



Leading Groups in Prayer

Last week I had the privilege of attending a few, short hours of **SCENE**, the **Sydney Congress Embracing the New Evangelisation**, a week of lectures, workshops and evangelisation activities held at St Mary's Cathedral, 19-26 July 2009. I was invited to present a workshop on Leading Groups in Prayer, and chose to present under the theme of the day, *Conversion and On-Going Conversion*.

How exactly can we lead groups in prayer for conversion? A key way is to invite groups of people to open their hearts to Christ, be filled with the Holy Spirit and encouraging an ongoing conversion in their lives.

I speak from my experience of working with youth as a high school scripture teacher, as a mother of three teenage sons, from my own youthful experiences of coming into relationship with Christ, and by what we currently find in leading the monthly youth nights, "Worship in the City", in St Mary's Cathedral Crypt, Sydney. In order to lead groups in prayer, it is critical that my own prayer is grounded in Christ. We can only share and encourage in others what we know, love and live.

There are many ways to come into the presence of God, and lead others on that journey. God's presence is experienced in contemplation, praise and worship, Ignatian spirituality and reflection. What is important is not so much the method we choose rather that the methods lead us to God. This leads to our mission to be involved in God's work and to witness to the importance of God in all of us.

At "Worship in the City" we bookend our youth nights with worship and prayer. Our first prayer focuses on inviting people in their need to remember God is good and ever faithful, always with us.

We remind the group of how Jesus healed people and set them free when he was on earth, how He went to the Cross, died for our sins, and in that act bore all our pain, all our shame, all our suffering, and all our sin for all time. We are then drawn more into relationship with God. Young people can have access to the same power of the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, a power that lives in us through our Baptism. We remind the young people that Jesus who overcame even death itself, can help us overcome whatever difficulty or situation we are facing.

Through worshipping God and in the name of Jesus we aim to create an environment of faith where God can and will move. We believe, for those who cannot. We join with the angels and saints who cry out "Holy, holy is the Lord..." We stand in God's presence and ask Jesus to intercede on our behalf.

Our final prayer for the night is what might be described as a 'surrender prayer'. It's where we are brave enough to encourage the people to invite Jesus into their hearts,

even if it is for the very first time. It is a heart matter; it is a decision of the heart. Not many people come to know and love Jesus through their intellect. The heart is the only place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth where we chose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation:” it is the place of covenant”.(Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2563)

We need to approach the heart, as Jesus did. He aimed “at the *conversion of the heart, interior conversion...*” (CCC # 1430) Jesus met people with love, at their point of deepest need, and spoke words of healing and renewal, for example, the woman at the well, who stated “He knows me...” (John 4:29)

We aim to cooperate with Christ’s call to conversion, to assist Christ in His work of turning darkness to light. We allow for and invite a response, a turning of hearts, a *metanoia*. We preach a crucified and risen Jesus, and if the Gospel has been preached, the Cross and resurrection explained, and the cost of discipleship has been touched on, we can then encourage and invite people to make a decision, to turn back to God. We encourage them to embrace Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, to invite Jesus into their hearts and be filled with His Holy Spirit. On the Road to Emmaus the disciples commented: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). At Pentecost, Peter preached, and “when the people heard this they were cut to the heart...about three thousand repented and believed and were baptised that day.” (Acts 2: 37-41.)

If we have doubts about our ability to lead groups in prayer, let us not forget the example of Mary, and say ‘Yes’ to God, and to the gift of her Son. We need the courage to believe that, in and through our lives, we can do the work of the Father, through the Son, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Cathy Martorana
Student of The Broken Bay Institute
Co-founder and Coordinator of *Worship in the City*