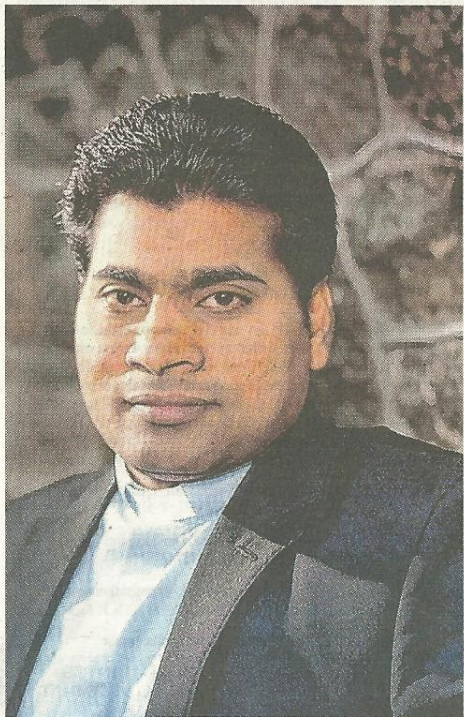


Reflections

Let us care for our youngsters



CHRISTMAS is one of the two most important church feasts when our churches are usually full — the other being Easter. Despite the pandemic situation this year our churches were half full and there was an equal number of people online.

The one thing I noticed was the increasing number of young people who go to Mass during these seasons. I prepare my homilies to recognise and appreciate their presence in the church, and to empathise with their struggles and difficulties in a world of ever-increasing complexities. There is usually some good feedback from these homilies.

A few years ago, I met a young person at Saint Boniface Okehampton who said: 'I have come back to the church after a few years absence, so I am afraid I am not a good Catholic.' I replied: 'Please do not worry. I have been a Catholic since birth but am still struggling to be a good Catholic.'

I hear from many parents that they feel frustrated that their children are not practising their faith. I have managed to have a chat with some of these children out of curiosity for answers about their absence from church. Some of them keep away from religion and faith for historical reasons, but most of them have a different

explanation that surprised me. Their daily routine during the week is so packed with activities that they miss attendance at Sunday service. It must be agreed that some of the church services are not as interesting for today's young minds as they are for the mature congregation.

Childhood was simpler and perhaps easier 50 years ago.

Given the exponential changes our society is undergoing it is much more challenging and demanding today to develop as a child, a youngster and eventually grow into adulthood. Our food habits, family structures, relationship styles, dress customs and social interactions have changed, and they are still

evolving.

Our children are deprived of a sufficient period of unburdened childhood, and sadly some are also deprived of decent parenting. Most of our children, and some adults, struggle to cope with the digital pressures of Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, You Tube and online games. There are too many choices but very few tools available to aid a good selection process.

There are many ways to make people knowledgeable and intelligent but very few to make people wise. There are convincing arguments against religion and faith but none to put anything in their place. This

sort of situation adds fuel to the burning changes that our young ones already undergo both psychically and emotionally.

If we want to care properly for our young people, I suggest we need to start with a focus on our families. We need understanding and unconditional positive regard to lead them gently through suitable religious paths and offer them the skills to make their own choices in life.

'Let his flesh become fresh with youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigour'.
Job 33:25

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