

CCR NSW Retreat Weekend with Jim Murphy, 19-20 Jan 2019, at St Agatha's Pennant Hills

Jim Murphy is the current president of ICCRS (International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services). You can read a bit more about him [here](#).

He gave all five of the talks at this retreat weekend.

These talks were recorded on video, and should be available by contacting the team at <http://www.ccrnsw.org.au/>.

What these notes are is only a rough summary /transcription of those talks.

Session 1, Saturday 19 Jan 2019

I am delighted to be with you here today. I am happy that this is a retreat and not a conference, an opportunity to come and rest in the presence of the God. He has a word for the Church, for the world, and something personal for you. It is a privilege to experience God. We will take it nice and slow and easy.

The theme for this weekend is a quotation from Zech 4:6
"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord"

We sing about this verse, but God has a bigger context for it. So I will give you the context and story behind this verse. To understand it you need to know about the captivity of the Jewish people in Babylon and the restoration of God's people when they came home.

In David's kingly line some of them were good and some of them were bad. Regularly God sent them prophets to call them back in line with His ways. Sometimes He sent foreign armies as a chastisement; although that looks like punishment, it was actually used to bring the people back to God. Sometimes even more drastic measures are needed. So the Assyrians came and took some into captivity and then when the Babylonians came and took over the Assyrians they took over Judah as well, and dragged them off to captivity too. This was some 600-700 years before Jesus. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, there was destruction everywhere and the city was wiped out – an unimaginable loss – and the people were scattered everywhere. Once in captivity the people began to think, 'Why did we rebel against God?' During those 70 or 100 or 150 years of exile other people came in to occupy the land. Then along came the Persians to beat up the Babylonians, and God uses the Persian king to set the people of Israel free. 'You can all go home now'. Amazing! Israel did nothing to regain their freedom. It was the Spirit of God moving in the heart of an unbeliever to make it happen.

Many problems do not have human solutions. God is the master of our destinies. Everyone's life is in the hand of God.

Zechariah was God's prophet for these times, but there were other characters too. Another prophet, Haggai, lived within a 100 years of Zechariah. Haggai's message was, 'It is time to rebuild the Temple, do this first, then build your own homes.' The task was to rebuild more than just the physical Temple; it was to rebuild the worship of Almighty God. It is not about

us, it is about God. When He is No.1 – everything else lines up. Worship God first, and then let Him take care of us. Let's get our priorities right.

Zechariah's main message was a message of restoration, of hope and healing.

There were two governors, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel, they weren't prophets but good men, practical men. They had to figure out, God has spoken – what are we supposed to do in response? What is God's responsibility? What is our responsibility? How much do we sit back? How much are we to be active? Somewhere between the 2 extremes is the right mixture. We are supposed to co-operate with God. It is a mystery of trust and work.

Ezra the priest, and Joshua the priest, had spiritual responsibility for the people.

It took teamwork between the prophets, the secular lay people going with the vision, and the priests, to offer sacrifice, to co-ordinate worship, and to get the people back on track.

There are had different callings and charisms, as Paul reminds us in the Body of Christ (eye, ear, feet) – diversity. What do we have in common? The worship of God. As Pope Francis [says](#) (cruxnow.com 11 Nov 2016), 'Do not confuse unity with conformity'. Our unity is in Christ. In the mind of God, diversity makes us strong.

There was a whole process to rebuilding the city. Sometimes work on the city went forward, while no work got done on the temple; sometimes work went forward on the temple, but the worship was lacking. It happened in dribs and drabs. Activity...stop...activity...stop. It was a process, like life, that gradually happens.

Growing closer to God is a process. Progress is not always forward due to human weakness eg two steps forward, one step back. God is willing to transform us incrementally.

At times the people rebuilding the city got discouraged again, and frustrated, and began complaining again, and slipping away from the Lord's path again.

Believe in God enough to forgive you your own failings.

The hardest person you are going to have to forgive is yourself.

Incremental growth, with the constant struggle it requires, has lasting change. Fast growth can be ephemeral. We have to let God be God, and let Him do it His way in dealing with our issues.

Keep in mind the big picture, even though we haven't got the whole story.

That is why prophecy is so important.

What promise has God made to you?

When we lose the big picture we start getting discouraged and wanting to give up.

He wants to give us a big dream to capture our hearts, minds and imaginations – because He doesn't want us to give up.

What work of restoration is God doing in you and in your life?

None of this is an exact science.

