

WRESTLING *with the* WORD

HOW THE LORD INSPIRES THROUGH HOMILIES

Father Patrick Jackson SAC



YEAR C

FOREWORD

Homilies for Sundays and Feast Days for Year C

by Fr Pat Jackson SAC

+++

Trying to understand the readings for a particular Sunday or Feast Day, who the writer was speaking to, and the issues that were being addressed in the context of the culture, I had the sense of wrestling with the Word like Jacob, to grasp in the darkness of my initial perception, the Spirit's meaning. The Word shone light on my own experiences, hoping that in sharing them they might resonate with others' experiences and help them. Even in giving the Homily for a particular congregation, I experienced the Spirit at work suggesting better ways and helpful words to feed the hungers in the human heart.

I have always felt the obligation to preach well for the sake of the people; a craft with the help of the Spirit to make the homilies personal and nurturing, relevant to those who listened. Delving into the scripture guided by the insights of scholars and homilists, listening to the wisdom of ordinary people, writers, current news and events, but especially having time to ruminate and be guided by the Spirit in what I have to say to the congregation on any particular Sunday was both fascinating and challenging.

I wish to thank my friend Anthony Lim for his encouragement and for bringing all these homilies together in printed form in line with the lectionary. Thanks to Fr Michael Kelly Csr for his assistance with Year C, Fr Brendan Byrne S. J. for his advice, Deirdre Heffernan, Rev Sharne Rolfe for reading and offering helpful comments, and finally, Annie Frances Hall who edited the three years of Homilies and added the scriptural citations to complete this work.

After some thought I decided to put all these homilies on our Pallottine Website, hoping it can be of service to other priests and people in their own Wrestling with the Word. Praise be to the Father, Son and Spirit and thanks to all who have inspired me to write.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this work to my twin brother
Dr Michael Jackson D Theol, (Manly); D. Psych, (Deakin)
Who died on October 21st at 3.00am in Bunbury
mourned by his loving wife and companion, Ann.
He lived for Jesus, sought for truth, had great empathy
for people in need, and for me and for many a source
of wisdom, understanding and life-giving spirituality
And to mum and dad who laid the faith foundation for their six children
and who inspired us to live it as a team,
supporting each other throughout our lives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	2
DEDICATION	3
LECTIONARY YEAR C GOSPEL OF LUKE	9
THE PROPER OF SEASONS	10
THE SEASON OF ADVENT	11
First Sunday of Advent	12
Second Homily	13
Second Sunday of Advent	16
Second Homily	17
Third Homily	19
Third Sunday of Advent	21
Second Homily	22
Fourth Sunday of Advent	24
THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS	27
The Nativity of Our Lord	28
Christmas Eve Children's Mass	28
Second Homily	29
Third Homily	30
Fourth Homily	31
Christmas Day (Midnight Mass)	33
Feast of the Holy Family	35
Second Homily	36
Third Homily	38
Feast of the Holy Innocents	40
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God	42
Second Homily	43
The Epiphany of the Lord	45
Second Homily	46
Third Homily	48
The Baptism of the Lord	50
Second Homily	51

Vincent Pallotti's Feast Day January 22nd	53
Vincent Pallotti's Birthday April 21st	55
SUNDAYS IN ORDINARY TIME	57
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time	58
Second Homily	59
Third Homily	60
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	63
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time	65
Second Homily	66
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	69
Second Homily	70
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	73
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	75
Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time	77
Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time	79
THE SEASON OF LENT	81
Ash Wednesday	82
First Sunday of Lent	83
Second Sunday of Lent	85
Third Sunday of Lent	87
Fourth Sunday of Lent	89
Fifth Sunday of Lent	91
Second Homily	92
HOLY WEEK	94
Passion / Palm Sunday	95
Second Homily	96
THE EASTER TRIDUUM	98
Holy Thursday	99
Second Homily	100
Good Friday	102
Second Homily	103
The Mass of Easter Night	105
Second Homily	106
Third Homily	107
Easter Sunday	109
Second Homily	110
ANZAC Day	112

SEASON OF EASTER

114

Second Sunday of Easter	115
Second Homily	116
Third Homily	118
Third Sunday of Easter	120
Fourth Sunday of Easter and Mother's Day	122
Second Homily	124
Fifth Sunday of Easter	126
Sixth Sunday of Easter	128
The Ascension	131
Mary, Queen of Apostles	133
Second Homily	134
Pentecost Sunday	136
Second Homily	137

FEASTS OF THE LORD IN ORDINARY TIME

140

The Most Holy Trinity	141
Second Homily	142
Third Homily	144
Body and Blood of Christ	146

SUNDAYS IN ORDINARY TIME

148

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	149
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	151
Second Homily	152
Third Homily	154
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time	156
Second Homily	157
Third Homily	159
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	161
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	164
Second Homily	165
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	168
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	170
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	172
Second Homily	174
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	176
Second Homily	177
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	179
Second Homily	180

Third Homily	182
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time	184
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time	186
Second Homily	187
Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time	190
Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time	192
Second Homily	193
Father's Day (Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time)	196
Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time	199
Second Homily	200
Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	203
Second Homily	205
Third Homily	206
Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	208
Second Homily	209
Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	212
Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time	215
Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time	217
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time	219
Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time	222
Second Homily	223
Third Homily	225
Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time	227
Second Homily	228
Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time	231
Second Homily	232
Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King	235
Second Homily	236
FEASTS	239
The Birth of Saint John the Baptist	240
Second Homily	241
The Sacred Heart of Jesus	243
Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles	245
The Transfiguration of the Lord	247
The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	249
Second Homily	250
Third Homily	251
All Saints	253

LECTIONARY

Year C

Gospel of Luke

THE PROPER OF SEASONS

Year C

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

Year C

First Sunday of Advent

Jer 33:14-16

I Thess 3:12-4:2

Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

It's Advent. It's come on us this year with a rush. Advent means coming. The Gospel of Luke puts the big picture of Christ's coming before us. He came in memory long ago, now in mystery, but will come in majesty as the Son of Man coming in glory on the clouds of heaven. Jesus paints the big picture before we settle into the cozy Christmas memory of his birth.

Advent is like fire drill, waking us to possible scenarios that we don't usually think of, and getting us ready to deal with them. After the NSW 'Mega Fire' of 79 days from 26 October 2019 to 10 February, 2020, we are now more alert than ever when the weather heats up. Advent works in a similar way. It paints a grim picture of the future in order to alert us to what is happening and to the coming of Jesus in the midst of it all.

Luke does this in two ways: describing **what** was going to happen at the end (eschaton – eschatology): the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, then the fall of Jerusalem, that presaged the final coming. The second way in apocalyptic language was the **how**, how it was going to happen. It seemed that Australia was on fire. With 75 direct deaths, 417 indirect deaths from smoke, 315 homes lost; and on top of that the Covid 19 pandemic that brought the world to its knees, we get the message of Luke - the frightening apocalyptic images of global disaster. Intertwined with this was the persecution of Christians who in the between-time witness and work for Jesus' kingdom.

All this can overwhelm us, make us anxious, unable to cope. But Jesus does not want to paralyse us with fear but to energise us to action, to rouse us to face the issues, to work together to find solutions, and to change our behaviour.

One such issue is global climate change. On the political level we see how difficult it is to come to consensus. Scientific experts may disagree about the details of their predictions but few dispute that global warming is happening, that it will get worse and that our use of fossil fuel is a major cause. There are pictures in the news of communities in the Pacific standing knee deep in the ocean where once their homes stood. They live under the poverty line and just above the water line. There are natural disasters, but others are man-made such as mud slides engulfing communities because of excessive logging; 10% of the richer nations consume 80% of the world resources.

John Paul II and Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, a plea for our common home, ask us to undergo an ecological conversion, to grasp again the Judaeo-Christian tradition of respect for the essential connectedness of all created things – from God the Creator and Sustainer to all life forms, a respect that was lost with the Enlightenment which pushed the primacy of reason, science and technology that quarried the earth with little concern for future generations.

At every Mass we lift up creation, this bread and wine, the work of human hands. The things we

touch and dispose of should lead us into a profound respect for God, for creation, and a sensitive care of people and of things. What do we do? Telihard de Chardin, a Jesuit palaeontologist in the Gobi Desert wrote ***On the Altar of the World***, "the whole of creation is like a eucharistic host offering itself to be consecrated and thereby transformed into the risen Christ."

Our future is determined by those who share responsibility for shaping it. Jesus wants us to stay awake to what is happening now, not just in the future. To be realistic about the way the world is going, without losing hope. It's easy to get pessimistic and give up. The future holds hope because of Jesus and God's action in the past and our part now. His death and resurrection have assured our liberation. Advent tells us to declare ourselves Christian, show ourselves disciples, and act as moral people of integrity.

This has to lead us into solidarity with the victims of climate change. The World Council of Churches pointing to the many people, especially in the southern hemisphere who are particularly vulnerable to climate change, reflected, "Though their per capita contribution to the causes of climate change is negligible, they will suffer from the consequences to a much larger degree. Climate change aggravates the social and economic injustice between rich and poor in our global community."

To contribute to this destruction of lives, of homes, of livelihoods and of communities "is not only a sin against the weak and unprotected but also against the earth – God's gift of life" **(57th CCIA Meeting in Brisbane, 7th February 2020)**.

When we gather to pray at the Eucharist, we gather in solidarity with Christians who assemble for Eucharist in many Pacific islands. This Advent lift up your heads and see and lift up creation in worship and in action.

Second Homily

Today we begin the Gospel of Luke which tells again the story of Jesus of Nazareth, that wonderful human being, Son of God, Saviour. His story has been told for 2,000 years. But why start at the end today? Certainly, Advent means the coming of the Lord and that coming at the end is highlighted in today's Gospel.

At a deeper level, Luke's Gospel begins and ends in the temple. Today's passage is spoken in the precincts of the temple, the cradle of Judaism and the heart of Israel's faith. Luke is telling his mainly Gentile community that to understand Jesus as saviour of the world and his message of universal salvation, they have to realise that Jesus' story starts here, in the faithful heart of Judaism. From here Christianity has grown, a new plant from the old, a growth he chronicles through nineteen chapters. Now, as the life of Christ nears its climax, the Lord once again comes to the temple, to God's people, in a last desperate plea for openness, obedience and faith in him. When these are not found, the temple, but also the powers and idols of this world fall in upon themselves,

implode.

Jesus predicts the end of the temple, and the shaking of the idols and powers that rule this world, and his final victory as Son of Man coming on the clouds. With the end of the temple, we are confronted by God, no longer in a dark room in an ancient building, the Holy of Holies, but in the innermost heart of Jesus. As Mary was a unique temple carrying the Saviour into her world, we also are to be temples bringing Jesus into our world.

Look at the picture of the solitary couple travelling to Bethlehem. Today those same roads are crammed with refugees looking to get away from the bloodshed and cruelty of war and terrorism, and now Covid 19! Europe and ourselves are closing our doors and borders. "Who knocking be?" We began sending travelling cribs around the parish to make Jesus welcome and awaken us to the needs of refugees and homeless.

Jesus' prediction is not to scare us, but to prepare us for his visitation into our lives. The end is always a story about a new beginning. Two men were snow-tenting up in the Swiss Alps near a glacier. They went to sleep as night set in – hours later one awoke in fear as he heard the loud cracking, roaring and rumbling all around him. He yelled to the other – who calmed him said – "It's okay, it's only the beginning of a new day" as the sun touched the snow and the ice.

When Jesus speaks about the end, he is thinking of a world that is going to disappear. The world of corruption and sin, hatred, jealousy, greed, war and murder we know so well, as it surrounds us like a second skin.

When Jesus speaks about the end of this world, he is foretelling the new world to come, a better one, a different one: the Kingdom of God, in which we will be changed. But we have to do our part. To be open, obedient, and faithful – holding our heads high and praying and working with all our might for all our worth. Yves Congar used the example of the French underground, who when they heard the allies were near, worked even more intensely to consolidate victory – the long night was ending.

When you face death, priorities suddenly shift – either there's a renewed effort or you go and get drunk – to blot out the thought, the pain and the worry. Jesus asks us to stay awake and face the nightmares in our lives and expect God's promises will be fulfilled – to live the kind of life God wants – coffee can keep us awake only so long, but if we are enthusiastic about something we can stay awake longer.

Advent is not simply the sentimental waiting for Christ's birth as a baby. It is his coming as Lord and the call to us to do our part to bring him, the Saviour, to others. One man in prayer wondered how he could spread peace this Christmas in such a troubled world as ours. He realised that if he had personal peace – peace that began with him – like courtesy is catching, then his peace would ripple out to family members and to others in ever widening circles.

You get the sense that living in our time is to walk the beach of history after a great tide has ebbed. Leaders in the West, in the face of decline, pledging to make their nation great again, while leaders in other countries are seizing power, becoming dictators and eliminating any opposition. We need to be morally great, not presuming we have all the answers but in dialogue with others, working to bring about a better world right where we are. We must look for the great time of God and search for signs of that incoming tide.

This is Advent's task, evening and morning, hot or cold: to walk the beach in the hour before dawn, to drink in the darkness and confront the cold light of moon and stars. And then to see, rising from the ocean's limit, the sun of a new day, great and red and warming, bringing light to a world whose hope for it was all but extinguished.

May the God of the advent hope fill us with joy and personal peace in believing, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second Sunday of Advent

Bar. 5:1-9

Phil. 1:3-6, 8-11

Lk. 3:1-6

Centre stage in today's Gospel stand the world leaders clothed in power, but where are they now? From the wilderness of Judea steps forth the adult John the Baptist not with power, but with a message that is crucial for the health, healing and salvation of society. His ministry takes place at the exact spot of the river Jordan where Joshua led the Jewish people into the promised land. John represents return, a coming back to the original spirit where God was central to the lives and future of the people. His word is "repent" "metanoia," a fundamental change of thinking that results in a new way of seeing and acting, a new way of living, which is the challenge of Advent.

Isaiah makes the same point. "Take off your dress of sorrow and distress." There's a lot of sadness, fear, depression in people young and old today. The Jewish people felt the same way for they saw their leaders and princes led away on foot "with enemies for an escort." When our life, job, future prospects are threatened, similar emotions well up in us.

Therese of Lisieux is a great example of one who came to a joyous assurance in God in the face of her own weaknesses – "our defects don't disappoint God". On the contrary, her faults were not fuel for self-accusation, but surrender. Psychiatrists try to get to the root causes of such ailments in people, but some tell me that often they are only putting band-aids on the problem. Once patients have the surface symptoms dealt with, they no longer seek treatment; the root problem remains. Better a prescription for a tranquiliser than a probe into one's inner soul. Therese didn't let her defects cause discouragement but learned to love them for the way they kept her dependent on God. To people who were prone to be saddened and dismayed by their weaknesses, she said: "Love your littleness, love your powerlessness," exploit its hidden grace.

Baruch is looking toward the time when we put on the beauty of the glory of God forever; when we wrap the cloak of the integrity of the Lord around us, when our fortunes are changing and the princes and the exiles return. God will give us a new name, "Peace through integrity and honour through devotedness."

"Peace through integrity and honour through devotedness. Okay, how does this work? Peace through integrity, not immediate big changes, but listening to that voice crying out in the wilderness, and turn, look east, see the blessings that God is doing in our lives. If we could find the wilderness, some quiet place even for five or ten minutes each day, free from the demands, the tug and pull of life, to be able to hear God's voice, and in our pain or disappointment make a way, a relationship straight for ourselves or others. A Catholic woman in the office noticed her friend flirting with the men. She got the courage to say to her, "You're flirting because your heart is empty." The woman thanked her later, not at the time. Where is the wilderness for you? What small blessings do you see, to thank God for, to fill your heart?

Honour through devotedness When we have God in our hearts, we see straight and recognise the blessings even in the hustle and bustle around us. In Mexico, a top executive and his aides were rushing for the train. One of the aides upturned a small stand where a young blind boy was selling apples and scattered them all over the platform. Being blind he was anxiously feeling for the apples. The executive turned round, saw the boy's plight and knelt down to put the apples in the basket. Some were damaged, so he pressed some notes into the boy's hand. One of the aides yelled frantically, "Jesus, you're going to miss the train." The boy turned his face toward the man and asked, "Are you Jesus?" When God is in our heart and we stop for one another, surely, we reveal Jesus to others.

How explain the joy in the words of Paul writing to the Philippians from prison in conditions that would be filthy, and vermin ridden. There is no fear, depression, or self-pity, instead his heart is full of joy. Sr Verna Holyhead asks us:

"Do we have a kingdom vision that can enable us to see around the twists and turns of personal tragedy or ecclesial failure and recognise there an Advent of Christ — his presence with us in the suffering, dying and rising from these painful realities?" (***cf Welcoming the Word in Year C, With Burning Hearts, Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn 2006 p. 5***)

In the wilderness John heard the voice of God. It is as far away from the centre of the empire as one could get, and certainly far away from its thoughts. In the wilderness, a place of death, God creates a way of life that all flesh can see. Receiving God's word, John becomes prophet, precursor and road builder proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins which is God's royal road, conveying Christ into the heart of every human being. May this Advent or arrival of Christ come into your heart and home and let you experience the great blessings he brings.

Second Homily

In the Bible a change of name signifies a new situation and a new job to be done. Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob – Israel, and Simon becomes Peter the rock. But here in the first reading it's a place, a city, a nation – Jerusalem – that gets a change of name. God speaks through the prophet Baruch to a nation that had experienced the destruction of the temple in 582 BC, and the exile to Babylon. It was a shut-down nation that suffered forced mass migration of its enslaved people. It is happening today. Into this calamity God speaks: "Take off your dress of sorrow and distress... the name God gives you forever will be 'Peace through integrity, and honour through devotedness.'" What a great name - it already denotes a task.

God has entered in, is actively inviting the people that were left in a ruined city to act "as" no longer burdened or distressed but "as" people on whom the glory of God shines, on whom his delight rests like a crown." To act no longer "as" slaves, but "as" free and to make that "as" an "is." God encourages before he asks the nation to change. We all need encouragement if we are going

to change or take up a new challenge.

The task facing the nation was to welcome refugees struggling to return home. "Jerusalem, look east, see your sons and daughter reassembled from East and West, coming back to you, jubilant that God has not forgotten them. God will flatten the hills and fill in the valleys to make the way possible." It is so easy for us to feel flattened, discouraged at the names we and others give ourselves. We can accept the negative estimate of ourselves by others and live by it. There is enough negativity in us - our failings, our sins - we are our own worst nay-sayers.

That's not how Jesus, God acts. Remember the story of the bent-over woman in Luke 13:10. She was doubled up for 18 years. She had taken on, accepted into herself the judgement and labels of her society, that she was crippled, dysfunctional and worthless. And she acted as such, but Jesus called her to act as a daughter of Abraham – to stand up tall, with dignity as a favourite daughter of God, valuable, precious, unconditionally loved by God. At his word, her response was to stand upright, able to confront people eye-to-eye with no sense of shame. **(cf Walter Bruggemann, "Texts Under Negotiation," Fortress Press, Minnesota, 1993 p.37).**

It is not enough to see something as different. We have to take it as different; grasp hold of the new thing God is promising and work for it. That is what John the Baptist did. He drove in his life like a stake for God. His work is in the terrain of the heart. John appeared as a prophet. At a time when no prophet had been heard within living memory, the Word of God was addressed to him. It put John within a world context: The Roman world of Caesar Augustus and the local authorities, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiphas. These are the powers with whom John and Jesus will have to contend.

We have to contend with our situation. Paul's situation was prison, yet he writes in joy to encourage his dear Philippian community, not as bound in chains, but free. He prays for them "that your love for each other may increase ... sharpen your knowledge and deepen your perception that you choose the best – not material things – but love, joy, grace, expectation, then you will be ready for the Day of the Lord." Every moment is a graced God-given moment to bring God into our dealings with one another; every moment can bring into existence the whole of God's purpose and promise for us and others.

John's call to change is joyful, encouraging because it heralds the salvation of all humanity. In the wilderness John heard the voice of God. It is as far away from the centre of the empire as one could get, and certainly far away from its thought. In the wilderness, a place of death, God creates a way of life that all flesh can see. Receiving God's word, John becomes prophet, precursor and road builder proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins which is God's royal road, conveying Christ into the heart of every human being.

Although John is centre-stage he is only a voice preparing the way for Jesus who slips in unobtrusively into our history simply, accepting John's Baptism of repentance and beginning his

life-changing work. Jesus is God's changing, liberating event for each one of us. May this Advent or arrival of Christ come into your heart and home and let you experience the blessings he brings.

Third Homily

When you are getting ready for a Christmas party or a wedding or a funeral you often urge your wife or children, "Get dressed! Let's go! Come on, we've got to get ready." That's God's message through the prophet Baruch to Israel which is personified as a mother still grieving from the memory of her children scattered and led in captivity to Babylon. "Get dressed, get ready for the celebration! God is bringing your children home."

Look East to Babylon, God is creating a highway through the scorching heat of the Arabian desert for the exiles to return like princes; he will plant forests and fragrant trees and water them to give shade and prepare a way so that Israel can walk in safety under the glory of God. So, "Throw off your mourning robes! They are coming home! God is bringing them back. Get dressed in the robe of integrity, put on your head Aaron's priestly mitre that has my name on it, for I, Yahweh, mean to let the salvation of Israel excite wonder across the world. Your name will now be Peace through integrity, and honour through devotedness."

The first reading and the Gospel are meant to speak to one another. There's something unusual that helps us understand what the integrity God expects of us. John the Baptist, son of Zecharia, is of the priestly class. You would expect him to appear in the temple serving under Annas and Caiphas, but instead we first hear of him at the Jordan, in the wilderness. Why there? Because that is where Israel, after the Exodus and the 40 years in the wilderness, prepared themselves under Joshua to enter into the Promised Land. John proposes a programme of renewal - a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins which Isaiah's road works illustrate.

To level and straighten out whatever is an obstacle or danger on our journey to God; the potholes we haven't bothered to mend; road rage in our dealings with others who don't obey our rules for them. John at the Jordan is calling us back to the excitement of first beginnings. But Luke takes Isaiah beyond Israel's beginnings as a nation to a mission to the world that will be realised in Jesus and writes "**all humankind** will see the salvation of God."

Our first beginnings are a marker against which to check our present progress. One such person was Clare Dreaver, a remarkable woman who died of a brain tumour at the age of 47, whose funeral was celebrated in our parish. She spent ten years at Tennant's Creek, in the Northern Territory. Three women from there shared in the eulogy and told how Clare transformed the place. She stood for integrity and called people to account when she learned of abuses or underhand dealings.

She took into her home two older women raped and robbed of their pension by drunken relatives. Without fear, she chased them away with a heavy digeridoo; she heard that the federal

government wanted to use land above Tennant Creek for a nuclear waste site. She won the case after eight years. She brought Catholic Care to Tennant Creek and stood for what she believed: the dignity of the poor, justice, love, and respect for others.

In one of Marcello Mastroianni's last movies, **Leo the Last**, he portrays a character, the last in the line of Italian aristocrats whose only sign of past glory was a decayed family mansion in a black London neighbourhood. Leo decides to blow up the mansion as a sign of repudiating the oppression it symbolized. With bits of the house scattered all over, one of the neighbourhood residents says to Leo, "So what! You've done nothing to save the world!" "No," Leo replies, "but we've changed our street." That's where it begins! **(cf. James A. Wallace, *Preaching to the Hungers of the Heart*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 2002, p.23).**

When we ask how to change our world in practice, St Paul brings it down to everyday realities. He says: "Treat each other in the same friendly ways that Christ has treated you." Writing to his community in Philippi, he prays a threefold prayer: that the Philippians may continue to grow in mutual love; that they may truly discern the demands of their Christian life; and that they may be vigilant for Christ's second coming. First love, then understanding, then ethics – these are Paul's priorities, for where would the last be without the other two **(Verna Holyhead, *ibid.* p.6).**

To change the world, we need to start with ourselves. It is first and foremost in our relationships, our families, our friends, that God is encountered, that faith is given flesh that our theories of justice are tested out, that our prayer is made real, that dreams are actualized. Our world can change if we change. Hence, the relevance for us of John's call to repentance.

To repent means to change our understanding of what is important in life, and to change our lives accordingly. To mark this change, John baptized the people, immersing them in the Jordan River, and they confessed their sins. He fiercely rebuked some people who came for baptism without wanting to change their life. John's call became his life work: to prepare for the One who is to come. Is it our work this Advent.

Third Sunday of Advent

Zeph 3: 13-18

Phil 4:4-7

Lk 3:10-18

Today is Rejoice (Gaudete) Sunday! "*Gaudeamus igitur, jubilemus sumus*" (sung): It's not just being happy, but living the Christian life with zest in the Lord. How joy erupts in our life is quite strange. C. S. Lewis watched and waited by the bedside of his wife, Joy, who was dying of cancer. He felt so helpless, alone, grieving. He described what he was going through in a book, and he gave it the title, *Surprised by Joy*, because it was a turning point in all his grief when joy suddenly entered, a quiet, strong, determined will to face life.

Dostoevsky tells the story of three men before a firing squad, but it was only feigned, make-believe. One man went mad, another fainted. But the third man, whose life had flashed before him — the quality of that life, how he had squandered it, made ill-use of it — was now suddenly, joyfully able to live, one day at a time.

The Jewish people coming back from exile, walking through the ruins of their towns, thought they were punished for their sins, but hearing the words, "Your time of exile is ended; the Lord has repealed your sentence," causes them to dance and shout for joy. It seemed like a dream! They refuse to be locked into an environment of despair.

Joy breaks forth from Paul in prison, even as he awaits execution. "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice." What's all the joy about? It's because the Lord is very near, the Lord is in your midst. If we have belief in a God who will never leave us, then despite the suffering, there is something to hope for and rejoice over. God's nearness didn't act as a threat to Paul, John or Zephaniah, but funded them with a radical source of joy that no-one could steal from them – not even the executioner. Their joy in the closeness of God gave an edge to their preaching, exhorting others to make ready; it gave them a vision to see the far side of disaster; it moved them to draw others into that sense of joy.

John the Baptist was a powerful voice that came out of the wilderness. We tend to think of him as a lonesome figure. But John was a magnetic character who intrigued people to seek him out and follow him. People flocked to him, stirred by his message of repentance, asking what must we do? John doesn't take us into the abstract. He speaks directly into our situation. He doesn't ask us to leave everything, but to do the ordinary things extraordinarily well as Therese of Lisieux did in the confines of her convent. John challenges our generosity so that others may have reason to rejoice. Give bread to the hungry and clothes to those who have none; no extortion or intimidation. Be satisfied with your wage. And John's answer is to challenge people's generosity and sense of fairness, so that others may have reason to rejoice (**Denis McBride, *Seasons of the Word, St Paul's, Mumbai 1997 p29***).

John goes deep and demands justice, fairness in our dealings with one another. Then he points

to another who will clear his threshing floor to reveal the solid wheat of our deeds; but the chaff, fiddling with surface things with no change of heart, all these things and we with them, will be swept into the fire.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. He will immerse you in God's mercy, love and peace. He will drown your failures in his justice and you will be filled with strength and joy, with a new will. Those facing obstacles in life or failed dreams may ask: what must we do? It's not a matter of doing. Let God do it; let the Father's creative Word transform us into the image of his Son and make us better able to follow the One who comes and to be builders of the kingdom of peace, justice and salvation. Then he will make our religion real, uniting God and human beings in everyday life, to serve God in our neighbour and truly be sons and daughters of God.

Cardinal Newman prayed: "Shine through me and be so in me, that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my spirit."

John was so on the mark, a man of such integrity and stature, but in our time, we find him too demanding, too forthright a believer. Yet we have a lesson here. The name Christian hasn't been especially threatening or strong of late, nor has it carried any power of witness or evangelisation or special identity. Perhaps it is time to reclaim and restore the name we carry and make it mean something in our lives and in the lives of others. Joy springs from a life well lived!

May the Lord Jesus, whose coming is near, surprise you with joy!

Second Homily

Last Friday night, thirty-eight of us went singing carols around the streets to our parishioners who were homebound, not well, or had asked us to come. It was a wonderful experience of shared community, seeing the joy it brought them and us. In one home, all the neighbours came around and wanted us to stay, but we had to move on to the next houses. When the commercial world is full blown into Christmas with the lights, families and children eager to shop, it helped us deepen the joy and interiorise the meaning of Christmas. Although we are here in Advent which is a bit more sombre with an accent on eager preparation. Still the joy breaks out on this 3rd Sunday of Advent.

The first reading captures the joy: "And the Father will dance, as on a day of joy, day of joy. He will exult over you and renew you by his love." It's as if Yahweh has taken Daughter Sion in his arms and joins her in a vibrant polka or bebop.

Today is Rejoice (Gaudete) Sunday, taken from the first words of the Second Reading. Joy breaks out in the most unexpected places. Thomas Moore the American psychoanalyst challenged one of his patients who hated his job, was bored and depressed in it, and did it badly, to take seriously his job. The man responded incredulously, "You're saying that I should go to this stupid job as if my heart is in it?" "You're in it, aren't you?" Moore replied. The man came back a week later to say that

something had changed in him as he began to take his 'stupid' job more seriously.

John the Baptist teaches us to live in this world with humility, which means seeing ourselves against the horizon of God and the task he has set before us. Seeing the impact of John on the crowds, people were saying John might be the Messiah, but John knows who he is. He is not the Messiah despite the press of the crowd. His mission is to prepare the people through a washing of repentance, knowing that someone unknown to him is coming who will transform people from within by the fire of his love.

John is the friend of the Bridegroom who is coming for his bride, his people; so John must decrease and let the person of Jesus fill his world. This is his joy and ultimately ours. Let's live where we are with humility, do what we have to do with love, and be open to the Lord who can broaden our horizons, so that we can live joyfully in this world.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Mic 5:1-4

Heb 10:5-10

Lk 1:39-44

Mary, a young girl of 15, hastened. The Greek word for hasten is 'spoude,' which means zeal, enthusiasm bubbling over, fervour. Mother Teresa commented, joy gave Mary haste. She was full of joy because she was full of Jesus! And what a visit that was!

Child-bearers became the first heralds of the King of kings; Mary and Elizabeth greet each other with prophetic words, and John salutes Jesus from the womb. Mary, the new ark of the covenant, carrying the divine presence, caused the Holy Spirit to fill John, and Elizabeth, who broke into song that Mary was the Mother of God. "Blessed are you, Mary; blessed is the child you bear. Why should I be honoured by a visit from the Mother of my Lord" (a reference to 2 Samuel 6:8 where David speaks about the ark which he is bringing into Jerusalem). Elizabeth's song, as John leapt in her womb, like David leaping and dancing before the ark, puts words to the mystery that no matter how small, least, or insignificant we may be, like coming from Nazareth or Bethlehem, God is with us in Jesus.

This came about because Mary embraced God's plan. The presence of Christ among us brings us great joy. But it's not automatic. From our side the important thing is to discover what God wants from each one of us and be brave enough to say "Yes." "When God has a proposition for us, like the one he had for Mary," wrote Pope Francis, "it is not intended to extinguish our dreams, but to ignite our aspirations." Mary is graced, gifted in a way unsought for, chosen by God for God's plan. Just as the Word, the Son of God, said yes to his Father's plan in becoming totally identified with us as Jesus of Nazareth. Yet everything hangs on Mary's response. And she did respond. That is why Elizabeth spoke, "Blessed are you for believing that the promise made to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

How many of us have really thought about God's plan for us? Pope Francis invites you and me to enter within ourselves and ask God what he wants from each one of us. What proposition does God have for you and me? "Then you will see how your life is transformed and filled with joy." Mary believed the promise made by the angel. She believed she will conceive and bear a Son, and that the Lord is with her in all that is happening.

God's plan is being realised quietly. Mary had to wait. Only a woman can really empathise with Mary – with all the depth of feeling, turmoil, anxiousness, the experiential impact of pregnancy. A child changes a woman's lifestyle and person. She will never be the same again.

"Watching and waiting, wondering why I'm so restless and sleepless, waking in the night.

What was promised soon will be here, I am yearning for him. There's a stirring deep inside me as I'm waiting, waiting for the child."

And the child that Mary waits for, will change not only her lifestyle, but the lifestyle of all who will follow her Son. Still Mary is not servile or passive. She searches to understand God's intent – How can this be? And the surrender – “Oh, then let it be according to your plan, I am your handmaid” is not a servile response but a willingness to serve. God's plan becomes her mission – to make space for God, for the work of God in her Son Jesus.

In putting herself at the disposal of God and his plan, Mary had to form, nurture, educate but not cling to her Son, nor be an obstacle but to allow Jesus to follow his Father's plan and bring it to fulfilment. Mary had to wait as we wait, to go beyond the attachment of being his mother, to be a disciple who learns and follows in faith.

“Searching and sighing, waiting for the dawn of a new day of promise. Emmanuel come forth. Soon he'll be here, right before me, I am ready for him. There's a stirring deep inside me as I'm waiting, waiting for the child” (Michael Mangan).

Emmanuel, God-is-with-us. There were times when we had more difficulty with the “*with us*” part. We found it easier to believe that Jesus was God *than that he was truly human*. For us today, the situation is the reverse, “*He's a man, He's just a man,*” Magdalene sang, in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. No! He's both God and Man; the Council of Chalcedon put us on track. The challenge is to earnestly seek to understand what the incarnation (**in-carne**) means, that the **Word became flesh in order to save us**.

But God's plan embraces the universe with its unknown number of galaxies – (we haven't come to the edge of our own galaxy), **and the incarnation we celebrate at Christmas is central to its unfolding**. We have narrowed the incarnation to the human dimension of Adam's sin, the Fall, and Christ's coming to restore what has been lost. But God's plan is grander than that!

God the Father fashioned, out of nothing except by his love, the universe from its beginning through the Word and the Spirit like two hands, into an evolutionary future; and God sending the Word, his Son, to become flesh in Jesus is pivotal to that plan. Advent is the mystery of God preparing for his bride, (the whole of creation), by the Word, God's Son, becoming a creature with all creation. Not only we humans, but the whole cosmos as bride is longing to be embraced, open to receive the richness of God.

The present generation no longer sees the universe as fixed and unchanging; modern science sees the world in process of coming to birth, of moving toward some form of full realisation. **The Catechism of the Catholic Church** has moved away from the notion of an all-perfect world as implied in the traditional teaching of Eden. Instead it acknowledges that “*creation did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator*” and speaks, rather, of a universe “*created ‘in a state of journeying (in statu viae), towards an ultimate perfection yet to be attained to which the Creator has destined it’ (#302)*”. Not only does God desire the sanctification of human beings, but today God is concerned for the redemption of our created universe which is groaning in one great

act of giving birth.

How is it possible for a Transcendent God to become a creature, to take the whole of creation to himself as God? *In both creation and the incarnation*, the Word of God is a *self-humbling God* who descends to be with creatures for the sake of their creation and deification – *God's abasement in Jesus* enables direct contact between the Transcendent God and creation. Vincent Pallotti in awe of this mystery said it was “the invention of Infinite Love.” Creation is an icon of God, yet Jesus is the cosmic pattern according to which all things were made. We contemplate the traces of God in creation, and explore our place within his grand plan.

“Our fulfilment is not in our isolated human grandeur, but in our intimacy with the larger earth community for this is the larger dimension of our being. Our human destiny is integral with the destiny of the earth” (**Thomas Berry: Dream of the earth**). David Ellyard, the astrophysicist, after studying the relationship between the formation of stars and the human body which contains the same basic gases and primal material, concluded, “*We are made of stardust.*”

Vincent Pallotti had a similar vision. In his spiritual attempts to span the abyss between himself and an infinite God, he called on *all created things, from the created humanity of Jesus, Mary, to all animate and inanimate things to create a bridge for him*’. He saw all created things as means leading to God, *culminating in Jesus as cosmic Christ, who redeemed us, not only by the powers of his soul and body, but also by the basic formative elements of every created being that constituted his body. Like the thin edge of the wedge, Jesus in the humanity he shares with us has brought all creation to God.* Jesus is one with us and with the universe. Pope Francis insists that “the earth is our common home, that everything is interrelated and interdependent, and that we are all kin, participants in a sublime communion of creation” (**Laudato Si, par17 and 24**).

THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

Year C

The Nativity of Our Lord

Is 62: 11-12

Titus 3:4-7

Lk 2:15-20

Christmas Eve Children's Mass

(The priest picks up one of the shepherds, a father and his son) "My name is Jacob and this is my son, Rueben, I am one of the shepherds. Come with us to catch the wonder, joyfully breathless, as we see with our own eyes this event, this thing happening that God has made known to us. We need to get down on our knees with the other shepherds and gaze into the cave that doubles as a stable, if we want to understand the mystery of Christmas.

"We hurried here at the message of an angel — tidings of Good News — a Gospel of great joy, "Today, a Saviour has been born to us. He is Christ the Lord!" The angels sang "Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth." But why to us, shepherds, poor, homeless men who carry the smell of the sheep? Why to us this treasure? Because having nothing, we are totally open to receive."

Are we totally open to receive, or are we like the little girl who dropped some money into her parents' vase and wouldn't let the \$2.00 coins go from her clenched fist? Her parents had to smash the precious vase to get her free. At Christmas, parents, spouse, brothers, sisters, friends give gifts hoping to please, but are often disappointed because once unwrapped, gifts are either left or grabbed as mine, the gift and the love behind it not acknowledged.

Look at the Christ Child that the shepherds saw — he came with open hands, totally poor, yet giving all, weak, helpless, sharing our human condition but without sin.

Yesterday our community heard and prayed for a child about to be born. The message was not from angels but from Waverley Hospital. A little girl was born prematurely with a tumour that was blocking her breathing; she was born at 4.05 pm, I baptized her in Christ at 4.30, and at 5.30 she died. Demi Sarah was so small and fragile; she let me enter and catch something of the mystery of Jesus — a child born, destined to die, heaven's gates are opened wide'

"In wonder, we shepherds realised that Jesus took our flesh; its grace and beauty, but especially its weight, sickness and suffering, its uncertainties, its being marked for death — but he came to free us, forgive us — to share our humanity so as to share in his divinity."

"Today, a Saviour has been born to you. We shepherds heard that '*Today.*' Then thirty years' later we heard him say '*Today,*' what Isaiah prophesied. of the poor hearing the Good News — of cripples and blind being healed and prisoners set free, '*Today is being fulfilled even as you listen!*' Three years later, we heard him say to a thief beside him on the cross, '*Today, you will be with me in paradise.*' And we realized Jesus came to bring us peace by his birth and by his death."

Dr John Rosen, a psychiatrist in New York City, worked with catatonic patients, He moved his

bed into the ward and lived alongside them. He lived the life they must live day by day — if they don't talk, he doesn't talk either. It is as if he understands what is happening. But then he does something else; he puts his arms round them and holds these unattractive, unloveable and sometimes incontinent persons, and loves them back to life. This is what Jesus did in a profound way, He moved his bed among our beds and loved us into life. In this time of grabbing, of violence and war, Jesus demonstrates that he is not the lover of power but the power of love.

"Oh, I meant to tell you, when we were much older, we shepherds were sitting together, trying to remember the tune the angels sang. There was me and Rueben and Rueben's son who wasn't born at the time. Suddenly the bleating of a lamb was heard; we stayed around the fire, but Rueben's son went in search of the lamb. Bruised and cut, he eventually found the lamb and carried it back on his shoulders. To our amazement, he was humming the tune the angels sang so long ago.

It is in giving not grabbing, in loving and forgiving that Christ continues his song among us. *Today a Saviour has been born to us.* A merry, peace-filled Christmas to you all.

Second Homily

There is something wonderful about Christmas – it is the spirit of Christmas. Sure, it is commercialised but people do go out of their way to be kind, helpful to others with a word or a gesture. It is the powerful currency of the Christian tradition, but a currency that can be de-valued. Unless Christmas is in our hearts, we will not find it under the tree – I mean, unless we personally meet Christ, all the presents, the material things don't really satisfy.

The gifts we chose and wrapped so carefully are often ripped open and perhaps, after ten minutes, the toys are discarded. More and more expensive can be the cry and we are disappointed! We need to awaken the inner creativity, love and imagination of the human spirit.

We are invited this Christmas to make Christ not the spare tyre, but the driving wheel of our lives – not when there's a breakdown, we call on Him – but Christ as the direction, the polestar in our thinking, acting, relating to others. He is the reason for this season, but let us not make Him a seasonal thing. So what is the reason for Christmas, for you and me? The deepest reason, shown graphically in that Christian television ad that God became human. The early Church added, "So that humans could become God." But I think, so that we could learn to be truly human the way God intends us to be. Jesus comes as the sign and cause of our human transformation. He comes to save – by working His salvation deep within our humanity and our world.

God in Christ did not slip on human nature, like a workman putting on overalls to repair some damage. He entered into our lives – our sexuality, our sweat, our emotions, anger, hurt, sorrow and our pain. Gregory of Nazianzen wrote "the unassumed is the unhealed" – there was nothing about us that appalled Christ. He became our brother.

He comes to encourage, bring us to mature personhood. Each Christmas for me is a question and challenge – how have I grown in my humanity. Before I can witness as a Christian, people must experience me as truly human! How alive am I to this world I live in? I want to make loving Christ the central, totally absorbing energy and aim of my being, and at the same time the love, emotional drive towards interpersonal love – as Jesus matured through birth, childhood teenage and adulthood – he is the sign and cause of our maturing.

Wise men are still searching for that star to discover how to be human now. Wise women have already discovered that star and encourage their men also to discover the ways into deeper humanity. May this Christmas not just be about gifts – but the gift of ourselves in loving, human, and divine ways.

Third Homily

Is 9:1-7

Titus 2:11-14

Lk 2:11-14

“Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.” Then God’s mighty Word leapt down ... in silence. God slips quietly into our lives. When we approach the crib at Bethlehem on tip toe (depending how small we are) or on our knees with the shepherds, we gaze in wonder and awe at this event that has come to pass. The mighty Word of God has become flesh in Jesus. God’s Son has become human. Some things can only be expressed in poetry or song. I think we have allowed ourselves to be short-changed when political correctness stopped carol singing in kindergartens and supermarkets; carols which captured the imagination of children as they re-enacted the birth of Jesus and joined with shepherds and angels in proclaiming the Good News.

Last night a group of us sang carols and the neighbours drew near, and in the candle light, felt close to each other, and affirmed our story and sense as a parish as it used to be. When the Vikings raided Saxon villages, they sought out and killed the story-tellers. If you take away a people’s story that holds their dreams and past together, the people lose their connection with each other, their meaning as a people and their purpose.

It is the children who draw us here, who lead us to wonder, who want to lead us into what the poet Blake called our second state of innocence. Small and close to the earth, children see things that miss our attention, a cicada shell, a leaf, a bird that slipped into the drain outside. Children have a real sense of mystery, of God at the heart of life. They help us to see with wide-open eyes, as Mary, Joseph and the shepherds see, with wonder at the sight of the baby Jesus.

The thing about wonder is that it draws us close to something that is beyond us, greater than we are. It counters the aloofness or cynicism we may feel toward God and the distance we put between us. In Jesus, God drew near to us in person – there was no loving from a distance. He loved us at close quarters, literally got under our skin, to feel what we feel, both the exhilaration of

life, the joys of family and friends and the pain that we all of us meet.

“There was blood and sweat and pain that Christmas night, not the blood and pain of war and death, but that of birth. The light that gleams on the birthing woman's sweat, the glistening womb-wet child and the gentle, calloused and midwifing hands of a carpenter will become the great light for those who walk in darkness. In this beginning the Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God – the Word made flesh – can only whimper and fill his mouth with his mother's breast. His newborn eyes do not yet focus on the world beyond the womb. And we respond to Isaiah's words with joyful faith, “Today is born our Saviour, Christ the Lord” (***Verna Holyhead, With Burning Hearts Welcoming the Word in Year C, John Garrett Publishing, Melbourne, p.14***).

We need to create family traditions at Christmas. Rather than rushing for the presents under the Christmas tree, pause a moment at the crib, retell the Christmas story, the gift of the Father in giving us Jesus. Where did God choose his Son to be born? Not in a great castle with security and comfort, but in a stable shared with animals, to a poor family who had no money to get a room, and in a feeding trough, a manger. It may not look like an appropriate place for Jesus to be born. It may be too messy, too smelly and exposed. But Jesus wants to be born there. In the same way he wants to enter our lives, no matter how messy, smelly, seemingly unworthy, too sinful for him to be there.

But Jesus does not wait for us to fix our lives up before he can come in. He wants to be with now, as we are, where we are. Will I make myself available for him. Our lives are not perfect, His today is now –Today is born in me my Saviour, Christ the Lord. A blessed and holy Christmas, make room for him, let him enter in. God bless you and keep you all.

Fourth Homily

Is 52:7-10

Heb1:1-6

Jn 1:1-18

From you children I catch the excitement that this night holds. How hard it is to go to sleep with one eye open. You just know that something wonderful is on the way. And now it's here! Everywhere! Welcome to Christmas that begs us to live with both eyes wide open. Mary and Joseph's eyes, the shepherds' eyes are wide open with wonder at this little babe with arms outstretched to us.

I want to tell you a secret. It is so extraordinary we can scarcely take it in! It is so ordinary that we easily overlook it! God became one of us to set us free from sin. God became human in Jesus, born in Bethlehem to help us grow to be fully alive. You know what it is like when we gather around the Christmas table and tell good stories, make people laugh. Christmas is the invention of infinite love. Only an infinitely loving God could have chosen this way. This little child is God's son, extending God's unconditional love to you and me. He took our human nature in order to confer on us the dignity of the children of God.

Children have a real sense of mystery, of God at the heart of life. They help us see with wide open eyes that the ideology, or political correctness of some people, trying to take Christ more and more out of Christmas, and out of life is wrong. If this one feast causes "people to smile more, or my grandpa who is always sick, gets better," "mum cooks good food," and "my dad is nice to me," as some children said, then think of the impact that living Christmas every day would have on the lives of others. So I am saying to parents and children, before we rush to the Christmas tree and the presents underneath, stop a moment at the crib and thank God and wonder at the mystery of the Incarnation, about God's Son becoming one of us. In the spirit of this season, we become aware of possibilities.

John's Gospel celebrates "the Word become flesh, dwelling among us." and empowering us to become children of God. Just think of the possibilities. When Jesus Christ was born what a vast potential for good lay in that crib of straw. We can be different and come to experience life more abundantly. Christmas encourages us to be aware of our capacity for change or growth. Life need never be boring, a drudge or stagnant because our possibilities are inexhaustible.

He came to save us. I do not need a saviour. But I am becoming increasingly aware with job losses, homelessness, the grip of depression, or the easy acceptance of pornography, the grip of gambling, or drink, of a call to be in solidarity with the poor. St Augustine who found a new start in Jesus, wrote "How much you loved us, O God. If your Word had not become flesh and had not dwelt among us, we would have had to believe that there was no connection between God and humanity, and we would have been in despair."

In Jesus, God drew near to us in person – there was no loving from a distance. He loved us at close quarters. This time is for us a time to return to him. In Jesus, God meets us where we are; shows us how to fully live. The joy of life is in the living! If we have things to do and places to go, our energy level will remain high, and life will be vibrant.

Let's give ourselves a Christmas gift this year and replace the "I can't" that may have led us to become stuck, giving up on ourselves, denying our talents and becoming fatalistic about the future, with possibility thinking. What is waiting to be born in us? What talents have we neglected over the years? What dreams of our childhood are still awaiting fulfilment? Let's take time to make them come alive.

In this way we bring joy and hope to others and celebrate the gift of an ever-new start, of the ever-offered possibility of personal renewal and the restoration of innocence among us in the gifts we give to one another – gifts of goodwill and peace, of goodness and love, symbolized in the material gifts we give to one another. A blessed, holy and fully human Christmas be with you and yours.

Christmas Day (Midnight Mass)

Is 9:1-7

Tit 2:11-14

Lk 2:15=20

Welcome everyone to our celebration of this holy night, the night when Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Mary, was born. If we come this night out of nostalgia then the church is full, as it is tonight. If we come only in faith, what would it be like then? Yet it is the children who draw us here, who lead us to wonder, who want to lead us into what the poet Blake called our second state of innocence. Small and close to the earth, children see things that miss our attention, a cicada shell, a leaf, a bird that slipped into the drain outside. Children have a real sense of mystery, of God at the heart of life. They help us to see with wide-open eyes, as Mary, Joseph and the shepherds see, with wonder at the sight of the baby Jesus. Don't be too grown-up, afraid to kneel at the crib and wonder, and take it all in – here is God becoming one of us, going through what we all go through, to transform and make holy our lives.

The thing about wonder is that it draws us close to something that is beyond us, greater than we are. It counters the aloofness or cynicism we may feel toward God and the distance we put between us. In Jesus, God drew near to us in person – there was no loving from a distance. He loved us at close quarters, literally got under our skin, to feel what we feel, both the exhilaration of life, the joys of family and friends and the pain that we all of us meet.

I lost my tooth on Friday night and now it's back. A miracle? No! but the loving action of a dentist who opened his door when his staff had gone home and did remedial work on my tooth. It made me think gratefully of all the loving actions of so many of you, for which I thank you and thank God. On the other hand, how do we keep open the door to people who are homeless or to others who do not want the help they most desperately need. I'm not a saviour of all the people or problems that life throws up, but we need a Saviour who wants to reach out to people through us.

It reminded me of the story of a farmer in Canada who did not believe in all this Christmas stuff. His family had gone off to Christmas Eve Mass, when a flock of migrating geese attracted by the house lights landed at his farm in the freezing cold. Despite all his efforts to try to get them into his barn for shelter, he frightened them away, scattering them in all directions. He wished he could get into the mind of the lead goose and bring them to warmth and safety. The bell rang in the nearby church steeple. It was then he realised that God had done precisely what he would have liked to do, in becoming one of us to save us.

St Augustine who found a new start in Jesus wrote, "How much you loved us, O God. If your Word had not become flesh and had not dwelt among us, we would have had to believe that there was no connection between God and humanity, and we would have been in despair."

Let's give ourselves a Christmas gift this year and replace the 'I can't' that may have led us to become stuck, giving up on ourselves, denying our giftedness and becoming fatalistic about the

future, with possibility thinking.

What is waiting to be born in us? What dreams of our childhood are still awaiting fulfilment? Let's take time or seek help to make them come alive. May you experience the gift of an ever-new start, the ever-offered possibility, the restoration of innocence among us, in the gifts we give to one another – gifts of goodwill and peace, of goodness and love, symbolised in the material gifts we give to one another.

A blessed, holy and fully human Christmas be with you and yours.

Feast of the Holy Family

Ecclus 3:2-6, 12-14

Col :12-21

Lk 2:41-52

Two cribs came back to the presbytery after travelling around the parish for all the Sundays of Advent. I was really privileged to read the comments made in the diaries that accompanied the cribs. Here are some excerpts: One person wrote, "The presence of the crib with me, was a beacon of calm and peace at this busy time. It was a joy to have the Holy Family in our home." Another wrote, "I talked to the Holy Family in the silence of my home. I know they have listened to me." "Spending time in front of the crib we realised that 'time' was the most important gift we could offer the Holy Family. We felt peace, love and serenity fill our hearts and our home."

"Thank you for the opportunity to be able to gather and pray as a family," "Dear Jesus, thank you for coming to our home. The presence of the crib made us feel so blessed, we were able to pray together. Let us put you in the centre of our daily life and be aware of each other's needs patiently." A wife wrote, "Mary, Joseph and Jesus coming to our home made my husband and I pray together for the three nights." One child wrote, "thank you for enlightening our house." A few times Jesus was adored as Saviour and what he went through to save us.

What do you hear? I hear the yearning to be together as a family, to pray together, to put Jesus centre stage in our lives as he invites us to gently to deal with one another. I hear the desire to make time for him in our busy lives. It's interesting that having the Holy Family, the crib at our home, the reading and the prayer helped us break down the distance between us. Pope Francis said that for a family to be holy, it prays. And voices the objection, 'But how can we? Prayer seems to be something personal, and besides there is never a good time, a moment of peace...' And he replies, "Yes, all that is true enough, but it is also a matter of humility, of realizing that we need God... all of us! We need his help, his strength, his blessing, his mercy, his forgiveness. And we need simplicity to pray as a family: simplicity is necessary!" And that is what the cribs did. They enabled us with our children or alone to simply be before Jesus and pray. Many entries said there was the feeling of peace and joy.

Jesus came into our human family to encourage us, bring us to mature personhood. Just as Jesus grew as a child, a teenager, and then to mature adulthood, so he becomes for every stage of growth the sign and cause of our maturing. We see that in the Holy Family as Mary and Joseph like any parent know the anguish of losing a child, no matter what their age. At Passover time Mary and Joseph search for Jesus for three days among the relatives, then back to Jerusalem and finally they find him in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking questions.

You hear the anguished rebuke in Mary's words, "Son, why have you done this to us... your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow?" What might have been a sword thrust through

Joseph's heart was Jesus' quiet assertion, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business." It's not rebellion but Jesus finding his identity in terms of his relationship with God. But he returns with them to Nazareth in obedience which is not a sullen putting up with parents. It is growth within relationships.

What makes a family or a community is not so much the number, as the quality of the relationships between the members. It's not a matter of counting heads as fostering the right spirit between parents, brothers and sisters, and ourselves. The need for self-realization, to become oneself in relationships can lead to dissent – a valid and necessary stage. It needs to come to the shared power and authority of adults in freedom as expressed in friendship, family, and community.

Jesus' obedience in a deeper sense will lead Jesus to another Passover when he will be lost in the tomb for three days, but ultimately through death - resurrection will lead us into us finding our identity in him and in the Father and the Spirit.

Second Homily

You only live once, so why not go out in style? That's what two cancer-ward roommates, an irascible billionaire (Jack Nicholson) and a scholarly mechanic (Morgan Freeman) decide when they get the bad news. They compose a bucket list – things to do before they kick the bucket, and head off for the-around-the-world-adventure of their lives, sky diving, powering a Shelby Mustang around a racetrack, gazing at the Pyramid of Khufu, discovering the joy of life before it is too late.

Two things that spoke to me in the film, ***The Bucket List***, were: joy is not found in living for oneself. During the adventure Edwin Perriman Coe, the billionaire, seemed to gain little from the adventure. He lived only for this life and for kicks, he had no faith. He went home to an empty house and wept. Carter, the mechanic, who had foregone so much in his 45 years of married life to see his family well-provided for, enjoyed each experience of the adventure. He went home to a renewed appreciation of his wife and family, to the warmth, joy and welcome he and his wife had nurture.

The second thing was the role of the father, his lived values, openness to life and his faith, and the power of his committed relationship to his wife. Together they created the love and stability of their family. It was only after Carter's asking Edwin to be reconciled with his daughter and her child that Edwin found joy. At Carter's funeral, Edwin said, "He saved my life."

Joy in the family! What a wonderful gift. It doesn't just happen but has to be worked at. We grow through relationships, a process that begins with the family. Today, the Feast of the Holy Family, we are presented with a model for parents as well as for children. A retreat director was talking about the Holy Family as a model of all families, and one man spoke up. "It was alright for them. Mary and Joseph were saints and Jesus was the Son of God. We are just ordinary struggling

families." The priest asked, "Have you found your wife pregnant before you ever came to live together, and you didn't know by whom? Did you lose your son for three days and had to search anxiously for him?"

The liturgy at Christmas invites us to return to Bethlehem for a brief moment and relive and retell one particular family story. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *'The Joy of Love,'* writes "Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod's implacable violence" (*par 30*). His Exhortation draws together the results from the Synod on the Family. It spells out in real and concrete terms the family in Scripture; the Challenges facing the family; the Vocation of the Family, in the teaching of Jesus, in the documents of the Church; the Sacrament of Marriage in its richness; and love in marriage - a realistic spirituality of conjugal Love. I recommend this to you.

This feast of the Holy Family is not to be understood only as a celebration of the nuclear family, but as a continuous celebration of the incarnation of God in the human story which in its newness changed the history of the world. Jesus lived and grew up in a human family, not protected from the stress and heartache which is part of every ordinary family life. The family is meant to protect the vulnerability of the young. The Mc world of consumption works to brand a child by the age of three. So many enticing forces want to take hold of their minds and hearts already by twelve or thirteen years.

Joseph plays a key role in the family. Many things come about, as God wants them to happen, because Joseph is listening to God and his messenger and promptly obeys. Joseph takes Mary to his home; goes to Bethlehem for the census; he flees with the child and Mary into Egypt and he returns, when it's safe, to Bethlehem and then to Nazareth. The calling power of Joseph, his authority, is one of service. With a listening heart and prompt action, he preserves the Child and Mary from danger. God communicates to Mary and Jesus through Joseph and keeps his protecting hand over the Holy Family.

Prayerful oversight, energetic action, a providing and mediating role, are often at a discount with the retrenchment of men after a certain age. A key role of the father is affirmation. He does not nurture like the mother, but he can affirm the growing sense of self, competency and beauty in his sons and daughters. Don't sideline the father; but a father must exercise authority by drawing out the best in his wife and children.

It is in our family that ideally we are to grow. On the children's side is the obligation to resolve and lay to rest any hurt between siblings and parents, especially when parents are getting older, otherwise, we carry hurt and resentment with us as a dog buried alive and still kicking in us. Paul in Colossians presents us with down-to-earth Christian virtues that promote relationships: being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient, bearing one another's burdens and especially forgiving as the Lord has forgiven us, and loving in an atmosphere of prayer and gratitude. It

highlights the relationship of children to parents and the quality of reverence.

Grandparents have a great role here. They need not accept the negative image of old age; they represent the historical memory of the younger generations. Walking them to school or baby-sitting, you share faith and fundamental human values. Young people without roots, fearful of the future, gain hope from you. You bring a perspective that can soften the painful side of life.

Third Homily

We can view the Holy Family as a nuclear family, Joseph, Mary and their son, Jesus, together with the extended family of relatives and friends, which provides a support system where Jesus and other youngsters would be secure, such as the wider family we hear of in the journey back from the Passover Feast. In reality, families are much more diverse, scarred by problems and worries, and marked by frequent failure, with much need for reconciliation and outside support. We are faced with a bewildering array of marriage and sexualities. We have to learn how God's own life can be touched in single-parent families, elderly couples, and all the other units that make up the family.

But the question facing me is how are families preparing their children for life and the building of a positive and productive society? For we know that children of dysfunctional families are two or three times more likely to have emotional or behavioural problems than children who had both biological parents in the home.

"The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual ... it is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses." The married couple give and give unconditionally to their children and wider family, often without immediate reward. They are a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children, witnesses of the salvation — which they share through the sacrament **(cf Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family par 72*)**.

A single tree exposed to all weather bears the effects of winds and sun, but if it's in a clump of trees it tends to grow up straight and tall. The whole family needs ongoing support, often from peer families who have successfully navigated difficult times for themselves and their children. It's not only theology but the shared wisdom that comes from the life of families, even the trivial matching of socks and other daily challenges they share. "Neither of the spouses will be alone in facing whatever challenges may come their way. Both are called to respond to God's gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort **(AL 74)**."

Their sexual union, lovingly experienced and sanctified by the sacrament, is in turn a path of growth in the life of grace for the couple. It is a nuptial mystery, expressed in the words of consent, in which they accepted and offered themselves each to the other, in order to share their lives completely.... it takes away any ambiguity." The family offers in the liturgy the mystery of God's

awesome presence in our midst (**Carroll Stuhlmueller CP**).

The Holy Family was not free of struggles. Mary and Joseph, like any parent, knew the anguish of losing a child, no matter what their age. At Passover-time Mary and Joseph search for Jesus for three days among their relatives, then back to Jerusalem, until finally they find him in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking questions. You hear the anguished rebuke in Mary's words, "Son, why have you done this to us... your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow?" What might have been a sword-thrust through Joseph's heart was Jesus' quiet assertion, "Did you not know that I must be about *my* Father's business." It's not rebellion but Jesus finding his identity in terms of his relationship with God his Father, seeking to discover his mission for God.

Twelve was the age among the Jews when a person was becoming an adult. Yet Jesus returns with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth in obedience, which is not a sullen putting up with parents. There is a natural authority in parents that comes from authoring their children and it needs the wisdom of both to know when to loosen the reins. Family fosters growth within relationships.

What makes a family or a community is the quality of the relationships between the members. It is not an aggregate of individuals but the achievement of common meaning, fostering the right spirit between parents, brothers and sisters, and ourselves. The need for self-realization, to become oneself in relationships can lead to dissent — a valid and necessary stage.

The children need to recognise in older parents that "an elder is a person who is still growing, still filled with potential, and still in pursuit of happiness, joy and pleasure, and his or her birthright remains intact" (**Barry Barkan**). Jesus' obedience in a deeper sense will lead him to another Passover when he will be lost in the tomb for three days, but ultimately through death and resurrection will lead us into finding our identity in him and in the Father and the Spirit.

Just as Jesus grew as a child, a teenager, and then to mature adulthood, so he becomes for every stage of growth the sign and cause of our maturing. The Holy family calls us to discipleship. Marriage means the commitment of a man and a woman to the joint venture of discipleship together, aware that Jesus promises to be present where two or three are gathered in his name. As parents they will be responsible for the primary socialization of new members of the community. It is both a task and a joy.

Feast of the Holy Innocents

1 Jn 1:5 -2:2

Mt 2: 13-18

Joseph knows that to embrace this child, is to embrace suffering. He is constantly called to awake from dreaming and act on the dream that the Lord had given.

The concern of parents may not be as dramatic as Joseph and Mary's, but there is the worry about providing, making ends meet, and the day-to-day guiding of their children. In the tension of their children wanting to break loose from restrictions of family, parents are constantly aware and concerned about the King Herods that seek to ensnare or destroy their children.

Take the letters H E R O D. **H** stands for King Heroin, the drug culture inviting the young to take drugs for kicks, to experiment which can only lead to kickbacks, death of many who drive under its influence, or the mental, social and physical effects of drug-taking. **E** stands for King Erotic, sex is presented as recreational, not relational as God meant it to be. This King claims 42 per cent single mothers, children who are fatherless, and thousands aborted. **R** stands for King Rage, the violence we live with daily, and incessantly presented and glorified in the media. Physical and moral violence. Crime in the streets. Crime in the home. The **O** stands for King Only. Only my clan, my tribe, my colour, my way. Others are suspect. Hate and racism flourish where this King reigns. The **D** stands for King Divorce, arguably the most common form of child abuse. **(From William Bausch, The Word. Homilies and how to write them, p. 179)**

It is in our family that ideally we are to grow. On the children's side is the obligation to resolve and lay to rest any hurt between siblings and parents, especially when parents are getting older, otherwise, we carry hurt and resentment with us as a dog buried alive and still kicking in us. Paul in Colossians presents us with down-to-earth Christian virtues that promote relationships: being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient, bearing one another's burdens and especially forgiving as the Lord has forgiven us, and loving in an atmosphere of prayer and gratitude.

Like Joseph, parents have one thing that gives them courage in facing and outwitting the King Herods in their lives: they have their dreams. They have in fact three dreams for their children: *Word dreams, Will dreams and Worship dreams.*

Word dreams. They are determined to get to their children first and say, "We can make our children's lives happier; we can keep our family strong; we can offer reassurance, support and concern. From the beginning we will use words like "Please" and 'thank you' and 'I'm sorry' and 'I love you' over and over until they catch our children's souls.

Will dreams. Dreaming of a good education for my children means that I will attend parent-teacher meeting. I will see that homework is done. I will monitor TV. Dreaming of a better neighbourhood, I will recycle, I will keep the property clean, I will not litter. Dreaming of closer family ties means that I will put the family ahead of a career, material gain, and social climbing. I

will give them the most precious gift: time.

Worship dreams. I will pray. I will teach them to pray. I will take my children to church from the beginning to let them know they belong to a larger faith community, that there is something more to life. Someone more to life. I will let them know of their privileged lives that they must share with the children of the world who go to bed hungry each night and many of whom do not wake up the next morning.

Such dreams will overcome and outwit King Herod. Dreams inspired by God, carried by an angel, and fulfilled by those who dare to cherish and live by them. You are dreamers, dream boldly, dream openly, dream loudly. May God bless you and your family. **(From William Bausch, The Word. Homilies and how to write them, p. 181).**

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Num 6:22-27

Gal 4:4-7

Lk 2:16-21

On this first day of January, I wish you every blessing for the New Year. The name "January" comes from the Roman god Janus, the god with two faces, one looking to the past and the other looking to the future. Take time today to look back at the year that has just ended and to look forward to the new year ahead.

How did I spend this one year of my life that has just passed — between the demands of work, family, friends and society, and the demands of my spiritual life? When we ask a question like this it leads naturally to setting goals and resolutions for the New Year. Resolutions are different from wishes. A wish identifies a goal I would like to reach, a resolution specifies the steps I need to take to reach that goal, such as having to face changes in employment, juggling financial concerns, disruption of holiday plans because of Covid, needing to share with my spouse or family and not having to bear all the problems on my own.

The fundamental message of Christmas to the shepherds and to us is that "Jesus is Lord", "A Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord." We are invited to place our lives under the Lordship of Jesus to let him lead us. Can we make time to pray, to really ponder over today's scriptures?

As we begin the New Year, the Gospel presents Mary to us as a model of that new life in Christ that all of us wish for ourselves. There we see that Mary was prepared to do something to realise this goal. In two instances, the coming of the shepherds at the message of the angels, and the finding of Jesus in the temple. We are told that Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. The Greek word for ponder, means to piece together; to come to grips with what God was doing in her life. She made time to ponder the Word of God. She found the Word of God both in divine revelation (the angel's words to the shepherds) and in her own experience (her encounter with her son in the temple). What was happening in her life was a great mystery to be discovered little by little.

The Jewish people in the first reading placed themselves under the name of Yahweh, that name meant protection, blessing, grace and peace. It is faith in that name, in Jesus our Saviour that gives us heart to dare something with our lives in this coming year. If Mary ponders the shepherds' message it's not putting off doing something. No, she is putting two and two together. It's a gathering of all her strength on this plateau so that she can make a leap of faith onto another level.

This unique person, Jesus is the Son, the Word, who was born of Mary, who took on our weak human nature to save us from the inside out. Born under the Law, circumcised and identified with his people who carried the promise of the Messiah, **is** the Messiah and Saviour of Jew and Gentile, enabling us to be children of God, something that we experience through the spontaneous prayer

of Jesus rising in us -“Abba Father” - which is Jesus’ prayer and relationship to his Father.

Although the Child lying in the manger looks like all children in the world, at the same time he is totally different: he is Son of God, truly God and truly man. This mystery – the Incarnation of the Word and the divine Motherhood of Mary – is the central mystery of Christian faith; it is indispensable if we are to have a solid hope for salvation and eternal life.

At Christmas we celebrated the birth of Christ. The Church now turns our attention to the Mother. Indeed, this was the process in history over the first four centuries. Only after the divinity of Christ was proclaimed in the early councils of the Church did attention then turn to Mary. The Council of Ephesus in 431 devoted much attention to the subject of how the Son of God was given birth to humanly.

Facing the bishops at Ephesus was not a need to honour Mary, but to resolve a question about Jesus. The issue was the two natures of Jesus. If Mary only gave birth to the humanity of Jesus, you lose his divinity, he's no longer **our** Saviour: we need God to save us. But if you keep his divinity, but lose his humanity, he's no longer our **Saviour, no longer God-with-us**: we are back to God far away.

It was then that the Church gave Mary one of the oldest titles: Mary was *theotokos*, which literally means God-bearing. To affirm that the Son of God had a human birth, the Fathers proclaimed that Mary was *theotokos*: she bore him in her womb and gave birth to him like any mother.

It is only through faith that we can accept it, while not entirely understanding it. In this journey of faith Mary comes to meet us as our support and guide. Following Mary, we can penetrate the mystery of a God who became human out of love and who calls us to follow him on the path of love; a love to be expressed daily by generous service to others.

There are times in the family when an unexpected visitor is coming, and we quickly close the door on a room that is cluttered, on a bed unmade, and take our visitor to the most welcoming part of the house. With Jesus the exact opposite must be done. We must open to him our messy, disordered rooms and, above all, the room of our intentions. Rather than making a New Year intention. Let him into the intentions of our own lives and minds and hearts. Mary can help us to let Christ in and start anew under the Lordship of Christ

Second Homily

When you are leaving this year behind and working to find yourself, what place will the role of faith have? For many, the time of their adolescence and young adulthood was exactly when they began to see the meaning of faith for the first time through their own experience, from their own perspective. In this way, they found their purpose in life and became lights for others. Positive self-identity means that one is self-defined, not other-defined. Too many people act out of a sense of

what others expect of them, rather than out of a sense of who they are.

How we live can lead people who are searching to look beyond us to the God who gifts us? God put us in the world to make it a better place. We have a role to play in God's plan of salvation. But in the last analysis it is up to us. We can say Yes to God's plan and get involved. Or we can say No and do our own thing.

As we begin the New Year, the Gospel presents Mary to us as a model of that new life in Christ that all of us wish for ourselves. There we see that Mary was prepared to do something to realise God's goal for her life. Mary was a contemplative. She pondered in her heart the wondrous things that happened to her. We are told that Mary kept all these things pondering them in her heart. The Greek word for ponder, means to piece together; to come to grips with what God was doing in her life: - putting two and two together. We must be quietly attentive to the movement of God's grace in our lives; we must become conscious of our own participation in the life of communion.

Mary made time to ponder the Word of God. She constantly pondered God's plan in order to respond at each stage of her life. The shepherds pondered, took time to approach the mystery and wondrously saw Mary and Joseph and the child. "Once they saw, they understood." They became disciples after seeing the child. Contemplation leads to action. So also for Mary! What was happening in her life was a great mystery to be discovered little by little that led her to respond to God's plan for her life.

Mary gave birth of God's own Son by faith's burning love, and brought Christ to birth in others by a faith that works through love. She brought forth the salvation of the world through the operation of her faith. If we truly savour this mystery of Christ with us through the Virgin Mother's faith, and savour the lives we've been gifted with, we may find ourselves joining the long march of witnesses, sent to all times and nations, to bestow the blessing that the Book of Numbers gave to us: "The Lord bless you and keep you, The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look kindly upon you and give you peace."

As the year runs out of time, out of money and out of wars, are we ready for him to come? Are we ready for this New Year? What is one area in our spiritual, moral, relational life that we want to make a resolution about, to resolve to do or change in the new year? St Paul in his letter to the Romans **(12:9-12)**, might give us a clue. He writes, "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with genuine affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

Can we pause for one minute to make our resolution?

The Epiphany of the Lord

Is 60: 16

Eph 3:2-3, 5-6

Mt 2:1-12

How many of us look up at the stars? The wise men looked up and saw a star and believed they saw a message in it. They saw the star as a sign that they were living not only in the present world around them, but in a world behind this world, a world different from this world, and yet appearing through it. The three Magi saw the star as a big question mark. It invited them somewhere.

Do you remember the scene in the film, *Dead Poets Society*, set in Weldon, a traditional and autocratic boy's college, where John Keating their English teacher seeks to inspire his students to look up, to break out of lives of conformity. At one point he leaps onto his desk and asks the class, "Why do I stand up here? Anybody?" One of the students replies, "To feel taller." "No!" replies Keating, and he explains, "I stand upon my desk to remind myself that we must constantly look at things in a different way. You see, the world looks very different from up here. You don't believe me! Come and see for yourself. Come on!"

Pope Francis is encouraging us to take up the new evangelisation, full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage and boundless love and attraction. Imagine if we like the wise men by our enquiry involved our children, grandchildren, and other people in our quest for Jesus. Our own excitement could attract others as we strove to know and share our faith.

On 24 December 2019, the James Webb space station blasted into space on top of a giant European rocket from French Guiana. They said it was our Christmas gift to humanity to give us a better understanding of our universe and our place in it after the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago. The wise men's human search needed the scriptures to lead them to Christ. Their journey was very much a journey of faith. And even when they saw the child, they still had to make an act of faith. I pray that the pictures from space will create wonder, not only for the scientists but also in us who see the screen and lead us to worship Jesus, the Word through whom all this was made, and to our Creator God, the Father who sent Jesus in the Spirit to seek us out.

Matthew was aware that the authorities of that time had rejected Jesus as the Messiah (the Christ) while many pagans (Gentiles) had accepted him. That situation is reflected in the story when we see King Herod and the Jewish leaders united in their rejection of Jesus, while the pagan travellers from faraway lands come to worship the child king of the Jews.

Epiphany means manifestation, an unveiling of a significant person or event. We don't see Jesus in the flesh, but he can become manifest in the scriptures or in an event that awakens us. But you can know the scriptures and not believe in Jesus. The chief priests and the scribes summoned by Herod knew the place in scripture, Malachi 5:1 where the child would be born, "only ten kilometres from Jerusalem at Bethlehem in Judea", they told him, but they never made the journey to worship nor acknowledge Jesus as King. It is only at the end of Matthew's Gospel that they

scornfully mock him as king. "If you are King of the Jews come down from the cross and we will believe in you."

Stars are only seen against the darkness of night. Sometimes we focus only on the darkness and lose faith. Or we can focus on the star, the light of Jesus, and let that guide us. Without faith human minds can become blinded. Bertrand Russell, philosopher and atheist, rejected all religion and God's existence. After Russell's death, his daughter, Katherine Tait, told of how it was impossible to raise the question of God's existence with her father. It was taboo. She said, "I would have liked to convince my father that I had found what he had been seeking, the ineffable something he had longed for all his life; that the search for God was not in vain. But it was hopeless." Contrasted with the joy of the Magi is a poignant passage in which Russell wrote, "Nothing can penetrate the loneliness of the human heart except the highest intensity of the sort of love the religious teachers have preached." We are all groping Godward. Even our loneliness can be God's tug on the human heart.

The joy of this Gospel is that outsiders are not to remain outside. This is our feast. The Magi, the wise men, representative of all non-Jews, belong here in the company of those worshipping the infant Messiah. The central figure of this passage is Jesus who says and does nothing. But in Christ, God has come to us. Jesus has come revealing the Father, answering that deep yearning in everyone. "Arise your light has come," says Isaiah, and Paul spells it out, "pagans now share the same inheritance [as the Jews], they are parts of the same body, the same promise has been made to them in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel."

Thomas Merton, brilliant, agnostic, after a riotous youth converted in 1938. He wrote about a visit to Rome in 1933: "And now for the first time in my whole life I really began to pray – praying not with my lips and my intellect and my imagination, but praying out of the very roots of my life and of my being and praying to the God I had never known" (***The Ten Story Mountain, Harcourt, Brace & Co, New York, 1948***). This outsider became a Trappist monk and mystic and enriched the Church and the wider social world with his writing.

Outsiders, seekers, and latecomers, we are all welcome as we journey with the wise men toward the Child of Bethlehem.

Second Homily

People are still searching for Jesus. Many, who had given faith away, have found their way back through their children. That's what comes out in the poignant phrase in the first reading: "All are coming towards you, your sons from afar and your daughters being tenderly carried," because after 70 years of exile, the adult exiled Jews who had grown up with idols of Babylon in the luxury, lifestyle, and gods of Babylon, had decided not to return to the Promised Land; to the struggle of starting over again. They had lost their nerve and opted for the easy way. And so, Third Isaiah, to

encourage those who do return, sees the Jews all returning through their children. But don't put all the onus on the children. In whose arms are they being tenderly carried? – It is parents or grandparents! It is us who need to lead our children to Jesus.

I'm sure that's the hope and prayer of many of you: that sons, daughters, relatives, friends will come back. Epiphany is about coming home. Gentiles, you and me, now share the same inheritance, and are now parts of the one body. The same promise made to Abraham and to the Jews is now made to us in Jesus, through the Gospel that's been preached to us, broken open for us through the Spirit. Epiphany is about the coming home of Gentiles, of never giving up on those who seem far away and are groping for the light. We need to be journeying toward that light ourselves, and not preventing others from finding it by our covering it up.

There's the young man caught up in pleasure-seeking, who finds himself crying at the back of the church either through illness or the futility of his life. A Dorothy Day communist journalist living with a man, who at the birth of her child is seeking one to thank and worship because of the greatness of her joy. The prisoner in solitary discovers that he is not alone; the addict cries out for help in his addiction; people out of work, with no money. People searching — knowing yet not knowing Jesus.

The danger is that we think it's the others who have to do the searching, who have to move toward us. We are Catholics, we are right. You see that danger in the Gospel. Those who possess the scriptures, who pore over the scriptures and can lead others to Jesus, never come themselves to worship him, have never been broken open to their need for Jesus; have never really experienced the inheritance and powerful promise of the Good News. It applies to the Jewish leaders, yes, but it can also be us in the Church.

The old alchemists of the Middle Ages who tried to turn base metals into gold had touchstones with which they rubbed metals. The mark that was left indicated the purity of the metals and how close they were in their search, to transform base metal into gold.

Jesus is the touchstone of authentic humanness. He teaches us how to be authentically human. We Christians are to be touchstones also. Despite our fears and weaknesses (which we share in common with other people) those who are searching, need Christians to show them how to live. If people are leaving the Church, perhaps it is because we in the Church are not addressing human issues, are not leading them to their spiritual inheritance.

If Christ came to make us authentically human, then he is the key to fit every human door. "In Christ", Vatican II states, "the mystery of the human person and what it is to be human is made clear" (***Church in the Modern World, GS par 22***). How well do we witness the humanity of Jesus? Like the touchstone, as people rub up against us, do they come to know Jesus? If we never speak of him, how will people ever know about Him? In their searching he is the Key to their lives.

In chapter 8:26 of Acts of the Apostles, the angel of the Lord directs Philip to meet with an

Ethiopian on his chariot who is reading Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man replies, “How can I unless someone show me?” **(Acts 8:31-2)**. The Word becomes audible, we hear what it means, when it becomes visible. Philip sat beside him as the chariot moved along and explained how the scripture related to Jesus. They came to a pool of water, and the man asked to be baptised. Just a chance encounter but Philip was ready to be used by the Lord!

To make people feel at home in Church requires that we make the humanity of Jesus visible to our brothers and sisters so that people who cannot yet see Christ may find him in and through us. Can we say with Paul to people who may not know Jesus, “I’ve been entrusted by God with the grace he meant for you ... the deep knowledge of the mystery of Christ ... the promise made to you, in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.” It sounds arrogant but it is true, because it is God’s gift to us.

Showing the face of Jesus, we should not focus on the gifts of the wise men to Jesus, but the gift that Jesus is to them. When we who hold the riches of Christ, share the treasure with others, a marvelous thing happens; we find that in giving, the appreciation of what we share grows in us and our faith is strengthened. May it happen here with us on this Epiphany Sunday.

Third Homily

We set many goals for ourselves, and when they have been reached they do not necessarily satisfy our deepest yearnings or give us strength when we need it most. Things happen unexpectedly to bring us back to what is essential. We think we live forever but when death is near, God and our relationship with God is the most important; God is the star within who speaks to our heart, “When there is nothing else, you will cry to me and I will hear you.”

We are stamped in the depths of our being, at the gut level, with “Return to the Maker.” Ignatius of Antioch, on his way to death, wrote: ‘There is a stream in us that murmurs ‘Return to the Father.’” If we are stamped in this way with a God-ward tendency, why not allow ourselves, like the mail stamped with “Return to Sender” to be found and readdressed? Because it’s not enough! We must journey toward God, and yet we need God to show himself.

The wise men represent so many who are groping God-ward. But there are also counterfeits to the real knowledge of God that only Jesus can reveal. The goal, the star, the wise men followed, stirred many reactions as they set out and enquired about the King of the Jews: fear and fury from Herod, and apathy from priests and scribes who had the knowledge but refused to act on it. The wise men entered the journey, saw the star and faithfully followed it. It led to Jesus. They said yes to the journey and became part of God’s plan. “It is Jesus who makes our supreme calling clear.” In him we discover how to live.

To seek to know God without Christ, searching for God through the things that he has made, is

like gazing over a sea wreathed in mist at an island that remains unexplored. It is like being limited to one dimension, one face of a cube. Epiphany is God's revelation in Jesus. Revelation means God himself reveals his own inner nature, like taking us right on to that island and living there, or taking us to the heart of that cube. "Only the Son, who abides in the Father's heart, can reveal him." This knowledge is so essential because, possessing it, we know what God wants of each one of us. We desperately need the light of faith.

If Epiphany means revelation, shedding light where there is darkness or counterfeit, bringing to light the reason and purpose of our lives, then Epiphany is a missionary feast. Epiphany telegraphs the opening of the Gospel beyond Jewish boundaries and the reminder of the world-wide mission of the Church.

There's a lot of apathy toward the Christian message today; expressed in the comment of one person, "Are you still bothering with all that church stuff?" The parishioner retorted, "That's my business!" But our faith is not just an individualised, privatised part of our life. Epiphany is a missionary feast asking us to reveal, to show Jesus to others who come searching.

The process of sharing the light, of revealing, telling others of Jesus, is three-fold: Belonging, Believing, Behaving. When you feel you belong you want to share, invite others in; even a 4-year-old boy or girl, if they feel they belong, welcome strangers into the family. People need to experience our friendship before they are open to hear the Good News. In the first reading, the Jews released from Babylon were returning home, the exile was over. Sons and daughters were drawn home by the deep sense and knowledge that they belonged as a people. Isaiah wrote, "A light has shone on us this day," and then, remarkably, the prophet extends that light to the Gentiles, "The nations come to your light and kings to your dawning brightness."

Belonging, all the relationships between us, are powerful. Second, Believing. Believing is showing the face of Christ. Don't focus on the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus, but the gift that Jesus was to them. Their primary gift was not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but the homage of faith. They came to adore. Can we say with Paul to people who do not know Jesus, "I've been entrusted by God with the grace he meant for you ... the deep knowledge of the mystery of Christ ... the promise made to you, in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel." It sounds arrogant but it's true because it is God's gift to us. When we who hold the riches of Christ, share that treasure with others, a marvellous thing happens; we find that in giving, the appreciation of what we share grows in us and our faith is strengthened.

Belonging, believing, and now behaving! In Solzhenitsyn's book, *Cancer Ward* one of the patients, a judge, comments: "You see that nurse; she is thoroughly Catholic; she says not a word about her faith, yet in all her behaviour it shines through" (*Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1974, this quote is omitted*). Behaving is living the message of Christ, and being ready to share when they ask us why we behave the way we do. How can people hear if we never speak?

The Baptism of the Lord

Is 42: 1-4, 6-7

Acts 10:34-38

Lk 3: 15-16, 21-22

A feeling of expectancy had grown, perhaps stirred by John, and into this expectancy stepped Jesus. When Jesus joined the queue of sinners waiting to be baptised by John, it was a mighty act of identification. He was identifying with the kind of people he came to save, namely sinners.

Baptism in Greek means to take the plunge. Jesus came as servant. He did not shy away from being totally human. In receiving John's baptism which was a baptism of repentance, Jesus took on our sin and fought to set us free from the inside, taking our weak humanity in to the saving waters of the Jordan and right through to the cross. From the inside Jesus felt our shame and guilt. He brought all human history before God for purification and the dynamic inbreak of divine life.

We hear nothing of those hidden years in Nazareth when Jesus at the age of twelve went down with Mary and Joseph and was subject to them. We hear nothing of Jesus preaching, healing the sick or feeding the multitudes. All we know is, "Isn't this the carpenter's son from Nazareth," in obscurity all those years. But during that time, Luke tells us, in the context of family and work, "Jesus grew in wisdom and grace before God and man (**Lk 2:52**).

The Spirit was growing in him, like the filling of a reservoir that would overflow mightily in Jesus' public ministry. You hear it in Luke (**4:16-21**) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." and in **Acts 10:38** when Peter told Cornelius about Jesus, that after his Baptism (the beginning of his public ministry) "that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil."

The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was an epiphany, a manifestation of who Jesus is and who we can become through him. When he came up out of the water, his baptism was an experience of God, of his Spirit, of freedom, bursting out of the heart of human existence. For Jesus, the descent of the dove was a moment of seeing and hearing in which he recognised himself and was approved by the Father as Son and Suffering Servant. It was a moment of decision. Jesus consciously took up his mission to save us. The voice of the Lord full of power, like a thunderclap, announced over Jesus: "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," What happened at the river Jordan signified the Father's stamp of approval on Jesus.

Peter Marshall in Scotland was walking home from the steel works over the moor after work one night when he heard his name called, "Peter!" He walked on but the voice came more insistently, "Peter!" He got down on his hands and knees and felt his way forward and found he was on the edge of a quarry. It changed the direction of his life. He studied for the ministry in the Presbyterian church and became a famous preacher in America.

Mahatma Gandhi was not a Christian, yet he was one of the most Christ-like persons of the last

century. He opposed India's caste system, and especially abhorred the treatment meted out to the untouchables who had no status and were outcasts from society. On his journeys through India, Gandhi was warmly welcomed by the people. When he entered a village, the head of the village would invite him to stay in his house for the night, where he would be assured of a bath, good food and a decent night's rest. But Gandhi politely refused the offer. He asked, "Where are your untouchables? I will stay with them." And he did, even though his action shocked the village leaders. He once said, "I have no wish to be reborn. But if this should happen, then I want to be born among the untouchables, so that I might succeed in liberating them and myself from their wretched condition."

Something dramatic happened at the Baptism of Jesus. It was a "Kairos moment, an 'It's time' moment, time for me to begin to do what God has been urging me to do for a long time". It was a mighty Abba experience, an experience of God as Abba that stayed with him all his life right to the end, in the Garden of Gethsemane where he prayed in his agony "Abba Father, let this cup pass from me, but thy will not mine be done".

Our own baptism is not a social event but a life commitment. It is very personal. Have you had such a moment, a time to awaken to action? Pope Francis has asked us to remember the date of our baptism and live it with Jesus.

When have I come to know the dramatic nature of my own baptism? What am I going to do about it?

Second Homily

Something dramatic happened at the Baptism of Jesus. It was a Kairos moment, an '**It's time**' moment. It's time for me to begin to do what God has been urging me to do for a long time. It's very personal. Have you had such a moment, a time of awakening to action? You see it with Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jnr. How does it happen?

Take the example of Archbishop Oscar Romero. From a poor family, ordained in Rome, in 1942 during the Second World War, he came back to El Salvador and was the conservative editor of the diocesan Catholic paper. He was critical of leftist movements which coloured his attitude to the Jesuits and base communities; he wanted to maintain the status quo and only timidly criticised the Local government. He kept to himself and had few friends except Fr Rutilio Grande S.J. who was similar to him in temperament. After an appointment to a smaller diocese in 1974, He was elected Archbishop of San Salvador as a safe choice in 1977.

Three weeks after his appointment as archbishop, Romero's friend, Father Rutilio Grande, SJ, was murdered on 12 March with an old man and a 16-year-old. The following Sunday, only one Mass in the entire diocese was celebrated, where he spoke against the murder. And he excommunicated the murderers. All the priests turned up and 100,000 people. Archbishop

Romero saw that peaceful protests were answered by death-squad killings. While he demanded justice and recompense for the atrocities of the police and army, he rejected the violence of the leftist and rightist groups. He demanded an investigation into the murders and because it was not forthcoming, he refused to attend any state occasions. He set up legal aid projects to support victims of violence.

His weekly radio sermons that were broadcasted throughout the country were regarded as the most trustworthy source of news. Military leaders warned him that “cassocks are not bulletproof”. But he was unstoppable in advocating justice for the suffering people. The night before his assassination he appealed to members of the army, National Guards, and the police to stop the killings. He ended his appeal with the words: “I command you in the name of God: Cease the repression.” He was assassinated on 24 March, 1980.

Jon Sobrino, the Jesuit theologian, said that Rutilio Grande's death was a Damascus moment for Romero. But other writers have said, No! it was a growing realisation in Romero. Bypassed as archbishop and become bishop of a smaller diocese, Santiago de Maria, he sought to understand the plight of the poor campesinos as well as current church teaching that could remedy the situation; he developed mobile speakers and preached to his people. When soldiers raided a village in his diocese, searched houses for weapons and killed innocent people, he was horrified. Gradually he became a vocal critic of the violence. He could see the spiral of violence that would ensue.

In his last homily, he said: “The harvest comes because of the grain that dies. We know that every effort to improve society, above all when society is so full of injustice and sin, is an effort that God blesses; that God wants; that God demands of us.”

We hear nothing of those hidden years in Nazareth when Jesus at the age of 12 went down with Mary and Joseph and was subject to them. We hear nothing of Jesus preaching, healing the sick or feeding the multitudes. All we know is, “Isn't this the carpenter's son from Nazareth,” in obscurity all those years. But during that time, Luke tells us, in the context of family and work, “Jesus grew in wisdom and grace before God and man (**Lk 2:52**). The Spirit was growing in him, like the filling of a reservoir that would overflow mightily in Jesus' public ministry. You hear it in Luke (**4:16-21**) “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” and in **Acts 10:38** when Peter told Cornelius about Jesus, that after his Baptism (the beginning of his public ministry) “God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil”.

Because God was with him, Jesus took a stand against evil, called and empowered people to do good even though he gradually foresaw it would lead to his death. But he trusted in his Father and did not hold back in his loving and healing, and by his actions challenging those in power. The Father vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead. And Romero, following Christ, believed “that even if I die, I will rise in the Salvadorean people” (**taken from Brockman, James R., Romero: a life, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989**).

Vincent Pallotti's Feast Day

January 22nd

Is 58:6-8, 10-11

I Cor13:1-8, 13

Lk 10:1-9

Vincent Pallotti in the aftermath of the French Revolution, a time of radical disconnect, saw his mission to revive faith and let love catch fire in people's inner selves; to make Catholics apostles.

I would like to highlight aspects of his charismatic personality, not so much his gifts of healing, bi-location, levitation, the multiplication of money and food for his orphan girls and for others. These were hidden under his humble acknowledgment of who he was before God. He was convinced that this was not his doing but the result of his trust in God in the face of real poverty found in human lives and souls. The God-given charism, however, he shares with us is the awakening of the apostolic vocation of the People of God, sharing in Christ's work of bringing faith and love alive.

I saw crowds going to the Tennis Open in Melbourne, thousands of people going to watch players slogging it out in crucifying heat. What if the motive drawing the crowds (men, women, children) was Jesus, giving his whole life for oppressed, crucified people? It needed someone to rally the people and Pallotti did that. He called it the Union of Catholic Apostolate – all the different vocations working together on the basis of equality, with the same spirituality, sharing the same mission.

He wasn't a saint in an ivory tower. Vincent had a wonderful way with people. He was found among the poor. When Cardinals and even the Pope came for confession in his passage-way cum-study- living room at home, he would make them wait while he heard the confession of the poor hay carters. "They have to struggle to make a living." Until his death in 1850, he was a priest sought by the poor and the rich.

Vincent worked in prisons, bringing hardened criminals and revolutionaries back to God, giving condemned men a decent burial, sheltering the homeless poor, feeding the hungry. He started soup kitchens at the time of the cholera epidemic 1837; founded two orphanages for girls left alone after the epidemic; night schools for illiterates, catechetical instruction for poor farmers; he involved artists and others to help the missions; he sent his best priest to London to look after Italian emigres when he had only a few members. To stir up people's faith he conducted popular missions, asked priests and religious and lay people for help. He worked with the military, was spiritual director to five seminaries, promoter of foreign missions. All this work was done from home, while nursing his mother who for three years was dying of terrible abscesses.

He couldn't do this alone. He wanted everyone involved, a united front in the apostolic mission of Jesus. He could do what he did through collaboration with others, letting them be co-

responsible for different works, each treated with equal dignity and working together in their different vocations and jobs. God called him to found the Union of Catholic Apostolate, union in a real sense, where people were welcomed, valued as individuals and loved by God, using their talents, occupations and trades.

Pallotti reflected deeply on the second reading, St Paul's 13th chapter of First Corinthians, Love was the glue which kept people, priests, religious and lay people working together with one spirituality and mission. It was absolutely essential. To offend charity was to be a destroyer of the Union. This love-based union was not just because we *like* others, and get on well together, but to *love* one another as Jesus loved, to lay down our lives daily for one another. When this is shown in our families, in our various groups, then like in the Gospel, Christ's mission is shown powerfully. It invites others to come along, sing our song, joyfully. This expresses the New Evangelisation which Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis invite us to take up personally and in the community.

Vincent Pallotti's Birthday April 21st

Acts 2:1-4

Acts 9:36-41

Jn 14: 23-26, 12-13

"If we cooperate in the salvation of others, freely using the gifts received from God, the author of nature and grace, we will become more like God," wrote Vincent. The divine likeness is not only to God, but to the Trinity. He believed that the work of the Trinity directed toward creation and every person is love – the dynamic life-giving Being of God actualised in love of the neighbour. In pithy statements he said, "The Trinity is the creator of the God-likeness and the initiator of the work of salvation, of apostolate. Jesus is sent as the Apostle of the Father, not only to restore our humanness but to share the unique filial relationship he has to the Father and to each one of us. "Cooperation in the saving of souls, perfects us as images of the Trinity, makes us like Jesus, and enables us to share in the glory of God."

Vincent realised the truth: that every time we love, there God is present. God has called us to be lovers. He did not super-impose God's image in order to love them. God's image flowed from the reality of their human condition as God's creatures. In loving them, Vincent's love reached the heart-core of people in their deepest, truest and objective lovable-ness and hence, also, touched the indwelling God of love.

I explored Vincent's image theology and wrote this small verse:

'Trace the lines of your face, Father
In me the features of your Son
I live no longer I, but rather
Jesus the incarnate One.'

The incarnation of Jesus is at the heart of Vincent's image theology because Jesus assuming our human nature enabled Vincent to find Jesus in his own frail humanness. How to achieve this was a journey that embraced his life.

At the age of twelve under the guidance of Fr Fazzini, Vincent strove for intimate union with God. At nineteen he had a living relationship with a God of infinite love who desired a like response from Vincent. How could he a creature be perfect like his heavenly Father is perfect? Fazzini guided Vincent in this time of tremendous inner struggle to find an outlet in apostolic work. At twenty-three Vincent was ordained priest. He had a double doctorate in philosophy and theology and was asked to tutor seminarians in Sapienza University. He had a good grasp of Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica and it was there he discovered the answer to his struggle.

It was the discovery of St Paul's letter to the Romans 8:29, that God is able to be reached and touched in Vincent's humanness, precisely through his shared humanity with Jesus. **"For those who love God all things work together unto good, who according to his purpose are called to**

be saints. For those whom he has foreknown are predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he should be the firstborn of many brethren.” It is precisely as man that Christ takes us to the Father. In 1832 through the intercession of Mary, Spouse of the Spirit, Vincent was transformed into the image of Jesus, his First-born Brother, and was raised by Jesus to the measure of the Father’s perfection.

St Irenaeus wrote: “The Spirit prepares the human person for the Son of God. The Son brings him to the Father, and the Father bestows on him Incorruptibility for eternal life, which comes to everyone from his **beholding** God” (*Adv Haer 4, 20, 5*). Hold on to that word ‘beholding.’ St Paul describes the process of transformation in his powerful image theology with the word “gazing.”

“All of us **gazing** on the Lord’s glory..., that same glory, coming from the Lord who is the Spirit, transforms us into his very likeness, in an ever greater degree of glory” **2 Cor 3:18**; “the splendour of the Gospel shows forth the glory of Christ, the image of God. It is not ourselves that we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’ has shone in our hearts that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ” (**2 Cor 4:4-6**). And Vincent uses the word “**contemplating**.”

Vincent applied this to himself and encouraged others by his *Daily Practical Reminder*: “The more you keep your eyes on Jesus, **contemplating him**, the more the love of Jesus will grow in you. As the love of Jesus grows in you, the more your confidence in imitating him will increase. Practise it in your thinking and acting and in controlling the affections of your heart. Do it every day. If you believe in Jesus and strive to imitate him you will overcome your faults, Jesus will take possession of you, extend his life to you. Jesus will live and work in you. He will fill you with himself and do everything in you, as Paul experienced, “I live, no not I, Christ lives in me (**Gal 2:20**).”

Vincent encountered not only Jesus, but also the Father and the Holy Spirit in his contemplation at the time of the Eucharist and wrote, “Not only is the divine person of the Incarnate Word present in the Eucharist, but also the Father and the Holy Spirit ... He mercifully nourishes me with his eternal, infinite **contemplation**...” Contemplation was not to make him passive but to reveal his being in God. The Trinity was present in all his ceaseless activity for the salvation of people, not only spiritually, but in their pressing human needs, especially the poor. His associates said he was in perpetual motion, with an energy that came from being united with his infinite God of love. When he died, having given his coat to a man shivering from the January cold, and as a result he caught pneumonia, the cry resounded through Rome, “the father of the poor has died.” Vincent died on the 22nd of January 1850 at the age of 54 and **beheld** God, Father, Son and Spirit face to face.

SUNDAYS IN ORDINARY TIME

Year C

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 62:1-5

Rom 12:4-11

Jn 2:1-11

Richard Crashaw, a famous Oxford don, entered a competition for a Latin poem on “the Marriage Feast at Cana” which is today's Gospel. It was a two-hour competition and after that time Crashaw had only written a few lines, yet he won the competition. One of his lines ran: "Lympha pudica, Deum vidit, et rubuit" (The pure virginal water saw God and blushed) he was spot on. St. John's Cana story and the wedding feast has a deeper theme of God coming to espouse His people. The same theme is expressed in the first reading. In our preoccupation with problems, often we are unaware of His coming but nature is aware and responds, is malleable to its Maker, as water turns into sweet wine.

A second theme is an Epiphany theme, that even in this crisis of the wine running out in the wedding, and Mary's and Jesus' compassionate response to it, the glory of Jesus is revealed and it ushers in his mission to save us. It's in our crises that we give Jesus the opportunity to truly reveal himself as Saviour.

That young married couple could be any one of us. For them their crisis came at the start of their married life, striking at the heart of their joy! They hadn't provided enough wine! Oh the shame and embarrassment! For us at some stage in our lives, the wine fails, the bubble and sparkle goes flat on a friendship, a marriage, a business, — even the joy of living slips away. We've poured everything into what we're doing unknowingly neglecting some things and there comes some change in our attitude of spirit. We've gone down and there seems nothing we can do about it as everything spills out into the open. We appear naked, embarrassed, let down before family, friends or associates. Our weakness is revealed, our failure, bad planning is brought into stark daylight and we can't prevent it from happening.

We have all experienced this hurt, pain, and bitterness. Mary picked up the embarrassed whisperings between the couple and the head steward, probably a relative. They did not provide enough wine. It had run out and the wine in the guests' goblets was disappearing quickly.

We forget about Jesus, present in all our relationships. Mary did not. Jesus had never done any miracles — but Mary knew he would help. We have not experienced the power of Jesus in our lives and we need to learn that he can help. Vincent Pallotti said “If we sought him in all things we would find him there. If we sought him always, we would always find him.” It's amazing that he is always found in crises, because that's when we really cry out for him. A crisis is a Kairos moment, the hour in which Jesus acts if we ask Him.

