Unit: Heroes and Role Models

Contents

Role models …2
Jesus as a role model …2
Saints …3
Holy men and women …3

Acknowledgement

Brisbane Catholic Education wishes to thank Rev. Anthony Mellor, Archdiocesan Theological Advisor for their contribution to the development of this unit.
Role models

Role models have the ability to influence lives, values and lifestyles. They set good examples and are looked up to and admired by others. They inspire others, who in turn want to be like them. Role models are not necessarily people who are famous, even though many young people choose this type of glamorous role model or have such people thrust upon them by the media. Good role models are people who have the inner capacity to reflect and evaluate their lives and interactions with others. Role models seek to grow and evolve throughout their lifetime. They have the capacity to connect with others and the Divine within and beyond themselves. They are not infallible, but they often have a clear sense of purpose, meaning and values in their lives.

Jesus as a role model

For Christians the role model is Jesus Christ. Jesus even referred to himself as a kind of role model – “learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart”. Matthew 11:29. The vision of Jesus is central to the lives, values and lifestyles of Christians and others who have lived, or live in countries that embraced the Old Law and New Law/ Law of the Gospel and reflected these beliefs and values in their laws and codes of behaviour. Jesus has clearly demonstrated the necessity of the inner spiritual life and connection with God, acting for justice and peace, authenticity and moral integrity.

The Jesus from whom we start afresh is not simply some wise teacher or wondrous miracle-worker from the distant past. Nor is he some peerless role-model who lived long ago and whom we must strive to emulate without ever managing to do so. He is the Lord crucified and risen who is here and now or nowhere and never. He is among us as presence and power; and the encounter with him is the very heart of the Christian life and of the Church’s mission. Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Installation Homily, May 11th 2012.
Saints

Early in Catholic Church history, the word saint was defined as one who had died and was in heaven with the Lord, one who could intercede and respond to the needs of people and the Church and finally one who was merited with public honour and cultic recognition by the Church. Saints are role models for many, in that they follow the example of Jesus Christ who lived a life of faithfulness to God even until death. Within their lives, inherent values of the tradition are exemplified. In every age, saints exhibited ways of living out the gospel in unjust and confusing times. Frequently saints were martyred for the beliefs and actions. Saints are able to transform the abstract into real life experience. They are able to contextualise the truth of the Gospel within their life and time.

The saints are those who, in some partial way-embody-literally incarnate- the challenge of faith in their time and place. Robert Ellsberg

Holy men and women

Canonisation is the formal process that has evolved over time in the Catholic Church for declaring saints. The Catholic Church makes no pretence that the list or “canon” is a complete list of all saints. There are countless holy men and women whose holiness is recognised by God alone. These women and men are recognised along with the ‘official’ saints on All Saints day annually on November 1st.

There are many Christians (not necessarily Catholic Christians) throughout the ages who have also exhibited heroic sanctity and that quite apart from any formal or official process, lived their lives, in some extraordinary fashion, proclaiming the mystery of the gospel. Then there are non-Christians like Ghandi, or the Jewish prophet Abraham
Heschel, whose impact on Christian spirituality and ethics has arguably equalled that of any orthodox Christian of our time. As Heschel wrote, “Holiness is not the monopoly of any particular religion or tradition. Wherever a deed is done in accord with the will of God, wherever a human thought is directed toward Him, there is the holy.”


Back to Lesson