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My thoughts

Initially I found this interesting, but profoundly discouraging. Why? Because I have been waiting for any kind of progress in any direction for so long, that I didn't want to hear that it might be a Sagrada Familia/Antoni Gaudi-like project that takes 3 or 4 or 5 generations to complete to transform our parishes and dioceses to where God wants them to be. Especially when I have words from international prophetic sources saying increase, acceleration, and harvest ringing in my ears. An extraordinarily compelling vision is required, as in the Sagrada Familia, for each generation to continue working according to the vision. We certainly need God's vision for the work of restoring our parishes and dioceses to health, and yet I suspect that all we have at the moment is desperation for change, any change that might improve the situation, and not much vision and divine direction. To obtain this, we need to gather, and humbly seek God's vision for our local situations in prayer, and reflecting together on the bigger picture given us in the documents of Vatican II and other papal encyclicals, together with the Scriptures. Seeking such a vision won't be a short project either. Perhaps the Australian plenary council process will go a long way towards achieving this.

Session 2, Saturday 19 Jan 2019

This is not a conference, but a retreat; so slow down and relax.

In Session 1 we had a look at the historical perspective. I encourage you to read Haggai, Nehemiah and Zechariah. What I've given you is but a snap-shot.

In them are a handful of themes or principles, with universal application.

The first is the sovereignty of God.

Human beings, due to original sin, have a hard time trusting God.

Before the original sin came the original lie. We were created in perfect love, with nothing to hide, with dignity and the strength of relationship. God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening, in a relationship of intimacy. Death, suffering and sickness are not part of God's original plan.

The original lie tapped into our desire to stand on our own two feet – just in case God doesn't come through for us. Maybe the most honest prayer in scripture is 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief'.

We all fear, worry and doubt – despite seeing God's miracles. How is that?

Every sin, big or little, has in common choosing self over God, built on the foundation of pride. It happens when we choose 'What I want' over 'What God says'. God, have mercy on us.

Why is it hard to trust God? Will He be there for me next time? When cancer strikes, when a loved one is going through a hard time, we struggle with this on both personal and community levels. When we are afraid, and desperate to find an answer, the temptation is to set up our own power base. Giving in to this temptation leads to failure, because pride comes before the fall. In trying to bring order into the chaos of our lives – if we don't turn to God – we get ourselves into troubles.

Trusting God is counter-intuitive. It goes against our instincts to want to manage our troubles. It is actually a lot like sky diving. Sky diving instructors drill into their students, 'Don't look down at the ground, you have to look up'. If you look down at the ground, you will instinctively bunch up, bunching up leads to broken bones. Don't bunch up.

Instinctively when in trouble we tend to pull in to a tight ball. When something or someone touches a raw nerve we all pull in, it is a natural human reaction. God says, 'Look at Me instead'.

You have new laws about slowing down when passing emergency vehicles with flashing lights. In other parts of the world, you must change lanes. The laws are to reduce accidents caused by vehicles veering into emergency vehicles. Why? Because we tend to move towards what we are looking at.

What are you looking at? Your past, your brokenness, your failure, whatever grinds your teeth. Whatever that is, you are heading towards it deeper and deeper. We have to set our eyes back on the Lord. We have to look at our problems against the backdrop of God's great love. When we focus on God and worship God, therein lies our healing.

We were built to praise and worship God. More healings happen during praise and worship than at healing services.

Helen Heller, who was physically blind, said: 'When you look at the light, the shadows fall behind'. Even if we feel nothing, it is still the right thing to worship God. 99 out of 100 times, when we praise and worship God amazing things happen.

Let us turn our eyes back to God. God can do so much in a twinkling of an eye.

The book of 2nd Maccabees was written about a 150 years before Jesus. It was written to encourage the Jewish people not to give up against the Greeks, and to not give up on God. In chapter 1 some of that encouragement comes from celebrating the rededication of the temple, the anniversary of Nehemiah dedicating the altar and fire, and recalling what God did back then.

When the Babylonian deportation took place, a few of the priests took some of the sacred fire from the altar, and hid it secretly in the hollow of a dry cistern. It had been requested by God that this fire never go out. Only 2 or 3 people knew where this hiding place was.

Many years later, 70-100 years, when it pleased God – in God's time, Nehemiah began the search for the sacred fire. He got the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to go look for it in the ruined city. They did find the hidden cistern/well, but there is no fire. Muddy water is all there is to find. Remember, this fire symbolised the presence of God, it

was a sacred fire that had burnt for hundreds of years since the time of Moses and Aaron. The 'fire' is gone. Their hearts sink.

Yet Nehemiah, who is not a priest and only a lay man, is inspired. He tells the priestly descendants, 'go get a bucket and scoop up the muddy water'. That's faith. Then he tells them to prepare the altar, and to put the sacrifice on it. So far, so good. Then he tells them to do something absurd. 'Take the muddy water and pour it over the altar and the sacrifice. Just do it'. So they have a new altar covered in mud. Then Nehemiah says, 'Let's wait. Let's wait for the Lord.' So they wait, looking at the pile of mud.