Crisis can mean death or a breakthrough' to a deeper realisation of his love (even when other loves have failed) and an opportunity to enter into a covenant with Him. He will act, if we obey. Jesus' statement to Mary is not a refusal, it is a reference to Mary as the New Eve who cooperates

with Jesus, the New Adam in espousing his people back to God by making a new love covenant with God. For in John's Gospel the word "Woman" only appears again in Chapter 19:26 to show there has to be breaking of the old wine skin — from the broken side of Jesus comes water and blood as Jesus gives His Spirit over to the Church.

If we obey Mary's words: "Do whatever he tells you" and we begin by doing the most embarrassing things like filling large jars with water, right to the brim, and bringing them as wine to the chief steward, so that there can be no adding or tampering, just pure virginal water as Crashaw put it — and we take it to the steward to verify that it's okay. It's then that the newness comes out of that obedient trusting of the wine, the Spirit. We discover the gift that the Spirit endows us with — we get over alcoholism or drug addiction, we face the deeper reality — the deep fear in us but not without struggle. We learn new ways of loving, of serving, of forgiving and beginning again.

When people who are angry, anti this or that, it increases their anger. But if they could call on the Lord, ask for the Spirit to flow to bring the bubble and sparkle back, then it would. We're trying to change without Jesus and it won't work.

No one can say Jesus is Lord, without the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit comes as we obey Jesus after the example of Mary. We are given a New Name — a change comes over us. We become a crown of beauty, a precious jewel in the hand of the Lord because he loves us. God wants to espouse us to himself. To rebuild what was desolate, to marry what was forsaken. To work to bring order back into our lives, asking God, to restore our spiritual self, and reconcile with our partner or community, children — or those whom we serve.

Second Homily

The readings today describe our relationship to God as a marriage; taking us into the joys and headaches of marriage, taking on a new name, the excitement of the guests arriving, the wine running out and Mary alerting her Son to the young couple's plight.

What do you do when the bubble and sparkle has gone from your relationship? There is the agony, the heart-ache, the embarrassment and shame, the desperate need to reach out for help. We might feel forsaken and abandoned, but Mary is there interceding for us with her Son. You get the picture of Mary really concerned for us in our need. You could imagine Mary happening to be around the kitchen area when she hears the kitchen staff anxiously speaking to one another that there is only a jug of wine left before they have to tell the young couple that the party is over.

Mary senses that the time is close for her Son to begin his mission. But she does not want to push him. He has his own timing; she sees him sitting with his disciples, engaged in conversation with those around him as he always did. Mary concerned for the young couple feels she has to act; she makes up her mind and approaches Jesus for help, "They have no wine?" The response from

Jesus is confusing, his words seem negative but his action is positive, "Woman, what is it to you or me? My hour has not yet come!"

Jesus is waiting on his Father's will, but Mary precipitates his mission, confidently providing the impetus for him to act, "Do whatever he tells you" she tells the servants in the kitchen. Jesus points to the six water jars that the Jews use for ablutions and tells the servants, "Fill them to the brim," and then tells them to take a sample to the chief steward who tasted it and tells the young host that he's kept the best wine till last, 120 gallons of it. Now the celebration can really begin. This was the first of the signs given by Jesus. He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him.

Let's tease out what the evangelist may be telling us. John calls this miracle of changing water into wine in abundance a sign that points to something deeper. It is a new beginning. It takes us back to Genesis, the beginning where the man and the woman who created the break-up with God in the first place, is met in Jesus calling his mother 'Woman,' the new Eve, and he the new Adam who will bring us back to God. The hour that Jesus resists, takes us to his hour on the cross, where he addresses Mary again as 'Woman' and entrusts us to her care. She receives us into the redeemed relationship we share as sons and daughters in the Son. We hear God calling us his delight, giving us a new name, taking hold of our present situation, building us up.

Changing Old Testament water into messianic wine, signifies or signs for John the passing of the old into the new. The messianic era has arrived. The feast symbolises the messianic banquet and Jesus as the messianic bridegroom who supplies the wine. The young couple doesn't know where the new wine comes from. Jesus is the real host who provides the best wine of the Spirit. The bridal theme is heard in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah and more powerfully in his contemporary, the Prophet Hosea: "I will lure her into the wilderness and speak to her heart. On that day, it is Yahweh who speaks — she will call me, "My Husband." I will betroth you to myself forever, betroth you with integrity and justice, with tenderness and love."

Third Homily

Sometimes we only see something when it is pointed out to us, like falling autumn leaves, their changing colours of gold and deep browns in the thin membrane of their dying leaves reflecting the process of resurrection through death to new life. "Something new can come, but only through the dying, and not just in the image of the old, but truly new, as yet unseen" (**James Maher, Autumn Easter**). That's what the prophet Isaiah is telling his people after 70 years of exile, released by the edict of Cyrus and coming home only to find Jerusalem a heap of rubble, and the daunting task facing them of rebuilding it.

Isaiah takes the people beyond their misery, by promising something new through the dying, and not just in the image of the old, but truly new, as yet unseen. They are swept up into the exciting brilliance of marriage and given a new name that blots out the shame of being "Forsaken"

and "Abandoned" in the face of the nations. It is a new marriage covenant, which promises a deeper more intimate relationship with God. In all their troubles the people hear Yahweh saying I delight in you, and your land will be married. They are not abandoned or forsaken.

In the Gospel of John we are taken into the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee where Jesus will perform the first of his signs by changing water into wine, revealing his glory so that the disciples come to believe in him. John has many meanings behind his signs. At this wedding there are two bridegrooms the young man and his bride, and Jesus who is the bridegroom, coming to take us into relationship with his Father and which will only be completed when the hour of his passion is completed; when in his last breath he pours out the best wine, his Spirit, upon Mary and the Church. Jesus is the new Adam. Mary is the Woman, the new Eve who says only two sentences in all of John's Gospel, yet is the faith-filled disciple of Jesus who initiates him into ministry. The party was flat because the drinks were down. Jesus was at the party, but it was Mary who pointed it out to him, telling him, they have no wine, and telling the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Jesus tells the servants to fill the six stone water jars with water. Six is one short of the Jewish number for perfection; the jars were used for purification. Only Jesus can fulfil the Jewish law and bring about our purification, our redemption. Each jar contained 20 to 30 gallons. Jesus commands the servants to fill the jars to the brim and take them to the chief steward. As they do the water turns into the best wine, not a small glass to sip, but 900 bottles of the finest vintage. The master of ceremonies compliments the bridegroom, but he's talking to the wrong Bridegroom. What a party that turned out to be. There is no stinginess in God's outpouring of love for us. I find it amazing that in out-of-the-way places like Bethlehem and Cana, God reveals the Saviour of the world and the Messiah who ushers in the Kingdom foretold by Isaiah.

Just as Jesus transformed the water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, he wants to transform us into a holy people who live in intimate union with him and who manifest his love and power to all the world. Jesus replaces the Jewish purification rites by the richer purification of his cross, his hour. At that hour Mary will be there under the cross pointing to him as he fulfils his Father's will and manifests his glory. She tells us to do whatever he asks of us.

Bill Wilson discovered the truth of that. As an alcoholic, he was admitted to a New York Hospital on 11 December 11, 82 years ago. He had just celebrated his 39th birthday. Alone in his room, he cried out, "I'll do anything, anything at all!" He described what happened next. "Suddenly, my room blazed with indescribably white light ... Then in my mind's eye, there was a mountain. I stood upon its summit, where a great wind blew. A wind, not of air, but of Spirit. In great clean strength. It blew right through me. Then came the blazing thought, "You are a free man." I became acutely conscious of a Presence which seemed like a sea of living Spirit. I lay on the shores of a new world." Wilson said that after this experience, he never again doubted the existence of God. And he never took another drink. He is the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In an article in the *Readers Digest*, Arthur Gordon needed help. He went to his family doctor an older, wise man, who asked: "Where were you happiest as a child?" Arthur said by the beach where they had a holiday home. The doctor suggested he take the day off, arrive at the beach, no later than nine in the morning, take your lunch, no ipad or radio, be on your own, and he gave him four notes to read every three hours. The first word was, "Listen carefully." Listen to the sounds around you. At noon, "Try reaching back." About 3pm, "Face what blocks you from being happy and ask God to help you." Later in the afternoon, he opened the last one as the tide was coming in. "Write your worries in the sand." His worries were washed away by the incoming tide.

To listen is to pray, and read the scriptures. Take a few days off to do a retreat. If you are depressed ask for the anointing of the sick, and go to confession. The church's sacraments are real helps in your journey into a deeper relationship with Jesus and Mary. Allow yourself to be drawn into God's love and delight as revealed in Jesus, in whom the prediction of Isaiah was fulfilled. May we come to believe in Jesus as Mary does.

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Neh 8:2-6, 8-10

I Cor 12:12-30

Lk 1:1-4, 14-21

Luke describes Jesus, emerging from his Baptism and his testing in the desert, as a prophet coming to Galilee, with the power of the Spirit on him. His reputation goes before him as he visits the synagogue of Nazareth where he used to go. The townspeople gather, for here is their local boy come good whom they are eager to hear.

Our local boy, Hugh Jackman, received a Golden Globe Award, for his role as Jean Val Jean in the musical *Les Miserables*. It stirred in me the powerful scene when the bishop told the police who arrested him, "I gave the silver to him," and to Val Jean, "My friend, you left too early, you left these behind" and gave him his silver candle sticks, the only thing of value he had. He says: "Remember this, my brother, in the mystery of God's plan; use this precious silver to become an honest man. By the witness of the martyrs and by the Saviour's Blood, I have bought your soul for God." It is a second chance for Val Jean, "He gave me back my life. He called me brother. He told me I had a soul. How does he know? Is there another way to go?"

Yes, there is! It is summed up at Nazareth in Jesus' proclamation of the mission he is about to begin. He takes the scroll handed to him, opens it and reads from Isaiah chapter 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, (Jesus is *the prophet*). he has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty for captives, to bring to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free and to proclaim the Jubilee year of release." Jesus startles his hearers stating: "Today, this Word is being fulfilled even as you listen." That 'today' startled them. They were so used to looking to the future for release, but this grace is available now, today, not in the past or in the future.

In Jesus' proclamation, the phrases are finely balanced with "new sight to the blind" in the centre. But that verse is not in Isaiah. Jesus wants his own people and us to see another way of living life, another way of relating to people, another way of standing in God's loving presence without fear. It is hinted at in Isaiah 35:5-6 as the sign of the Messianic age to come.

How can we work together to create this new sight, a vision of parish which has the characteristics of hospitality, in which each person is welcomed and known by name, experiences being loved by God, included in, togetherness, with an attention to need; an alive liturgy, and the discovery and use of one's giftedness that would lead to participation and active involvement outwards? How can we work together to implement them?

It's a matter of seeing familiar things differently. Parish renewal is grounded on the mindset of mission. To think of parish in terms of mission; the difference between maintenance (the things we've always done) and mission, is seeing familiar things differently. Innovation is the key to survival and growth. Many of the great social innovators like Mary Mackillop, Nanna Nagle, William Booth, never saw a need without doing something about it. Innovation is in the generating,

acceptance and implementing of new ideas, pastoral methods or services, whatever we can develop within ourselves and others for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Vincent Pallotti whose Feast Day is today, was such an innovator. Unlike Mary or Nanna Nagle he did not want to found a religious group. His charism from God was and is the awakening of the apostolic vocation of the whole People of God, sharing in Christ's work of bringing faith and love alive. Faced with the terrible poverty he found in human lives and souls, he founded in 1835, the Union of Catholic Apostolate in which all the different vocations, working together on the basis of equality, shared the same spirituality and the same mission. It was only later when Rome became suspicious of lay revolutionary movements that Vincent in 1846 reluctantly founded the Pallottine priests and brothers' community and later two Pallottine sisters' communities to be a flag ship carrying his vision.

Vincent worked in prisons, bringing hardened criminals and revolutionaries back to God, giving condemned men a decent burial, sheltering the homeless poor, feeding the hungry. He started soup kitchens at the time of the cholera epidemic 1837; founded two orphanages after the epidemic; night schools for illiterates, catechetical instruction for poor farmers; he involved artists and others to help the missions; he sent his most experienced priest to London to look after Italian emigres when he had only a few members. To stir up people's faith he conducted popular missions, asked priests and religious and lay people for help. He worked with the military, was spiritual director to five seminaries, promoter of foreign missions.

He couldn't do this alone. He wanted everyone involved, a united front in the apostolic mission of Jesus. He could do what he did through collaboration with others, letting them be co-responsible for different works, each treated with equal dignity and working together in their different vocations. It was union in a real sense, where people were welcomed, valued as individuals and loved by God, utilising their own talents, occupations and trades.

Pallotti reflected deeply on St Paul's 13th chapter of First Corinthians. Love was the glue which kept people, priests, religious and lay people working together with the one spirituality and mission. It was absolutely essential. To offend charity was to be a destroyer of the Union. This love-based union was not just because we *like* others, get on well together. It was the call to *love* one another as Jesus loved, to lay down our lives daily for one another. When this is shown in our families, in our various groups, then like in the Gospel, Christ's mission is shown powerfully. It invites others to come along, sing our song, joyfully. This expresses the New Evangelisation that the Popes invite us to take up personally and in the community. Frances especially invites us to go to the peripheries where a new sense of parish can grow by a process of formation through action.

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jer 1:4-5, 17-19

I Cor 12:31 – 13:12

Lk 4:21-30

A teenage boy was shooting some baskets in the driveway of his home, the basketball ring just above the garage door, when he lost one of his contact lenses. He looked for it but couldn't find it. He went into the house and said, "Dad, I lost one of my contact lenses and can't find it." His dad got up from reading his paper, went outside and in a few moments returned with the lens. The boy was amazed. "How did you find it?" he asked. His father replied, "You were looking for a piece of plastic. I was looking for \$150."

When we don't have the right sense of values, we can fail to find the important realities of life. That is why the people in the Gospel rejected Jesus. They could not accept one from their own town as their Messiah. They missed out on what was really important. To them, Jesus was no more than a piece of plastic.

Without showing any real faith in Jesus, the townsfolk of Nazareth demanded that Jesus do in Nazareth the wonderful things they had heard him do elsewhere. They felt they had the right to be the first to benefit from his gifts. They were Jews, God's chosen people; charity begins at home! But Jesus said to them – what matters is not who you are, but whether or not you believe. God doesn't have favourites. There is no room in the Kingdom of God for privilege.

God's charity begins not at home but where there is human need and the faith to receive it. He gave two examples, Elijah's care for the Sidonian woman from Zarepath during a time of widespread famine – the jar of oil and batch of flour did not fail, and Elisha who cured Naaman the Syrian general, both of whom were Gentiles.

On hearing that the benefits they had rejected (through lack of faith in Jesus) would be offered to the Gentiles, the people were outraged. Gentiles were outsiders and considered sinners; they were God's own people. How dare he suggest that the Gentiles would be preferred to them. In a burst of nationalistic fervour, the mob turned on him, hustled him out of the synagogue and tried to do away with him (**cf Flor McCarthy, *New Sunday Liturgies and Holy Days, Dominican Publications, 2002, p.188***).

But why did they turn on him so angrily? Because of what he said! We use Jesus' words so easily, "A prophet is not accepted in his own country," and we apply it to writers, musicians, and reformers who often have to go elsewhere to be recognised. It is a common experience. But it goes deeper than that. It was not just a case of not appreciating him. They rejected him because he pointed out their lack of faith and told them that the Gentiles were more open to God than they were; that the benefits of God's promises were meant for all.

When God appointed Jeremiah as a prophet, he told him, "to brace himself for action. To stand up and tell them all that God commanded him." Prophecy is not about pleasing people. It's about

speaking the truth that no one wants to hear, the truth that is often covered up. We can tell the truth that shatters people. Paul talks about saying the truth in love. Jesus' over-riding concern was compassion. There was so much he desired for his own people. But they like us cannot bear too much truth.

A doctor had to tell his patient about his condition; that he was very ill, did not have much time to live and that he should put his affairs in order. He asked the man, "Is there anyone you want me to call?" The man said, "Yes, another doctor."

We can reject the truth and the truth givers. And we do it in three ways: We reject the message of those prophets who do not conform to our pre-conceived ideas, "How can he say anything worthwhile? Isn't this the carpenter's son?" Second, we reject those prophets who come to us with demands. And third, we reject the prophets who disturb us — this Jesus who asks us to see him in the poor, the outsiders, the Gentiles.

We need to learn that the God revealed by Jesus is Father of us all. One of the saddest words in the Gospel is that Jesus walked through their midst and passed them by. Jesus never went back to Nazareth. He made Capernaum his centre of operations.

It's hurtful to be rejected by one's own. Jesus was saddened by what happened to him at Nazareth, but he didn't get embittered and bury his gifts. He did what he could to those who believed in him in Nazareth, and then took his gifts elsewhere.

Second Homily

The uniqueness of Jesus would have been an irritant in a small town like Nazareth. He somehow stood above the rest, which people would have interpreted as disapproval. So, although they were amazed at his teaching, proud of their local boy who had made good; had they not invited him to preach in their synagogue; yet there was an underlying feeling of resentment. They knew that Jesus knows the hidden, darker side of their lives. Still, they want Jesus to prove himself to them, to do miracles, provide fireworks, so that they might endorse him as one of their own.

When Jesus proclaims that the words of Isaiah are fulfilled in him, the resentment begins to smoulder. "The carpenter has got religion!" They are asked to accept Jesus in a completely new way, to believe in him. "Well! Who does he think he is; isn't this Joseph's son?"

The answer is an emphatic No! As the voice at the river Jordan had declared, as Jesus' family tree (his genealogy) had revealed, as the devil himself admitted, "This is the Son of God." And what it means for him to not be the son of Joseph, but the Son of God; the new Adam, the founder of a new humanity, Jesus goes on immediately to make plain. Go back to the 3rd chapter of Luke where the genealogy of Jesus ends with the words "son of Adam, son of God."

Luke portrays Jesus as the prophet of a new humanity, aware of what was happening in his

society, but also aware of how God his Father was feeling about the situation. Jesus will not be hemmed in by stereotypes; would not allow himself to be limited by his townspeople's narrow vision; would not live down to their expectations. He fought against exclusion. There's a story of people who only looked down, but who were searching for the Tower. Someone said he saw it reflected in the lake. People rushed into the lake, some drowned, but one man was knocked down in the crush. Looking up he saw the Tower. People were carrying the sick on stretchers toward the Tower. Others kept looking down. Jesus opened his people to their history that their own prophets only found acceptance elsewhere, in people open to God's workings.

At the outset of his ministry, Jesus assumed the prophetic mantle of Isaiah and fulfilled it: the Good News was being proclaimed to the poor, those held captive were being released, the blind were given new sight, the downtrodden set free. But Jesus' mention of the prophets, Elijah and Elisha, bringing God's healing to pagans, hit a raw nerve. The whole congregation sprang to their feet, enraged, and hustled Jesus out of the synagogue to kill him. It's more than the tall poppy syndrome. Ghandi held that you have to unmask evil non-violently. And Jesus does just that.

Jesus' mission was one of dramatic inclusivity. For Jesus, everybody is included; everyone belongs to the Kingdom of God his Father: beggars, children, tax collectors and sinners, rich and poor, Pharisees and Sadducees, those who believed in him and those didn't, and yes – even Samaritans foreigners and Romans. His stories, too, gave the same message – they were about great banquets open to all, both the formally invited, and those who just managed to struggle in. The banquet is the symbol for God's grace, unmerited and freely offered and available to all. For Jesus there are no barriers. Those who came to believe in him would become sons and daughters of God.

His compassion was a radical form of criticism, for it announced that any hurt was taken seriously, was unacceptable, an affront to God. What made Jesus' teaching hard to accept, for them and for us, was that it was a critical assessment of the structures and values and attitudes of human society which his listeners and followers were part of. His message was for the poor, but he confronted those who kept them poor and benefitted from their poverty. He fed the hungry, but was aware of those who had plenty but refused to share. His heart went out to those who mourned; but he knew who caused those tears, made the laws, enjoyed privileged status.

Is it any different today? How does Australia rate in terms of inclusion? Conflicts and exclusions abound not only in the area of wealth. Issues about race, colour, culture and religious affiliation create 'ins' and 'outs,' and how fiercely those divisions are fought over. It does seem that when one is 'in', one's perspective tends to be precious and the defence of it touchy. Political correctness hems us in and creates stereotypes/caricatures of any who oppose them. Try to talk about life issues or politics.

If we are true prophets in these times, we can't simply quote the words of Jesus or copy his

actions. We need to tackle the problems of our day with the mind of Christ and in the spirit in which Jesus tackled the problems of his times. We need to be aware, understand what is really happening and decide what we are supposed to do about it. When we do stand up, be prepared for the anger, but stand firm in Christ.

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 6:1-8

1 Cor 15:1-11

Lk 5:1-11

Have you been rock-climbing or abseiling and slipped, (even with the entire safety harness on) and clung precariously on the dizzying heights aware of the rocks below? Have you been caught in the surf with the waves pounding over you, or in a severe thunderstorm in the open? Or confronted with personal failure, suicide, depression, death, accident or ill-health? You are overwhelmed, helpless, your inherent human weakness and fragility come to the fore – it envelops you like a fog. “This thing is too powerful for me.” From deep inside comes the cry for help. “What a wretched state I am in?”

This is what Isaiah experienced, and Peter, as the force of God's holiness broke in on them. Isaiah is the prophet of the Holiness of God. He had a vision in the inner court of the temple – the Holy of Holies. What we take for granted in every Mass as we pray ‘Holy, Holy, and Holy Lord,’ Isaiah experienced suddenly as stark reality. God is totally other, fearful yet fascinating. Holiness is who God is and what God does, and Isaiah enveloped in the smoke and incense realises he is face to face with God and sees himself like in a mirror as he really is: weak, vulnerable; sinful, imperfect. But he doesn't stay grovelling in self-pity. He accepts God's forgiveness in the angel touching his lips with the hot charcoal, and experiences what holiness is – it is being set apart for service. If we meet God often in a crisis, he gives us a job to do and the ability to do it in a way we never thought possible. To God's question of God: “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah joyfully replies, “Here I am. Send me.”

Larry Norman's song expresses that moment: “I am a servant – I am listening for the call. I've been unfaithful, so I sit here in the hall. How can you use me when I've never given all? How can you choose me when you know I'd quickly fall?”

“I am a servant, getting ready for my part. There's been a change, a rearrangement in my heart. At last I'm learning, there's no returning once I start. To live's a privilege, to love is such an art, but I need your help to start. Oh please purify my heart. Oh please use me, I am your servant.”

I am a servant – I am listening for my call, which can be during a retreat or prayer experience. Peter wants to be a disciple of Jesus. He is proud and impressed as Jesus preaches from his boat, but after the preaching, when Jesus told him to launch out into the deep and lay down the nets for a catch, Peter shook his head. What does Jesus know? He, Peter, is the fisherman, and the time for fishing is the night. Religion is alright in its place, but when it interferes with a man's job, his life and leisure, it's a different matter altogether. Out Peter went, fishing all night long; all over the lake he and his partners fished and they caught nothing; they were dismal failures. Yet the word of power shows that Jesus knows more about Peter's job than Peter himself.

When he obeys Christ's word, factors in the Jesus element he is totally blown away – fish of all

varieties full grown, fill the nets to breaking point – he is faced with who Jesus is and who he is. Aware of something divine, wrought by Jesus, he falls down on his knees in the bottom of the boat and begs the Lord to go away from him – his sinfulness is too much. To have seen the Holy Lord, is to be set apart for service – and Jesus speaks: “Be fisher of my people.” “Catch people alive by sharing in my mission. Now be my disciple.”

Bede Griffith, before he ever became the famous Benedictine in India, as a secondary student had given religion away. One day as he was coming out of the college in the evening he beheld a beautiful flowering bush; he was given a vision of nature, for a moment a vision of the oneness of all things. It set him off on a search through the Romantic poets and all kinds of philosophies to capture that experience.

He began reading the Bible, and in the Scriptures he discovered a Moral Being – it wasn't just words – there was a Moral Will behind the word, a person who changed people like Isaiah and Peter, and changed history. He came back to religion, was ordained an Anglican priest and worked in the slums of Bethnall Green, London, amidst the grime and poverty. It was wearing him down. So this night he faced himself. Like Peter he went down on his knees against the inclination of his mind and began to pray all night. He said it was like being with Jesus in Gethsemane, but made it through to the morning.

As he got up off his knees – a voice spoke – “Go on a retreat.” He had never heard the word “retreat” before. He enquired and found that there was a retreat being run by the Cowley Fathers. He went to confession and wept for the first time in a very long time. He discovered that he had to surrender the citadel of his mind – he had made it an idol. And as he looked at the simple people around him whom he had despised. He saw that they in their simple faith possessed all along what he had been searching for.

He went back to his room in the bus, and all London seemed to be filled with light. He went into his room, picked up his New Testament and read – “It is not that we loved God, but he loved us first” **(1 Jn 4:10, 19); from *The Golden String - An Autobiography*.**

When we acknowledge who we are before God, and yield our heart and mind to him, God does not depart from us sinful men and women. He travels into our lives, and wants to bring out the very best in us for God and for others.

We need such disciples today.

Second Homily

We've lost the sense of the transcendent. If you do away with God, like the character in Albert Camus' book, "The Outsider", you are left trying to find meaning in the midst of absurdity; moved solely by outside events or circumstances, acted upon by life, with no inner orientation, no inner stability. Meaning comes from a relationship to a transcendent Other to whom we are

accountable.

Christianity offers transcendent truths at a time when there are doubts about God and wariness about claims of truth. It offers forgiveness of sins when personal moral failure does not trouble people. It offers an approach to ethical living when most people are more interested in maximising their pleasure. It offers difficult truths about individual and institutional conduct when most prefer easy political answers.

There is a drift to unbelief, with all its jazz and the glitziness of its advertising. But there's another drift, quiet and personal, what the poet Francis Thompson in "O World Invisible," calls ... "the drift of pinions would we hearken, beats at our own clay-shuttered doors." The Spirit constantly speaks.

Joe Esterhazy, best known earlier for writing such adult-themed thrillers as "Basic Instinct" and "Jagged Edge," lived his earlier life as if the seven deadly sins were a personal to-do list. He found God or rather God found him. He was diagnosed with throat cancer and had to give up his addiction to five packs of cigarettes a day, and his daily intake of tequila and gin to fuel his writing. To fight his cravings, he started walking every day, which took the edge off. But after a month he knew he needed something more. One summer day in 2001 on his walk, the cravings were terrible. He became filled with frustration and despair, sat down on the curb and started to sob.

He said, "I heard a voice inside me that said, 'Please God, help me.' And even as I heard it, I thought to myself, 'What is this?' But then I heard the voice again and I realised it was something inside my own heart that was praying for the first time since I'd been a boy." Cautious at first about rekindling his relationship with God, he gradually came to know that God loved him. Only then would he ask God to save his life. At this point he asked God to help him with his addictions and he did."

We live largely on the surface of life, things going on as normal. There can be moments, though, when the world of spiritual values bursts into our lives, cracking us open, moments of loss, failure, sudden illness, marriage break-up. We don't know ourselves or the other. But as Leonard Cohen put it, "the cracks let the light shine through." There can be times when you get beyond the physical appearances to the mystery underlying them, like the cross or the host which cause us to fall on our knees, profoundly aware of the Lord present in the host, or on the cross who died for us because he loved us.

Isaiah doing his regular round of duties in the temple is suddenly confronted by the holiness of God. Peter pushing out into deep water at the Lord's command, finds himself beyond the superficial, especially when it results in an unbelievable catch of fish. I am not talking about dabbling in the occult. I'm talking about the profound experience of the living God, a holy God. God acts for a purpose worthy of his holiness. Behind his words of scripture is a moral will, a person, a holy God who chose men and women who influenced our world for good.

Isaiah is chosen by such a God. God's holiness is fearful, awesome, and fascinating, causing us to pull back and yet drawing us into the mystery like moths to the flame. The seemingly solid world is not so solid after all. The cry of Isaiah, "I am a sinful man," and the cry of Peter, "Depart from me, Lord," is an act of surrender to the mystery. Surrender makes God's holiness visible. When Jesus, the holy One preached, in his presence evil was forced to reveal itself. This surrender, an acknowledgement of our weakness, makes us ready to respond to what God wants. When we commit our lives, God can use us for good, for a plan worthy of his holiness. It is faith that enables us to know the mind of God.

The three words of Jesus in the Gospel tell how Peter comes to this point of surrender. Jesus' word: "Push out into the deep," invites us to go beyond shallow materialistic preoccupations, to find what enriches our life. We still have to cope with whatever life presents, but we do it in a different spirit.

The second word: "Let down your nets for a catch." It must have seemed madness to the experienced fisherman, Peter. Night is the time to fish. Nevertheless, he puts his confidence in the Master, despite his better judgement and does what Jesus asks, and is overwhelmed at the result. He falls on his knees in the boat before the Lord. When have we fallen on our knees in the boat of our lives before someone greater, who does great things in spite of us? This is where discipleship begins and from where we get the strength to follow. We are no longer doing things in our own power but in his.

Jesus' third word: "Do not be afraid, you will be fishers of my people." It's similar to Isaiah's response, "Send me." In responding to Jesus, Peter had to leave his baggage behind and take up God's challenge. God wants to take us beyond the superficial to the destiny that he desires for us. This is sheer madness to atheists. They need to learn from Bede Griffith who discovered that he had to surrender the citadel of his mind. He had made it an idol. He looked at the simple people around him whom he had despised, he saw that they in their faith possessed all along what he had searched for.

When we acknowledge who we are before God, yield our heart and mind to him, he does not depart from us sinful men and women. He travels into our lives, wants to bring out the very best in us for God and others. We need such disciples today.

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jer 17: 5-8

I Cor 15:12, 16-20

Lk 6:17, 20-26

Luke in his Beatitudes does not spiritualise the situation of his disciples or the multitude that listens, but says, “blessed are you who are economically poor, not just poor in spirit, you who are hungry, struggling for a bite to eat, who weep, and are reviled”. He calls them blessed, advantaged in comparison with those who are rich, have their fill, laugh and are thought well of and are enjoying their consolation now.

Hang on, surely there is nothing wrong with being rich, enjoying a good meal, having a hearty laugh among the crowd with whom you want to be in good standing. What does Jesus mean with his four blessings and four woes? Isn't it out of place as we're getting together to celebrate special occasions?

Jesus is not promoting poverty, hunger, weeping and hurt as a way to live. They are not things to be striven after but rather avoided. The late Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife, Brazil, said: “Saints may be found in slums, but you can't retain slums in order to make them the breeding ground of saints”. No! Jesus is speaking about the outcome, the suffering that comes from people struggling for the Kingdom of God, who know sorrow may come, but it will not have the last word.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote: ‘The most precious thing in the whole world is the consciousness of not participating in injustice.’ In 1958, Martin Luther King went to Birmingham, Alabama to support poorly paid sanitation workers. Two of their number were sheltering from the rain in the back of the truck; the faulty mechanism went off and they were crushed to death. Their families didn't even have the money to pay for their funerals. In the non-violent protest march led by King, fire hoses were turned on the marchers to stop them. But they just kept on marching, King said, because they knew a fire within that could not be put out, and they knew water that flows not from hoses but from Baptism. In that memory and conviction they marched on to freedom.

They are people who put their trust in God. In the topsy-turvy world of Jesus, Luke presents God's preferential option for the poor. We can build walls for billions of dollars to keep people out and feel secure on our side while stopping people who have not been paid for a month from upsetting our way of life.

When we are well off and our every need is catered for, like the Mazda or Jaguar ads, God is not so important. We don't need God at the moment thank you; extra things are taken for granted. But when you are poor, struggling, there is a real hunger for God. Every blessing comes as gift and a source of joy. The poor who trust in God know how to rejoice.

There's a story from the American writer, Maya Angelou, whose aunt was a live-in housekeeper for a wealthy couple in California. The couple lived in a splendid house that had fourteen bedrooms. The aunt's job was to do the cooking for the couple and the evening meal for their

frequent guests.

The years passed and the couple got older. They stopped entertaining. Eventually their evening meal consisted of scrambled egg, toast and weak tea. They ate in silence, hardly seeing each other at the table.

On Saturday nights the housekeeper would invite a few of her friends into her basement quarters. There they would eat some plain but good food, have a few drinks, play records, dance, and finally settle down for a game of cards. Meanwhile jokes were told and there was lots of laughter.

One day in the midst of all this hilarity the door opened. It was her employers who beckoned her to come out. In the hallway the wife said to her: 'We don't mean to disturb you. But you all seem to be having such a good time. We hear you and your friends having a good time every Saturday night and we'd like just to watch you. We don't want to bother you. We'll keep quiet and watch.'" The husband added: "If you'll just leave the door ajar, you or friends don't need to know. We'll never make a sound."

Her aunt agreed. But she found it sad that her employers owned a large house, swimming pool, three cars and lots of palm trees, but had no joy. Picture the wealthy couple standing in a darkened hallway, peering into a lighted room where black servants were lifting their voices in laughter and merriment. **(Flor McCarthy, *New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies* p.198ff).**

This story gives an insight into what Jesus was talking about in the Beatitudes. In the eyes of the world, the rich seemed to be blessed by God, while the poor seem cursed. But Jesus spoke about the strange poverty of those who live for the wealth of this world, and the strange wealth of those who trust in God. It's a fact that the very hazards for the poor make death very close as happened to the two sanitation workers, but make the other world close as well. This is why Jesus says: 'Blessed are the poor, the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.'

