

It goes without saying, but we constantly need to be reminded that we live in an amazing world, yet often we fail to recognise or appreciate this reality. Those of us who are middle-aged or more can remember the wonder that captured the world by the lunar space program of Apollo 11 on July 20th 1969, when Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the surface of the moon, we were all watching a truly memorable event. I watched it in my primary school hall- we were all crowded around the one school black and white television set. We looked into the night sky, viewed the moon, and were amazed at this accomplishment. I had posters on my bedroom wall of the Saturn Five Rocket and a map of the moon. Yet, today, with the frequency of travel and the success of the space program, few people take notice of its accomplishments. Familiarity led to a lack of interest over time.

Medical science is another area where significant advances have been made in recent years, but the commonality of its practice today tends to dampen our enthusiasm. When the South African physician, Christiaan Barnard, successfully performed the world's first human-to-human heart transplant operation in the early morning hours of Sunday 3 December 1967 the world was amazed. Later when heart transplants became more common and many other organs became possible we again stood by and took notice. Today, however, in major hospitals around the globe there are thousands of transplants, saving and extending the lives of countless people, yet few take notice. The frequency of these medical procedures makes them seem routine. To the individual involved it is a highly significant event, but the world barely notices. Familiarity again leads to a lack of attention or enthusiasm.

The loss of amazement in our view of space, medical science, and many other areas is, found also in our understanding of God and the amazing things God does for us. They say that familiarity breeds contempt, in this case a sense of aloofness and a lowering of how important God is. This certainly seems true when considering how the Christian community, collectively and as individuals, responds to the presence of God in our world. God is ever present; one can always count on God. Therefore, we have a tendency to forget and, thus, need to be reminded of what God does for us each and every day. Today's Gospel Reading is one example of many that demonstrate how amazing Jesus was and how people took notice. "Behold the Lamb of God". We are challenged, therefore, to again observe and perceive the amazing power of Christ in our lives.

The gospels abound in examples of how the people with whom Jesus had contact were amazed at what he did and said. St Mark (4:35-41) recounts the amazement of the disciples at Jesus' ability to control nature. A storm rages on the Sea of Galilee and the terrified apostles call out, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus rebuked the wind and water and calm comes upon the sea. Mark reports, "They [the apostles] were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" Jesus' teaching was also very impressive to those who heard him. Saint Luke (4:32) reports how the people of Capernaum, "were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority." Similarly Saint Matthew (7:29) reports at the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, that "the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." Jesus' ability to work miracles and effect cures of people was also amazing to those who witnessed these events. After Jesus casts out the demon from a mute man who speaks, "the crowds were amazed and said, 'Never has anything like this been seen in Israel'" (Matthew 9:33b). Again when Jesus cures a blind and mute man Matthew (12:23) reports, "All the crowds were amazed and said, 'Can this be the Son of David?'" Word of Jesus' ability to

cure drew all manner of people afflicted, all of whom were cured. Matthew (15:31) again reports, “The crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.”

Today’s Gospel Reading, drawn from the outset of Jesus’ public ministry, demonstrates not only the amazement that people experienced, but how the Lord was able to convert hearts to such wonder. John the evangelist tells us, Jesus called his first disciples, Andrew and Simon (whom Jesus renamed Peter). The call of Andrew and Simon, the hallmark of discipleship presents numerous challenges to us, the Lord’s contemporary disciples. We must notice the response of the disciples. None of these men, mostly simple fishermen, hesitated one moment once they encountered Jesus personally. His attraction and call must have been overwhelming; there was obviously an instant attraction. It was more than what he did or said; Jesus’ person had to have been larger than life. Why else would men who had families and lives immediately leave everything to walk an unknown road? Logic cannot be used to explain their response; Jesus moved people almost immediately beyond logic. He truly was an amazing person.

