

I think there would not be one of us who did not share the concern felt in Thailand about the 12 boys of a football team who, together with their coach, were trapped in a cave-system for some 17 days.

It is with awe that we watched the efforts made, -first of all to find out where the boys were trapped, and then the mighty efforts to keep them alive and bring them to safety. We stood in awe of the divers who'd come from all parts of the world, who risked their lives again and again through the narrow flooded passages of that cave-system, and of the local people and the military who kept the whole operation running and all those people fed. We saw co-operation and working together at a level we can only dream off in the political sphere, but here, with one focus, they brought it off.

It's a lesson we should really take to heart, for it was the unselfishness and self-giving of so many people that brought this desired result about, and is proof of the basic good-will that's alive in all of us, when we are given the opportunity, and give it a chance.

And that is where I see a link with today's Gospel. In the first instance, it is seen in Our Lord's concern for the Apostles, who had just come back from their first efforts as missionaries, calling people to look at the direction their lives were taking, while healing the sick and warning off evil spirits. They wanted to share their experience, but the clamor of those who had come to see and hear Jesus was too great to allow them to do this, so Jesus invites them to get into the boat with him and head for a quiet beach somewhere.

Maybe they managed to get some of that enthusiasm of their chests as they were sailing along, but when they turned back towards land again, the people were there already, anxious not to miss a word of what Jesus had to say.

It must have been a disappointment to both Jesus and the Apostles, but Jesus was able to see a deeper need, - of people who needed direction, and so, as today's Gospel tells us, he set himself to teach them at some length.

We don't know what he taught them that day, but the fact that this episode is followed immediately by telling us about the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the sharing which that involved, makes me suspect that it could well have been much of the teaching we also heard in the sermon on the Mount, especially that of the Beatitudes.

There, the assertions of How happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, those who mourn, who are humble, who desire to do what God requires, who are merciful and who work for peace, - are brought to life in the cooperation that was achieved in the rescue of that young football team in Thailand.

We have, in the teaching of Jesus, all that is required to make of this world a truly livable place, where there is concern for each others' welfare, and where the resources of our planet are responsibly managed, and the environment protected for the benefit of generations to come.

But it needs two things which were very much in evidence in the rescue of those young people in Thailand. The first is the obvious selflessness and self-giving of all those involved, which I've mentioned already. But there is also the reliance on prayer, the reliance on God.

That was very obvious in the prayer offered by people who flocked to the temples, and in the meditation which that young soccer coach taught the boys while they were trapped with him. It was also in evidence in the prayers offered in churches throughout the world, and by each of us individually, as we urged God for their safety.

We need the recognition of God's existence in our lives, and of his over-arching power and design of creation, - and under his guidance to bring that design to fulfilment.

In doing this, our challenge is not whether we will have the power and the skills to do so, but whether we'll have the humility to admit our poverty without God, and to work hand in hand with Him.

Let's pray for that.