In the first reading, Jeremiah speaks of people's relationship to God as two trees, one in the barrenness of a desert, and one by flowing streams - which tree would you relate to?

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

I Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

I Cor 15:45-49

Lk 6:27-38

Fear makes us do strange things. A man in a paddock was charged by a snorting bull. He started to run. There was a solitary tree in the paddock with an outstretched branch twelve feet up. He had to give it a try. He ran like the wind and jumped. He missed the branch... He caught it on the way down (**cf. Mark Link, Youth 2000, p. 212**).

Anger and hate make us do strange things. Like David's friend Abishai, who wanted to kill Saul who was pursuing David to kill him out of sheer jealousy. They had crept up to Saul's camp and found the king and his retinue asleep. David said No! to the killing. "The Lord forbid that I should put my hand against the Lord's anointed; but take now the spear that is at his head, and the jar of water and let us go" (**1 Sam 26 5-25**). We want to nail the one who is out to hurt us and our family. It's an instinctive response that arises inside us

Jesus challenged the attitudes, the presumptions of his day. In a highly structured universe where everyone was in their place and designated as friend (insider) or enemy (outsider), Jesus proclaimed and lived into existence the vision of the Kingdom where there was a place for everyone.

The Mediterranean culture of his time was combative, that is, prone to conflict as a natural consequence of their core values of honour and shame. Honour is a public claim to value or worth, requiring public recognition of that claim. If you can put someone down, and they are shamed, caught unawares, then it redounds to your honour or that of your family or clan. They must lose for you to win. Imagine the resentment that burns within the loser. Much of this still holds true for the Middle East, and for us, too.

A mother heard her young daughter and school friends planning to get their own back on a girl at school. She challenged her daughter who replied, "Love your enemies may be alright for Sunday, but during the week it's an eye for an eye." Revenge and retaliation only add darkness to darkness. By adopting a vindictive attitude, we become poisoned by hatred. We use up a huge amount of energy in hating. Revenge may satisfy one's rage, but it leaves the heart empty.

Celeste Dixon, a 23-year-old Texan woman, whose mother was murdered by Michael Richards, angry and full of hate, went to the court each day until she heard the judge hand down the death sentence. She felt this sentence was something she and her family deserved. When the trial was over, and her family stood outside the courtroom celebrating, she saw Michael's mother standing alone and she was crying. She said, "I realized then, that the news that made us all so happy, had broken her heart. I went over and hugged her, and told her I was sorry." Celeste was deeply moved by reading the story of Maria Goretti's forgiveness of her assailant, and how forgiveness had

wrought a transformation in the man who murdered her. Celeste believed that God was asking her to forgive Michael, and so she did. The experience helped her see her mother's murderer the way God did. "God gave me a glimpse of what his love is like. If you understand that, it is impossible to hate anyone" (***The Tablet, June 27, 1998***).

It's vital to keep the heart free of hatred. Loving the enemy is not a passive putting up with evil, but an active reaching out to the other while non-violently resisting the evil. Still, it is one of the most difficult things in the world is to love someone who hurts or hates you. We can't do this on our own without a personal relationship with God.

Gerry Adams. Leader of the political wing of the IRA Sinn Fein, in an interview spoke of his father and brother being killed by the Ulster Defence League. He said a defining moment came when he saw the futility of the fighting and decided to go for peace and to dialogue with the other side, first in secret and then openly. It resulted in the Good Friday Peace Accord which is still holding.

No-one can forgive my enemy but myself. Enemy is a very strong word. It's easy to deny that we have enemies. But it's often someone who stands in the way of our freedom, dignity and capacity to grow and to love, someone we avoid or refuse to communicate with. Dislike can grow into annoyance, into anger and then into hatred. We have to be careful not to let the seeds of our dislike grow and multiply.

It is a struggle to overcome the feelings of bitterness and revenge that well up inside, and can keep welling up when we are badly treated by another or betrayed. It happens in business, school and social life where people we thought were friends or colleagues take our ideas and claim them as their own. Forgiveness is never easy. Each day it must be struggled for, and prayed and won.

Jesus' words, unmask the enemy, free the person from hatred and bring the Kingdom to birth. An old black man owned a valuable piece of land. He would not sell. The people who wanted the land got the Klu Klux Klan to go out and lynch him. He came out and faced the crowd of hooded men with his Baptist pastor and said, "Before you lynch me let me spell out my will" (he had stayed up all night to write it). "I give to Tom Smith my fishing rod that I used to teach him how to fish; my gun to Peter Jones when we went hunting ..." and so on down the list. Each one in that lynch mob knew they were unmasked by love and went away (**from Bausch, *A World of Stories*, Twenty Third Publications, Mystic Ct, 1998, p. 232-3**).

Love lets the person emerge and attempts to set them free. Whether they become free is their decision.

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ecclus 27:4-7

I Cor 15:54-58

Lk 6:39-45

A lawyer was questioning a prisoner in the dock. He pointed his cane at the man and said, "Who is the blaggard at the end of my cane?" The prisoner replied, "At which end, my lord?" Someone told me, "When you point your finger at someone, do you realise that 3 fingers are pointing back at you."

The readings for today stress trueness in word and action if we are to be a disciple of Jesus. We need personal faith and conversion if we are going to help our brother or sister. How can we help or heal others when we suffer blindness, spiritual cataracts that prevent us seeing clearly, both the others and ourselves. Intent on the mote in our brother's eye, we have forgotten the beam in our own. Lord, make us clear-sighted about ourselves and gentle towards others.

In clearing the leaves round the house and using a sieve to shake out the good soil and leave the rubbish behind, the first reading from the wisdom tradition tells us we have to be careful about our language. "In a shaken sieve the rubbish is left behind, so too the defects of a person appear in their talk." I am not talking about political correctness. Even Jesus was rarely applauded when he exercised his critical mind. But people knew what he stood for. "The test of people is in their conversation; their words betray what they feel."

And Jesus in the Gospel tells us: "The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will be like his teacher." In Jesus' time, you would search out the best teacher to learn from him, to listen and attend to his words, just as you'd do at Uni; you'd find the best lecturer or course that would better equip you for your future profession or job. But in Jesus' time when there were no books easily available for reference, all the knowledge came through the teacher.

When I was doing my apprenticeship as a carpenter/joiner before the age of pre-fab buildings, I learnt from other tradesmen, so that when you did a good job, it reflected how you felt about yourself. If you did a good job, you felt pride in your work or not so good if it was done badly. The Second Vatican Council in its document, ***The Church in the Modern World, par 10***, wrote, "When a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well ...he goes out of himself and beyond himself, he exercises his vocation to be the image of the transcendent God".

Look at the teacher we have in Jesus, his words carried healing, set people free from the things that crippled them physically or morally. If you are a disciple, you must not only talk but enact the truth of your own teaching. You must undergo your own conversion first. You must undergo an inward change before you enact the same process in others. If as a disciple you are ignorant of doing good, then you are no longer worthy of the title.

Jesus' criteria for good or bad discipleship is in the fruits they bear. It is from the goodness that resides in a person that good words and deeds emerge. Look at Jesus. From the hidden years in

Nazareth the Spirit was at work in him, filling him like a reservoir that burst forth in power in his ministry. People benefitted from being in touch with Jesus, healing, deliverance, forgiveness, release from past burdens flowed out of him; and all these experiences were not imaginary, they were real and effective. It's the same with the true disciple: people do not have to guess at the authenticity of their discipleship. It is evident in the fruit their ministry bears.

Jesus wants to share his life with us and work through us. Vincent Pallotti taught us a **Daily Practical Reminder**:

“The more you keep your eyes on Jesus, contemplating him, the more the love of Jesus will grow in you. As the love of Jesus grows in you, the more your confidence in imitating him will increase.

Practise it in your thinking and acting and in controlling the affections of your heart. Do it every day.”

“If you believe in Jesus and strive to imitate him, you will overcome your faults. Jesus will take possession of you, extend his life to you. Jesus will live and work in you. Didn't he promise, “The one who has faith in me, will do the works I do, and even greater works **(Jn 14:12)**. He will fill you with himself and do everything in you, as Paul experienced, ‘I live, no, not I, Christ lives in me **(Gal 2:20)**.”

It is the store of goodness, which is Jesus' and God's presence in us. so that when we reach out to people in all sorts of ways, it is not us, but Jesus ministering through us. It is very humbling that he wants to work through us and bring about the kind of world God our Father wants.

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 8:41-43

Gal 1:1-2, 6-10

Lk 7:1-10

In Luke's Gospel he does not mention Jesus going on a mission to the Gentiles, but he does include the incident of the centurion. It is included in order to speak to his own community, that if Jesus had no quibble in going to the centurion's house, why can't Jewish Christians accept Gentiles. This growing awareness is found in the Acts of the Apostles to express the struggle of the early Christian Church in relation to Gentile converts. There, Luke writes, that God shows no partiality; rather "the man of any nation who fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him" (10:34-35 and 15:9).

Solomon in the first reading hints at the opening of the Jewish door to Gentiles who reverence God's name in his holy temple. A similar thought is presented persuasively in the Book of Jonah and the Book of Ruth. At a time when Jews returning from years of exile in Babylon are enforcing a more rigid living of the Law, Jonah and Ruth are presented as pagans who are open to God's will for their lives.

Today that mission is global. There is a fundamental direction, Godward in all creation, and humanity has a central role to play in restoring that direction. We face an ecological crisis that is seriously calling us to work together with other Christian churches and with the leaders of world religions for peace and the saving of our common home. The ecological crisis is an ecumenical crisis. Covid 19 has brought about greater awareness of the global proportions of this crisis. We need to work together to save human lives and our planet. It calls us to pray and to have faith in God's care for all.

The centurion was likely a senior officer of Herod Antipas' peace-keeping force (**cf *The Collegeville Bible Commentary, New Testament, p.950***). As a soldier he knew the strategic value of clear, decisive commands and the ready obedience to carry them out. He knew the power of his word. He also knew the value of human lives, at every level, even that of a faithful servant. His approach was not over-bearing. As a non-Jewish peace-keeper he wanted to establish good relationships with the Jews. To strengthen his friendship with them he built their synagogue. He was also sensitive to the religious customs of the Jews, their purity laws, and so he asked a delegation of Jewish elders to approach Jesus on his behalf and on behalf of his servant. Jesus was going with them, but not far from the house the centurion sent another delegation of friends, to tell him not to come in. His word would be enough.

Jesus had come to Capernaum from Nazareth where his own townsfolk were so outraged at his words that they wanted to kill him, and here is a pagan who puts his whole life and the life of his servant, trusting in Jesus' word, and stands at the ready to obey him. This is what Jesus hoped from God's own people, but instead it comes from a pagan. The centurion's word is one of compassion,

"Please come and heal my servant," of deference, "I did not presume to come to you myself," of humility, "I am not worthy to have you under my roof." But it is his word of trusting and total faith that astonishes Jesus and rings from him that joyful cry as he speaks to the crowd, "Not even in Israel have I found a faith like this." And almost as an afterthought we learn of the healing of the centurion's servant from a distance.

Flor McCarthy tells a lovely story set in the time of the emperor Tiberius. A man had two sons, one was a poet and the other was overseas on military service. The father favoured his son who was the poet, whose eloquence thrilled the people who filled the amphitheatre in Rome. He rarely heard from his other son. The father had a dream in which an angel came to him and said, "The words of one of your sons will be known and repeated throughout the world for generations to come." The father woke up a very proud man. After a few years the father was killed trying to save a child from under the wheels of a chariot. He went to heaven and met the angel he had seen in his dream.

"I knew that my son's poems were immortal," he said through his tears. "Could you please tell me which of my son's poems these people were repeating?" The angel took him fast forward and said, "The verses your son who was a poet were very popular in Rome. Everyone enjoyed them. But when the reign of Tiberius ended, his poems were forgotten. The words you are hearing now are those of your son in the army."

The man looked at the angel in disbelief. The angel continued: "Your son went to serve in a distant place where he became a centurion. He was a good and just man. One day one of his servants fell ill, and he appeared doomed to die. Your son heard of a holy man who was able to cure illnesses, and he rode out to meet him. When he met him he told him about his servant. The man was ready to go to his house with him. But your son said these words, words that have never been forgotten. He said, 'Lord I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. Say only the word and my servant will be healed.'"

The words of the centurion were recorded in the Gospel, and we say them every time, in every church, every time we approach for Holy Communion. And Flor wrote, "there is no better way of disposing ourselves to receive the Lord than to echo the words of the centurion.... But it's not enough merely to echo those words. We must try to have the same sentiments the centurion had — humility, trust, and firm faith. We too need the Lord's healing" (**ibid. pp 216-7**).

THE SEASON OF LENT

Year C

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18

2 Cor 5:20 - 6:2

Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

When things in our life are bad and we feel afraid, Lent presents us with three things that can really help: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In prayer we are asking God to change things but he does not do it automatically. God needs us to work with him. The prophet Joel called everyone to pray because there was a huge plague of locusts, so big that the swarm blocked out the sun. The locusts would eat up all the crops, everything, and leave dust and starvation in their wake.

St Augustine said that fasting and almsgiving give wings to prayer, How? They link us to life, because often there's a split in our prayer. It is up in our heads, it is not linked to life; it is not getting to the deeper layer of our heart. There is no split in the life and prayer of the Ukrainian people facing the might of Russia and a nuclear threat. There is no split in the prayer and life of those Russian people who are willing to face imprisonment in their opposition to the war. The cry of Lent "Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return" has become very real for them.

Prayer needs fasting, but not as an endurance test or a boosting of the ego. Our weakness from lack of food puts us in need of God. God wants more than fasting from food. He wants fasting from doing wrong, and an inner fasting of the mind from self-pity, blaming others, nursing grievances.

Giving alms helps us to pray. If our prayer is genuine, the Spirit of God, the God of tenderness and compassion takes hold of us and our hearts become like Christ's, moved with pity for others. Almsgiving is the practical nature of our love for others. It can take on a variety of forms – caring for the bodily needs of others, which we call the corporal works of mercy, caring for the sick, the homeless, feeding the hungry. Almsgiving means more than handouts but tackling the root causes of hunger and homelessness. It might mean a radical change in our own lifestyle. Almsgiving means forgiving. Lent is a time of forgiveness from God, but also forgiveness of one another, letting go of past resentments, breaking down the barriers. Lent is a journey into the forgiving heart of God.

When you are signed on the forehead with ashes, the priest says, "Repent and believe the Gospel." Jesus is asking us to see differently, to look at God, the world and ourselves differently and then to do something to help. The test of Lent in the end is not what we have done for Lent, but what Lent has done for others through us.

At Lent we should try the key to our heart's door. It may have gathered rust. If so, this is the time to oil it, in order that the heart's door may open more easily when the Lord Jesus wants to enter at Eastertime. Lord, oil all the hinges of our heart's doors that they will swing gently and easily to welcome your coming and those you send.

First Sunday of Lent

Dt 26:4-10

Rom 10:8- 13

Lk 4:1-13

We begin forty days of Lent: a series of steps in our life's journey of living towards Easter. Easter understood not as a once-a-year celebration somehow remote from the rest of the year's everyday life and living, but rather as the deeper meaning of our life here and now. Have we understood the symbolism of these days?

The number 40. In the Bible stood for two things: the formation of a people, and preparation for mission. During the forty years in the desert, God formed a motley group of slaves into a people set free, chosen as God's own people. Moses spent 40 days and nights on Mt Sinai before receiving the Ten Commandments; Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the desert before beginning his public ministry; and when risen, Christ was with the disciples for forty days before ascending into heaven and giving them the task of continuing his work. Forty, then, means: the formation of a people for mission.

Before taking up our mission we need to know who we are and what we stand for – what makes us special and how we can use it to help others. The first reading asks us to bring a basket to God, to thank God for all the good things he has given us. What's in the basket? Firstly, being grateful to God for being alive, being me, not somebody else, caring for me and all those dear to me and others.

Lent is a time to open up, discover, and deepen what we take for granted. For example, William Bentley was fifteen on his dad's farm in Vermont, New England, when he was given a microscope and became spell-bound by the beauty and variety of a snowflake. He said, "Under the microscope, I found that snowflakes were miracles of beauty; and it seemed a shame that this beauty should not be seen and appreciated by others. Every crystal was a masterpiece of design and no one design was ever repeated. When a snowflake melted, that design was forever lost." Each one of you is a miracle of beauty, a masterpiece of design, unrepeatable. When God created you, he broke the mould. Much of our originality is a gift given by God discovered in quiet moments, what makes us special and how we can use it to help others – our identity and mission.

As well as discovering our true identity, Lent is also a time to face the lie in our lives, the areas of our lives in which we have compromised ourselves. Lent is not just about self-denial, a 'giving up', but more a positive journey into growing awareness of our Christian identity and dignity; the struggles involved in trying to live a deeply Christian life.

The second symbol, the desert, ultimately is not a setting but a state of soul. The desert, traditionally, was the place of temptation, of testing for Israel. Temptation attacks the core of our identity, tests our mettle as individuals and as a group. Israel repeatedly failed the test in the desert. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to re-enact and restore the identity and destiny

of God's people. It is a place where we stand before God with no false veneer or pretence.

When Jesus in the desert rejects feeding his body at the expense of disobeying God, "man does not live by bread alone..."; when Jesus rejects the offer of universal power at the price of worshipping Satan; when Jesus rejects testing God to suit his own convenience – what is he doing? Jesus emptied himself and became as all men are (Phil 2:7), putting himself in the position of a human being like any of us, under the authority of the Word of God. He is in fact going right back to the beginning, back to square one; he is the new Adam.

Luke's account of the temptation of Jesus in the desert comes immediately after Jesus' Baptism and the narration of his family tree which concludes with the words about Jesus as, "Son of Adam, Son of God."

In Eden, the first Adam, the head of the human race was confronted by the tempter, disobeyed God's word, and set the whole human race off on the wrong track by listening to the lie, "You shall be like gods." He was already created in the image of God. Pride is the corrosive power at the heart of each temptation.

Solzhenitsyn, the Russian author, wrote that people often betray others, not because they are cowards but because they have been corrupted by many compromises none of which seemed important at the time. – tempted to take the soft option. This is what Satan is pressing Jesus, the second Adam, to do. The difference is that Jesus will be the totally obedient one, the human person as man and woman were meant to be, one who is altogether righteous, who never loses his relationship to God through sin. Jesus overcomes Satan by his undeviating obedience to the will of God, an obedience he pursues right through to death on a cross (**Philippians 2:8**).

Like all of us, Jesus had to distinguish between the voice that whispers attractive lies and the voice of God. In the desert he had to confront the basic question: what does it mean to be God's anointed one (the Christ)? What is the true direction of the mission God has entrusted to me? These are basically the same two questions each of us has to ask: Who am I, and what am I called to do? The temptations in the desert encourage us. We have the Word of God, can respond to the Father's voice, and know his care, in every aspect of our lives. We can overcome the struggles and temptations in our lives by calling on the power of Jesus, that same power that Jesus demonstrated in his victory over the trials and struggles in his own life.

*What Lenten practice have you prayerfully chosen?

*If the devil was to put three temptations before you today which attack your core values, what would they be?

*Where would you derive the strength and power to resist them?

Second Sunday of Lent

Gen 15:5-12, 17-18

Phil 3:17-4:1

Lk 9:28-36

God called Abram out of Iraq, promising that he would be the father of a great nation. God took him onto the mountain and showed him the stars to describe the number of his offspring. Abram put his faith in the Lord and was considered justified. But it all seemed a pipe dream. He was very old and Sarah was barren. Nothing was happening. So, God got him to lay out the animals and birds for sacrifice. Then at the darkest point of night, Abram woke in terror from a deep sleep by a smoking furnace and firebrand that went through the sacrificed animals and sealed God's covenant with Abram, to ratify God's promise of a son and a mighty people when all seemed hopeless.

At the darkest point of his ministry Jesus took his three disciples, Peter, James and John, up the mountain with him. Prior to this event in Luke's Gospel, Jesus had been healing, teaching and experiencing success in his initial mission. But the religious leaders were for the most part hostile to him. Tension begins as Jesus continues on the road to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the headquarters of religious power and authority. If Jesus went there it would entail conflict and death. Yet there was so much more for him to do. Should he go? What good would it do his mission to die in Jerusalem? All this Jesus takes to his Father in prayer.

The cloud coming down, symbol of God's presence, enfolds the disciples and they are afraid. It is also a symbol of the Dark Night that Jesus humanly is experiencing; a Dark Night that is the absence of any human experience; God seems to be absent. It is like being on a phone conversation with no response from the other end, but only one's desire to be in contact with the beloved. The Father is asking Jesus to trust him, to be faithful even to the cross without humanly knowing the outcome. Two examples give us a glimpse of what that decision cost Jesus.

Therese of Lisieux, dying of TB, underwent the Dark Night of faith. It felt as if an iron curtain had come down between her and heaven, that she was climbing through an underground tunnel through thick fog. "Everything had disappeared. The horror of her Gethsemane would only end with her death. Her only prayer was Abba Father." On the day of her death, those around her witnessed the terrible force of the disintegration and discouragement she was facing – "I can't take it anymore... "I can't take it anymore." But they found themselves face to face with the terrifying force of her trust in God and the full extent of her surrender – "I am not sorry for delivering myself up to love. Oh no! I am not sorry, on the contrary." When she died her face shone with great beauty like her Beloved Jesus.

On the mountain, Jesus knew that the cross awaiting him had to be faced. It was a terrible moment of decision. In making it, he was transformed before his disciples' eyes. The friends of Martin Luther King Jnr said a similar thing. On April 3rd 1968 before delivering his speech in

Memphis, Tennessee, his associates said that King, a few days earlier was terribly afraid when gunfire broke out disrupting his non-violent protest march. But on this day he had gone into his room and prayed. When he came out, there was a marked change in him. He was no longer overcome by fear.

That night he spoke: "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. ... But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." The next day he was felled by an assassin's bullet outside his motel room.

On the mountain, the place for an encounter with God, Jesus appears with the mountain men Moses and Elijah; Moses whose face became aglow as he received the law from God; Elijah fleeing for his life to Mt Horeb or Sinai because Queen Jezebel was out to kill him for killing 450 of her prophets of Baal, but who heard God speaking in a whisper which restored him to his prophetic task. So Jesus made the decision to save us and he was changed. Dazzling light, the glory of his divinity shone through him, and he heard the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him."

Hearing his Father's word spoken in love, Jesus was affirmed in the purpose for which he was sent – to redeem us through his death into resurrection. In his conversation with Moses and Elijah, Jesus comes to see his future death as an exodus and liberation which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. From this point on, Luke begins the journey narrative from chapter 9:28 right through to chapter 19:28.

After the cloud lifts there is only Jesus in his humanity, a promise that in all our trials, Jesus will be with us in the ordinary events of life. Even when the disciples betray Jesus, and the people fall away, Jesus, ever true to his Father, still journeys on to bring us to the forgiving love and mercy of God. That face aglow as Moses' was, soon to be disfigured by brutal scourging and crucifixion, shines forth again on that Easter night as he comes to forgive, letting us know the cost that forgiveness entails, May the unconditional mercy and love of God through Jesus bring peace to our families, our church and our world.

Third Sunday of Lent

Ex 3:1-8, 13-15 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12 Lk 13:1-9

Do you remember the opening scenes of *Les Misérables*, the musical adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel? Jean Val Jean degraded and brutalized by nineteen years in the galleys, known only as 24601, a slave of the Law. Given five years for stealing a loaf of bread, which became nineteen because of repeated escapes; he is released on parole. Entering the village of Digne everyone refuses food or lodging to this disreputable and dangerous ex-convict.

Someone suggests he try the door of Monsignor Myriel, the bishop. To his surprise the bishop welcomes him warmly, inviting him to share his supper, giving him advice and a bed for the night.

Val Jean rises in the middle of the night and steals the bishop's silverware from the cupboard above his head. He would have killed the bishop had he woken up. He is caught and brought back to the bishop. The bishop told the police "I gave the silver to him," and to Val Jean, "My friend you left too early, you left these behind," and gave him his silver candle sticks, the only thing of value he had. He says to him: "Remember this, my brother, in the mystery of God's plan; use this precious silver to become an honest man. By the witness of the martyrs and by the Savior's Blood, I have bought your soul for God." Caught would have meant a life sentence.

It's a second chance, "He gave me back my life." He called me brother. He told me I had a soul. How does he know? Is there another way to go?" All he had known was law, represented by the ever-present figure of Javert: "You have to pay your dues." Instead Val Jean is confronted by grace. The bishop treated him with unfailing courtesy and ignored the stigma of the past. Val Jean wrestles with the demands of love, admits his sin and cries: "Jean Val Jean is no-one now. Another story must begin."

Moses was a fugitive. He had killed an Egyptian, escaped into the desert of Midian, changed his name, married a wealthy shepherd's daughter and lived secure and hidden.

That was until the burning bush. It created awe and fascination in Moses as he stood before the bush crackling with fire but not burnt up. "I must go and see this thing!" Suddenly the voice of God watching from the bush, said – "Moses come no nearer. Take off your sandals – the place where you are standing is holy ground." When God's holiness makes contact with persons, he sets them apart for service. "I have seen the miserable state of my people and I send you to Pharaoh to bring Israel out of Egypt" (**Exod 3:1ff**). Awe led him to Someone greater than himself who gave him the resolve to obey. Moses' encounter with the living God gave him back his true identity and a mission. It also was a second chance.

Yet, like Jean Val Jean, Moses had to wrestle with the demands of grace. He threw up four objections; He wanted to remain anonymous. I'm a nobody, "Who am I that I should go to the Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt. Second, he did not know God's name: "They will ask

me, what is his name? What shall I say to them?" Third, no one would believe him: "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'". Fourth, Moses claimed he was not a good public speaker, "O my Lord, I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. Please send someone else."

God answered all his objections. The divine name that God reveals is "Yahweh" which means "I am who am will be with you." The name reveals a dynamic God who will manifest himself in history, a God of purpose who requires a moral response, the saving of his people. God's language changes from I to you, ("*I send you*"). God is not interested in Moses' ability but of his availability. Forget your stutter, Aaron will be your spokesman. Moses said to God: "I am to go then to the sons of Israel..."

Surrender makes God's holiness visible, seen in righteous behaviour. When Fr Maximilian Kolbe took the place of a Jewish fellow prisoner in Auschwitz and went into the starvation bunker, one commentator said, "His action was worth more than a life-time of sermons."

In the Gospel, Jesus mentions two accidents that happened suddenly to Galileans. One group at worship in the temple who left their weapons at the door were surprised by Pilate's henchmen who mingled their blood with their sacrifices. The other eighteen had a tower fall on them. Jesus did not say they died because they were sinners and had to pay. No! These poor blighters didn't have a chance, but we have a chance to change and do what God requires of us.

To illustrate what he meant, Jesus told the parable of the fig tree. A healthy tree is interdependent, needing good soil and nourished by the gardener who fertilizes it. In return the tree gives back fruit. Like the fig tree planted in the only good soil in the vineyard, I live in a very special place. But am I just taking without giving - Is my life barren of fruit? After three years of producing no fruit I could be chopped down, but the Lord Jesus wants to give me a second chance.

Righteousness, right behavior means depending on God in all that we do. Self-righteous means we draw our strength from our self. Outwardly we may appear holy, but inside we are ruled by our desires and will. But if I surrender to the Lord the bush is burning in me, the yearning for goodness, right, and love. It is a time of grace awaiting my response. Can I say with Moses or Jean Val Jean, "A new story must begin?"

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Josh 5:9-12

2 Cor 5:17-32

Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

The estrangement of a father and son or daughter is a very painful affair. The younger son's demand for his share of the estate was in reality a death wish. An estate is divided only on the death of the parent, but he wanted his share now. He got his way and left home.

Mark, a young adult I knew, wanted to go to New Zealand to climb Mt Cook. He and his friend Andrew trained, saved up their money, but a few days before going, he had an accident with his father's car. Jim demanded that Mark give money to repair the car. They had an angry disagreement, but Mark still left to go to New Zealand. Mark and Andrew, climbing Mt Cook, had an accident, and fell into a crevasse, their bodies were never recovered. Jim later had a breakdown. He had no time to be reconciled with his son. I gave him my profession cross and said to him, "Jim, here is the body of your son".

In the Gospel, meanwhile, the younger son had a great time, wantonly spending his money, but when the money had gone so had his friends. Desperate, he hired himself out, in the ultimate disgrace for a Jew, looking after pigs. In his hunger he would even have eaten the pig swill, but no-one offered him anything to eat. It was only when he had hit rock bottom that he came, not only to his senses, but to his self. He was still the son of his father. He rehearsed his self-hating script, "I will go to my father and say, 'I am not worthy to be called your son, treat as one of your hired servants.'" It was still self-serving. At least he would get a meal and a roof over his head. So he set off home.

A young man had been estranged from his family. He wrote to his father asking him if he could come home. His house was on a bend near the railway line and there was a tree in his back yard. He asked his father in the letter, if he was able to come back, could his father put a blue ribbon on the tree. The young man was quite anxious as the train was nearing his house. He closed his eyes and asked the man in the seat opposite, "Mister, is there a blue ribbon on the tree just round the bend?" "Son," the man said, "the whole tree is covered with blue ribbons!"

The father seeing his son coming from a long way off, ran toward him, forgetting the dignity expected of a father, and clasped him in his arms. He did not scold or punish him as the Pharisees and scribes would expect. Even the son, did not get to blurt out his self-hating script, as the father told the servants, "Quick, put the best robe on him, put sandals on his feet, a ring on his finger, sign of equal ownership of the property. For this my son was dead but now has come home alive. So let us rejoice."

Isn't the father a bit irresponsible? That's the accusation of the elder son. He dissociates himself from his father because of the son who was a sinner. He says to this father, "You and this son of yours." "I slaved for you, but you never offered a kid to me to celebrate with my friends". The difference between the sons is that the younger son knew the father's heart, but the older son saw

himself as a slave.

We are dealing here with a God of infinite mercy whom Jesus revealed in his ministry. He welcomed sinners first, and in that welcome invited them to conversion. Whereas the Pharisees, in their complaint about Jesus, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," dismissed sinners and refused to have anything to do with them. But Jesus is in line with his Father who said to Joshua, "Today I have taken the shame of Egypt away from you," meaning "you are no longer slaves but my own people."

What is the parable saying to you? It is not that anything goes. There is terrific suffering in welcoming home the lost. It entailed the death of Jesus. We could well memorise **2nd Corinthians 5:17-21** which instructs us, "Whoever is in Christ Jesus is a new creation. The old is gone, the new is here. All this is God's work who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on his reconciliation. For our sake God made the sinless one, (*Jesus*), into sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God".

What breaks through hardness of heart? It is the love of a father in imitation of Christ. This could be our project this week to seek reconciliation even in our family, whether spouse or sibling.

A good example is Gandhi. As a young boy he came under the influence of an older boy who got him to do things his parents would not approve of and deceived them for a year. He wasn't happy doing these things and knew he had to tell his father. He could not face him directly but thought that he would write a letter begging forgiveness and give it to his Papa. He wrote down all his mistakes and requested his Papa to give him a suitable punishment. He gave the letter to his father and stood silently by his sick bed.

When his Papa read the letter of confession, tears were rolling from his eyes. On seeing the tears roll down from his fathers' eyes Gandhi's heart broke. He was very sorry for what he had done and for breaking the heart of his Papa. He made up his mind never to commit such a mistake. He kept this till his death. His Papa did not scold him or did not use any harsh words. Papa was simply silent. He tore the letter into pieces as a sign of boundless forgiveness. The loving act of his father purified Gandhi's mind.

The Father forgives us in Christ, but he also wants us to avoid situations that would lead us to sin and deception and consequently lose our peace of mind. I invite you to come to the Father and open your heart to him.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Is 43:16-21

Phil 3:8-14

Jn 8:1-11

It's a strange scene, the accusers standing in a ring around the woman who is standing, and Jesus bending down to write in the sand. They had drawn the line, she was bad, an adulteress, and they were good, and were ready to execute the Law by executing the woman.

They had drawn the noose tight around Jesus, to trap him in public. Does he condone the sin and thus flout the Law of Moses, or condemn the woman and lose credibility as a merciful Master? Jesus does neither. He gives the woman a fresh start.

She was caught in the very act of committing adultery but where is the man? The scribes and Pharisees know the Law, (**Dt 22:22**), that both the man and the woman should die. Their memory is selective. Their intent is to trap Jesus. It's a situation affecting many women particularly in Muslim countries under Sharia Law. But also the exploiting and trafficking of women in the West.

In the face of the hypocrisy and double standard, Jesus does a curious thing; He begins to write in the sand. Maybe he was teasing out the situation. He would not be intimidated. But certainly, his next utterance was masterful. According to Jewish Law, it was the witnesses who were allowed to throw the first stone. Witnesses they may have been, but without sin the fervent crowd of scribes and Pharisees certainly were not. There was the added implication that Jesus was not referring to just any sin, but in particular to sexual sin.

