

Wanted - saints for the new millennium



Continuing our monthly series under the auspices of the Catholic Agency for Support Evangelisation, **Clare Ford** urges each one of us to go out and share the Good News

"EVANGELISATION? Not over my dead body!" was the heartfelt response given by a committed Catholic when asked what evangelisation meant to him.

Other responses included: "Isn't that what Protestants do?" "For priests and nuns only, not 'ordinary' Catholics." "Faith is for living out, not talking about."

It is ironic that each of these people had chosen to attend a meeting about how their parish could reach out more effectively to those outside the Church. A further irony is that if our predecessors had shared the attitude that spreading the Good News that God loves us is really not a very Catholic thing to do, that parish wouldn't exist, and they themselves wouldn't have found out about the Faith. England and Wales both have excellent evangelistic traditions; currently however, there is a way to go before CASE's vision of enthusiastic Catholics who confidently engage with culture and who are equipped for the task of evangelisation is realised.

So, what are some of the things that hold us back from sharing the Good News that God loves us? Maybe we find it difficult to accept the truth of God's love for ourselves. It's one thing to believe this in theory, but another thing to actually live by it.

Taking a step in faith and proclaiming God's love in the midst of uncertainty is a dynamic way of experiencing the power of that love. Often people feel they don't know where to start. Without a doubt, prayer is the best place to begin; by placing our efforts in God's hands from the outset, we immerse ourselves in His strength. Ten of the 14 free downloadable resources we offered for Pentecost from www.casereources.org.uk were explicitly prayer-focused.

Confidence

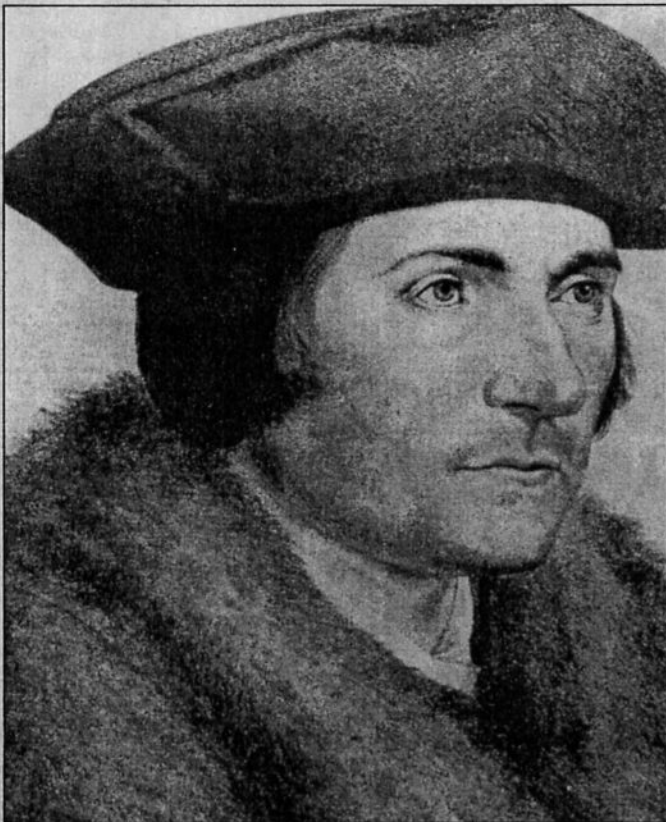
Many people think they don't know enough about their faith to speak out about it. Being properly informed is definitely a good thing, but you don't have to be a theology professor to share with someone the meaning faith gives to your life. We can have confidence that God will give us the words, "do not worry beforehand about what to say because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you must say," (Luke 12:12).

A similar stumbling block is an awareness of a discrepancy between what we believe and how we behave. We might also feel demoralised by negative media images of the Church. How can we proclaim a faith with such high standards if we fail to keep them ourselves?