Then at the hour of sacrifice, suddenly out of the mud...a little wisp of smoke. The fire is back! The sacrifice is being offered. They are gobsmacked, and begin to offer the prayers of petition, sacrifice and offering. Wow! We can do nothing without You! Then the priests begin to sing the hymns.

Nehemiah ordered the rest of the muddy liquid to be poured upon stones, and a flame blazed up. But the light cast from the altar was brighter, another light brighter than all these fires, not set by them but by God, a supernatural light that outshined everything else.

God can do the miraculous in our lives. Sometimes we feel that the fire has gone out and all we have left is mud. It is never too late for God to bring light back into your life. There is still fire coming into the mud and mess and dead stuff in your life. There is still the Spirit of God bringing healing, redemption and freedom. God's plans are for our welfare and a future full of hope.

A friend of mine was driving home from his mistress's home to his wife, quite happy with his life. At some point he reached over to the glovebox, and heard on the radio station, 'My friend, you need God'. He started sobbing for 30-40 minutes, and realised that his life was actually mud. He said, 'Then my car filled with light. I knew I was in the presence of God, who loved me and who was bringing fire to my mud'. That's when God moved. Don't ever underestimate the power of God when all you have is mud and it is too late. Stop saying 'it's too late', and don't say it anymore.

A fire is coming, of healing and mercy. You do have a future full of hope – not confidence in your mud, but confidence in God's fire. It is coming to all of us.

Maybe we have dumped our mud on the altar, several times and we are waiting. How long did Nehemiah wait? How long would you stand with Nehemiah? How willing are you to stand before Him and say, 'I'm at a complete loss of what to do, I'm at a loss'? How long? We have to ask ourselves this; how long before you write it off as a failure?

Daniel was crying out and asking God for help. The moment God heard your prayer God jumped into action. So why the delay and the anguish? Why don't you do it right now? Why prolong my agony? Our sense of time and God's sense of time are different – we don't see the divine perspective. God is never too quick and never too late.

'If you had been here our brother would not have died'. Are we able to get off Chronos time and get onto Kairos time? Doing that means believing that all things are working for good

for those who love God. As humans, we want things and we want it now. But we are not God, so we need to choose to believe.

It feels like an eternity between pouring the mud and the time of fire. Those that wait upon the Lord renew their strength. Waiting is one of the greatest disciplines of the Christian life. Waiting says: that I know my Redeemer lives, whatever He does it will ultimately be for my benefit (through the waiting may be with clenched teeth and without feeling). It is a choice, to believe.

God is in charge. He knows our personal and communal situation, whether we see it or not. He is already on His way, according to His divine timing and His divine will. I love it the days I feel it; I proclaim it the days I don't feel it.

Your mud is part of your story, surrender it to Him who can change the ordinary bread and wine (which represents us) at Mass into the body, blood, soul and divinity of His Son Jesus.

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My thoughts

It is so hard to believe in the fire when all you have is mud and ashes.

Why we have to go through these valleys of death befuddles us, but it seems to be God's pattern to have this 'dead as a dodo' stuff before resurrection.

If Jesus had come while Lazarus was still alive, his healing would have been an ordinary miracle. But Jesus let them go through the death, the burial, the morning and grief, and only then did He give them the most extraordinary miracle. If you were able to choose, which miracle path would you select? Are you glad Jesus chose the latter? Are you willing to put up with the extra pain to receive God's extra gain, and the higher and wider purposes that go with it?

The two images, of the sky diver looking up and of the muddied altar waiting for God's fire resonated strongly with everyone gathered at Pennant Hills, and many took advantage of handing over their mud to God through the sacrament of reconciliation over the 2 days of retreat.

Mass, Saturday 19 Jan 2019, CCRNSW Retreat

Fr Hugh Thomas CSsR was the celebrant for Mass during the #CCRNSW retreat weekend. You can learn a bit more about him [here](#) and [here](#).

I include the notes from the Mass because so often the readings for the day amplify or underline themes that have been in the talks, as does the homily. To exclude them would be like serving a dinner without a quarter of the main ingredients.

The readings were taken from Saturday Week 1 in Ordinary Time, Year II, and the proper of the Mass was for Saturdays in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The first reading came from the Letter to the Hebrews beginning, 'The Word of God is alive and active'. The Psalm response was, 'Your Words Lord and Spirit and life'. The Gospel came from the section of St Mark where Jesus calls Levi to follow him out of the customs house.