I think Jesus was listening to the Spirit and reading the hearts of each man. So that, as he looked up, they knew, each one knew, as he said "Let him without sin cast the first stone" and they knew that he knew them through and through. They moved away, beginning with the eldest. Older men in precarious power (perhaps women today) may be strong in the condemnation of rivals but have a keener sense of their own weakness than younger idealistic men or women. Jesus could just as easily point the finger, "You, what about you on Saturday night? and you...?"

Jesus was silent, listening, and listening meant not just getting to the heart of the person, but letting that person be at the centre of one's own heart and self. The woman cowering before Jesus, expecting condemnation is drawn into the heart of Jesus where there is no condemnation. Jesus and the woman are left alone, misery and mercy faced each other.

The story is told of a young soldier in Napoleon's army who ran away but within a couple of hours was captured by his own troops. The punishment for desertion was death. The young soldier's mother went to plead with Napoleon to spare the life of her son. Napoleon heard her plea but pointed out that because of the serious nature of the crime her son had committed he clearly did not deserve mercy. "I know he doesn't deserve mercy," the mother answered. It wouldn't be

mercy if he deserved it.”

In today’s Gospel we have the magnificent story of the mercy of Jesus as he forgives the woman taken in adultery. The woman is still uncertain of the outcome until Jesus asks openly and lovingly, “Where are they who condemn you... I do not condemn, Go and sin no more.”

The Gospel this Sunday invites us to find forgiveness in Jesus that takes away our self-condemnation, to leave the past behind and allow him to do a new thing in us. Jesus offered the woman and us two opportunities at life – a physical one, and a new kind of relationship with God and others. Jesus knew that human attempts at love often get twisted and fall short of the mark. He also knew that given a chance the human person carries a great potential and capacity to love in all the right ways. Jesus gave her and us that chance.

Second Homily

Jesus is found in the most unlikely places. Dominique Lapierre, the writer, found him in Anand Nagar, the worst slum of Calcutta, where 70,000 people were crammed into an area the size of three football pitches. He stayed with a Polish priest and watched the work of Mother Theresa's sisters. He called that place *City of Joy*. In 1992 he wrote: "I had decided to put my pen to the service of this place that has more heroic people to the square metre than anywhere else on earth." "Few of us in the affluent West will ever experience such ecstatic joy because we have never known such depths of despair. We are in a way, the impoverished.

In today's gospel Jesus is found not by the Pharisees but by a woman caught in the very act of adultery – humiliated, reduced to a thing, a test case to trap Jesus whether he condones the sin and thus flouts the law of Moses, or condemns the woman and loses credibility as a merciful Master? The woman herself might be thinking: "If two were caught in the very act... why am I made the victim? Does Jesus condemn or condone me? he who loves people and is sensitive to their condition, their despair?"

No! He doesn't condone the sin nor condemn the woman. It hurts Him deeply because He knows its cost in terms of human ravage. He knows the cost of our sin. He wants to turn the depth of despair into ecstatic joy by bringing us through and out of the entanglements of sin. He will never condemn us to leave us in our sin. That's all the Pharisees wanted – leave the case neat and tied – condemned. Next! Jesus treats us not as cases but as persons.

“Do you condone this thing or not?” The ring is tight, fastening around Jesus, the ring of tight-faced men. Jesus escapes the net by bending down and doodling in the sand – what is He doing? He is listening to the Spirit and reading the heart of each man... as he looks up... they knew... as he spoke: "Let him without sin cast the first stone."...They knew that he knew them through and through. And they went away from the eldest to the youngest.

That is where Jesus is found, in our human hearts. We aren't perfect as Paul discovered. We are

running for the prize, for which we are captured by Jesus' love. Older men and women have a keener sense of their own weakness than younger idealistic men and women... but they need not have gone away. They could have stayed and acknowledged their sin, as clearly as they pointed out the adulterous woman's sin. They could have found the joy of Jesus. Jesus is not taking sides; he is offering salvation to all.

When Jesus listened it was not just to get to the heart of the men and the woman before him, it was first of all to let that person be at the centre of his own heart and self. So this woman at the raw edge of life, cowering before the Holy One, expecting condemnation, is drawn into the Heart of Jesus where there is no condemnation.

There is joy in forgiveness – rejoice with me – this daughter was lost and is now found. Let us celebrate for she is now home with God and with us.

Self-justification (as the Pharisees practiced it) is no longer necessary. His forgiveness justifies us and lifts us up and out of the snares that hold us back. Forgiveness is His Easter gift, as the first reading says, "There is no need to recall the past...see, I am doing a new deed. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises." "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation" (**2 Cor 5:17**). "All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death" (**Phil 3:10**).

"Since I am baptized into Christ's death I must consider myself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (**Rom 6:11**). We so easily feel condemned by what we hear, such as people's comments, but we need to ponder the words of Jesus... really listen and be empowered. "Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?" "Neither do I condemn you, go away and do not sin anymore."

Jesus knew that human attempts at love often get twisted and fall short of the mark. He also knew that given a chance the human person carries a great potential and capacity to love in all the right ways. Jesus gave her and us that chance. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He has set you free" (**Rom 8:1**).

HOLY WEEK

Year C

Passion / Palm Sunday

Is 50:4-7

Phil 2:6-11

Lk 22:14 - 23:56

Processions have a point, a purpose. And the point of Jesus' triumphal procession is to inaugurate his Father's Kingdom. Processions delight and disturb. Jesus' procession delights the people and disturbs the authorities, and behind all these, the fury of Satan, power of darkness. Right from the outset, forces have been getting together to control Jesus and, if not, to kill him. At the beginning of his public ministry, Satan tempts Jesus, and offers earthly kingdoms if he will submit to him.

Luke's whole Gospel is framed between the temptation in the desert and the temptation in the garden and on the cross. In the wilderness Satan attempts to divert Jesus from his God-given task. Jesus repulses Satan. At the end of that contest, Luke writes, "having exhausted all the ways of testing him the devil left him to return at the appointed time."

Now is the appointed time, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the hour when darkness unleashes all its power. Luke portrays Jesus as a gladiator in a struggle to the death with Satan. This is the meaning of the agony in the Garden; it is a gladiatorial combat, sweat pouring from him in huge globules like drops of blood. The issue is the same, "Father, not my will but thine be done. Yes, I will drink the cup to bring about the Kingdom." A decision reached through intense prayer. His disciples fail the test, succumb to sleep.

It needs the mystics, such as John of the Cross, to take us deeper into the meaning of Christ's sufferings. John wrote: "I looked at your Cross O Christ and there read the song of your love," or St John Paul II, "The cross is like the touch of eternal love upon the most painful wounds of our earthly existence."

Peter betrays him in another garden, that of Caiaphas the high priest. Earlier he had said "Though all the others lose faith in you, I will never lose faith. Even if I have to die I will never deny you" (Mtt 26:33, 35). "At that instant, while Peter was still speaking, the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered what the Lord had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will have denied me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly." The look of Jesus penetrates not only Peter's heart and conscience, but ours as well. Can we ourselves allow Jesus to look at us, a look that comes from the pure heart of Jesus and his love for us. We claim to be Jesus' friends but so often we let him down.

Luke's Passion helps us understand why Jesus goes to the cross. It is to free us from all that crucifies us, from all that stops us truly loving. We all are offered God's favour. Just look at the variety of characters that Luke parades before Christ on the cross and then those magnificent words of love, uttered by a battered, bloodied, crucified innocent One, God's only Son, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing." Those words brought a brutal Japanese killer,

Tokichi Ishii, to conversion. When he read those words of forgiveness, he said, "I was stabbed to the heart, as if pierced by a five inch nail."

Jesus wins our salvation by the skin of his teeth. Luke makes evident, Jesus' struggle is not just within himself, with leaders or human agents who torture him, but with the power of darkness, with Satan and his hold over people and nations.

Where does Jesus get the strength to respond like that? We get a clue in the first reading from Wednesday of Holy Week, "Morning by morning he opens my ear so that I may hear like a disciple; I have not rebelled, have not turned back." It is the constant exercise of prayer, listening to the Father in the moments of Gethsemane that prepares him for battle.

May we receive the redeeming look of Jesus, as he looked at Peter, and remember the selfless love of Jesus that may help us rise above our weakness. Remember the prayer of St Paul in Galatians that stayed with him all his life, Paul in Galatians 2:23 "Christ loved me and sacrificed himself for me," but not only for me, but for our world in its agony and turmoil.

Second Homily

Jesus is at the peak of his popularity, riding into Jerusalem as Messiah King, the rich throwing their cloaks down in front of him, the crowds cheering "Hosanna to the Son of David". Within five days he would be jeered at, killed, crucified on a tree. Was it an ill-timed bid for power, an attempt by any ambitious politician to seize power with himself as leader?

No, Jesus is sent to do what the Father asks of him. "God loved the world so much that he sent his Son, not to condemn but to save", to snatch us out of the power of evil by confronting it head-on. "Christ became obedient," it is an early Christian song that Paul put into his letter to the Philippians, a song that caught the meaning of Jesus' death: He was sent, obedient to his Father. Although divine, he emptied himself of his divine status to become one with and for us. He was without sin, but freely took on himself the consequences of sin, going to the very depths of human abasement, to the cross, to redeem us.

The cross, the strange mystery at the heart of Christianity, enabled those early Christians facing pain, suffering and death to continue to hope and believe. The cross stood for a God who is in solidarity with us in our suffering, not one who inflicts the cross as punishment for sin. Everyone wrestles with suffering and death. At times we grasp the meaning of suffering as we are going through it, at other times it is sheer hell, darkness, and we don't know how to cope.

St Luke's account of the Passion takes us by the hand to the prayerful contemplation of Christ in the different episodes of this mystery of pain. Jesus' silent pain at the Last Supper when faced with Judas' betrayal; the disciples still wrangling as to who is the greatest. The intense, debilitating pain of Gethsemane, the hour when darkness unleashes all its power. Luke portrays Jesus as a gladiator in a struggle to the death with Satan; it is a gladiatorial combat, sweat pouring from him in huge

globules like drops of blood. Feeling forsaken by men and by his Father, Jesus through intense prayer reaches the decision, "Father, not my will but thine be done. Yes, I will drink the cup to bring about the Kingdom." His disciples fail the test, succumb to sleep. Peter betrays him in another garden.

On the cross the leaders mock Jesus and cast at him the very words he had heard at his Baptism: "This is my Chosen One" and they say: "If you are the chosen One, save yourself." Jesus hangs on, his one concern is to save us.

And yet Christ is not alone in his pain; the Father sends an angel to comfort him in the garden; the women on the way to Calvary mourn and lament for him; the good thief declares Jesus' innocence; the gentile centurion confesses Jesus as a great and good man.

Pain is a hidden treasure. People today are afraid of pain. They want to eliminate it, to uproot it from human and even animal life. Our culture seems to be engaged in a battle against pain rather than for people. At times we can destroy pain, but in such a way that we destroy something of the human being.

We try to protect our children from the least pain with Panadol even for infants when sometimes human comfort is more effective. Elderly people and the terminally ill are given medicines which cause them to lose consciousness to a large extent. Aren't they being deprived of their freedom and nobility of spirit? I am not in favour of suffering as such, and it should be alleviated as much as possible, but I am in favour of the human assumption of pain.

Young adults when faced with failure, disappointment in love or a corruption scandal, prefer to put an end to their life rather than cope with the painful situation. Why? Because the treasure hidden in suffering is unknown, it has not been discovered. It is a hidden treasure of humanisation. For Christians, it is a hidden treasure of assimilation to Christ's lifestyle, of its redeeming value.

A friend of mine was dying at Monash; she was going into an unconscious fit every thirty seconds, and she told me she wanted to commit suicide. I spoke with her and said, "I will be here with you and walk with you through your suffering." Medical science is discovering that a friendly presence by the patient's bedside can alleviate pain more than an injection of morphine. There is a close relationship between soul and body and the spiritual comfort of closeness that alleviates the most terrible pain. Offering up our suffering with Jesus, gives it redemptive value. The Father raised him up and gave him the name above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In the floor of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, you can put your hand through a hole and you can touch the rock of Calvary. The place of the crucifixion is as near as the touch of the hand. Crucifixion is near for us all the time – our worries, problems and suffering – all ages know some pain and suffering. And yet all through this time Easter is near.

THE EASTER TRIDUUM

Year C

Holy Thursday

Ex 12:1, 11-14

1 Cor 11:23-26

Jn 13:1-15

Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world. He called his disciples to celebrate the great national feast of Jewish liberation, Passover. It was a night when they remembered and re-enacted the killing of the lamb whose blood was splattered on the door posts and beam to save a nation. Tomorrow it will be poured out to bring about his Father's kingdom.

It was a strange mix that night, the tremendous longing of Jesus to celebrate the Passover before he suffered. It should have been the most intimate meal. After all, these were not only disciples but the closest friends of Jesus with whom he shared his life. There was intimacy, joviality in the sharing as the meal went on, but there was also betrayal under the surface soon to be enacted by Judas and the other disciples. Jesus knew it. Instead of accusation, he washed his disciples' feet, hoping against hope that they would love one another as he himself loved them. Before he took bread into his hands to change it into His Body, Jesus first took the feet of his disciples.

"Do you understand what I have done to you?" Jesus asks his disciples and us as he poured water into a basin and put a towel around his waist, going from one to the other, bending down and washing dirt from dusty feet.

Peter caught the shame of it: "Never, Never shall you wash my feet!" This is this more than psychological massage – it is a debasing, demeaning act to disciples still ambitious for power; Jesus is giving an example of servant leadership. He is asking us to imitate him who loved us so much that he poured himself out for us as he does with the water. Jesus is the servant tonight. Tomorrow he will be the Suffering Servant.

Tonight, because of Covid, when only one person's feet is washed "in Memory of Jesus," Jesus wants us to copy his total self-gift, through Death to Resurrection. He wanted to leave an indelible impression in our heart and mind as he stripped down to serve. Only his unconquerable divine love could ever find those of us who are lost or feel destroyed by our own sin. Could we ever forget the way in which he held and washed our feet? It is an anointing that strengthens us when our feet are weary, our bones tired from carrying out his mandate. "Do this in memory of me". Can we sense his desire as we cradle his broken body before eating of it and drink from the cup of his suffering and remember with St Paul, "He loved me and sacrificed himself for me".

It was in the shadow of the Cross that Jesus pours water over his disciples' feet, pouring out his life and love for them. The washer of the disciple's feet is the one who takes away the sins of the world. We need to remember that the motif for this narrative is cleansing – Jesus' response to Peter – "If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me" – meaning – that there is no room in Jesus' fellowship for those who refuse to be cleansed by his atoning death. Jesus'

action, in his longing to save us all, sends out not a ripple but a tsunami of love over our world, a love, if we truly understood it, would overwhelm us.

Second Homily

It should have been the most intimate meal. After all, these were not only disciples but the closest friends of Jesus with whom he shared his life. He loved them. It was a night when they remembered and re-enacted the killing of the Lamb whose blood was put on the door posts and lintels as God prepared to liberate them. Despite the joviality there was betrayal and Jesus knew it. Instead of accusation he washed his disciples' feet, hoping against hope that they would love one another as he himself loved them.

Unlike the news that repeatedly shows horrific events, the Church each year, retells an event that shows the enormity of Jesus' love. Not to blunt our senses, but to awaken us to do what he has done. It's also so that we do not forget, but remember, "Do this in Memory of Me." We don't remember an event so much as a person, the person of Jesus who loved us so much that he poured himself out for us as he does with the water. Jesus' action sends out not a ripple but a tsunami of love over our world. If we understood his love it would overwhelm us.

A priest was going to say Mass for the elderly at a Nursing Home. I asked him what he was going to say. He said "What can you say, except to tell them to be like Peter, and allow their bodies to be washed and their bottoms wiped." Like Peter we come tonight to allow ourselves to be loved, to be washed, and then to wash each other's feet in an attitude of service, and to remember this night which is different from any other night. Not to remember is to forget who we are.

Remember! Remembering creates our identity as a people who inhabit two worlds, this world with its struggle, but another world where we get the strength to stand by those who are suffering. Not to have it on telly but to do it quietly. Character like photography develops in darkness.

Anna Akhmatova who died in 1966 was a Russian poet who, during the Stalinist terror, refused to go into exile. She identified herself with other Russian women who waited with diminishing hope for their husbands in prison. She suffered with other women. She wrote "In the terrible years of the terror I spent seventeen months waiting in the line outside the prison in Leningrad. One day someone in the crowd identified me. Standing behind me was a woman, lips blue from the cold, who whispered to me: 'Can you describe this?' And I said, 'I can.' Then something like a smile passed fleetingly over what had once been her face." Humanity fleetingly restored, hope not allowed completely to die, by Anna's word. Through years when evil and terror reigned she remembered and projected a reality that would not be smothered or destroyed. That reality was love.

Elie Wiesel, who spent years in Auschwitz, known only by a number, who watched his father die and heard the head of the block say: "Here there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends. Everyone

lives and dies for himself alone,” and who felt the absence of God and a great void within himself. “It’s the end, the Polish rabbi cried, “God is no longer with us.” It took him ten years before he could write. “Why I write,” he said, “is the fear of forgetting. I owe the dead my memory.” He calls us to remember, “For out of that memory which the perpetrators of the crime, and the onlookers, are so anxious to forget, comes some hope.”

What Jesus reminds us tonight is that it is not the end, God is with us even in the worst suffering, that we are brothers and sisters of a common Father and that love will have the last word. The redeeming event that begins again tonight not only opens for us a way into another world, but because it is a redeeming event within history, it alters the way in which we live within our history and world. We are to do what he has done, in memory of him.

Good Friday

Is 52:13-53:12

Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Jn18:1-19:42

We beheld “a terrible beauty” to use a phrase of W.B. Yeats. We screened our faces against him, so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance. Yet behind the blood and sweat and spittle a resolute will: Father thy will be done, not to punish me but to gain all my brothers and sisters and to reveal your love for them. Who is this Suffering Servant, but Jesus, Son of God who gave his life that we may live?

Yeats’ words, “a terrible beauty is born” come from his poem about the 1916 Easter Rising when a group of Irish men and women rebelled against harsh English rule and took over the General Post Office in Dublin and held out for a few days before surrendering. Sixteen of them, including the two leaders Pearce and Connolly were executed. Yeats was clearly fascinated and at the same time troubled by this heroic and yet in some ways pointless sacrifice. The seeming futility of their action against such odds (in Yeats words) “a terrible beauty is born,” marked the birth of the Irish Free State.

The death of Jesus by crucifixion was a shock to the early Christians. Jesus’ seemingly futile death saw a new birth for those who followed him. When we gather, Jesus is present in spirit, pouring out his love and his grace into our lives. Slowly it dawns on us that this horrifying symbol of the state’s power over life and death, a symbol of disgrace and condemnation and fear, is transformed into something entirely different from its common meaning.

We’ve gotten so used to the symbol of the cross, that we take it for granted. We decorate it, encrust it with diamonds and make it another piece of jewellery like an earring or nose ring. Jesus comes to us in the most outlandish way. He comes in sacrifice and self-giving and total love. Innocent of the charges against him, he nevertheless accepts the cross to show us how far he will go for us, how high he will be raised for us, and most importantly, where he expects us to follow. The cross is the sign of a radical way of living that demands making choices.

The paintings of Renoir are full of light and colour. We may not know that Renoir was horribly crippled with arthritis and had to have his assistants move his chair around the canvas he was working on. Every stroke of his brush was an agony. One of his assistants, the painter Matisse, asked Renoir why he was punishing himself. Renoir looked at the painting he was on and replied, “The pain passes, but the beauty remains” **(Bausch, 60 More Seasonal Homilies, p. 66).**

Sr Wendy the Carmelite nun, commenting on El Greco’s painting of *Christ on the Cross*, said that Jesus is depicted as dying in an ecstasy of joy because he had achieved what his Father intended. Hence his final words, “Consummatum est” “it is accomplished”. This was the shout of the centurion to his soldiers for a battle won or a deed well done. And she remarks, “Joy lasts and grief passes.”

Second Homily

“Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani, My God, My God why have you forsaken me.” It is a cry from Jesus, a lament to his Father. With a very human fear of being abandoned, Jesus utters a plea for an explanation, to get some sense out of his senseless suffering; a cry to find the meaning behind the excruciating pain he was enduring.

It's too simplistic to say he paid the price of our sins. To whom did he pay the price? What kind of God is this, would a father torture his own son? No! The Father is suffering in and with Jesus. You hear an echo of the Father's lament in the pain of David at the death of his rebellious son, Absalom. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would that I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!"

God loved the world so much that he sent his best gift, his Son. And Jesus came to carry out the Father's plan to save us, to bring about a world where people would act differently, treat each other with honesty, care and compassion. He was true to this all his life. By his life he showed visibly God's goodness, love and mercy that welcomed sinners. Being forgiven, they changed their life for good. He upturned the values of the scribes and Pharisees who held that you had to earn forgiveness before you could be right with God. But Jesus challenged their assumption by saying the publicans and sinners are entering the kingdom ahead of you. That was one cause of his death. How dare he challenge the status quo?

How did Jesus save us? Jesus in becoming human embraced the humanity of all of us. He confronted the very source of evil we face in his concrete humanity, worked through our sinfulness to break Satan's hold over us. Like a sponge he soaked in what we go through and purified it. He became our sin that we might be right with God. Instead of lashing back at those who were killing him, Jesus took in our sin, worked through it in his human person yet stayed true to his Father's purpose to set us free, free to be the real person God made us to be.

“What does God know of what we go through?” We decry the action of one of the paparazzi, who took the ring off Princess Diane's finger as she was dying in the car crash in the Paris tunnel. God does know what we go through, knows more than we could ever know. As his own Son, Jesus, hung dying, naked on the cross, the soldiers played dice, gambling for his clothing. But not only his clothing; they sought to rob him of his very humanity.

Death comes unexpectedly, and even as we grieve we know from Jesus that death cannot hold us. I was thinking about Jesus' death and the power of his obedience right into death through incredible suffering as he recedes more and more into himself until that one cry, Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani My God, My God, why...?

What is this obedience of Jesus? If Mugabe could bring the granary of Zimbabwe into absolute ruin, if Hitler and Stalin devastated Eastern and Western Europe, and now Putin in Ukraine, I saw

that Jesus' obedience to the Father's will is cosmic. His Yes to his Father swung back the evil from our first parent's No, he swung the world back into its proper axis and alignment with God. Mediaeval mystics called the cross the axle-tree. The cross we adore today is a cross of light, an exploding cross; it's as though the energy at its centre, gaining its power through obedience can contain itself no longer and must burst free.

It is at the point of pain that grace gathers at its highest intensity. This we know from the passion of Jesus. His Calvary darkness exploded into Easter light. Therefore, all our suffering is redemptive too. When we unite our pain with his, small miracles happen. "Through your pain, you will discover Me" (**Frank Andersen**). It is in our woundedness, not in our power, that we find him.

There is no area of life now that falls outside the presence and activity of God. In the cross, God is found to be active and present in the midst of extraordinary evil, suffering and death – drawing good out of evil, salvation out of suffering and new life out of death. In its own way the cross of Christ captures the paradox of life that those moments in which God seems most absent can be recognised as moments in which God is most present.

Jesus underwent the way of weakness. But from that weakness comes courage to do what Jesus did, to work to bring about the kind of world the Father wants, even to die for others. The world before was a cosmic No! to God. Jesus' Yes! unhinged that world and made it a world ever open to the grace of God no matter how hard life might be. God's grace is always available to give us strength. With Jesus, death enters into glory.

The Mass of Easter Night

Rom 6:3-11

Lk 24:1-12

When the women burst into the room where the eleven were, before they had even opened their mouths, their looks, their voices, their gestures, made everyone there realise that something unheard of had happened, and a shudder ran through their bodies. The world of spiritual realities enveloped them, filling the place and all those in it. The women struggled to put into words: The tomb is empty, we have seen angels. Alive, Alive, the Master is alive. Peter and John raced for the tomb and Peter came away scratching his head.

The Resurrection is a faith experience. It wasn't made up. It was something from the outside exploding in on the apostles which took them completely by surprise and which they had to grapple with. No-one can say "Jesus **is** risen, Jesus **is** Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. That **is** is continuous to the end of time. It was by the Spirit that they came to believe that Jesus lives; their faith-experience was transmitted faithfully to us. All that he claimed to be is true, Saviour and Lord, if only we let him in. He is my and your Saviour, my and your Lord.

Nothing has mastery over him – neither death, nor sickness, nor poverty, neither spirits above or below can separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus. He **is** Lord, master of all. The world is starting over. God's Kingdom is here. Jesus is Lord. There is no hour glass in his life, and his power flows to the ends of the universe. He is simply available to anyone and everyone who calls for help. Any place, any time.

Keith Green a Jewish convert and singer wrote, "All my life I've been searching for that crazy missing part. With one touch you rolled away the stone that held my heart. And now I see that the answer was as easy as asking you in. And I see I could never doubt your gentle touch again. It's like the power of the wind. Like waking up from the longest dream, or so it seemed, until your love broke through."

We're content to believe this, but the disciples experienced the reality of it in their lives by submitting their lives to Jesus. Christ's conquest of death overcame their fear of death, brought them into a community of hope, and sent them to witness courageously to Jesus risen; and to speak the compassionate word of God into the world, entering into the suffering and hope of all people making common cause with them.

This is the day the Lord has made for us to acknowledge him and let him remake our lives. That's my prayer: that we will really experience what we pray about; that faith will accompany our prayer; and that we attain the solid conviction and vivid awareness of Jesus risen. We are Easter people and Alleluia is our song. Alleluia.

Second Homily

We have come out of darkness into this place transformed in light. We followed the risen Jesus, symbolised by the Easter candle, through the wilderness, just as the Jews followed the pillar of fire, Yahweh, through the desert. We had seen Jesus dead, hurriedly placed in a borrowed tomb. The thought came to me this morning as we prayed by the dead body of Jesus. "Jesus, it's finished! Over! You're finished!" Isn't that how our secular culture sees him, like the cartoon in yesterday's Herald-Sun. All the Easter holiday traffic on the road screaming at Jesus, "Get out of the way, you're a bloody nuisance." But Jesus replied to me, No, it is not finished, it is accomplished. Christianity is dynamite and the obedience of Jesus has lit the fuse. It is Jesus raised from the dead by the Father's glory who tonight calls our elect to follow him. Jesus I love you, you meet me here tonight with your life, love and challenge.

The resurrection is the foundation truth of our lives. Jesus lives and wants to share his risen life with us. But how does that translate to the new post-Christian generation. We would like to share our faith with others so that we have an agreed foundation to build on. They want an experience of Jesus that can capture their imagination and faith. The Judaeo-Christian ethic that was the foundation of our western society is undermined. The alleluia we sing today comes from Christ who has scaled the heights and is drawing us on behind him to experience him. We need to face the realities of today's culture, in order to speak to it. I'm not talking about youth only but their parents and grandparents.

The mark of the postmodern culture (**cf Michael Paul Gallagher**) is one of a *wounded imagination*. We are faced with bewildering shifting images. Do I have an image of myself as a Catholic, or am I alienated from church and clergy because of media reporting? But we are the church, what image do I have of being church? You and I are created in the image of God and of Jesus that we need constantly to reverence in every person. We need to grow in our Catholic faith, not as a boring study, but taking it out joyfully to others.

A second mark of our culture is a *wounded memory*. Without a memory of our Christian story, we become disoriented and are easily manipulated. We don't have the fight to oppose evil. Twice in the Gospel the angels told the women to remember. Whether the apostles believe or not, hold on to the memory. "Why look among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here; he is risen. Remember ... And they remembered his words."

A third mark of our culture is a *wounded sense of belonging*. We need to create inclusive welcoming where everyone is accepted. The experience of culture is so strong that it can wipe out our sense of belonging unless we really work at it. We need Christ-centred fellowship that welcomes, listens, and affirms the unique gifts and goodness of each one.

The Orthodox often begin their Easter services with jokes to bring out the fact that God has told the great cosmic joke against satan and the powers of darkness by raising Jesus from the dead,

and broke the hold of death and sin over us.

Look at Acts of the Apostles: the risen Jesus called disciples to be in community, to listen to the teaching of the apostles, to go beyond fear and guilt by seeing the risen Lord in our midst, not dead but really alive and life-giving. His first words at Easter were peace not recrimination. Like with Thomas, Jesus gently deals with our woundedness by letting us touch his wounds, calling forth in us the confession, "My Lord and my God." Finally, he breathes the Spirit on us and sends us out as he himself was sent by the Father.

A joyous and rollicking Easter to each one of you and may the peace and joy of Jesus be with you always.

Third Homily

At the end of tonight's Gospel, I can understand Peter's amazement when faced with the empty tomb. For us, as for Peter, emptiness points to the lack of something – empty pocket – no money; empty chair at table reminds us that someone is missing; empty cupboard – we're out of food.

Jesus gave us great joy when he came to us as a baby, emptying himself of his godly power to do so; we saw him totally emptied on the Cross, till there was nothing there anymore, but the total will of the Father. God could now work his wonders through Christ, the Firstborn from the dead.

On this Easter night, if we but alter our perspective, the empty tomb means that Christ has broken the chains of death and darkness. Even though we must lose much, be emptied and die, Christ is with us always. This is indeed our deepest joy.

Three women in the Gospel tonight enter into this mystery - that he is found not among the dead, but the living. Three women who represent the women of our world, who stand at the crosses of war, famine, disease; who forage for food to fill the empty stomachs of their young, who nurse those sick with AIDS, Covid 19 and hunger, and when death comes, who bury their dead. These three women who kept vigil with the dying Christ, are the first to experience the risen Lord. Women who bear the first stirrings of human life were destined to bear the first tidings of eternal life. The empty tomb is where Christ broke the death barrier not only for himself, but for us.

Jesus' death was a death into Resurrection. Resurrection means not emptiness but the final and definitive validity of the single and unique life of Jesus. He is the Saviour of the world – the only way; to live with his life is the way to joy.

To share this joy with others, we must find a form of emptiness in our own life. We must empty the debris of our own desires from our life and make room in our living for the risen Jesus. Since the empty tomb, nothing matters except everything and everything is Christ's and Christ is God's, "And when everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subject to the One who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all" **(1 Cor 15:28)**.

In the front wall of the sanctuary, we put up a large whale, and asked **“Why the whale?”** The sign Jesus promised to the generation that did not understand him was the “sign of Jonah the prophet,” i.e. the sign of his own Resurrection. Just as Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, in the same way Jesus was three days dead. The life of every Christian is signed with the sign of Jonah because we all live by the power of Christ’s Resurrection.

This Easter may your life be filled with the strength that is found in faith, the peace that comes with hope, and the lasting blessings of God’s love.

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34, 37-43 Col 3:1-4

Jn 20:1-9

They all thought he was dead, even his disciples. It was all over. His enemies were all rejoicing, Satan, evil and death. The disciples saw Jesus die. It was clear-cut and final. But they didn't realise it was, in reality, a death into Resurrection. Jesus turned the tables on those who conspired to kill the Lord of life. The stupendous fact is that Jesus lives. "He is risen Alleluia." The Orthodox priests on Easter night begin by telling jokes, so that people are rolling in the aisles and entering into the great cosmic joke on Satan, evil and death. "He has done it, Christ conquered death! Jesus Christ has won it."

Easter is the central feast of Christianity. Christianity is based on a two-fold event, Jesus' death and resurrection. None of the disciples saw the resurrection. The disciples only saw an empty tomb. But they met the risen Christ in incidents like the one in the Gospel. Little baby, Victor, meets him this holy night and is plunged into Christ's dying and rising in Baptism. He meets Jesus not on the roads of Galilee, but of Melbourne. Divine life has been given to Victor; like a fragile plant in him, it needs to be nurtured by his family and by coming to this family, the Christian community, where he hears the Christian story, meets Jesus, and says yes again to Him.

The disciples had to wrestle through to faith in Jesus Christ, their risen Saviour. They experienced a change in themselves, of faith instead of fear, of love instead of hatred, of strength instead of weakness. It's the person-transforming power of the risen Christ. And it's their faith experience that gives a foundation to our struggle to come to faith. And over time Victor will do the same. Often, we are content to believe the Resurrection, but the disciples experienced the truth of it in their lives, by submitting their lives to Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour, they went out to tell others this Good News so that these, in turn, could experience the Resurrection.

Jesus is not just brought back from the dead to die sometime later. There is no hourglass in his life. He lives and is the author of life. The Resurrection doesn't mean a new period in the life of Jesus, new and different. It means the permanent, final and definitive validity of the single and unique life of Jesus. He is and claimed to be the Saviour of the world. The Father vindicated that claim by raising Jesus from the dead. He died for our sins and rose, and gave the Spirit to justify us, to make his conquest of sin effective in our lives.

The world is starting over. Jesus is simply available to anyone, any time and especially in the Church. He makes his risen life available to us. This time is the day the Lord has made for us to acknowledge him and let him remake our lives.

Let each day be for you a resurrection from the shrouded veil of night, an affirmative declaration that God still turns on the light. We are Easter people and alleluia is our song. A happy Easter to you all.

Second Homily

A newly baptised Christian after the Easter Vigil said: "I am waiting for the flash, the zap that changes everything. We want to live in the glow, the assurance, the glory of Resurrection, but is life really like that? Our life is more like the Gospel reality.

