



Book Launch – *My Spirit Land*

Speech

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MercyCare Wembley**

I remember the days that are past. I ponder on all your works. I muse on what your right hand has wrought, and to you I stretch out my hands (Psalm 142:5).

These words from Psalm 142, were originally written in the context of someone who feels abandoned by God but who still cries out to God in hope. In the midst of this person's struggles, he recalls God's fidelity and God's graciousness to him over many years, and longs to know that fidelity and graciousness again. and so, immediately following the words I have just quoted, we find the writer of the psalm saying this: *like a parched land my soul thirsts for you. Lord, make haste and answer.*

I am not for a moment suggesting that Archbishop Emeritus Hickey feels abandoned by God. I certainly hope this is not the case, although to the extent that it might at times be true for Archbishop Emeritus Hickey, as it is for all of us, we can remind ourselves that we are in good company. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, now Saint Theresa of Calcutta, revealed towards the end of her life that not long after she made the decision to leave the convent of the Loretto sisters and begin her work with the poorest of the poor, she began to experience a painful and constant sense of the absence of God in her life. Her fidelity and constancy in the face of this terrible trial help to explain the secret of her sanctity. The great spiritual tradition of the Catholic Church would suggest to us that, at times, God allows this to happen so that through this experience of the absence of God, we might learn to long more deeply for his presence.

The instinct which has prompted Archbishop Emeritus Hickey to write his memoirs has not been, perhaps, the experience of desolation and the absence of God, but rather the realisation that the long story of his life and of his ministry as priest and bishop reveals the wonderful, sometimes surprising and unexpected, but always challenging presence of the Spirit of God, leading him forward, step-by-step. The archbishop has now given us the opportunity to revisit this journey with him. In doing so, he is helping us to reflect on the way in which God might be accompanying us step-by-step along our journey of life.

And at the same time, Archbishop Emeritus Hickey is giving us an opportunity to thank God that he has walked faithfully for so many years with the Lord by his side, has allowed the Lord to open his eyes and ears to the cries of the poor and needy, and has nurtured in him a generous and



loving heart which has always driven him, and still drives him, to reach out to those who need him.

Not all of us will have the opportunity or the desire to publish our own life's journey in a book for others to read. We should, however, be very grateful to those who do choose to do this, especially when they are people of faith, for in sharing their story with us, they are inviting us to at least tell our story to ourselves, even if we don't tell it to anyone else. Like the psalmist, it is good for each of us to remember the days that are past; it is good to ponder over all that God has done; it is good to stretch out our hands to God in praise and thanksgiving for his faithful love.

Saint Luke tells us that this is exactly what Mary did: she handed over all that had happened to her and she treasured it in her heart. And it was because of this contemplative and reflective spirit that Mary was able to say, "*The Almighty has done things for me. Holy is his name.*" Today we have gathered to thank Archbishop Emeritus Hickey and to celebrate with him as his memoirs are released. He proclaims that the Almighty has indeed done great things for him, and indeed is still doing so. In this sense I am sure that Archbishop Emeritus Hickey would want to associate himself with Mary's words. *Holy is his name.*

Congratulations, Archbishop Barry, on bringing such an important project to a conclusion. I hope that, in reading it, many people are inspired to walk the same gospel path that you have tried to walk through your long life of humble service to God's people.