

Soul Space

SERIES: NEW YEAR, NEW YOU

Season colour: **WHITE**In this series, **Gerard Moloney CSsR** offers tips for being a better Christian in 2018.

LOVE IS WHAT COUNTS

2 018 is a significant year for me, because this time 30 years ago I took my final vows as a Redemptorist and was ordained on October 2, 1988. In the three decades since then, I have preached in parishes throughout the country and beyond. I have conducted retreats and novenas. I have studied journalism and edited several publications.

I have spent years in college and accumulated a level of knowledge, but there is one question I keep asking, a question that seems to me to have ever greater relevance in the context of the declining significance of the church in Irish society: As a vowed religious, as a priest, what precisely is my value to society? What difference do I make?

Those who went to school with me all those years ago have gone on to settle down, have families, forge careers, and contribute to the country in various ways. I look at those in the professions, and see the contribution they make. Teachers, doctors, nurses, carers provide a vital service. They change lives. I look at those who are counsellors or social workers, and see that they offer something truly valuable. They help people. I look at those who are farmers, and see the fruits of their labours. They produce the food we need to survive. I look at those who are parents, and see their extraordinary achievement - they have brought new life into the world, and care for it and nurture it, ensuring the future of the human race. I look at those who have joined the police and defence forces, and the critical work they do to keep us safe. I look at entrepreneurs, lawyers, journalists, even politicians, and see how essential they are too. I look at everyone around me and see the colour and contribution they make to the Ireland of 2018.

Then I look at myself, and those like me who are in religious life, and I wonder what I offer. What service do

I provide? What practical use am I in today's Ireland? What contribution do I make to society?

And this is the crucial question, especially with so many Irish people now wanting nothing to do with religion, and choosing not to have their children baptised. What's the point of living the religious life? What good do I do?

WITNESS

The answer is clear: I do some good if I am a person of love, one who champions and exemplifies the values of compassion, justice, forgiveness, tolerance. Through my preaching and my living, I must mediate the God of love to people. I must highlight injustice, offer hope. Be a sign of goodness, inclusion, generosity, peace. If I am not, then I'm not witnessing to what I profess. As a religious, I am nothing if I'm not a person of love. I contribute nothing if I'm not a person of love.

This is a relevant question for each of us to think about on this feast of the Baptism of the Lord, and as we begin a new year. Not many of us are priests or religious but, by virtue of our baptism, all of us are Christians, members of the Catholic Church. Baptism makes us one family. Through baptism Christ claims ownership of us. Through baptism we are called to grow in faith, hope and love.

If I do not live a life of love, then it's clear that I'm not a good priest and religious, and my life is of little use. During this anniversary year, I aspire to live in such a way that love governs everything I do. It's my top New Year's resolution. Whatever your vocation or occupation, as a Christian, living a life of love must top your New Year's list too. ■



Today's readings

Isaiah 55: 1-11

I John 5:1-9

Mark 1:7-11

having a little water trickled on your head. It was quite literally being plunged into deep water that made you splutter as you came up. It is in this moment that Jesus sees the heavens opened and hears the heavenly voice tell him "You are my Son, the Beloved." Other Gospels have "this is my Son", as though the message was addressed to someone else. Mark wishes us to see this as the moment of Jesus' call from the Father, his 'vocation story'.

GOD'S WORD TODAY

We read the first part of today's Gospel earlier in Advent, so let's take time to look at the second part. Jesus, the village carpenter of Nazareth, goes in search of John the Baptist. He might have met him for the first time as he made his way to Jerusalem with friends and neighbours from Nazareth for one of the annual pilgrimage feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. John certainly spoke with authority and conviction that attracted people. Being baptised was not just