Christianity is dynamite and Christ has lit the fuse. Pandemonium had broken out. People running everywhere ... Mary running from the empty tomb, and Peter and John running ... the weight of Jesus' death and their own betrayal still heavy on them after Mary's report, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb." "My God, when will the nightmare end; haven't they done enough."

You get the sense as they enter the empty tomb and see, of Peter coming away scratching his head, wondering, and the evangelist comments "...until this time they had failed to understand that He must rise from the dead." It's quite a journey from this, to the bold declaration of Peter in Cornelius' house, "God raised him up to life and allowed him to be seen only by certain witnesses. We are those witnesses. We have eaten and drunk with him after the Resurrection, and we proclaim that all who believe in him will have their sins forgiven."

Even Jesus had to make a journey from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. His obedience to his Father to death on the Cross was a complete, total, letting go, being wrenched into death's oblivion. Like the trapeze artist in mid-air, before being caught up into the sweep of One Other, Jesus lay buried in the tomb, and with him all the hopes of the disciples, perhaps even Jesus' own human hopes. It was not a passive lying down in the face of defeat. No! It was the active acceptance of God's greater, wonderful loving plan for our lives, that we do not always see and that only dawns on us in time.

The first antiphon of Evening Prayer II from the feast, *The Exaltation of the Cross*, says it beautifully: "This was Love's great deed that death should die, when Life itself was slain upon the tree."

Jesus was vindicated in his claim of being the Saviour of the world, only by his Father raising him up. Good Friday is "good" only because it resolutely looks toward Easter rising. Flowers grow from dirt, delicious omelettes from broken eggs.

Good Friday and Easter belong together, precisely because Easter receives its power from the quality of Jesus' response to life, its uplifts and headaches, to the God of his life.

That quality response was his radical obedience to God's claim on his life. He took all of us through death and resurrection into a new relationship with his Father. Jesus, the Christ, the risen one has destroyed the distance between us and God. He appears unexpectedly in all our lives.

But the Easter moment in our lives comes in God's own time, as in revelation moments of a new baby born, a serious illness, a break-up in relationships, 25 years of marriage celebrated, and

we cry in hurt and in joy, "How did we deserve this?", and come through gradually to an understanding of God's gracious hand in our journey to full conversion.

The newly baptised who wanted Easter to be "a flash that changes everything," wrote this poem:

"Over and over, we struggle out of the tomb, feet tangled in the sheets, decay just settling in; over and over catch the scent of clean air, as the stone yields; and over and over, turn again to the dawn, the new light" (*source uncertain*).

Our risen life is an ongoing conversion. We are not meant to stay in the tomb. As we grope out of our tomb, we touch the fingertips of others reaching out of theirs, a mother who has lost a child and who has received much support from other grieving parents, meets a new couple in the parish, or in their group, shocked by their Good Friday loss, and reaches out in service to them.

As we meet our crosses, the height and depth and breadth, and bend towards one another, these crosses become strong bridges on which we cross to one another. We all die alone, but we rise in relationships and we realise that Easter is just a beginning.

A happy Easter everyone! And happy birth-day Resurrection parishioners

ANZAC Day

Is 9:1-6

1 Cor 1:18-25

Jn 12:23-29

Today we remember the centenary of Anzac Day and World War I. We gather, not to glorify or endorse conflict of any kind, but to remember, and pray for the many service men and women and civilians who died in the service and defence of our country. In the words from C. J. Dennis, **A Square Deal**, "We want this land we've battled for, to be a land worthwhile."

We remember all who died and were wounded in war. The fighting in Gallipoli cost 100,000 lives, 8,709 Australians, 2,721 New Zealanders, 32,000 British, 10,000 French and 56,000 Turks, 1900 Australians wounded; World War I: 61,928 Aussies dead, 152,171 wounded; World War II: 39,400 dead, 40,100 wounded; Korea: 386 dead; Vietnam: 520 dead; Iraq; East Timor; Afghanistan. On top of that are the millions of civilians who died of war, starvation and disease.

Again C. J. Dennis "There's something owing to the dead, An' Diggers live for more than bread." Many Australians who lost their lives in war weren't thinking to save the world or defeat evil regimes. As in the trenches of France, and the patrols in Vietnam, or on the Kokoda track, Australians were looking after their mates alongside of them. Many Australian veterans march on ANZAC Day in memory of their mates left behind, and the ones who have passed on before them.

Paul Keating said that "the spirit of Anzac became the canon of Australian life: the ideals to which we aspired, the values by which we lived. We will continue to hold the memory of those who served and died as inextinguishable and sacred. We will continue to remind ourselves 'Lest we forget'."

We remember the nurses, chaplains, stretcher-bearers, like John Simpson and his donkey, but also the people whom they served to protect. Nick Madaras was a 19-year-old American soldier killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq. He wanted to share his love of soccer with the children. After his death, family and friends collected 800 soccer balls which were given to the Iraqi children. One grateful Iraqi parent said: "Nick Madaras has risen in the Iraqi children."

Petty Officer H.B. Shiptone serving on the *HMAS Sydney* which went down in a ferocious battle with the German raider *Kormoran* 100 nautical miles off Sharks Bay in the West, wrote his own epitaph in the form of a poem in which he confronted the possibility of his death.

"Let me live, O Mighty Master, Through this war. Yet if I'm slain, Tasting triumph and disaster, Joy and not too much pain. Let me roam the raging waters for a while to love and laugh, and when I'm beneath the ocean, Let this be my epitaph — "There sleeps one who took his chances, in that war-crazed tragic hell. Battled luck and circumstances. Loved and laughed, but fought and fell. Victor, then he did no crowing; Wounded, then, he did not wail; Cursed and swore, but kept on going,

Never let his courage fail. He was fallible and human. Therefore loved and understood by his fellow men and women, whether good, or not so good. Kept his spirit undiminished, had a laugh for every friend, Fought for freedom till it finished, Lived, loved, laughed, until the end.”

SEASON OF EASTER

Year C

Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 5:12-16

Apoc 1:9-13, 17-19

Jn 20:19-31

In the Gospel, on the evening of Easter Day, we see a group of disciples meant to be the Church, but instead we find weak, dispirited, frightened men who had betrayed their Lord and Master; huddled together behind closed doors "For fear of the Jews," and unable to move out to the world to proclaim the Good News of Christ risen.

The disciples knew they had betrayed Jesus. They were terrified that what had happened to Jesus could now happen to them; tensely aware of any sound - a footstep on the landing or a knock on the door. Suddenly, Jesus enters. Closed doors of fear and guilt are no barriers to Jesus. He stands in their midst. His first word is "Peace be with you," and he shows them his wounded hands and side. Death cannot hold him, he is risen, victorious over death and evil, and he is with them. Seeing the Lord, the disciples are filled with joy.

Peace is Jesus' Easter gift. His gift of peace is also mission, the continuation of the mission on which his Father had sent him. "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you" and for which they must be enlivened by his Spirit. Jesus breathes on them and the word Jesus uses for "breathe" is used nowhere in the New Testament. It is the *ruach of Yahweh*, the mighty Spirit / breath/ wind hovering over the primeval chaos in Genesis that brings about a new creation. The same breath Yahweh breathes into the human figure made of clay and Adam becomes fully alive.

When Jesus breathes over the disciples, the chaos of their lives is transformed into a new creation; they are raised from self-recrimination and fear. Reconciled and raised by Jesus' Spirit-breath, the disciples are to continue the mission of divine mercy on which Jesus had been sent by the Father: the reconciliation of sinners. "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven..." The disciples saw and they believed. With that seeing went hope. This is the Church we hear of in the Acts of the Apostles. The disciples and Peter move out with power into the streets of the city to heal and free people from the shackles that bind them.

In the second part of the Gospel, eight days later, we shift from Church, to what is the heart of the Church — faith. Nowhere is Thomas called "The Doubter." Rather he is someone who will not accept the word of the other disciples on hearsay but wants to experience the content of their faith for himself. Thomas was absent from the rest of the community on that Easter night, wrestling on his own with his grief and doubt. He had seen his Master, the Messiah they all believed in, crucified. It killed his hope. Not even the change he saw in the other apostles, the fear and guilt gone, had any impact on him.

To be an apostle is to have seen the risen Lord. Thomas had not seen. He projects 2000 years ahead to our generation that needs experience in order to believe. "Unless I see and touch, I will not believe." He was still the loner. If our faith in Jesus is to grow we need to gather at Mass, hear

Jesus' Word, celebrate and come to experience over time the presence of the risen Lord. The problem with Thomas was that he was not in the community when Jesus came and so he does not believe. Eight days later back in community, he encounters Jesus, regains his faith and makes that magnificent profession of faith "My Lord and my God." It is his faith signified by that word "My" My Lord and My God."

This is the issue facing the Church today — the climate of faith. The climate or context we live in affects belief or unbelief, certainty or doubt. Our faith is nurtured from our upbringing, that is, the whole complex of emotional overtones and practices of the people that have surrounded us from the beginning that creates our worldview. Faith survives and grows because there is a whole culture that silently conspires and promotes it to keep a religious view of life intact.

The trouble comes when the climate changes from one of support to one of hostility and ridicule. When a world of pluralism drowns individual commitment, then to be a believer, much less a public believer becomes extremely hard (**Bausch, 60 More Seasonal Homilies, ibid., pp. 68-9**). You see it in the first reading: "No-one dared to join [this group of the faithful], but they were loud in their praise."

The deep-seated resistance to come to church perhaps can only be overcome by the experience and witness of other Christians. It is Christian community that makes faith plausible and believable. Thomas struggled on his own, outside the community, between doubt and faith.

When he returned to the community, despite his protests, he regained his faith, especially when he met Jesus himself.

In that meeting in the Upper Room something tremendous happened to Thomas that led to his magnificent act of faith. The early Christians used to meet by common consent and Pentecost happened again and again, signs and wonders at the hands of the apostles. May our faith in Christ risen shine through us as a Christian community and draw others by our radiance to really meet him and come alive in his Spirit

Second Homily

When we have been badly hurt by people. We avoid them, glad we were out when they came round. The wounds are too tender. We harbour our hurts, hold them close, won't let people near. Peace is often hard to find. We want space to get away and lick our wounds. Like Thomas we can't keep on running. He wants proof. He is quite belligerent in his refusal to believe.

Then suddenly, here is Jesus giving him an invitation to touch his wounds, wounds that he and the other disciples had some part in causing. Jesus invites Thomas, repeating back to him the challenge he had thought so private, "Unless I put my finger into the holes the nails made ..." and says, "Thomas, put your finger here in the wounds of my hands ... Give me your hand: put it into my side."

What is Jesus doing and why is he doing it? Is he trying to shame me, make me feel guilty? No! not when we hear his greeting – Peace! and see and feel the love streaming out from his eyes, his face alive, his hands reaching out in welcome. Nothing can hold Christ bound. Behind the wounds stands the person of Jesus and his attitude behind the gesture of offering his wounds, not seeking pity. These are glory wounds – the sign of his victory over betrayal, evil, human weakness and death that he comes to bestow.

The atmosphere is one of reconciliation, of being restored again to companionship with Jesus and community felt in the warm welcome of the others embracing him. He sees the Lord, joy and peace flood over him. It is a new creation – the Eighth Day – the first day of the new creation. Just as in the first creation God breathed on Adam and brought him to life, now Jesus breathes his new creation into Thomas and the disciples. Jesus tells them that his gift of peace is also mission: the continuation of his mission on which his Father had sent him, and for which they must be enlivened by his Spirit. The disciples and Peter move out with power into the streets of the city to heal and free people from the shackles that bind them.

Yet Thomas, like us, wants not just a feel-good experience, he needs a faith that will help him deal with the hurts life throws up, a faith that helps him negotiate the new world that seems bewilderingly out of control; looking to make some sense of the present and future situation.

Christ's victory is offered to wounded and broken lives. This is the sacramental dimension of John's Gospel. The fruit of this sacrament of reconciliation is Christ's Easter gift of peace and joy. The sacrament is an incentive to live a risen life

The sacrament has four aspects:

Confession, the most embarrassing, is voicing, and admitting our guilt before the brokenness in others. It is touching the wounds, our own or others. A driver facing a child in her hospital bed, who because he was drunk had run her down at the pedestrian crossing, and the anger of distraught parents.

Sorrow, “Oh my God, what have I done? I am so sorry”, not so much for me, as for God or the person I have hurt, or maybe myself.

Penance, making up for the wrong caused.

Absolution, re-entry into the embrace of the risen Jesus in this community.

The sacrament of Reconciliation – is a new beginning, a spur to live the risen life of Jesus' peace and joy that comes from Jesus' acceptance of us despite our woundedness.

How can we let people touch our wounds unless we have the power of the Holy Spirit?

Third Homily

To be an apostle is to have seen the Lord. But what happens when all the apostles who had seen the Lord are dead. St John's community raised that question, and this Gospel tries to be a bridge between the apostles and subsequent generations of Christians. We did not see, yet we believe. The fact that we are gathered here is a sign of our belief that Jesus is alive and a declaration of our love. Future generations depend on us to hand on what we have received so that they too can have life through the name of Jesus. If we all do that there will never be an end to the story of Jesus.

St Peter speaking to newly baptised Christians, which includes us, writes, "You did not see him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe; and you are sure of the end to which your faith looks forward." Faith gives orientation and purpose to our lives.

How can we get what the early Christians had? On the 14th January 2016, we celebrated Sri Lanka's New Year and the canonisation of Fr Joseph Vaz our first Sri Lankan saint. He was a resolute and creative missionary who came to Tuticorin on Easter Sunday 1687. Landing at Jaffna he found Sri Lanka under Dutch control and Calvinist, so that Catholic priests were banned. The faith of Catholics was suffering. He went about as a sannyasa, a mendicant monk, and one of his strategies was build huts in various places where the Catholics could gather, pray and deepen their faith. With the shortage of priests, the Mass meant so much to them. On a very basic level it meant community, the fellowship, in which we listen to the teaching of the apostles, we break the bread, share in the eucharist, and we pray.

John Steinbeck in his book, ***The Winter of Our Discontent (Penguin Classics, 2001)***, wrote about his aunt Deborah, "Aunt Deborah read the Scriptures to me like a daily newspaper, and I suppose that's the way she thought of it as something going on, happening eternally but always exciting and new. Every Easter, Jesus really rose from the dead, an explosion, expected but nonetheless new. It wasn't two thousand years ago to her; it was now." What a great way to listen to the teaching of the apostles.

After community and the teaching of the apostles, the second thing Thomas needed, and we need, is confession. The other disciples in the Upper Room, locked in by fear and guilt, suddenly saw the Lord Jesus right there before their very eyes. They had seen him crucified. There was no doubting that. Jesus' first word was peace, not recrimination. They saw the wounds that Jesus showed them, signs of his victory over sin and death, of his ultimate obedience to the Father. They recognised Jesus! They saw, believed and were filled with joy, their sins forgiven. Has confession fallen out of our lives? Look at how Jesus cares for Thomas. No recrimination here! He gently deals with the doubt of Thomas, his woundedness, by letting him touch his own wounds, and inviting him back into intimacy with himself.

A third thing needed is this. Once Christ was glorified by his death and resurrection he began immediately to communicate the Spirit. He breathed on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus not only became life-giving himself, but also empowered his disciples to share in his life-giving mission to people. You see the impact of an alive, down- to-earth community in the first reading of Acts; a group of Christians who communicate this Spirit to others. It is the Holy Spirit who enabled them and us to believe even though we do not physically see him. We walk by faith. "We may not touch his hands and side, nor follow where he trod; yet in his promise we rejoice, and cry 'My Lord and God.'" As Jesus was sent by the Father, and sends the apostles, are we ready to be sent by him as St Joseph Vaz was?

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 5:27-32, 40-41

Apoc 5:11-14

Jn 21:1-19

There is an air of despondency, almost futility, at the beginning of this Gospel. Scholars say that this is the first appearance of the risen Lord to Peter. Peter's world which, not so long before, had been securely tied together had become unravelled, hanging loose. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, with the death of Jesus his hope had gone. He is simply going through the motions, "Let's go fishing." At least there's some security in the known. They are in the dark, even their fishing skills had failed. In the grey morning light they sit in the boat. Everything seems futile. The zest for life has gone.

A voice comes to them through the greyness to try again, not in the dark this time, but in the full light of day. They respond to the call, throw the net to starboard and the fish come rushing in. For the beloved disciple it is the sign of Jesus, and he whispers to Peter, "It is the Lord! He is alive and he is with us." And Peter dives overboard, almost naked but wrapped in his cloak and totally soaked. He has no defenses now. This is one meeting he must not miss as he swam to the shore.

The miraculous catch of fish in Luke chapter 5 relates to Peter's acknowledgement of his unworthiness and his mission to be a fisher of God's people. It's the same here; the scene focuses on the role of Peter who drags the net of 153 fish to shore, without the net breaking – a reference to the Church that Peter is meant to hold together without splitting apart. "As soon as they came ashore, they saw there was some bread there and a charcoal fire with some fish cooking on it."

The charcoal fire takes us back to **(Jn 18:18)** when a terrified Peter by the charcoal fire in the garden of Caiaphas' house denied the Lord three times. The charcoal fire could be a symbol also for us, of something from our past which we wish we could undo. That is why Peter had to get to Jesus to try and explain everything. The atmosphere here, however, is not one of recrimination, but of restored companionship. Jesus welcomes them: "Come and have breakfast!" to join him in sharing the bread and the fish cooking on the charcoal fire. The disciples are in awe, not daring to ask Jesus who he is.

Then Jesus holds a Eucharist with them and, instead of the words "gave thanks," there is the unusual word "he steps forward" (erchetai in Gk) and takes the bread. In every Eucharist the Risen One steps into our midst. He comes to us from the other shore in order to hold a meal with us. Heaven and earth join each other. The disciples who step out of the boat, in which they have laboured in vain the whole night, are an image of ourselves: we emerge from the night of our life, in which we often drift aimlessly on the sea, often shaken by the wind and the waves. But when Jesus comes to us and has a meal with us our lives are transformed. Resurrection happens to us and in us.

It is only after the meal of reconciliation, experiencing the love of Jesus, and the joy of his

friendship that Jesus asks Peter three times “Do you love me?” Now we know the meaning of the charcoal fire. Hadn't Peter boasted, “even if all lose faith in you, I will not,” and so Jesus asks him “Do you love me more than these others do?” Jesus asks for agape love, a love that is not egocentric or possessive. At the third question, Peter acknowledges that it is only in the power of Jesus' love that he can love. Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to let go of his guilt. When Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” it is not payback time. He is more interested in our future prospects than our past failures, what we can become. Love of Jesus is at the heart of mission. At the third question: Peter humbly opens his heart to Jesus and lets him look inside, “Lord, you know everything, you know I love you.”

It is only in the power of Jesus' love that Peter is able to love and follow Jesus.” Peter's mission, his shepherd role is tied to love and to a willingness to lay down his life. He is no longer at the centre of his life and security. Jesus is! It is then that the Lord entrusts Peter with shepherd leadership and predicts his death. Love brought Peter a task – to shepherd the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock. Love brought Peter a cross. In a counseling session a wife was airing all the things about her husband that annoyed her. I asked her, “Were you able to say to him ‘I love you.’” It works both ways. Are we able to say to the other I love you?

H.V. Morton the travel writer was in Albano, Italy, and saw this old, square looking building. Going inside he found an ancient church. It had a brass plaque on the floor and he could just make out the words: “Quo Vadis?” This was the place, the story is told, where Peter hurrying out of Nero's persecution in Rome met Jesus – and Peter asked Jesus, “Quo Vadis?” “Where are you going?” and Jesus replied, “to Rome to be crucified.” Peter turned around and followed his risen Lord. When we were younger we chose our own way – but at the heart of mission is to have someone lead us where we would not normally choose to go.

Over this coming week in whatever situation we find ourselves, at home or school, on a project, or job – two questions might be asked of us: One from Jesus: “Do you love me?” And One to Jesus: “Lord, where are you leading me so that I can lead others?”

Jesus invites us to say over and over these two questions and listen to the reply!

Fourth Sunday of Easter and Mother's Day

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Apoc 7:9, 14-17

Jn 10:27-30

My brother and I were going to a film at a theatre in Bourke St, Melbourne. I was driving along Swanston Street, following a line of cars turning left up to Bourke Street, only as I got near the corner I saw the sign: 'No left turn', but I kept going. Round the corner there was the policeman pulling each car in. When he came to me, the only excuse I had was, "I was only following the others." The policeman retorted, "Father, you're meant to be a shepherd, not one of the sheep!" I think I made his day.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday and Mother's Day. We are all called to be shepherds, but mothers do it in their own unique way with love. Jesus spoke about the shepherd as the gate of the sheepfold. At night the sheep would be enclosed in a ring or wall of stones, and the shepherd would situate himself in the opening to guard the sheep from wolves and robbers.

Mothers are very protective, nurturing life from the womb, and together with their spouse, are attentive to the first signs of recognition, first steps, first words, helping their children discover the world of others and of God. Women are more aware of the effect of wrong peer pressure on each child or from computer or smart phone, and need to alert their father and together foster honest, open discussion with their children.

In the Gospel you can hear the tenacity and toughness of Jesus in these words: "The sheep that belong to me, listen to my voice: I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no-one will ever steal them from me." There is a bond, an intimacy between Jesus and those who belong to him. They are constantly in his thoughts. He would lay down his life for his sheep. In all their cares and concerns mothers need encouragement.

Encouragement, in terms both of putting heart into people and having the courage to face opposition, is very evident in the first reading about Paul and Barnabas. In their powerful preaching they encouraged people who had been specially blessed to remain faithful to the grace they had received. But jealousy broke in. The synagogue leaders got powerful people to oppose these Christian apostles. Acting as a shepherd, means working for Jesus whether with great success or seeming failure, and standing up for the Lord with joy. What motivated the people dressed in white to come through the great trial was the desire to be found worthy to stand before the Lamb.

Husbands, men generally, we need to be like Barnabas who cared for Paul and encouraged him. Pray for your wife, mother, sister, as they continue their wonderful work for us in the family, society and Church. Women hold up half the sky. If they weren't there what would fall in?

If the family is meant to be the crucible of competence, where your children learn confidence, trust, courtesy and gratitude, then mothers have a key role. But men need to be lovingly supportive. Women are not just in the home, however. They climb mountains for nurturance of the wider society, making a difference as doctors, nurses or volunteers in ravaged areas. But women also have to safeguard family and family values.

Two things, I think, undermine the stability of the family and family values. One is extreme individualism. Worn-out mothers often feel unappreciated “who notices and who cares”, and their sense of self might be tempted by the allure of pro-choice. Promoting choice in human affairs while good in itself can have an impact on the family, especially if fueled by the secularist pro-choice agenda. It ignores the quality of the choices made in human relationships. We get the situation where large sections of the community not only demand the right to choose, but also the right to define what is right or wrong in any set of circumstances in which they make a choice. In marrying and having children you can no longer think of individual choice. It applies to men also in their relationship to women. Having and caring for a baby requires responsible love, love that responds to the needs of another, especially the most vulnerable.

The second thing that can erode family and family values is seeing the vocation of wife and mother from a purely romantic viewpoint. Having an over-romantic notion of love does not prepare either spouse for the demands of motherhood or marriage. We must struggle to resurrect the ancient tie between romantic love and all loving, and between all loving and the will. Love first of all is a decision, not a feeling, and Christian love is a lived decision, a Yes said again and again. Our love must be real and active. To love as Jesus loved is the sign of Christians. It is not a harmless, sweet, sensual feeling. Love is cross-shaped. It makes demands.

In all three readings this Sunday, it's obvious that knowledge and know-how aren't enough. It's not just stamina to keep going. The underlying motivation for being a shepherd is the power of deep desire. We need to tap our spiritual desire and pull together as a couple. Desire is a vision, an idea that motivates our lives and shapes our destiny, namely what God is calling us to be. The vocation of mother, like a priest or religious, is not a stereotype. Each mother brings her own uniqueness and gifts to the task. Few have known success who have not known the fire of passionate desire in their hearts, minds and their very person. “Where there is no vision the people perish’ (**Prov 28:19**).

We Pray for our mothers today and ask God's special blessing upon all women, young and old, married or single, those growing into mature womanhood. We ask Mary to be our guide and to mother the birth of Christ the Good Shepherd in each one of us.

Second Homily

Today is vocation Sunday. Everyone has a vocation, but I want to focus today on priestly and religious vocation. The word, "vocation," comes from the Latin "vocare" - to call. We are called not once, but many times in the course of, and in the context of our lives, in response to the real needs of our time.

We live in a rapidly changing world, and the church seems irrelevant to that world. The Rev George McLeod said "The trouble with the Church these days is that no one any longer thinks it is worth persecuting." We are content. We close our doors to this world; we don't know the neighbours living on either side of us. The Church is perceived as of no consequence in relation to the pressing social and political issues of the day; with the paedophile scandal why give your life to God? Why? because God is in the midst of our world; Jesus Christ reveals the central truth about our human condition; the Holy Spirit is in and through all things. Bewildering as the rate of change may be, the heartbeat of God's love and the promise of the fullness of the kingdom remain constant. It is the love of God and Jesus that calls us.

The hardest moment for me was answering God's call. My twin and I were going to be builders. I remember the time at the side of the garage, Michael telling me he was going to join the Pallottines. My plans came crashing down. For two years I wrestled with that call, comparing myself with other builders and asking, "What does it profit if I gain the whole world and suffer the loss of my own soul?" The depression I was feeling was like being on a high diving board and bouncing up and down, hesitant to take the plunge. My one niggle was about my tools, a thread that could keep me from diving. I asked for a sign, but realised that the only sign would be in the decision I made after serious deliberation.

I joined the Pallottines in 1957 and gained my matriculation. I told the Lord that if he did not want me he could send me back. But Jesus the carpenter wanted joiners, so I stayed. They were great years: a spiritual year, three years of philosophy and four years of theology. I was ordained in 1964. During parish supply in Tamworth, I felt the harness of priesthood settle on me, calling me to choose again. As priest I did a Diploma of Youth Leadership, a full-time course for two years, and began retreat and youth work at Pallotti College, Millgrove. They were busy, rewarding years of retreats, camps and leadership training. God gifted me with health and strength to conduct, for example, five camps over the Christmas holidays after a busy year. "Where there is love, there is no labour," wrote Augustine. I loved the work.

I had been called by superiors and the bishop, but now I experienced God calling me to a renewed vision. I lived out of that call. Priesthood is not a stereotyped thing. There are calls within the call. Priesthood is shaped by the person who takes it on. The 60s-70s, were a heady time of change. When everything was being questioned, I wanted to listen in order to arrive at answers to those questions. I found that God's call came as a result of the convergence of

probabilities – young adult leaders were seeking to live in community, to have an experience of the risen Jesus, a share in the mission of Jesus, and have a life-style to support that mission.

In 1976, I founded a young- adult community in the spirit of our founder, St Vincent, of lay people and priest working together for the mission of Jesus. On the first year three young adults formed community with me; and the one year later eight young people. At times I walked the seashore on training days, asking the Lord, "Where are you leading us?" I needed the Spirit's guidance, trying to see the growing edge of the work.

Another call came in 1979, to develop Discipleship Camps, and some of the community left. They chose a different direction. The Spirit was at work in spite of difficulties.

I was sent to Riverton parish in 1981 and worked with youth and adults in the broad sweep of parish life. While praying the Office, the words of Ps 102:18 struck me, "that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord," and it became the program with youth for the next five years. I was under a tough parish priest who sought to curtail my work, but I resolved, no matter how small the circle, I would be creative within it.

In 1986-88 I did a pastoral counselling and spirituality course in New York while also working in a parish. Upon returning I was asked to take on the formation of our priests and brothers, as well as Lay Missionary training for our mission in the West. At that time some older leaders, from Pallottine camps, came and asked to have the same experience for their children as they had. Out of that came Family Camps, Men's Breakfasts. It was also a time of writing and research. I completed my Doctorate at the time I was asked to come to St Christopher's as parish priest.

I thought, as I took up the role of parish priest in 2001, that only now am I mature and ready for the task.

I have told you my story to let you know the great joy and opportunities to serve, that religious priesthood affords. I have had four quite different career changes. Everything you learn is grist for the mill. My trade was used, work with young people and adults challenged me.

There was my own inner work, integration of my celibate lifestyle, as well as growth times of prayer and healing for myself and others. Sr Joy was a great co-worker in my ministry. Her womanly insights were valuable. I am most privileged to be part of our parish and ask for your continued prayer and support.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:21-27

Apoc 21:1-5

Jn 13:31-35

It was after Judas had left, the cross looming very close, that Jesus left his bequest to his disciples: to love one another as he loved us. This is the sign of Christians, the benchmark of disciples of Jesus. Love is not just being patient and kind, sweet and ineffectual. Love here is cross-shaped. It makes demands. Jesus named his betrayer hoping he would admit his wrong and come back to him as Peter, condemned by the look of Jesus, after his denial, had done.

We have all experienced betrayal in some way. Betrayal by others, our plans and ideas, broken promises, betrayal of love. Here it is Jesus' intimate companion who betrays him, one of the Twelve, who is instrumental in bringing about Jesus' death, the death of the Son of God made man in Jesus. Such betrayal cuts deep and takes time to get over. It is not something that we quickly forgive but agonise over before we come to some resolution. Our whole life is at stake, our identity. Facing this betrayal that will lead to an horrific death, Jesus bequeathes what is at the core of his being, "Love one another as I have loved you."

How does this love that Jesus speaks of help us get over our hurts? It is a love that shows itself in deed, in action which helps us be true to the person we are, that God wants us to be. Jesus' love is a concrete expression of God's covenant-love which is true to his people even when they fall away from him. Jesus reaches out to all to bring them back to God; he is faithful to his charge right to the end. Faithful love means struggle as well as sanctuary; commitment takes guts, where love is tougher than all the rest. He can never give upon us. He holds a memory of us in his heart. No matter what we do, Jesus loves us. Jesus' love freely chosen will be faithful in the face of suffering and will ultimately lead to resurrection. It is in this context that Jesus speaks of glory five times in this short passage.

An elderly person asked God, "What do you want me to do at this stage of my life?" She heard God's word, "Care for others."

How does Jesus love heal our hurts? By our being faithful to Jesus' plan for us, and by service of others who may be worse off than we are. God wants to energise us to speak up against wrongs done to us and others, Christian love does not shrug off the problem, my whole life can be at stake. Nor does love surrender my personal hurt and damage to God and acquiesce in the wrong done. No! Christian love is real and active. It calls people to account for their unjust actions toward others or oneself.

We can compare Christ's love with Peer Gynt, in Ibsen's play of that name. He is a character who takes as his motto, not "To thy own self be true" but "to thy own self be enough." He takes advantage of women and others; he allows his own brute nature to dominate, is never faithful to commitments and lives as he pleases. He never attains his God-given destiny.

Ibsen uses three symbols to portray Peer Gynt as he nears the end of his life. The first symbol is the onion, an image of his inner self. Peeling off layer after layer to see the core, he realises there is no inner core in him. His cry of “Angst” expresses existential anxiety. Ours is an age of anxiety, of young and old committing suicide because they have no inner core of values, no inner connectedness with God. I see people with Walkmans or Bluetooths hanging off their ears, and wonder, when do they get time to listen, to reflect on life or on what they’ve done each day. Where is that inner sacred space where they can listen to the stirring of their hearts, to God speaking to them, like the elderly person who asked God what was wanted of her at this stage in her life.

The second symbol in Peer Gynt is of an old-fashioned camera with plates that ought to receive the imprint, the negative of the person photographed. The photographer tells Peer Gynt that he leaves no impression at all, no worthwhile impact on society at all. His life is a blank plate.

The last symbol is the Button Maker whose task is to melt each person down to a button that expresses their essential character and what they lived for, such as justice, love, fidelity. The Button Maker finds nothing in Peer Gynt. He can only melt him down to be waste material.

Peer Gynt is enough for himself, and he loses himself. He lives for no-one and stands for nothing. A wonderful example of someone striving to attain his true identity is told of Michelangelo standing before his completed statue of Moses, striking it, saying “Speak,” as he strove to realise himself in his craft.

It’s only when we reach beyond ourselves to attain our full identity that Jesus’ words make sense. Jesus tells us to love one another, as he loves us. His love is outgoing. It is not self-centred. It is love for others. It is a chain reaction of love, energising others, serving them, forgiving them as Jesus taught us to, precisely because we live in him, and God is at work in us. But it does not stop us speaking up. Jesus called his own disciples to account, confronted Pilate who gave in to the religious hypocrisy of the temple priests, acknowledged him as innocent, yet condemned him to brutal scourging, and gave in to the crowd to crucify him, because his own future was compromised.

Polonius advice to his son in Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, “To thy own self be true, and it follows as night the day you cannot be false to anyone,” is reinforced with greater force by Jesus challenge to us “To love as he has loved”.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

Apoc 21:10-14, 22-23

Jn 14:23-29

“During the Second World War in a city in Eastern Europe occupied by the Nazis, the Gestapo were sent out early one morning to round up all the Jews in the ghetto area where they had been confined and bring them to the train station. They were told to take nothing but the clothes on their backs because there would not be room on the trains for their luggage. Jewish men, women and children were marched down to the station and crammed into cattle [trucks] cars for the trip to Auschwitz. Inside the cars there was almost total darkness. People were barely able to move, not even to relieve themselves.

