

I wonder how many of you remember the fairy tale of the Emperor’s new clothes. If you do, you’ll remember how an Emperor was tricked into believing that 2 tailors could make some beautiful garments from a special cloth that would be invisible to all except to sophisticated people. He fell for the trap, and ordered a set of robes for him to wear in the Royal Parade.

The word had gone out about how special this cloth was, so there was much anticipation when the day arrived and the tailors came with a stack of boxes. With great fanfare and elaborate gestures they took the garments out of the boxes and proceeded to dress the Emperor in them. He could not see anything visible, but not wanting to appear a nitwit, he acted as if he could, and so it went for all his entourage, who oohed and aaahed and clapped in surprise even though there was nothing there.

When at last the time had come for the Parade to move off, there were thousands of people along the route, who, also not wanting to appear fools, cheered and gushed over those splendid garments they could not see. But then the pretence was revealed when a young child called out: “Hey, the Emperor is not wearing any clothes. He is naked.” And they all realised how they had been taken for a ride.

I take it that in that story you recognise what Jesus prayed about in the Gospel today: “Blessed are you, Father, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.”

In the paragraphs leading up to this Gospel fragment, Jesus had commented on the work of John the Baptist, and how the common people flocked to hear him preach and be baptised by him, while the scribes and other sophisticated people stood off at a distance, refusing to believe in his call to repentance.

Continuing along those lines, Jesus then slates the towns where he had preached and worked many of his miracles, but could not get a hearing except among the ordinary people, fishermen, day-labourers, the poor and lowly ones, those without influence.

It’s one of the hall-marks of Pope Francis, in his time as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and still today, that he found himself drawn to that level of people, the deprived, the poorly-educated ones, the homeless and unemployed, the rag-pickers and scavengers on the garbage dumps. He

sought them out because he felt for them, and because they needed support and someone able to speak for them. But he also came because he recognised their faith, the reliance on God he found there, and the way they expressed that in their devotions.

I’ve been led to say a little about this last bit, by an article in last week’s Catholic Leader, where it wrote about an effort by St. Finbar’s Primary School, Ashgrove, to introduce students to Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Called : “Adore for 24”, after careful preparation, all through that school-day, different classes would spend half an hour before the exposed Sacrament, quietly praying, reflecting, experiencing the Presence of Jesus in their hearts. The practice had a profound influence on students and teachers alike, and to read some of the comments made by the students, you can only marvel at the ways God is working in their hearts.

It makes me ask: what are the practices and devotions that nourish and strengthen our faith. For most of us that may mean Mass and Communion, while for others it could also include the Rosary, dropping into church for a quick visit, making the Stations of the Cross, a special devotion to Our Lady or one of the Saints, regular Morning and Evening prayers and grace before and after meals, and so on.

Coming from Argentina, where coming together for Processions are a favourite form of expressing devotion, as Archbishop, Pope Francis took great pleasure in participating in these devotions, but what about us? How do we publicly nourish and nurture our faith?

Due to the Protestant Reformation most people in Northern Europe stopped practising these forms of devotion, but what about the Italian, Spanish, African and Asian roots of so many who form part of our Parish, - what nurtures their faith, and what can they share with us that can help our faith come alive in other ways, if the opportunity were to present itself?

In today’s Gospel we hear Jesus telling us: “Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.”

What opportunities do we give Him to bring us some rest? Can we, perhaps, learn something from those children in Ashmore’s Catholic Primary School?