Fr Hugh Thomas

The Word of God is something alive and active. Jim has been giving us the Word of God this morning: Zechariah, Nehemiah, Haggai, Maccabees. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal has brought to us the importance of the Word of God; all of it is precious. Vatican II reminded us of the words of St Jerome, 'Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ'. Is the Word of God still as important to you as in the first days of your baptism in the Spirit? We still need the Word of God every day.

We are all familiar with the Gospel scene. Levi (or Matthew) being a tax collector was despised by decent people. They considered tax collectors to be crooks, and hated them. There is a famous painting of this Gospel scene by Caravaggio. Pope Francis was inspired to take his motto as a bishop 'having mercy and choosing' from this painting, 'The Calling of St Matthew'. Jesus is pointing at him, and Matthew is looking up in amazement: 'Me??' Because of the mercy of God, and still He chose me.

There is some mud sticking around – we all have this – no one can pretend we haven't, and yet we are chosen. Of the billions of people in this world, how many of them know God? Of them, many may know God, but don't know Jesus as Son of God. We are so blessed and chosen. Are you better than them? No. Some of them might be more honourable than us. We are not deserving, yet by His grace he has taken pity on us, chose us, and says, 'Follow Me'.

Matthew invited all his mates to have a big meal with Jesus. What's He doing mixing with this crowd? 'The sick need Me'.

We are all sinners here. Now we've got to go out and spread the fire. It doesn't require a soapbox, but people down the street are in need. We ask Mary to help us receive His message and to live it so to set our city and state on fire.

Session 3, Saturday 19 Jan 2019

The story of God's people is also our story and my story.

The first theme, putting the Lord No. 1 is essential. Our God can do the impossible. Regularly we go down to Mexico to minister to people in the rubbish dumps. We took 418 food bags with dried goods in them, and 650 people came, and they all collected food bags. He multiplies food. Don't ever tell God what He can't do.

If God is the main thing, then we should be a deo-centric culture, with praise and worship at the heart of all we do. There is a danger in ministry where we let ourselves get busy doing things for God and neglecting our personal time to be with God. The main thing is God. Try not to let the secondary role become the primary role.

Is my whole life deo-centric, built around Him, in all aspects?

When God is at work, you can bet money there will be opposition from the enemy of humanity (that's what St Ignatius calls him).

Zechariah chapter 3 gives us an example of this opposition.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing at the altar of the Lord, with satan standing beside him accusing him. The angel said, 'May God rebuke you'. Joshua was standing in filthy garments. The angel said, 'Take off his filthy garments and clothe him in festal garments and a clean mitre. See, I have taken away your guilt.'

This is very similar to the story of Isaiah saying, 'Woe, is me, I have unclean lips', and an angel taking a hot coal from the altar and touching Isaiah's lips with it to remove his guilt.

Joshua represents not only himself, but also the people. Standing beside him is the father of lies, the accuser of the brethren, dumping accusation upon accusation upon Joshua. Be aware of this tactic of accusations. The purpose of them is to increase discouragement and hopelessness, often by playing tapes of past hurts and failures back in your head. They don't even have to be of past sins, any stupid comment of condemnation will do. God wants to remove the old and replace them with garments of celebration and marks of office.

God wants to remove that brokenness and clothe us in righteousness and to equip all to do the work of the Lord. This is God's desire for each man, woman and child. Everyone has a call and a vocation. There are no spectators in the kingdom of God. Everyone has something they were literally created to do.

The Lord silences the accusation, then God removes the gunk. He gives you your true identity and dignity. The evil one wants us to look down, the Holy One wants us to look up.

People often start acting out what they believe about themselves. Teachers look forward to school photo day, because that day being dressed up for the photo the students treat each other differently, and act differently.

In Texas there was a great teacher who left her cushy job and went to teach in a school for troubled kids. Before starting, the teacher asked to read the basic files on all who were to be her new students. In those files the teacher discovered that all of the new students had very high IQ's, genius level ones. So when the teacher met them for the first time the teacher was gushing, 'How excited and privileged I am to be working with you this year. I am going to push you. This is going to be a great year. There will be extra work for you, but you are so capable of it.' Sure enough the year was transformational for these students. They discovered that they were capable of more than they ever dreamed they could be. What were hoodlums were changed into stars. It was only a long time later that the teacher discovered that it wasn't IQ scores in those basic files, but locker numbers (183, 184...). This teacher treated these students in a way that helped them find who they really were.

Do you treat everyone around you like a genius?

Do you treat everyone as a child of God?

Some years back I was in youth ministry at a parish, and there was this really difficult kid. I didn't like him at all. But God said, 'I want you to hang out with this kid more'. So I did. Then one day this kid says to me, 'What are you doing? Are you trying to change me? I am not worth your time. My Dad has told me I am nothing and will never be anything.'

