

Fr Christopher Gleeson, SJ:

## KEY ADDRESS 2

NOTE: Unlike the first session for the Keynote Address, Father Gleeson did not have a written text for this part two presentation. He spoke with the slides of his PowerPoint presentation

I'm going to stand because otherwise I might go to sleep in my own presentation. One of our Jesuits in Australia did that when he was preaching once, he went to sleep during his own homily. That would be terrible. And, as Katherine Manalang has pointed out to me, I've got more slides in this presentation than I had in the first one and I've only got half the time. But that doesn't matter, we can stop and, if you want, you can get the presentation later.

[In response to technical issues] I might have to sing! I have a nephew, Simon Gleeson is his name, who's been playing the part of Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables* in Melbourne, in Perth and in Sydney, which started on Friday night. Jean Valjean has this beautiful line in the second act, where he sings: "To love another person is to see the face of God." Isn't that a beautiful line?

Spirituality is a slippery term: all sorts of people use, even businesses use it these days, in the corporate world. But I love this definition from Ronald Rolheiser: "Spirituality is the fire that burns within us." And what about the fire that burns within the Archbishop? Boy oh boy, he's a passionate man. And Ronald Rolheiser says "Passion is God's fire in us". I'm talking at CJC – think I am, unless they've given me the sack – on Friday morning and that's one of the things in that Holy Spirit school that I want to talk about: passion is God's fire in us. Richard Rohr is an American Franciscan priest, I think we have a Franciscan chaplain in the congregation somewhere today. In doing all sorts of staff formation, I always come back to this thesis, the Rohr principle: you can only lead others as far as you yourself have gone. So your own depth, your own spirituality as a teacher is critical, essential to the way you lead the young people in your care. If you've got no spirituality, if there is no depth in your life, then you're not going to lead them very far, are you? Hence the importance of days like today. Putting it more simply, you lead others to the depths to which you have been led, you can only transform people to the degree you have been transformed. And education is about transformation of hearts and minds.

This is a very challenging line: what we don't change in ourselves, what we don't transform in ourselves, we transmit. We can easily impose our agenda on other people. And our agenda, our curriculum, as the archbishop was saying this morning, is Jesus, our 'songline'. He mentioned the word pedagogy, which I was happy to hear him say, because etymologically, of course, pedagogy is about accompaniment, leading a child. Pope Francis talks about that all the time. And the road to Emmaus, as we are going to see, is about accompaniment. "Education is not a job but an attitude, it is a way of being." You have got that in your journal actually. And this is him again: "To educate well we need to step out of ourselves and be among young people to accompany them in the stages of their growth, placing ourselves at their sides." Surely that's what the road to Emmaus is all about.

One of the great educators in my country has been this man, Hedley Beare, years ahead of his time. "Our role is to be the guide on the side more than the sage on the stage". Guess where I am at the moment. [Audience laughs]

As you know, in Luke chapter 24 there are six stages in Jesus' accompaniment. Six stages in the Emmaus companionship: first, of course Jesus is walking with those two disciples, disoriented, slow learners, disillusioned.

And then, listening to their story: that's what Jesus does, he listens carefully to their story and like a good teacher he paints a bigger picture for them. "Hey chaps, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are about salvation history, that's what it means," that's what a good teacher does. And for the fourth stage, there is just one sentence in that Gospel where he motions to go on and they

say "No, come and have a meal with us." As a good teacher he doesn't impose himself but he disposes. He blesses the bread: good teachers have blessing as part of their ministry as well. Not necessarily with the big gesture but just by their affirmation and encouragement. And sourcing things: that's what a blessing is. It's all in God and our life is a journey from God to God, isn't it.

And finally, community building: "Were not our hearts burning within us, as he spoke to us on the road?" It's that passion again. And they go back with that story and build up the community.

That's the initial stage of walking with the distraught disciples, as one of our Australian Jesuits, Quyen Vu, with his little group of students in Dili, East Timor. And the Pope says: "In accompanying young people we need a new language, a new way of saying things. Today God asks this of us: to leave the nest which encloses us in order to be sent a new language."

I think I saw that chap today. Can you see that? Is that picture too dark for you? Can you see it? [lighting issues resolved]

Mary, the constantly faithful companion. I love the bare bottom of the baby Jesus there. That's a statue in our grounds in Xavier College in Melbourne.

