

In 2003 our theme was 'Bread and Fishes'. In 2004 it was 'Basin and Towel'. We have decided on the theme of 'The Potter' for 2005.

It is suggested that the first urban civilization was created around 4000BCE, in what is today southern Iraq. Villages grew into towns and then towns into the great city states: By 3000 BCE the people of these cities, the Sumerians, had already established a sophisticated trading commercial culture and new crafts and occupations evolved. More skills and tools were invented.

While some men still hunted and fished, others began to plant crops and rear animals. As they became more experienced and their farming methods improved, food production increased and so did the population. Trade expanded and more pots were needed. Various ways were tried to speed up all the pottery techniques: making, decorating and firing. Most women were already almost fully occupied and "specialising" in the vital task of bearing and rearing children. It seems that women almost certainly developed the techniques of sewing, weaving and basket making in most prehistoric communities. They were probably also the first potters - the makers of bowls, dishes, jugs etc. It is not surprising therefore that in these early village societies building a basket and coiling a pot had a lot in common.

The ancient technique of building a coiled pot involves squeezing, squashing and smoothing the successive layers of coils into a thin even wall which swells or tapers as it grows and encloses a shape. To do this you need to turn the pot around slowly as you work. Early potters soon learned to make the task of periodically turning the pot much easier and more efficient by beginning their coiling on a dish or bowl, or even a flat plate or smooth platter they could twist round as they worked.

Using the principle of the wheel enabled the Sumerian potters to adopt a turntable for making and decorating pots. Until the arrival of the wheel, the women usually made the pots in their spare time. With the invention of the wheel, it seems that in most ancient cultures many men took over the full time task of pottery making and decoration because of the time it needed. As a result of large urban communities becoming more organised and complex, predominantly matriarchal village societies gradually became dominantly patriarchal.

The image of pottery making, found its way into the Hebrew scriptures and was used to refer to the role the potter plays in fashioning the clay into the desired shape. We will use some of the references such as Wisdom 15:7; Isaiah 28:15-16; 43:1-2; 45:9-12; 64:7-8; Jeremiah 18:1-6 and Ecclesiasticus 38:32-34 in our Formation weekend prayer

St Paul also referred to the potter imagery and we are very familiar with his reference that *"We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us."*(2 Cor 4:7). Paul also wrote *"The pot has no right to say to the potter: "Why did you make me this shape?" Surely a potter can do what he likes with*

*the clay? It is surely for him to decide whether he will use a particular lump of clay to make a special pot or an ordinary one". (Rom 9:19-24)*

There is much to be gained by reflecting on the call from the Scriptures and many religious writers that we allow ourselves to be moulded, shaped or plied into the image God has for each one of us. To do this, we have to trust in the hand of the potter and his wheel. Hopefully this theme will enrich our lives and deepen our commitment to being effective leaders.

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