Our challenge is thus twofold — to be amazed and to respond. To be amazed and to respond. The two go hand-in-hand. If we are truly amazed by the presence and power of Christ in our world, then we will have the courage and the capacity to respond. Responding to the call of Christ, for he calls us all, is the hallmark of a disciple. Familiarity, however, breeds a sense of ordinariness into our perception. Few people today are amazed at space exploration, the marvels of medical science, because we are all quite familiar with these truly amazing realities. Contact with people and the gathering of information is so easy, literally at our fingertips through a computer keyboard, that those things that were considered so amazing only a few years ago are seen today as routine. We complain when our Internet connection is down or its speed is slower than we want. Yes we become frustrated. Yes, familiarity can breed contempt, aloofness, a lack of attention over time, a withdrawal.

We need to recapture that sense of amazement at the presence and power of Christ in our lives. We can do so in many ways, both ordinary and extraordinary. Tomorrow when we awake there will be numerous ways to be amazed at the power and presence of God in our lives. The mere fact that we are still alive should prompt a prayer of thanksgiving, especially when we realise that many will die without seeing another day. Sensing the weather is another way to appreciate the amazing power of God. We might see a beautiful sunrise, feel the warmth or the cold of the air, or hear the call of morning birds. God’s creation is all around us; we should be amazed. As we prepare for the day ahead, we might eat breakfast, read the paper, or watch or listen to the morning news on television or radio. Each of these activities is possible, in the end, as a result of the amazing power of God. How often in our day will we consider the amazing presence of God all around us? While much human effort is present, the energy, technical ability, and opportunity that generated what we have, comes from God. Yes, God is present in the miraculous, as when Jesus amazed the crowds with physical cures and his ability to control nature. But God is equally present in the routine, ordinary, and even mundane events of everyday life. God is present in our successes and joys, but the Lord is equally present in our failures and pain. God is present in every moment of every day; we must open wide our senses in order to perceive, experience, and fully appreciate what God does for us each day. We have to clear out our preoccupations and distractions and let God in and quit our aloofness and apathy. We need to get closer and end our trajectory away from the Sun.

Day-to-day life, however, numbs our senses to God. The cacophony of life, the dazzling distractions of the world insulate us from the ultimate truth and reality. Our own importance, agendas and

priorities inflate in our lives whilst God's importance, agendas and priorities deflate. Often the only thing that seems to shake us from our lethargy of experience is something that is truly extraordinary, positive, or more often than not negative and challenging forcing us out of our comfort zone.

We must find ways to recapture the excitement and energy for life and most especially for our relationship with God. We must take the necessary time to find God again in our daily lives. We rush from one event to another; our days are so filled with "things to do" we seldom, if ever, have any time to reflect upon life and how the amazing power and presence of God can be found in it. Thus, today we must overtly strive to discover God's presence in our world. In essence what we must do is empty out space in our lives so they can be filled with God's presence which comes to us in so many miraculous, as well as seemingly ordinary, ways. The need to concentrate less on our small world, on our needs and what we think, and to seek God's great presence is related in a humorous but illustrative story.

Fred Everybody, Hilda Somebody, Peter Anybody, and Janet Nobody were neighbours, but not the type that most would want to know. They were odd people, distracted, busy and difficult to understand. The way they lived their lives was ultimately chaotic.

Everybody went fishing on Sundays, drinking coffee and reading his newspaper at the local cafe or stayed home and spent important time with his family and friends. Anybody wanted to worship, but he was afraid that Somebody (who was somebody!) would speak with him. Nobody was the only decent one of the lot. Nobody worshipped and prayed, repented of her sins every Sunday. One day there was a call in the pew sheet for an important position on Parish Council. Everybody thought disinterestedly Anybody would apply; Anybody guessed Somebody would definitely apply. So, guess who applied? You are right — Nobody!

Let's not be an everybody, somebody, or anybody. Rather, let us truly strive to be a nobody. In such a way we empty ourselves and respond to the call of Christ so we can be filled with his amazing power, who died to set us free and, thus, will always be our brother, our friend, and Lord.

I shall leave you with the Prayer we print in our pew sheet each week:

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which you have given us,
for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.
Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,
may we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day. Amen.

(Richard of Chichester 1197-1253 AD)

Fr Robert Newton