As a companion you've got to get amongst them, be alongside young people. "If the times are bad, then let us be better." We were talking at lunch today about some of the evil things in our world, the IS. "If the times are bad, then let us be better. Then, the times will be better. For we are the times." St Augustine said that a very long time ago. Teachers are crucially important people, the great shapers in our world, as Jonathan Sachs says.

I'm sure you Latin scholars would know that the word 'companion' comes from two Latin words: cum, meaning 'with' and panis meaning 'bread'. So a companion is one who breaks bread with another. And that's what we did this morning, in building up our companionship as teachers at the Eucharist. Companions nourish the heart, mind, soul and body. And the frangipani comes from the same Latin word, to break bread. Have you got that flower in Singapore, the frangipani? Lovely, isn't it? To break bread.

And it is easy to miss that action in the Eucharist, you know, when the priest breaks the bread – it's such a subtle action – we miss it and yet it's so important. The Irish say 'we live in the shelter of each other'. An Irish blessing. I think I've heard an Irish accent. Are there any Irish in the hall today? Don't be shy, I love the Irish. Oh, come on, there's got to be someone, I thought I heard some Irish accent at lunch.

'None of us is as strong as all of us'. We talk about pastoral care in our schools and that word 'care', very importantly, might have little to do with 'cure'. Care is attention to. I think often we are too worried about racing for a solution and trying to cure something rather than really caring for that person. "It's about learning to befriend problems". Thomas Moore said that again: "Honour the symptom and let it guide us in close care of the soul." Honour the symptom: you don't need to rush to solve all the problems. Jesus walks with these chaps, first. "Care is a participation in the pain of another. Cure without care is meaningless." Van Breemen wrote that a long time ago.

So, that's the first stage, of just walking with people. And now Jesus listens with reverence to what they have to say. Hearing people out before rushing in with the truth. Isn't that true that if you listen to somebody's story, it's an act of healing in itself? Because a person's story is sacred ground, it's sacred territory, isn't it? And to listen to that, really hear it, hear the words behind the words, is a great act of healing. And teachers, you do that all the time.

I love this, I used these words in a homily in Brisbane and one of the parishioners made me a note book cover with these words on it. "You have to listen to the river if you want to catch a trout." There are all forms of listening, aren't they? We listened to the lovey singing and guitar playing before but listening to a person's culture is very important. The teacher as a horse whisperer, you might have read the book or seen the film, Robert Redford was in it, wasn't he? Teachers are those people who can really tease out students' deep yearnings.

"With great respect for people's experiences, their culture, and you have a great diversity of cultures in your country, in your city, we help them to listen to themselves and discover their own deeper desires."



In Ignatian spirituality, deep desires are critical for getting in touch, we believe, with God's voice for us. God expresses himself in our passions, our deep desires. So, often, when you're starting a spiritual relationship with somebody, one of the first questions you ask is: what are the things that give you life, who are the people that give you life, what are you passionate about?

In Australia we wear blazers – that's a sporting blazer on screen and that's a father and a son from a school where I was a Principal for a long time, at Riverview. "Never cut off talking, keep listening, that's what I do." Those words come from a wonderful book by Jonathan Smith, 'The learning game', I used to give it to teachers new to the school.

Joan Chittister – I love Joan, I'm not sure all of our bishops in Australia love Joan – but she's a wonderful writer: "So many people have never been heard in their whole lives".

"What we don't name we enable". There are often things that are left simmering in our lives and as soon as you name them and can put them on the table, you disempower them.

"I have a theory that only what touches the heart remains in the mind". I think these words of Joan Chittister are an important educational maxim. I can remember being met at a wedding reception, a few years ago, by a young man to whom I taught Japanese history in Year 10, and he had a glass of red wine in his hand, so did I, and we were chatting and he said: "Father, I don't remember much about the Japanese history you taught us," and that was very deflating, I thought I was a good history teacher. "No, no – he said – I don't remember much, but I do remember that you came and visited me in hospital when I had a breakdown."

"Only what touches the heart is really lodged in the mind." Think about that for your own teaching, as well.

It's a slippery business trying to get hold of the meaning of spirituality as capacity to listen. "Listeners – those who hear the pain behind the pain... come few and far between," Joan Chittister says.