Be mindful of how we treat others. Don't be an unwilling accomplice of the evil one.

God wants to restore the true authentic image of His will for us.

Take it on faith, whether you feel it or not.

God is bigger than the opposition.

Let's look at another kind of opposition. When Nehemiah brought the exiles back there were all kinds of other people living in the Holy Land. There were a whole lot of people who didn't want the Israelites back, and who exhibited hostility and enmity, overt and subtle towards them. No one was happy to see them come back.

For a host of reasons there are people who will oppose what you want to do, for all kinds of motives. Even our friends will oppose and resist.

Nehemiah did an interesting thing, he ordered the people to do two things. The first one was for everyone to sleep with their weapons in their hands. Then he set half the people to building the wall, and the other half to shielding and protecting the builders.

So this kind of opposition is dealt with in 2 ways; we carry our own weapons and one half of the group protects the other half.

You have a responsibility for your own life- only you. It is really easy to slide into a victim mentality, and very hard to get out of it. It is easy to stay trapped.

There was a new zoo in Germany, custom built habitats without cages and separated by moats. The bear exhibit had been created to delight the bears as much as Disney world delights children. To populate the zoo, the zoo was buying up circus animals. They found a circus bear that lived in a cage, and spent most of its life going 5 paces forward and 5 paces backwards. The zoo was so excited about this bear seeing the habitat for the first time that they called in the video cameras. They opened the cage, and the bear looked out, and then paced back and forth in the cage. The bear had to be lured out of the cage with bits of meat and a cattle prod. Now this massive bear was out of the cage for the first time since it was a small cub. What did the bear do? It still kept going 5 paces forwards and 5 paces backwards. The bear might have been out of the cage, but it was going to be much harder to get the cage out of the bear.

Even if you were dealt a bad hand in life like that bear, it is not the end of your story.

What are the weapons Nehemiah wants us to sleep with?

There are 5 things that together lead to spiritual prosperity:

Prayer

Scripture

Sacraments

Community Service

These are the 5 normal ways God works in our lives. You will languish without them. They are the weapons we need to fight for ourselves.

When I am a victim, the whole world is about me. Serving helps us see the needs of others.

If you make these 5 things part of daily life, they are the best weapons for self-protection.

We need this sense of belonging to each other. If half of us build and half of us protect, then we get it done together.

Gossip and criticism, we all fall into it.

Do you realise that each time we talk about each other and have a joke at each other (especially about that other person's weakness) we paint a target on them, and we are not protecting them. In fact we are giving the evil one the GPS co-ordinates of their weaknesses.

We are called to bear with each other. As long as we are alive, we will misunderstand and hurt each other. The trick is, what mechanism do we have to talk it through? We can get past this if we ask the Lord.

We have lots of superficial relationships. We don't know how to deal with disagreements. Something goes wrong, and people are not seen again.

Reconciliation comes from the Latin: re for again, con for with; cilia for eyelashes. When you are at odds with people it is hard to look at them. It is the human condition. Find a way to be reconciled to one another. What can't be done humanly can be done spiritually.

Say I have a problem with pride. Everyone knows about it except me. Wouldn't it be good if someone stood between satan and me, and stood in a spirit of prayer, fasting, compassion and mercy? Will you cover me instead of expose me?

Jesus did that. Jesus died for us in the weakest area of our lives, the places that drive our nearest and dearest nuts. Will you stand with Jesus there?

Doing this lets God help people to see their faults rather than letting satan know where those faults are. It is such an important principle!

Opposition during restoration. The people who came back with Nehemiah got discouraged and overwhelmed. They began the work of restoration, days, weeks, months, years of it. At some point the people just got tired and discouraged.

There are times when we too go through the motions without enthusiasm. It is OK that we get tired and weary. It is OK to say, 'Lord we are tired, we need restoration, renewal and refreshing'. God has got to stir something up that we just don't have. Together let us seek how to turn back to the Lord and find the pulse and fire again.

God wants us to have that enthusiasm again, but we must ask for it.

Nehemiah's builders started fighting each other – which wasn't real smart given they had enemies on every side – but it is a normal human tendency. We feel freer to be meaner towards the people that we love. Why is that? Under pressure we start snapping at each other.

The Lord pleads with us for unity and for us to love each other. We have enough opposition out there; we don't need the internal stuff.

Even as they rebuild, the people start to go back to their old ways and to go off track again. How do we hold up the vision of what God wants, aware of the gap of where we have fallen to? There is tension between 'what God wants' vs 'where the people are'. Sometimes God says, 'stir them up and correct and rebuke them', and sometimes we need to gently walk with and accompany people.