Practising what we preach is obviously vitally important in helping people to accept the truth of what we say, but ultimately, evangelisation is not about telling other people how they should behave, it's about gently inviting them to be open to God's love, to experience the difference knowing Jesus makes. If our faith doesn't actually make much difference to how we live, we can be challenged to grow in that faith, to allow it to shape the decisions we make, the attitudes we have towards others.

The first letter of St Peter tells us to "always have your answer ready for people who ask the reason for your hope" (1Pet.3:15); offering to pray for a friend when they share a problem with you, avoiding joining in with gossip at work, can lead to people to ask about your beliefs. Sometimes people misquote St Francis' "preach the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary," to say it's more important to act on faith than speak about it.

Although there can be a real power in wordless witness in some situations, there



St Thomas More: Pray to him so you may have the courage to share your faith

is usually no need to choose either actions or words. When people see something distinctive about the way we treat others, they can assume that we just happen to be a nice person. Although that may well be true, a really easy way of evangelising is to make clear that faith is our motivation for going that extra mile.

Although those who are ordained are called to preach in a particular way, sharing faith is not reserved to a privileged professional few. The idea that you're somehow not worthy is no reason to not evangelise. Just as we're not worthy to receive the Lord at Mass, we need his healing to share him with those we meet outside Church. Nobody else will meet the unique combination of people you do - you may be the only Gospel they read! Jesus makes it crystal clear in today's Gospel that "your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).

Political correctness in our multi-faith society can make people think evangelisation is somehow inappropriate. Clearly, truth needs to be presented sensitively, but all people have a right to hear the Good News about Jesus. This doesn't mean people are forced to believe, but are freed to make up their own minds.

I believe a key reason for not speaking about our faith, is that we're simply not used to it, we don't often see people do it. Once upon a time, polite people avoided speaking about religion, sex or politics. Now all's fair game, bar religion.

Each of these reasons is ultimately based on fear that somehow we're not up to the task. The scriptural response to this situation is loud and clear in the 365 times we are simultaneously comforted and challenged to "Be not afraid!" It's a call that was echoed by the Holy Father in his World Youth Day Message of 2000: "Do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium!"

Despite Cardinal Hume's insistence that "faith is always personal, but never private", many of us are still more comfortable with the idea of 'keeping the faith' than with sharing it. Our current reticence to speak bold-

ly about how belief in Jesus shapes our lives belies the rich heritage we have to draw on.

This week we have celebrated the feast of Sts Thomas More and John Fisher, and on July 22, we will remember Ss Philip Evans and John Lloyd. The lives and deaths of these four martyrs of the Reformation bear clear witness to the challenge that living faith in a radical and obvious way presents to contemporary society. In these days of warm ecumenical relations, there is no reason to assume that being inspired by their commitment to proclaiming the Gospel might lead to further division.

Intimidated

It can be easy to feel intimidated rather than inspired by the example of the saints, after all, we remember and celebrate them because they were that bit different, they did live their faith to an heroic degree, but that would be to miss the point. If you feel diffident about sharing your faith because your doubts sometimes outweigh your beliefs, ask St Thomas to help you. If when you tried before you ended up saying the wrong thing, ask St Peter to intercede for you.

If you think what you've got to offer is too insignificant to make any difference, think of how St Therese of Lisieux's 'Little Way' led to her being named Patron of the Missions. If you think you might mess things up, rejoice that you're in good company, and in your weakness, rely on God's strength - open yourself to His love and make His love known.

● *CASE team member Clare Ford has a background in education. She has worked as a primary teacher in Hartlepool, in Higher Education training new RE teachers at Maryvale Institute, and was recently Head of RE at a secondary school in Birmingham.*



EVENTS IN YOUR DIOCESE

SHREWSBURY: Flower festival at St Peter's church, Castle Hill Close, Stalybridge on June 26 from 12-6pm; June 27 from 10am-4.30pm and June 27 from after 11am Mass-4pm. Tickets cost £3, and £1 for children.

PORTSMOUTH: Diocesan Mass with Apostolic Nuncio Pablo Puenta on June 27.

DUNDEE: James Walls, a student for the diocese of Dunkeld will also be ordained deacon in June, with his ordination taking place in his home parish in Dundee on Sunday 27.

WESTMINSTER: Book launch for A Biblical View of Law and Justice by David Mellroy. The book explores the biblical message about law and justice, there will be a launch party at the Inner Temple Parliament Chamber at 6pm on Tuesday 29 June 2004. RSVP: Mrs Rebecca Mellroy, 3 Paper Buildings, Temple, London EC4Y 7EU.

PAISLEY: Rev Francis Hannigan, a student of Scotus College, will be ordained priest on June 29 in St John's, Barrhead, at 7pm.

PLYMOUTH: Mass in the cathedral to celebrate the 1,250th anniversary of the diocese's patron, St Boniface on June 30 at 7pm. Singers from the Plymouth parishes are invited to join the cathedral choir at 6pm in the Cathedral Centre.

MIDDLESBROUGH: Connecting People To Big Issues and Practical Action in Northallerton on July 2. Joy Carroll and Jim Wallis are going to be the keynote speakers at the convention of the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber.

The convention aims to relate specific issues from the global arena to the experiences of grassroots action in the region. More information from www.crc-online.org.uk or 0113 2443413.

WESTMINSTER: Open air celebration with Bishop Bernard Longley at St Joseph's Pastoral Centre, on July 4 at 3pm. Bishop Bernard Longley will say the Mass followed by a shared picnic in the grounds afterwards.

LIVERPOOL: The Catholic Cathedral is holding a concert on July 3 at 7.30pm called 'Te Deum'. Tickets cost £6 (£4 concessions) and are available from the Cathedral Gift Shop or by phoning 0151 707 3541 or 0151 724 6644.

SALFORD: Act For A Change, July 3, at St Peter's House, Manchester. Churches Against Poverty's series of roadshow events working together to tackle poverty and economic injustice kicks off in Manchester on July 3. The event runs from 10am - 4pm, at St Peter's House, Oxford Road. For more information or to offer to host an event in your area, contact Owen Crane on 0161 236 9321 or email: owen@church-poverty.org.uk. **LIVERPOOL:** St Patrick's parish, Southport is holding an open gardens family day on July 4 from 12 noon-5pm. Tickets cost £2.50. The church hall will also be open selling refreshments and stalls. Proceeds will go towards a the church's new building appeal fund.

CLIFTON: Catholic Education - The Future? As part of the series of talks: 'Living Our Faith', Taking place July 8 at St Bonaventure's Presbytery, Egerton Road, Bishopston, Bristol at 8pm. Further details from Mary Barrett: marybee75@hotmail.com. **SALFORD:** Exhibition celebrating the Circle of Life and God's Promise, plus a flower festival, at St Dunstan's church, Moston: July 9 10am-7pm; July 10, 10am-6pm and July 11 12noon-5pm. Admission is free and home made refreshments will be available. All welcome.

ARUNDEL AND BRIGHTON: Friends of Arundel Cathedral have organised a special summer event on July 10 in the grounds of Arundel Castle. It will begin with an open air Mass, celebrated by Bishop Kieran Conry, and followed by an entertainment-packed afternoon which will have something to offer all the family. Tickets are now available from Lindsey Stratford at The Friends' Office (01903 884567).

CLIFTON: A talk by guest speaker, Peter Bradshaw, Co-Director of the Clifton Diocese Department for Schools & Colleges and former Principal of St Brendan's Sixth Form College, Bristol on 'Catholic Education-The Future?' Held at St Bonaventure's, Bishopston, Bristol on July 8 at 8pm, the event has been arranged by St Bonaventure's Parish Pastoral Team. Further details at: www.stbons.org.uk/ or emailing: Mary Barrett on marybee75@hotmail.com.

WESTMINSTER: St Joseph's Pastoral Centre's Sri Lankan Day on July 10 from 2-8pm. For more information, call the centre on 0208 2023999.