

# The Catholic Weekly

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NEWS

### US speakers keep coming because Sydney wants Jesus

By *George Al-Akiki* July 11, 2024



Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers. Photo: Parousia Media

American speaker Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers has no plans for sightseeing during his ninth visit down under since 2012, touring eight Sydney parishes in six days for a series of motivational Catholic talks.

“From my observations being here a number of times now is Australia’s experiencing some of the same troubles we’re having in the United States—attracting and keeping people in church, the passion and enthusiasm to really see the parish as part of the extended family and community,” he told *The Catholic Weekly*.

Some of the common trends he’s noticed: [dropping Mass attendance](#), a lack of people on fire and families struggling to hold onto faith.

“There’s more people in New York City than there is in all of Australia, but when you look at the big picture, the struggles are across the board,” he said.

“This world isn’t interested in truth, beauty and goodness. It’s interested in the god of me, myself, and I—the trinity of the culture.”

“People sick of that are looking for truth in all the different places, but coming up short,” said Fr John Amsberry, Deacon Harold’s spiritual director, also on tour with him.

“I was asking a seventh grader back home why he and his family were never in church. First two things he said right away: ‘boring’ and ‘there’s no benefit to me.’”



*Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers addressing a crowd in Sydney. Photo: Parousia Media.*

The hope of learning from each other’s situations might just be what’s leading so many US speakers to Aussie shores in recent years.

In the last eight months, speakers like Deacon Harold, [Matt Fradd](#) and [Jason Evert](#) have all made the trip to Sydney, looking to learn from and help rejuvenate Australian Catholic

culture.

“Jesus says go and make disciples of all nations. That desire is here and why we keep coming back,” Deacon Harold said.

“Everybody’s heard of Jesus, they went to Catholic school, but somewhere along the way he hasn’t penetrated their hearts.

“And so when they hear speakers like us come out, Sydney wants to find that. It draws them out to a parish on a work night at 7:30pm, when you could be watching footy or doing anything else.

“I can’t sit behind a screen, because we’re an incarnational church. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word didn’t become flesh then jump on a Zoom meeting!

“We need to be with people and that means rolling up our sleeves and getting our hands dirty in the work.

“The church in America, as in Australia, only benefits from hearing people share their experience of that love.

Tony El-Mourani attended Deacon Harold’s talk at St Jerome’s Punchbowl on Monday night and returned again to hear him the next night in Croydon.

“These speakers bring to the city a new perspective that we might not even have considered or see unfolding,” said Tony.

“Sydney needs Jesus, and the lessons we can take from others and also give back to them to fulfil that mission are always very much welcomed.”