So spirituality is about listening and you good listeners in a school, whatever religion you are, whatever culture you come from, you're sharing your spirituality with your students through listening.

"To have a tender moment is to pray." I wonder if you've had a tender moment today. I've had a number, people I've met, things they've said to me. And I love this: "prayer is a matter of picking up the tender moment and letting its grace soften us," or make us 'mellow', that lovely old English word 'mellow' and 'grateful'. Prayer is as simple as that, picking up the tender moment. Now anybody can do that, no matter what their religion or lack of. Some of these South Sudanese photos come from Brother Bill Firman, a De LaSalle brother, a dear friend of mine.

"What constitutes a tender moment? Anything in life that helps make us aware of our deep connectedness with each other, of our common struggle, our common wound, our common sin and our common need for help..." that's another way of describing spirituality.

"God is winking at us during the day." That's a photo of myself going off to hear confession [audience laughs]. Very useful piece of furniture that.

In talking about listening – and I'm not going to be able to finish this presentation really – but in our Ignatian spirituality what we call the Examen is a prayer that we're meant to pray even if we haven't got the time to pray formally in a day, just to do the examen, which is a matter of rewinding our day we can do it formally in five parts by thanking God – Ignatius said that the worst sin in life is ingratitude – asking for insight, looking at/pondering my day, asking forgiveness and looking to improve tomorrow. That's the formal way of praying the Examen, but it can be just a matter of tuning in: why am I unpeaceful at the moment? Why am I tense? Where was I loving today? Where was I not at peace today? What event or person touched my heart today?

That's listening to ourselves, and at our Jesuit day school situated just near the Sydney harbour bridge, they've got a little card that they give all their students for their desks, for their pockets. It has five questions on it and it's the Examen composed by the students themselves:

What was the best thing I heard today?

What was the best thing I saw?

What was the best thing someone did for me?

What was the best thing I did for someone else?

What can I do to improve tomorrow?

Thank you God.

Isn't that a lovely way of rewinding the day? And that's a very integral part of listening to ourselves. Same thing: "In learning to listen we must learn also to listen to ourselves".

"Discernment is the art of looking into our hearts and minds to see what parts of our life leads to God and which parts lead away from God."



You've heard the story of the two wolves? It's a good story, let me tell you very quickly:

A Grandfather, native American, was sitting around the fire one night with his grandson and he said: 'Grandson, in every human being there are two wolves and they're fighting, they're inside us, and they're fighting with one another. One is good and the other not so good. The good wolf brings us love and peace and joy and hope and generosity, life-giving things, and they are the signs of the good spirit leading us to God. But that good wolf is at odds with the evil wolf or the evil spirit, which bring us anger and arrogance and lies and jealousy and you can throw in other things, like resentment, resentment is a terrible disease, and they are leading us away from God'. And the little grandson, sitting there by the fire, is thinking and he says: 'Grandfather, which wolf wins?' Grandfather says: "The one you feed". Which wolf wins in us? The wolf you feed. Attitude is so important.

There is another story about a man who came home one night and got out of his car in the drive and found a python on his front lawn. This was a big worry for him, so he went to open the boot of his car, attacked the python with a machete and killed it and went to bed quite happy with himself. Next day he woke up, pulled the blinds up, looked out at the front lawn and found his garden hose in pieces all over the lawn. Moral of the story: don't make a decision in the dark.

And we do, don't we? From time to time. We write letters in anger. Dangerous these days with emails. As a baby Jesuit we were told "Ok, if you write a letter in anger, put it under the pillow or put it in your desk and look at it again in the morning." And a hundred percent of the times you will have changed it or not sent it at all. Never make a decision in the dark.

So, discernment can lead us away from God when I'm locked into my own view, quick to judge, rigid, moralising, that little word 'should', 'they ought to'. British Jesuit Fr Gerry Hughes used to talk about those people who had hardening of the 'oughteries': 'they ought to do this', you know. Self-centred.

Whereas those qualities that lead us towards God:

- Open to growth and change
- Taking time to listen and reflect
- Flexibility
- In touch with real desires
- In relationship
- Ready to offer a deeper vision: [end of audio]

(Time prevented Father Gleeson from developing the final three stages of accompaniment on the road to Emmaus-disposing not imposing, blessing, and community-building. Please refer to the full PowerPoint presentation contained in the attached DVD.)