

Jesus, Harry Potter and Shan ...

30/7/17

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

So the boy . . . the boy must die?" asked Snape quite calmly.

"And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential."

Another long silence. Then Snape said, "I thought . . . all these years . . . that we were protecting him for her. For Lily."

"We have protected him because it has been essential to teach him, to raise him, to let him try his strength," said Dumbledore, his eyes still tight shut. "Meanwhile, the connection between them grows ever stronger, a parasitic growth: Sometimes I have thought he suspects it himself. If I know him, he will have arranged matters so that when he does set out to meet his death, it will truly mean the end of Voldemort."

Dumbledore opened his eyes. Snape looked horrified. "You have kept him alive so that he can die at the right moment?"

"Don't be shocked, Severus. How many men and women have you watched die?"

"Lately, only those whom I could not save," said Snape. He stood up. "You have used me."

"Meaning?"

"I have spied for you and lied for you, put myself in mortal danger for you. Everything was supposed to be to keep Lily Potter's son safe. Now you tell me you have been raising him like a pig for slaughter —"

"But this is touching, Severus," said Dumbledore seriously. "Have you grown to care for the boy, after all?"

"For HIM?" shouted Snape. "Expecto Patronum!" From the tip of his wand burst the silver doe: She landed on the office floor, bounded once across the office, and soared out of the window. Dumbledore watched her fly away, and as her silvery glow faded he turned back to Snape, and his eyes were full of tears.

"After all this time?"

"Always," said Snape.

(An excerpt taken from the book entitled, "Harry Potter and the deathly hallows: Ch 33")

One of the skills you learn very quickly as a teacher of children is their ability to read. Educational Psychologists often refer to the term, "Reading Age vs Physical Age". This is a means test to determine the level of a student's reading ability in terms of standards and norms. The more a student is able to read, the more their ability to comprehend text and information for themselves. It has been my experience over the last twenty plus years in education, that if a student is a strong self-initiating reader, they will no doubt excel in education and assessment.

I was very lucky with my daughter, Shannon, who grew up with a Mother who is an avid reader and a Father who always dragged his theology books from university with him whenever he moved. Shannon remains a strong reader to this day and I count myself lucky as a parent when I consider the number of parents I meet with at school asking me for the magic potion to enable their child to read more!

Enter Harry Potter.

Shannon, like many children of her generation, remain absolutely drawn to the Harry Potter series of books. I have vivid memories of her as a young girl sitting in the pews at St Michael and All Angels, with the Book of Common Prayer open on her left knee and a Harry Potter book open on her right...

Somehow, to the criticism from many, I have failed to be drawn into the story of Harry and his adventures. I have occasionally watched parts of the various films, but yet somehow always left confused about the plot and characters.

There is no doubt that the author, J.K. Rowling is a highly gifted writer who has the skill and capacity to draw people into her world of mystery, magic and wonder. Her books have gained worldwide attention, won multiple awards and sold more than 400 million copies. They have become the best-selling series book in history and have also been the basis for a series of films.

In today's Gospel reading we are once again reminded of the powerful parables that Jesus told his followers. In a sense, He was the J.K. Rowling of the day, for ultimately, the book that the life of Jesus contributed to, has been with us for over 2000 years... (I do wonder sometimes if Harry will last that long!)

The parables were a very powerful literacy tool that Jesus used to convey complex and meaningful ideas about God, love, loyalty and being a disciple of the Lord. Jesus had the ability to read His different audiences and adjust His teaching styles and methods in a way to maximise the impact of His message of love. Parables were also a common cultural form of communication. By using parables, Jesus was able to convey an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The parables were also able to be heard and understood at various levels by the differently educated followers. Some were able to hear the parable at a basic level, yet still leave with a message. Yet there were also

those educated followers who were able to interpret the parable at a much deeper level. Jesus was very skilled at telling a story, in such a way that people were moved and changed...

This started me thinking...

J.K. Rowling and her Harry Potter series are also incredibly powerful today in terms of their outreach and impact on children's lives. Her stories appeal to many children because of the fantasy that represents the relationship between magic and morality. Harry Potter provides a world for young readers, where they are able to engage with a world defined by imagination and therefore have an alternate to the realities of life. The Millennial Generation (Born between 1982 and 2003) is dealing with a real world marked by dysfunctional families and often, institutions too, that often fail to provide a moral framework. It has been suggested by some researchers that Harry Potter is about a subtle form of teenage rebellion against the adult world...

Some of the strong themes that can be identified in the Harry Potter stories could be said to be:

Friendship and betrayal

Loyalty

Love

Fight between good and evil

Family and friends

Standing up for the truth

If you think very carefully about it, all of the above themes are in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, too!

Here we have the Son of Man, who was seen by many as a rebel. The Gospels are a collection of stories about friendship, betrayal, love, the fight between good and evil, as well as definitely standing up for the truth! I would even go so far as to suggest that there is even magic in the Gospels if we reflect upon the wondrous miracles that Jesus performed many times. It is all there. Yet, the hard question needs to be asked, "Why do so many young children find the

Harry Potter books so accessible, yet the Bible is seen by many to be “old fashioned or irrelevant?”

This is a hard question to answer, for ultimately, the story of Jesus is just as wonderful, if not more so, than all the Harry Potter books combined. The challenge is for us as Christians, Lay Ministers and Priests, to reconsider how we present the Gospel of Jesus to the youth of today. I would argue that perhaps our style of presentation and communication has paled in comparison next to the likes of J.K Rowling and her ability to tell powerful stories that have changed so many children’s lives. Our goal should be to relook at how we tell the Old, old story so that it rekindles the imagination and loyalty of the same youth who remain addicted to Harry and his exploits.

You see, the Gospels and the story of Jesus Christ have a very powerful story that has withstood eons, in spite of poor hermeneutics and uninspired preachers. J.K Rowling has, in a sense shown us all up, for we now need to focus on presenting the Gospel in a new and creative manner that will capture the hearts and imagination of the likes of the Millennium Generation. We have the core material... the Gospel authors gave us that in the Gospels. It is our responsibility and privilege to engage with the Good News in such a way that the saga of Jesus Incarnate lights a new fire among the youth of today...

No easy task... and I start with myself!

For as J.K. Rowling said herself, “Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic.”

It is our responsibility as inspired Christians to ensure that the sense of wonder and mystery of the story of Jesus Christ is told to all, over and over again.

I close this morning with a final quote from J.K. Rowling, who said:

“We’ve all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That’s who we really are.”

God bless you this week ahead as you reflect upon the light of Jesus and how we live and present the Gospel to a world that is seeking the truth and hope.

Amen.