

Gospel Stories Presented as Liquid Pictures

A dramatic form known as liquid pictures was just one of the techniques taught at a National Drama Workshop, showing young people contemporary ways of sharing the Good News.

Enthusiastic and talented students and young people came from the Sydney, Parramatta, Canberra and Sandhurst dioceses for the Workshop held in the Blue Mountains from 1-4 May.

World renowned dramatist, Fr Michael Moynanhan SJ, passed on his expertise in the workshop sponsored by the Bishops Committee for the Media and the Jesuits in Australia.

Fr Moynanhan first demonstrated the dramatic form, then the group read the parable together, talked about the story, its message and then acted it out.

The liquid pictures dramatic form is a story played out in 5 or 6 movements. Students at the workshop portrayed The Friend at Midnight, the story of the man who came to visit his friend at midnight asking for bread.

While one group took the story quite literally and acted out the conversation, another group chose to adapt the concepts to contemporary life. Instead of asking for bread, the friend who knocked on the door at midnight was seeking more beer for the party. After several times being knocked back and told "get outta here", the kind friend opened the door and the man was invited in.

Therese, from Canberra, said "using the dramas opened up the gospels and made them more alive and accessible".

Tableaux vivants is another dramatic form that opened up the Gospel stories. Snapshots, similar to photos in a photo album, are portrayed to tell the story.

A practical example of this dramatic form was the story of the Gerasene demoniac where the demons were sent from one man to a herd of swine. The final scene as depicted by one group showed the man walking tall, onlookers not able to believe their eyes, and the pigs carrying the burden of the demons.

"What spoke more powerfully was those dramas without words" said Kylie, from Canberra. She went on to say that the drama techniques had many practical applications, particularly useful in parishes.

Fr Moynanhan told one story of just how effective the use of drama has been in a parish with a mix of cultures. In the parish there were three distinct cultures, Hispanic, Vietnamese and Anglo-saxon. The language barriers created all sorts of problems, with services needing to be held for each group in their own language. A group of people got together one Easter and prepared a mime of the Passion play. Six people and two pieces of cloth were all that it took. "This universal language is now used every year and unites all the cultures in the parish." said Fr Moynanhan.

Currently Fr Moynanhan is the Director of Fine Arts Research Institute for Gonzaga University in Florence, Italy. He has given workshops around the world on mime, story telling and the use of dramatic and imaginative forms.

"I usually teach teachers", he says. But he was more than happy to work with Australia's young people from high school and university and with adults. I'm hoping they will take these skills back and teach others."

This was definitely part of the legacy passed on to his students who are planning to keep in touch with each other, to share the knowledge and experiences of drama and the gospel stories with others in their schools, parishes and communities.

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