May the Holy Spirit give you guidance about how to cover that gap. You can't yell at people to change – that doesn't work. You can't lower standards either – that doesn't work.

Nehemiah began the restoration work with provisions from King Cyrus. However sometimes the supplier ran out of supplies or the enemies cut off the supply chain.

Know this: If God has given you a project to do, He will give you the means to do it. It may not match our ideas of how it should look, but He will give you all you need to do the job according to how He wants it to look. If things you think you need don't come, then they may not be needed. Trust in the provision of God. His plans are not always as flowery and ornate as we like to imagine them to be.

Dare to dream that God wants to do a work of restoration in His people.

If you believe in God's plan of restoration, do you believe that you have some role in that plan?

If God wants to do a restoration work, can you believe God will equip His people with all that is needed to do the job?

Pray about these three things:

God is doing a work of restoration.

In some way, you play a role in that restoration.

God will give you and us all that is necessary for that restoration.

Let them percolate in your heart. Tell God about the one you have the greatest trouble believing.

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My thoughts

Do you get the impression that the work of restoration that God wants to do is bigger and more extensive than we can imagine? It is much bigger than our parish's plan for this year. It is much bigger than the diocesan 5 year plan. It is about bringing a whole civilisation back to Him, and making it Christo-centric.

We can't do it alone; we can only do it in co-operation with God and as a community.

The restoration work occurs under battle conditions, and can only go ahead if our personal spiritual weapons are battle ready and if we protect each other. Every builder needs a prayer warrior-intercessor. How we treat each other and talk about each other matters.

Session 4, Sunday 20 Jan 2019

This session began with an invitation to people to share what from yesterday's input resonated most with them.

Jim Murphy

God speaks to the community and He speaks through the community.

Things can be very unfair and unjust, and that's real, but we have to avoid a victim mentality. Remember the bear in the cage? We have to change how we see ourselves.

Some years back Jim met a girl who had been very badly treated for 7 years by her mentally ill mother, chained up and neglected. He asked her, 'How did you forgive your mother?' She answered him by pulling her sleeves back to show the damage still remaining on her arms and wrists and said, 'If I did not forgive her, I would still be in her chains'. This girl became a person of forgiveness and mercy. It is not easy to do. It doesn't mean forgiveness is easy to do. We need grace from God to do it. The only influence we have is on our own hearts.

Do you remember the 3 beliefs from yesterday: Restoration, Role, Providence?

Principle no.1: God is number 1. Either God will do it, or it isn't going to happen.

Principle no.2: The reality of opposition. Ultimately God always wins. Hold onto that.

God is calling you and I to build. 'Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain'. Psalm 127:1

Stop doing things for God. Start doing things with God.

If you think of any New Testament miracle, you would be hard pressed to find one that didn't require the practical assistance of others.

We see the obedience of the servants in filling the water jars at Cana, and we see faith as they bring the dipper to the boss of the wedding feast. When did the miracle happen? Was it after the jars were filled, or was it when the dipper was being taken?

Then with the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes to feed some 40,000 people, the 2 fish and 5 loaves didn't belong to Jesus. He blessed and broke the loaves and fishes, and handed them to the 12, who each walked out to the groups who sat ready.

When Jesus goes to raise Lazarus from the dead, someone has to roll back the grave stone, and others have to unbind him.

There are a few exceptions.

Jesus prefers to work in the context of His people.

God wants us to be part of His work.

We need the power of vision to do the work of building. The book of Zechariah contains many visions, promises and hope for that purpose. I encourage you to read Zechariah and Nehemiah.

Nehemiah showed a special motivational gift in his speeches to the people. Some people have this gift of giving vision to others. A modern example is how Churchill spoke to the people of England when things were bleak indeed in 1940, 'We will fight them on the beaches....' etc. This gift changed the situation from bleak to determined and hopeful of victory. Napoleon put it another way when he said, 'a leader is a person who deals in hope'.

We need to restore vision in 3 ways.

- The vision of God: Many have a distorted vision of God, so we need to share with them the true vision of God.
- The vision of self: People need a true vision of who they are in Christ. Treat them like a child of God, whether they see it or not.
- The vision of the world situation: Most people don't really get it that they are in a massive battle between Light and Dark.

Nehemiah's vision enabled the people to rise up and start building, and he brought order and teamwork to the process. He set one group clearing the rubble. He set another group rebuilding the north gate. Another group were sent to rebuild the south gate and to watch out for lurking enemies. Another group were given the task of getting the eastern wall up quickly.

Everybody had a specific job to do, which allowed them to focus on their own job and to do it well. We need to marshal our resources like this. The gift of administration and organisation is far from mundane.

