

**Lent 2001: 'Launch out into the deep and expect great things'**  
**This Lenten pastoral letter written by Archbishop Francis Carroll.**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, Launch out into the deep. I am sure that Jesus is saying these words to the Church of our time, just as he did to Simon Peter after he and his mates had spent all night fishing and caught absolutely nothing. I am in good company in thinking that way as Pope John Paul II is also convinced of it.

You remember the Gospel story - Peter and Andrew and the brothers James and John are washing and mending their nets after a fruitless night fishing. Jesus asks Peter to let him speak from his boat to the crowds pressing around him to hear his words. When he has finished, Jesus tells Peter to put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch. Peter must have been really discouraged by the failure to catch anything. He was deadly tired after being out in the boat all night and he'd already washed the nets and packed them away for another day. Added to that, he was the expert and experienced fisherman and now was being told by a landlubber to go out again at an obviously wrong time.

But Peter had heard and seen enough of Jesus to take him seriously and somehow to trust him against the odds.

We don't know what he had expected; perhaps he was just being nice and expected nothing. One of that mattered; he did what Jesus told him to do and did it precisely because Jesus said so. The results were amazing, nets full to breaking point. He calls his partners to help out and all the nets are filled with a catch the like of which they had never seen.

Why is this story so relevant today. Why does John Paul use it in writing to the whole Church after the renewing experience of the Jubilee Year, and in his call to meet the challenges of a new millennium of Christianity? Why do I say that our local Church must take it to heart, do what Peter did and launch out into the deep?

The Church, and so many in it, are like Peter and his fellow fishermen. Weariness and discouragement bow many shoulders. So much effort and so little to show for it. Experience and expertise, hard work and well planned programs, and still nothing in the nets.

I see priests looking like Peter and his friends. So many have laboured long and hard, and the churches continue to empty. The young do not appear. There are few priestly fellow workers coming to help. The promise of powerful lay participation does not seem to materialise. So they clean their nets, maintain the boat and don't really believe anything is going to change, but will probably get worse.

I see parents and grandparents who are saddened by the fact their children no longer come to church with them and disregard so many aspects of the faith and morals their parents value and have tried all their lives to impart. Younger parents are burdened in a different way. They wish to give spiritual sustenance to their children but their own faith understanding is vague and they do not know what to say.

Teachers in Catholic schools and catechists in State schools and parishes see the wholesale exodus from the visible Communion of the Church. They too have laboured all night long and the fish have become invisible.

Religious Brothers and Sisters gather, too, around their nets of consecrated life which are empty of vocations and point to the likelihood of dissolution of a whole way of life. Who will continue their mission, who even will look after them in their old age?

Lay parishioners, promised a new springtime flowering of their baptismal call and mission, are wearied by frustration because of unhelpful attitudes and structures. Women particularly are not allowed even to go out in the boat.

Many young people are weary in spirit at an age when they should be bursting with hope. There is a lack of meaning, the emptiness of self-indulgent ways and the darkness of addiction and even suicide. Their nets too are empty of purpose and hope.

The whole Church community knows the weariness of living under the constant pressure of a secularised society and the loss of sleep because of division within, and opposition without, the Body of Christ.

There we are, all standing on the shore contemplating the fruitless labour, cleaning and mending nets that suddenly seem out of date and inadequate. Is it worth going out again to seek the illusive fish?

Then Jesus comes. He asks the simple courtesy of sitting in Peter's boat, of being welcomed into our lives. He speaks the word of God to the crowd, and to all of us today. He looks with compassion and understanding at Peter, and at us. He understands the weariness and discouragement of those who have no earthly reason to hope. And yet he says, put out into the deep.

Peter listens to Jesus' word, puts trust in him and follows his direction. The result is beyond all expectations.

Will we listen to God's word, put our trust in Jesus and be humble and wise enough to follow his direction? If we do, the result will be beyond all our expectations also.

For the Jubilee year, and at the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, Pope John Paul has written a letter to the Catholic people of the world. He begins and ends with the encouraging words of Jesus to Peter, to convey a message of hope.

"Now is the time," he writes, "for each local Church to assess its fervour and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities ..."

This is the task facing us in our local Church in Canberra and Goulburn.

For the next few years, our prayerful reflection and pastoral planning will be in the context of preparation for a Diocesan Synod in 2003. In our last Synod in 1989, we considered the whole mission of the Church. This time we will concentrate on just some of its key aspects and our approach will draw from the experience of Jubilee.

We experienced, as did the Universal Church, the Jubilee as a time for the purification of memory. In other words, we repented of past sins against God, God's people and God's creation. We asked forgiveness and we readily granted forgiveness to others, even our enemies.

We recalled afresh that our primary call is to holiness of life based on a personal relationship with Christ. The Jubilee centred on Jesus Christ as revealed in the

Gospels and we gave priority time to prayer. We must remain firmly anchored in the sacred scriptures and re-commit ourselves to the primacy of prayer.

In the Jubilee Year, we contemplated the face of Christ and sought to depth his compassionate heart. Now we must show the face of Christ and reflect his compassion to those around us, in the Church, and in the world.

If we have truly seen the face of Christ and felt the beat of his heart, our prayer and pastoral planning will be inspired by the new commandment Love one another as I have loved you. While that love must be all inclusive, it gives first place to the poor and marginalised.

John Paul II was deeply impressed by the young people who came in their millions as pilgrims to Rome. In our local Church, we will begin our new millennium with young people, both to support them and to draw vitality from them in the life of the Church. A group of enthusiastic young women and men, are already meeting to pray and plan their part. I ask that the place of young people in the Church and in the world, will become the number one priority for this year of 2001 in every Catholic parish, school, local community, movement and agency of the Church.

As we continue on our journey towards the Synod, we will gradually broaden our horizons. Within the Christian calling of all the baptised, we will give particular attention to the role of lay persons in the life and mission of the Church, including many issues raised in the report Woman and Man; One in Christ Jesus.

Right now, we are about to enter the season of Lent and begin our journey with Christ to the Cross of Good Friday and the Resurrection of Easter Sunday. Surely this is the time really to launch out into the deep. Let us put out into the deep waters of intense prayer and contemplation of Jesus, seeking to meet him, especially in Sacred Scripture and in the Eucharist. Let us plumb the depths of repentance and forgiveness, climaxing in a sincere celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Let us put out into the depths of compassionate love that takes seriously the needs of the poor and inspires a truly sacrificial support of Project Compassion.

St Paul reminds us that we should never give in to a sense of weariness or a spirit of pessimism. "So let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ". Never give in then my dear brothers and sisters, never admit defeat. Keep on working at the Lord's work always, knowing that in the Lord, you cannot be labouring in vain".

In other words, "Launch out into the deep" and expect great things.

Yours sincerely in Christ,+ Francis P Carroll Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn.