

## CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY “JOURNEY HOME”

“Do not pray for the grace to be with you because they are already with you, rather, pray for the grace to be awakened in you.” This was the reminder of Bro. David Leary, OFM, Franciscan Friar of the Province of the Holy Spirit, to the thirty two (32) priests and deacons of the Diocese of Bunbury at the beginning of their annual retreat held last September 14-19 at Saint John of God Retreat Centre, Safety Bay.

Bishop George Kolodziej, SDS, DD, while attending the formation of new bishops in Rome sent his message to his priests and deacons with the exhortation about the retreat. He said, “A retreat is always a gift – not just a time away from usual responsibilities but a graced opportunity to be renewed in our friendship with Jesus, to be strengthened in our calling and to rediscover our quiet joy of being His priest.”

Bro. David led the reflections towards the deeper understanding of priests and religious’ life as a “Journey Home.” He gave emphasis on the “culture of encounter” as “Kairos experience” of God’s providence for His priests. “We are alone only if we choose to be and only when we fail to see the “Kairos” moments that call us home, which is always communitarian. This is the great challenge: to be open to and perceive the Kairos moments where Grace is alive and active in each of us and our life in community.”

There were two sessions every day. One in the morning and one in the afternoon. A one-on-one dialogue with Bro. David was an opportunity for everyone to have some sort of counselling and professional accompaniment. Every night, each deanery was assigned to lead the “Holy Hour” before the Blessed Sacrament. One of the most important parts of the retreat was the “Reconciliation Rite.” It was so beautiful to see priests confessing their sins to each other. After finding God in the messy realities of our lives, it is always good to know that we have God who will always be loving us despite our brokenness.

“When you face your brokenness, you also know it is part of the human condition that follows you from birth to death. Justification comes when you live that reality and learn, with Grace to be humble. We may remain burdened by images of the past: our errors, failures, hurts and pain. They can haunt us. It is why we return time and time again, to the memory of the incarnation, to Jesus who reaches out, the suffering Jesus, his resurrection and the spirit that guides and inspires. We need that context to survive our fragile humanity.”

At the conclusion of the five-day retreat, Bishop George, who came all the way from the formation of new bishops in Rome, celebrated the mass. He thanked Bro. David and all the priests and deacons for praying for his mom who recently died, and for always being available to offer their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Everyone went back to our presbyteries full of vigour and hope to continue our ministry to the people of God.