This concept of the diversity of work in the re-building means that we don't have to worry about the other projects that the designated groups are doing.

Everyone has a gift, something to give and to contribute to the work of restoration. And it doesn't have to be a charisma.

On a trip to the Middle East, and an Islamic country, I came across men with a 1967 Ford Galaxy. We were able to bond over our shared love and appreciation of this car. They were surprised that a Christian was as car-mad as they were, and this was a 'meeting point' the Holy Spirit used to enable me to talk to them about Jesus.

You are more than your charisma; your personality, your temperament, your hobbies, your work can all be 'meeting points' that the Holy Spirit can use to bring people to God.

Each person is essential, not only for what you do, but crucially for what you are.

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My thoughts

God wants us to work with Him. It is His preferred way of doing things. But of course, we have to wait for Him to initiate and invite us in. It doesn't work if we start off ourselves and expect God to catch up.

Isn't it a breath of fresh air to hear how important gifts of wise administration are, and how they help the other gifts to work at premium capacity?!

As long as there is a God gifted person in the leadership/gift-co-ordination role, then that frees those called to do works of mercy to concentrate on assisting those in need, while the evangelists do the outreach and the teachers and pastors do the discipleship.

It might also stop us loading each other with guilt for not being gung-ho at everything. Have you noticed how evangelists want everyone to be great evangelists, and prophets want everyone to be great prophets, and preachers want everyone to be great preachers?

It is OK to not be the same. It is OK to have different callings from God. We should be helping everyone to find their unique God-given calling; and not assuming that if God has been calling me in this particular direction that God is calling you in the same direction too.

Every gifting has levels: there's the ordinary level that God can call upon anyone at any time to exercise; there's a ministry level or area where a charism is frequently used by God; then there's an office level for gifts recognised by the community as having far more than local reach and authority (city, regional, national, international)

Session 5, Sunday 20 Jan 2019

Sometimes even when we know what to do, it is still not easy to do it.
Sometimes we feel we can't jump that high – that's why He gives His Spirit.

When Jesus says, 'Take My yoke...', we know that the yoke goes across the shoulders of two animals. Normally an older more experienced animal is yoked with a younger animal. The older one calms the younger one down and communicates, 'Just walk with Me, I know how to do this.' On our own we are not capable of doing what God is calling us to do.

How does the Spirit work? It starts with you and me.
God is responsible for the great revival – no one else – and He will deal with us first. Pay attention to your own piece of real estate, and only then together look at the big picture. However if you wait until you are perfect to help anyone else, you will die of old age before that happens.

This is a both/and, not either/or, and we need to seek balance. God wants to give you the power to do the things of the kingdom, and also to be and to become holy. Both are essential and necessary.

Charisms flow from the generosity of God; they are undeserved gifts from the ridiculous generosity of God. God knows how to give good things to His kids.

Have you ever sat in a carpark of a hospital, nursing home or funeral place and said, 'I don't want to go in. God help me.' and you eventually got up and went in. That was His grace at work.

Priesthood is a special example of this; God working in the man, with the man, beyond the capacity of the man.

There was a farmer's wife who came to a prayer meeting with her very reluctant husband. He had a speech problem that made putting a sentence together a laborious effort. He was prayed with for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and nothing seemed to have happened. However at subsequent prayer meetings, he would be prompted by the Holy Spirit to stand up and speak – and out came this divine poetry. The farmer had been given an extraordinary prophetic gift that only operated under the influence of the Holy Spirit. At all other times he continued to have speech difficulties. This was an unusual charism chosen to show forth the surpassing power of God.

So don't limit God by saying, 'I could never do that', because we put our faith in the God who can do it in us.

Human effort cannot fix the world – only God can save us now.

Do not count yourself out – let Him use you to do something extraordinary – that the rest of us really need.

If God calls you to do something – do it. But you don't have to go it alone, seek out and talk to experienced people about ways to move forward in responding to that call.

Prayer groups are not the only place for charisms, they are for the water cooler interactions too. If someone at the water cooler shares what they are struggling with, seek the Lord for that person, and if there is openness and permission from him or her, take the opportunity to pray together about that situation.

Don't ever be afraid to minister in the Spirit anywhere.

The Spirit gives us the power to be something else – to be the sons and daughters of God.

Galatians 5:22 give us the fruits of the Spirit which flow from the Isaiah 11 gifts of the Spirit. When the Spirit of God fills and dwells in you, His personality starts rubbing off on you. Then the Holy Spirit's capacity for courage, wisdom etc start becoming our qualities, forming us into the likeness of Christ.

You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Can you believe that?

