overtakes a person, like a love-sick lover! In other words: Be crazy about God, because God is crazy about you! This is a passage to be engraved on our hearts every day, as it was for Jesus. No wonder Jesus was able to do what he did, he really believed this scripture! And how he lived it.

Let's enjoy this Word of God now, in song. In two ways: we will learn a new song, and then we will sing the same scripture in a way familiar to us. First the new song...

Song: Sh'ma

Sh'ma Yisrael, Sh'ma Yisrael. Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.
Sh'ma Yisrael, Sh'ma Yisrael. Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.

(Repeat with harmony)

Verse 1. (Cantor)

Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and all your soul and all your might.
And teach your children to love the Lord. For all generations, Sh'ma Yisrael.

All:

Sh'ma Yisrael, Sh'ma Yisrael. Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.
Sh'ma Yisrael, Sh'ma Yisrael. Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.

(Repeat with harmony)

Verse 2. (Cantor)

Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and all your soul and all your might.
All day, every night, when you sleep when you wake, surrender your heart, Hear O
Israel.

All:

Sh'ma Yisrael, Sh'ma Yisrael. Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.
Sh'ma Yisrael, Sh'ma Yisrael. Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.

(Repeat with harmony)

Beautiful! As we strive to love God and one another in Antioch, we can pray this
scripture deeply in our hearts and with our voices.

And there is another way we can pray that same scripture. You know it already. It goes
like this...

Song: Love the Lord! (Antioch style)

VI. Conclusion

So, let's wrap this up.

- Antiochians, we who take our name from the place where the believers were first called Christians, let's be proud of our name: Christian! Catholic! And let's not ever forget the name by which Jesus was proud to be called: Jew! Israelite! Son of David!
- Let's delight in the fact that our baptism makes us sons and daughters of God. And let's not forget that this same baptism makes us descendants of Abraham and Sarah.
- Let's be really proud that Antioch is so much part of this people called by God; how blessed we are in Antioch to share our Catholic faith and a Jewish heritage.
- Let us sink our hearts and voices deeply into the Scriptures – the Gospels, the New Testament, yes! And also the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. Let God's Word show us how to live and witness as God's people so that indeed (as the prophet Isaiah says):

The nations shall stream to the house of the Lord
Many peoples shall say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob.' (Isa 2:2-3)

[Song: Straight into one or two refrains of "Unto the House of the Lord."]

Liturgy

Vince takes the stage in alb and stole. Readers line up in a horizontal line across stage. Vince and the readers will do a simple liturgical gesture during the sung "Lord hear our prayer". We can teach this to the readers just before the event starts. It's very, very simple.

Vince:

After that feast of insights, music, beautiful words from scripture, we now present our prayers the Lord as we prepare to enter into WYD.

As we do so, we will sing a refrain that appears often in the psalms. Let's join now in prayer to the Father with hearts of love united with Jesus, and with his people.

(music to Taize 'O Lord Hear My Prayer' starts up softly)

As first reader comes forward, the choir sings: **'O Lord Hear My Prayer...'**

Reader 1:

Reader 1a. We give thanks for the gift of God's love. May we love God with all our heart, all our soul and all our strength.

Reader 1b: We give praise for the gift of God's Word. May we treasure the Scriptures throughout our lives.

(Sung Response)

Reader 2:

Reader 2a. We give thanks for the community of the Church, for her people, her leaders, especially Pope Benedict. May we always love one another in Jesus' name.

Reader 2b. We give praise for our ancestors in faith, for the saints and martyrs and holy people who have gone before us. May we be inspired by their lives.

(Sung Response)

Reader 3:

Reader 3a. We give thanks for the gift of Mary, Mother of Jesus, and for the Jewish people, whose fidelity to the covenant brought forth the gift of our Saviour. May we learn from their witness what it means to live as a chosen people, chosen to keep the Lord's Name alive for the sake of all peoples, for the sake of all nations. Lord, hear us.

Reader 3b. We give praise that the Word was made flesh, and we pray for peace in the Holy Land where the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

(Sung Response)

Reader 4:

Reader 4a. We give thanks for the gift of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. May our hunger for God draw us ever closer as one Body of Christ.

Reader 4b. We give praise for the gift of our Antioch communities. May we treat our brothers and sisters in Antioch with love and respect.

(Sung Response)

Reader 5:

Reader 5a. We give praise for all Christian apostles who have borne witness to the Gospel in many lands and cultures. May we too bear witness to the Gospel by word and example.

Reader 5b. We give thanks for the gift of WYD. May our witness as descendents of Abraham, and as disciples of Jesus Christ, bring fire to the earth and peace to hearts.

(Sung Response)

Vince:

Lord God, heavenly Father, hear our prayers,

Fill us with the love of your Son

and the grace of your Spirit.

Send us forth to be true witnesses to the Gospel,

joyfully proclaiming the Word of Life

and inviting people to be immersed in the depths of our sacred Tradition.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Aaron's Blessing:

And may the Lord bless you and keep you

May the Lord's face shine upon you

May the Lord bring you his peace.

Amen.