When we think gift, we normally think of objects, but 'the' gift is the person of the Holy Spirit.

With some people, the room changes when that person walks in, and that person – just by their presence – brings everyone closer to God.

More people are converted by character than by charism: pick both!

This inner work in us cannot be done except by the Spirit of God.

We all need to be more open to the Holy Spirit. Ask Him, 'where is the bulls-eye on my back?' He wants to shine light on it. He will show those areas of weakness to you for the purposes of love and healing.

Human beings don't co-operate well together – but the Holy Spirit can make unity happen and can make team-work happen. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no vision to unite us.

I invite you to journey with the Holy Spirit. Ask Him, 'what do I need to pay attention to from this weekend?' Reflect on it, but keep inviting the Holy Spirit into the process.

The only way restoration happens is by the Spirit of God.

There is no other way, no other option.

We have been called by God, to be with God for this great restoration.

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My thoughts

There is outward and inward work to be done, and all under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. As missionary disciples, the charism gifts are the missionary part, and the character gifts are the discipleship part, and we should earnestly desire both types of gifts from God's goodness.

To think that we can do anything (prayer groups, children's liturgy, parish leadership, soup kitchens, evangelisation through social media, teaching as a catechist, youth groups, welcoming ministry, raising a family etc) without the Holy Spirit and His charisms – is sheer lunacy. But with Him all things are possible, fruitful, and effective.

If there isn't room for the Holy Spirit's charisms to operate in your corner of the restoration work – make room. Get your team together, collectively surrender your whole ministry to His leadership, beg the Holy Spirit together for the charisms your team needs, and spend time in prayer each time you come together seeking His guidance and direction, and be open to changing your plans according to His.

Make room in your hearts and minds too. Get hold of resources that have experiential knowledge of how charisms operate, and study them. Visit ministries in similar fields to yours where charisms are operating, and let the possibilities of what God can do get you on your knees seeking Him with all your heart.

Mass, Sunday 20 Jan 2019, CCRNSW Retreat

Fr Hugh Thomas CSsR was the celebrant for this Sunday Mass during the #CCRNSW retreat weekend. You can learn a bit more about him [here](#) and [here](#).

The readings were taken from Sunday Week 2 in Ordinary Time, Year C.

The first reading came from the Prophet Isaiah beginning, 'About Zion I will not be silent'. The Psalm response was, 'Proclaim His marvellous deeds to all the nations'. The second reading came from 1 Corinthians 12 about the variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel came from the section of St John where Jesus changes the water into wine at the wedding at Cana.

Fr Hugh Thomas

Today in most churches we talk about marriage because of the setting of the Gospel at a wedding feast. The ministry of Jesus began by His attending a marriage of a man and a woman. Bride and bridegroom is a theme running all through Scripture beginning in Genesis when He made them male and female. God uses this image of marriage to illustrate His love for us.

We are a people constantly unfaithful to God, but constantly called back to Him. God only chose one race at that time, the Jewish people, yet they were rebellious and inconstant. Sometimes He had to punish them to bring them back to their senses. Despite everything, He still loved them. He still delights in them, and in us. He never took back His choice.

Marriage is important in God's eyes. That's why it is under so much attack.

God loves marriage so much! Is it irreparably damaged? God is able to change things. How? Through us.

Even if you have been wounded, you still have a part to play.

Our witness shows that Christian marriage is still possible, whether it be 15 years to 58 years.

Jesus wanted the guests at the wedding and the wedding couple to have a good time, because marriages are worth celebrating.

These things equally apply not only to Israel but to each of us individually too. In God's eyes we are a princely crown, 'not forsaken, My delight'. God delights in us, even when we are messing it all up.

Some of the Saints have had the mystical marriage experience. He has this for each and every one of us.

It was the Mother of God who noticed that there was a problem with the wine supplies. She knew He would never refuse her. We ask her to pray for all the families who are here – especially for those who are struggling and for families broken but still loved. One day He will restore everything. Believe it!!

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The final session of the CCRNSW Retreat wasn't exactly a prayer meeting. The chairs were rearranged into circular formation with an altar-table in the middle. After a brief explanation, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance was brought in and put on the altar-table, and participants were free to just have some 'me and God' time, or to join in the

praise and singing that accompanied the Eucharistic adoration. Passages from Rev 5 about the throne room of God, and from Rev 21 about the new heavens and new earth were read out. 'You are the people of Revelation. This is now.' Sometime later prayer teams went around quietly praying over the targets on our individual backs. Following that prayer time people were invited to give testimony to how God had been working in them and speaking to them during the retreat.

The content of this Retreat weekend was so incredibly good, it deserves a far wider audience. So please feel free to share it around.

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