“In one of the cars near the back was an elderly woman who had taken with her a single bag, hidden under a long heavy coat. After several hours of riding on the train, the woman sensed that evening was near. It was Friday and the Sabbath would begin at sunset. She leaned down with great difficulty, opened the bag she had dropped at her feet, and brought out two small loaves of bread and two small candlesticks. She had no matches, but as word spread through the car, someone found a box of matches in a coat pocket and passed it along.

“The candles were lit and held by two people, their faces momentarily warmed by the light. Then someone began to sing in Hebrew the words of the great 16th century hymn, ‘Lecha dodi likrat kalah..’ that is, ‘Come my beloved to meet the Bride; let us greet the face of the Sabbath.’ Every man, woman, and child joined in, and the sound of voices filled that train moving ever deeper into the darkness of night.” The rabbis say that while it is true that the Jews have kept the Sabbath, it is equally true that the Sabbath has kept the Jews.” **(James A Wallace, *Preaching to the Hungers of the Heart*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 2000, p.70).**

That simple ritual of bread, candles and song kept the Jews in that train. Like the Eucharist it gave them a sense of identity as God’s people, gave them hope that God was with them.

“If you keep my word,” it can equally be said that Jesus’ Word keeps us. Take for example Ellen’s word to her daughter Jane, ‘No, you will not attend that R-rated movie, even if the parents of everyone says it’s okay. I love you too much to allow you to harm yourself.’ That word stays with her when the pressure is on. It could be the peer pressure to take ecstasy. Don’t take it in the first place, rather than having to battle its harmful effects afterwards. Jesus’ word about the Good Shepherd lived by 18-year-old Sam, who doesn’t drink at the party, and at the end says, I’m sober so I’ll drive you home. He is shepherding the lives of three or four.

The word Jesus addresses to his disciples leaves them three things: two promises and a gift.

Jesus’ first promise is something stupendous to those who love him and keep his word. When someone is going away on a long and difficult journey he or she might promise their disciples that when they have reached their goal they will bring them to share their success. But Jesus turns this

around to say that the end of the journey, the destination he aims for is in the disciples themselves. "The Father and I will come and make our home in you. It's a relationship with the living God within you. We experience it at every Eucharist if we are really aware.

Jesus' departure via his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven are really stages on a journey that reaches its end within us. It's an astonishing expression of God's unconditional commitment to us and to the world. It is an equally astonishing rewrite of traditional notions about heaven; 'God's dwelling place' which of course is 'no place'. God is not bound by any space and time. Heaven, the presence of God, is within each one of us to which we have to be faithful to the end.

The second promise to his disciples, anxious and afraid of the future without Jesus, is the promise of the Paraclete, (*God right by their side*), "the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name." The Spirit will teach, prompt the disciples, encouraging them to make difficult decisions. The disciples had been with Jesus three years and still hadn't grasped what Jesus ultimately was on about. They were fearful about what will happen to them when he is taken away. As yet they still had not got the mind, purpose, conviction of Christ.

But Jesus promises "when the Spirit comes he will remind you of all I have told you." That word "remind" means a whipping away of the veil over confused minds. "I see it all so clearly now," like the scales that fell from Saul's eyes. The Spirit will take those narrow-minded men onto the ship of Paul's mission to the Gentiles, through uncharted waters, rough seas and changing currents and back to port at Jerusalem, where in council "It seemed good to us and the Spirit" that this was the way forward.

There may be times when we just receive the added push we need to accomplish a difficult undertaking, or a golden opportunity presents itself, or a sudden inspiration appears out of nowhere. Coincidence? Isn't it the Spirit dwelling within us, often without our realising. Isn't it possible that coincidences are merely God's way of remaining anonymous?

We hear the power of God's word that can keep us, bring us back to God, in the life of Maya Angelou, the poet and author. In her twenties in San Francisco, she was becoming a sophisticate and an acting agnostic. She said, "It wasn't that I stopped believing in God; it's just that God didn't seem to be around the neighbourhoods I frequented." "One day my voice teacher asked me to read a passage from a book, a section which ended with these words: 'God loves me.'

He said, "Read it again" After about the seventh repetition, I began to sense that there might be truth in the statement, that there was a possibility that God really did love me. Me! Maya Angelou!" Maya suddenly began to cry at the grandness of it all. "I knew that if God loved me, then I could do wonderful things. I could try great things, learn anything, achieve anything. For what could stand between me and God!" (**Bausch, 60 More Seasonal Homilies, p. 79**).

Thirdly, the gift that the Easter Jesus gives his disciples is peace, a peace the world cannot give.

The peace that Jesus offers is not freedom from struggle or tension, a sentimental feeling of well-being. The peace that Jesus offers is a peace that no experience in life can ever take from us. It is a peace that no sorrow, no danger, no suffering can ever diminish.

It is a peace that is independent of circumstances. Jesus, facing the darkness of betrayal and crucifixion, like the Jews in the cattle truck, is preparing his anxious, distraught disciples for what is ahead. He takes the loaf of bread, the cup of wine and prays that reassuring prayer: "This is my Body, This is My Blood," this is Me given for you, always when you do it again and again, as Maya did, I myself will be with you. Eucharist is the great gift of himself to us. The result is peace, the peace of Christ, true stability. For when we keep Jesus' word, the Father will love us, and with Jesus through the Spirit, will come to us and make his home in us.

The Ascension

Acts 1:1-11

Eph 1:17-23

Lk 24:46-53

An image Jesus uses to express his going away to his disciples is: "giving birth", exemplified in a woman in childbirth. The Ascension of Jesus, leaving the grief-stricken disciples through his death and resurrection, and the excruciating pain of the woman in the process of giving birth is captured in John 16:20:

"I tell you most solemnly, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers, because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child, she forgets her suffering in her joy that a person has been born into the world. So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be filled with joy, and that joy no-one shall take from you."

The pain is turned into joy because a child has been born into this world. It's the same for the disciples because they will experience the transforming experience of Christ being born in them anew through the Holy Spirit.

For the past six weeks we have been experiencing the central mystery of our faith – Christ's death and resurrection – his obedience to the Father, growing to a greatness in the bursting forth of the Spirit at Pentecost. We are right here in the heart of this mystery. But how does the Ascension fit? What does it mean? Ascension says something about our humanness. The risen Jesus appeared to his disciples still bearing the scars in his hands and feet and side. These scars express his pain and his victory. It is with these scars that Christ ascended to the Father in his and our human nature. These wounds plead for us. His heart is ever open for us.

There's a story about Satan, angel of light, who disguised himself as the risen Jesus, and disguised his evil angels as angels of light, who sang: "Lift up your gates O heaven, and let the king of glory enter." The angels in heaven were thrilled and began to open the gates as they asked: "Who is this king of glory?" And Satan opened wide his hands in a grandiloquent gesture and said: "It's me." Immediately the heavenly angels slammed shut the gates. The marks of the wounds were not there. Satan had not earned access to God.

I was profoundly struck by Cardinal Newman's emphasis on the importance of the Incarnation – God's Son become flesh in Jesus – as the pre-condition of our redemption. How could we be restored to God except by one who was God; how can we be saved, except by one like us, saved from the inside by one who knows our struggle, resists evil and, in his own specific humanity, works through the sin of us all, and has inserted into our human nature the re-established relationship with God he has won for us.

Early Christian writers expressed this reality in three words "Carne cardo salutis" 'The flesh is the hinge of salvation'. When everything was out of joint, off its hinges, the Son came to bring the

world into right order. Not like a workman who dons overalls to mend the world, but by sharing our life intimately in every way, from birth to death. We are saved by Christ – but salvation is achieved not so much by Christ as in Christ. The way Christ lived reached its climax in his Death and Resurrection. When you consider the scars and pain in your own body and what caused them, you realise that your body is yourself, fully involved, working out your salvation. Many a mother I've seen with a limp, the result of a difficult delivery.

The Ascension means that this body, our human nature, in Christ is destined to be at the Father's side. Our destiny is clear. We in our flesh will rise and see God face to face. Jesus is the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, like the thin edge of the wedge driven in, he brings the rest of us with him. Jesus' Ascension gives us hope that in Christ we have made it to God.

But Ascension also says something about our mission. Ascension means that Christ is physically absent, gone from our view. The most wonderful person who ever lived, is seen no more.

But what about now? How is Christ seen now in his humanity? We make Christ present. Formed by scripture and sacrament and shaped by his Spirit we become what we receive, namely Jesus. We are to be witnesses of the risen Jesus.

I visited a hospital recently and experienced the wonderful sense from Catholic people, "Thank God the priest is here!" I'm sure doctors receive that trust and expression of relief. I know mothers do in times of hurt. But I believe that should be the feeling each one of us gets – "Thank God you're here –you bring faith, hope, joy, service –your special gift, which lets Jesus be glimpsed as he was on the roads of Galilee". It's not just a case of giving good example, but of consciously being present as witnesses – making Jesus' saving humanity present in this time and place.

In another sense the Christ has not departed this life. Christ is here. St Augustine said "Christ is now raised above the heavens; but he still experiences on earth whatever sufferings we his members feel. He showed this is true when he called out from heaven, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? it was Christ present in his Christian people, the Church.

Now is the time to ask for the Spirit who brings about the rebirth of Christ in us. To ask in the words of Elizabeth of the Trinity "O consuming fire, Spirit of love, come upon me and create in my soul a kind of incarnation of the Word that I may be another humanity for him in which he can renew his own mystery."

Mary, Queen of Apostles

Jdt 13:22-26

Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4

Jn 19:25-27

We all need heroes, heroines. Young people are hungry for role models that can be imitated, not celebrities in the world of rock music or film, but ordinary people who rise to the occasion in ways that are within their reach. In the scriptures there are many examples of inspiring female leadership and strength of character in times of crisis.

In today's Mass there are two: Judith and Mary. Judith was a beautiful and pious widow. She responded with extraordinary daring to the threat of the capture of her people by the Assyrians. First, she addressed the elders of her tribe, reminding them of the ordeals endured by their forebears, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. She chastised them for their willingness to surrender their town to enemies.

She gave herself over to prayer, begging God to grant her strength to overcome the powerful Assyrian army. She dressed beautifully and with her maid set out from the town and was immediately taken into custody by the Assyrians. She asked to be brought to their leader, Holofernes. He fell in love with her. On the fourth day in the Assyrian camp he invited her to a banquet, where he fell asleep after drinking great quantities of wine. When she was left alone with Holofernes, she prayed once more before taking his sword and cutting off his head, putting it in the basket her maid carried. She then left the camp with her maid and returned home, where she told the Jewish community what had happened. By this time the Assyrian army, learning about the plight of their leader, fled in disarray. The accolade bestowed by the people on Judith for her courage is expressed in the first reading.

Mary is a woman of Spirit. That's Pallotti's vision of Mary as Queen of Apostles. We like truths familiar and tame; we don't like them to jolt us out of the familiar into the realm of new possibility. The Holy Spirit who came on Mary was not tame. The Spirit is the force that made the beginning of a new creation with the birth of Jesus, God's Son become one of us, and the birth of the Church, the Body of Christ. It's a woman not a man who brings Jesus' real presence into the world on both these occasions.

Together with Mary in the Upper Room, the dispirited followers of Jesus are fired by the Spirit with a new energy, new enthusiasm and new authority. Out in the marketplace they proclaim how they have been changed by the power of the Spirit.

We could feel we are getting older, reluctant to try anything new. At a time in the Church when lay people felt passive, Vincent put before them Mary, a lay person whom the Church raised and praised as Queen of Apostles, to rouse apostolic idealism. He does the same today. Just as a good coach might revive his dispirited team, Mary and the Spirit rallies us to bring a new zest into our marriage, our job, our parish friends and activities. We raise our spirits by living with Spirit in

everything we do.

Second Homily

In 1976 a French Church Commission consulted women on their role in evangelisation, in being apostles. One woman wrote: "A woman is more suited to what pertains to life rather than to structures, more suited to activity involving personal relationships. A true life is a life lived according to the Gospel. This goes before any other consideration. If you would preach a sermon, you must yourself be a sermon."

Mary's role was just that. She cooperated in the work of evangelisation without preaching but doing what she had to do in the ordinariness of her life. But she did it with such perfection that she surpassed the apostles in merit, so that God who saw the disposition of her heart, raised her to the dignity of Queen of apostles. She is a great example to all of us in our own situation.

Judith is a prototype of Mary. She was beautiful and wise. The Assyrian general, Holofernes, was leading an invasion to destroy the people of Israel who were terrified and ready to surrender. Judith reprimanded the leaders for putting God to the test and argued that faith meant "waiting for deliverance," not coercing God. But then she acted. With her maid she walked into the enemy camp and without losing her integrity, ultimately cut off Holofernes' head. Even though her countrymen wanted to marry her, she remained unmarried for the rest of her 104 years.

When I was in Rome, one of the Pallottine Sisters mentioned that Pallotti chose beautiful paintings of Mary for his orphanages, church, but also as Mary Queen of Apostles to inspire all who commit themselves to evangelisation, to being good news, bringing the risen life of Jesus into every area of life. It's not just physical beauty but the beauty of holiness that gives power to apostolate, Vincent believed; lived holiness, that is, living with exactness and pure intention the duties of our state in life. What God looks for is holiness not magnificent works.

Holiness is carrying out God's will when it means going in a totally new direction, despite the consequences, seen in Mary's life; under the foot of the cross while your child of promise dies; awaiting God's definitive word of victory with the descent of the dove, and the compelling conviction that Jesus is alive and active in the worst catastrophe.

Flannery O'Connor, the American novelist, received a letter from a sister who ran a cancer home in Atlanta, Georgia, asking her to write the story of a 12 year-old girl who died of a horrific cancer. Throughout her illness Mary Ann maintained such a remarkably brave spirit and a courageous and lively disposition that she was an inspiration to the sisters and the patients. Her life showed how human affliction, borne in faith, can transform lives.

Flannery wrote: "One of the tendencies of our age is to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God, and once you've discredited his goodness, you are done with him. In this popular pity, we mark our gain in sensibility, and our loss of vision. If other ages felt less, they saw

more of faith. In the absence of faith, we govern by tenderness, but this so-called tenderness causes the death of vulnerable people. For us genuine tenderness and real love for the afflicted can be discovered only at the foot of the cross, standing with Mary.

Mary is the great example of the relationship between holiness and evangelisation through her intention, her yes throughout her life right up to the Cross and beyond. Her holiness is an open receptivity to God's plan of redemption. She imitated her Son in her whole life, making Christ present to men and women so that they might experience the saving power of God.

Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-11

I Cor 12:3-7, 12-13

Jn 20:19-23

Today we celebrate the great Feast of Pentecost when Christ filled the Church with the power of his Spirit and sent it into the world to bring his peace, joy and forgiveness to humankind. Pentecost means Fifty, from the Jewish Feast of the Week of Weeks $7 \times 7 = 49 + 1 = 50$, celebrated after the harvest. It is the fullness of the gift of the Spirit promised by Jesus after his Death/Resurrection event; and seen as one full day from Easter.

Jewish pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the feast, from all parts of the known world, came running at the sound of a violent wind, asking “what’s going on?” and were astonished by this small community of disciples speaking in tongues, each pilgrim hearing in their own language God’s mighty deeds. It is not babble; Pentecost is the reversal of the Tower of Babel, which was a story about a united people who spoke one language and decided to build a structure to reach the sky for their god. Yahweh, observing their city and tower, confounded their speech so that they could no longer understand each other, or work together and scattered them around the world. Pentecost on the other hand is a feast of unity in love.

Pentecost is not just the birthday of the Church; it is the birth of being Church, of daring to live the life of Christ into which we are born by Baptism and in the power of the Spirit. Pentecost sweeps up the dead bones of that little Jerusalem community so that it comes alive, stands up and goes forward to the ends of the earth with the Good News of the risen Christ. The Spirit takes the group of dispirited followers and fires them with a new energy, a new enthusiasm and a new authority. Pentecost is not only an initiation into a new covenant with God; the presence of the Spirit causes us to open our lives to others; to answer the call of Jesus to extend that covenant to our families, our neighbourhoods and civic communities, to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger and the outcast; not to compartmentalise our lives, but to make them one.

The Spirit is not the gift to proud achievers, then or now, but to those who pray, who wait obediently on the promise of the Father, announced by Jesus, and who have discovered the transforming power of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection in their own frailty and aridity.

We need the fire of Pentecost to take us beyond complacency, beyond the babble of misinformation, for example, in regard to Covid and conscience positions for or against vaccines, that set many families apart; but also in many areas of church, politics and media. Without really listening to one another, we can all so easily rebuild Babel

The Spirit is at work in new quiet but exciting ways, in spite of the struggles the Church faces and that we face with family, work, health or moral issues. If someone you love, dies or departs, you might step in and carry on that person’s work and mature through it. The departure of Jesus was necessary for the completion of his mission and the maturing of the disciples themselves. Jesus

who stood by them when with them, now promises another Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in his name.

The mission of Jesus was to reveal the Father **Jn 14:9**; the mission of the Spirit is to reveal Jesus to us and in us, to interiorise Jesus and the Father who come to be at home in us. We are to continue the mission and message of Jesus by being Jesus and bringing him alive through our life and witness.

For that to happen Jesus puts two conditions before us: "Do you love me and are you faithful to my Word," (*my teaching, my commandments, my right rules for living*) that bring you happiness? If we strive to be faithful, Jesus promises. "I will send you 'Another Advocate and Comforter' who will fight for you and be alongside you."

The Spirit works in two ways: on a personal level and then spurring us to action on a social level. The flame on the heads of the men and women is light, enlightenment, deep understanding, conversion. Jesus in the Gospel says, "When the Spirit comes, sent in my name, he will teach you and remind you of all I have said to you." That reminding is a whipping away of the veil over the disciples' minds and wills, leading them to understand all that Jesus taught them.

Augustine called Pentecost the eyes of the Church. Even after three years the disciples still 'didn't get' all that Jesus was trying to tell them; they were frightened. The Spirit took them and takes us beyond superficial enthusiasm to conversion, going beyond the false self to the true self made in God's image. Jesus' words came on fire within them. "Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us on the way?" Jesus' teaching moved from the head to the heart. It is the Spirit promised by Jesus and the Father who has brought this about.

We need the Spirit to fire us and enthuse us in our own attempts to work at forgiveness, love and understanding, and to make a difference in loving and acting as Jesus did and still does in us. It is evident in the change in the disciples at Pentecost- the doors are flung open, fear is gone. They proclaim boldly the risen Jesus, the Good News. We need to do this personally but also in small groups that wrestle with the issues, pray, grow and affirm each other and go into action.

Second Homily

D.L. Moody, the great evangelist could draw tens of thousands when he spoke, and was asked how he became such a great speaker: "Before I speak, I go to an open space and say, 'Lord, set me on fire'.

Only people who burn can burn up. Parents, care-givers can feel dried up, spent, because constantly called on to give. It's widespread among people in the caring profession who overtax themselves for the sake of others. It's so easy to neglect our inner fire which is the task of the spiritual life. We keep the doors of our oven open, so all we are left with is ashes. Nothing emanates from us anymore.

You may have had the experience we had it in the parish trying to put up a Pentecost banner, a beautiful work done by ladies of our parish. All we had to do was to lower the bars and connect the rod to carry the banner, but there was a snag in the line and we could not lower the bars. Trying all kinds of things, we were totally frustrated by a small knot right up there where the pulleys are. Pope Francis saw Mary, with the Holy Spirit as the untier of knots.

In your marriage or family relationships, it can be just a small thing, a word, a misunderstanding, an issue with money, in laws, some snag which can be a source of frustration, a knot we find hard to untie. Trying to get close to someone you like, or a member of the family but you can't find the right word or right moment. Ask Mary and the Spirit, the untier of knots to help you. Sometimes we just have to dare and trust that it will all work out.

Pentecost is just like that. It is not just the birthday of the Church; it is the birth of being Church, of daring to live the life of Christ into which we are born by Baptism and in the power of the Spirit. That first Christian community feeling the loss of Jesus, surprised by his rising, unsure where to go, finds the Spirit sweeping up the dead bones of their frailty so that they come alive, stand up and go to the ends of the earth with the good news of Jesus risen.

We can feel the Spirit this Pentecost as a gentle breeze as Elijah did; at other times with a force that can flatten trees. It shifted Bunbury Cathedral fourteen inches off its foundations. A violent wind hit the Upper Room and fire fell on the disciples as they joined in unceasing prayer with Mary, Mother of Jesus. Just as we can feel the wind, we can see the fire which has power to refine and transform

When we ask for the fire of the Holy Spirit, we ask for the fire which awakens life, which rekindles within us the flame that had burnt low. At the depth of our heart, this is what Pentecost tells us; there are not just ashes, but glowing embers from which our whole being can be inflamed anew.

The old Irish have a Gaelic word for burying warm coals in ashes at night in order to preserve the fire for the cold morning to come – they call it Grieshog. Don't let the fire from yesterday be permitted to burn out at the end of the day. We start off with our dreams, but the challenge is not to allow the old fire to die, but to keep its heat in order to be prepared to light a new one. It's a holy process, this preservation of purpose **(cf Joan Chittister)**.

People hunger for something larger than themselves, a higher purpose that gives life – where there is no vision, the people perish says Proverbs 29:18. We want to regain our vitality, to be in love with life and people again, in the service of others. On a talk back show I was moved by the stories of three people: a woman working in a foster home, who realized that the children had never had pyjamas at night, and began collecting for the thousands of foster children; a Microsoft executive at the height of his career, left a million-dollar job to bring books and literacy to Tibet and other places; a woman cut out coupons and provided for needy families. They honored a call and were

changed. We long to hear Jesus say to us: “I will do these things: Will you be on my team?” (**cf Oprah Winfrey show**).

Jesus still needs people to carry on his work. That’s why he sends the Spirit to give us energy, courage and love to get on with the task he has given us. The Spirit gives not only warmth but light. Today Christians are often put down on account of their faith; feel they are fighting a losing battle. But the Holy Spirit is by our side and wants to lead us into the full truth. He lifts the veil that covers everything. All too often we grope in the dark. When the Holy Spirit lifts the veil we are able to recognize the whole truth. We get the bigger picture. We now can see to the bottom of things. Everything suddenly becomes clear. Only through the Holy Spirit can I understand the words of Jesus as they affect my specific situation, they become word of life that lead me into life.

What the Spirit did was to bring out what was already inside them. His love awakens energies in them that they didn’t know were there, so that they were able to do things they did not think they were capable of. After Pentecost their hearts were on fire and there was a wind at their back. We too need the Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit to help us realize the power and the gifts we have within us. We need the Spirit to harness that power and release those gifts so that we can be fearless witnesses.

FEASTS OF THE LORD

IN

ORDINARY TIME

Year C

The Most Holy Trinity

Prov 8:22-31

Rom 5:1-5

Jn 16:12-15

It took St Augustine twenty years to complete his work on the Trinity. When we come to some clarity about God as three Persons and try to articulate it, we give the impression that we have sighted God through a high-powered telescope like Hubble. But as St Augustine said, "If you think you've grasped it, you haven't got it, it is not God," for God is a mystery, not up there, but a mystery of love at the heart of our lives and of the whole universe.

A friend of mine said that when he joined the charismatics, he got to know the Holy Spirit and Jesus, but now for him, in his spiritual life, it is just God. All the rest is so much speculation! The theologian Karl Rahner countered saying that many of us live as monotheists, believing in one God, but we have lost our moorings in the foundational Trinitarian experience essential to our identity as Christians. God is not some remote Being, absent and dominating. It is the three-fold experience of the mystery of our gracious God who came near us in Jesus of Nazareth and in the power of the Spirit that gave birth to the doctrine of the Trinity.

If Moses could experience God, despite difficulties, as tenderly compassionate, slow to anger, full of loving kindness, always faithful in love, and who begs God, "Come with us. Adopt us. We are yours. You are essential to our identity as your people." How much more can we say this to God revealed personally as Father, Son and Spirit. The Trinity is essential to our Christian identity.

We need to know the nearness of this three-personed God today as people are reduced through unemployment or redundancy, fear and isolation, disease and death through the Covid 19 pandemic. We're only prized for what we can produce in monetary terms. Human worth and dignity are at a discount. We need to know the nearness of a loving, caring God. And God could not have come any nearer than sharing the flesh and spirit of our downtrodden humanity in Jesus of Nazareth and made personally present through the Spirit.

God loves the world so much that he sends his Son who gives his life for us, rises from the dead and sends the Spirit to lead us to the fullness of truth. What is that truth? It is that there is a mystery underlying everything we know or take for granted. God is pouring himself out in love, every moment, emptying himself in the ongoing creation of each one of us and of our universe; Jesus has poured out his life for us; and this love of God has been and is being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Sure there's suffering and struggle, but the Trinity are right there within it and within us, empowering us through love to deal with the difficulties.

The sun in our galaxy, and there's millions of galaxies, the scientists say, expresses only one small example of God's creative love. Millions of tons of helium explode into hydrogen which burns away never to return, - but only one millionth of that heat and light reaches our earth. Yet without the sun's rays our planet would freeze over, we could not exist for a second. The very nature of God is

to seek out the deepest possible communion and friendship with every last creature. Through the doctrine of the Trinity we do our best to put words to this mystery of God for us, and live it through our care of others.

Irenaeus, who lived in the second century (130-200 CE), described the Son and Spirit as the two hands of God reaching down to us. We don't directly experience the Father, but we do experience Jesus and the Spirit. Jesus is the body-language of God. He reveals the Father. 110 times in John's Gospel, Jesus calls God, Father, but the whole life of Jesus reveals God's love – Jesus welcoming, healing and drawing us through himself to the Father. In a telling manner he reveals the Father, especially in the giving of his life. He doesn't take his life, he gives it for you and me.

The role of the Spirit is one of leading, guiding, pressing us forward into living the way Jesus lived, pouring out our lives for others. In one of my visits to lay missionaries in W.A. one of them was disgruntled. He wasn't going to let himself suffer burn-out in his care for Aboriginal young people. I received a letter from him later, 'Thank you for your visit. Since you left, things that seemed impossible now are a lot easier. It is still hard, but after you prayed over me, I feel really at peace and haven't wanted to go home. I have really prayed about things here and I think I will finish the year.'

We can be so busy watching against burn-out that we never catch fire. God's love poured into us takes us through. If we knew in advance what we would be up against, we couldn't bear it. But the Spirit makes Jesus' words come alive to us in fresh ways and takes us into the future. As a Christian community we are to make Jesus' words and actions alive and fresh for people today. This hope is not deceptive. We have God's word for it. It is the love and courage to go on that we experience, knowing in our hearts that it is through the Holy Spirit that we can do it. Isn't that something to boast about!

Second Homily

A man was walking beside the sea when he found a magic lantern. He rubbed it and a genie appeared and offered him anything he might wish. The man said, "I had a terrible argument with my brother 30 years ago and I want him to forgive me." There was a flash of lightning and smoke and the genie, said "Your wish is granted! But can I ask you a question. I am most impressed. In all these years, people asked me for a castle, jewellery or riches, but you have asked only to be forgiven by your brother. Are you old or are you dying?" "No way, but my brother is, and he's worth 60 million."

Perhaps on this same beach, 1500 years earlier, St Augustine was walking, pondering. He had been writing about the Trinity, trying to explain it. He found a small boy who had dug a hole in the sand and, with his small bucket was running back and forth with sea water to fill the hole. Augustine asked him, "What are you doing?" "I'm trying to empty the ocean into this hole."

Augustine laughed, "You'll never do it. The ocean is so vast and your hole is so small." The boy replied, "I've as much chance of doing it as you have of explaining the vast mystery of the Trinity."

We have a hole in the soul that we try to fill with a whole range of things. They can fill us up for so long, but after a while things don't satisfy us. There's a deeper yearning in us. We marry, often not the other person but our own dreams, illusions and expectations. When reality shatters those illusions, we're faced with the task and the joy of making it into real relationship. There's an aliveness but also a death in sexuality as we experience oneness and a profound aloneness in our journey toward each other in God. Into our weak flesh God has put this immense, sometimes uncontrollable urge to love and be loved.

We have a capacity for the infinite, and the actualisation of that capacity in a response to God makes us more deeply ourselves. That infinite is God, a triune, relational God. The teaching of Three Persons in one God implies that relationships are found at the level of ultimate reality. The persons of the Trinity, sharing one nature, are distinct solely by their relationships to one another as Father, Son and Spirit, and to us as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

If God has created the universe, and if we are made in the image of such a relational Triune God, then relationships are constitutive of transcendent reality. Even the scientists are seeing the inter-relating web of life from the atom to the cosmos; and noted that atoms changed their behaviour when observed.

The community of Father, Son and Spirit has created in us an orientation toward family, toward community. Male and female in the image of God have we been made. Community is not in numbers, in counting heads, but in the quality of the relationships between people. That's what makes community. So, solitary and social, me and others, is the tension, the polarity we live, and to risk relationship is where we find God and find ourselves. We are never alone. We want to belong. Children want to know who gave them birth and when they were born.

The first reading, Proverbs, influenced by Greek philosophy, spoke of the Logos, God's creative Word which created everything. For us Christians that pre-existent Word was *not created by God*, but points to the *Second Person who is God* from the beginning, "of one being with the Father though whom all things were made". In other words, we are created in the image of the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth. He is our DNA at the very heart of each one of us, who not only wants to be *with us*, but *in us*, and not only to be *in us* but *as us* in the uniqueness of each one of us.

The 60s/70s were described by sociologists as a Revolution of Expressive Disorder; it was anti-authority, anti-institution, a reaction to traditional ways and an opting for greater self-expression, individualism, the Me-generation. Today there are attempts to socially engineer family relationships even further by imposing *Safe Schools Coalition* programmes in all public schools.

Children as young as four are being treated as sexual beings and told they can choose their own gender. The programme, **Early Start Initiative** by *Early Childhood Australia*, is being implemented

in childcare centres and kindergartens. Among other things, it will explain cross-dressing and take toddlers on tours of opposite-sex toilets. The book, ***The Gender Fairy***, tells pre-schoolers that *only they* – not a doctor or parent- can decide whether they are a boy or a girl, or what clothes they should wear. This is social engineering, not respecting the normal growth process in children.

Such a programme is destructive of family relationships and creates confusion in young and tender children. It destroys any natural sense of modesty and invades the inner sanctum of each person. David d’Lima from Family Voice spoke out recently against the South Australia Education Department’s policy of removing doors from toilets, refusing to acknowledge sexual difference. The safety and privacy of girls should not be compromised because of anti-science Rainbow ideology. It must recognize that schools are neither agents of the State nor proponents of radical ideology. They operate in the place of parents to whom children are born and must not operate without parents’ consent.

The mystery of the Trinity asserts our innate dignity. Jesus, the Word incarnate who created the universe and delights in being with us is *in* us. The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And the God of infinite love claims us as adopted sons and daughters meant to walk before God our Father in love. We are created by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sanctified by the Spirit. We are precious in God’s eyes.

Pause a moment to affirm that you are an image of the Triune God. Now, if you wish, turn to the persons each side of you and say, “I salute the God within you.”

Third Homily

How do you view reality? What new things have you become aware of in the past week? I was in Mexico, staying with a Mexican family and a young American came to stay. He wanted sandals at the market and we were dropped off at the market to buy them. After his purchase he was hurrying home. I asked him, "What's the rush?" He said, "I don't want to be mugged." He was missing the opportunity of really enjoying the culture, the sounds, the sights, and the people. What do you think when you see a person? Do you see a mugger, a bore, or a nice person?

A teacher was exploring the topic of self-worth and relationships with a class of 14 year-old girls in a private school, and asked how they would visualise themselves in 7 years' time. One girl said she would like to see herself as "One hot chick!" Instead of seeing herself as someone who found a cure for breast cancer, or simply as a great friend, she was seeing herself as a piece of take-away meat. Ours is a sleaze culture that seeks the sexualisation of girls and has a taste for ever younger titbits. There's a rising tide of anxiety in parents, teachers and health professionals who care about young girls and teenagers; boys too, who lack male role models who respect women.

What is our awareness of transcendent reality? I see people of all ages from children with their electronic games, young and older people with blue toothbrushes or ear plugs stuck in their ears and I

wonder if there is room for silence, space for their own thoughts? Do these things, even mobile phones, keep us on the surface of things Do we have an inner life?

We are made not for depression or loneliness, but for one another and for God. We are made in the image and likeness of God, a God who is communion. God's image is writ large into our very nature, imprinted on our neurons, coded on our brain cells, and burned into our hearts. God is communion, relationship, and so are we. God's inner life is to be in communion, Father, Son and Spirit. How, then, do you get in touch with this God within?

St Bonaventure wrote that the way to God begins with the things that speak to our senses and which lift us up to God. They are his traces or footprints in the world. Joseph Mary Plunkett, executed by the British Government in 1916, wrote, "I see his blood upon the rose, and in the stars the glory of his eyes. His body gleams amid eternal snows, his tears fall from the skies." It takes a decision to step beyond immediate reality to see God in nature.

Looking at the material world, the soul takes in the reflection of God, mirrored by the things received through the senses. Soul, here, is understood as the image of God in the depths of the person, the most profound dimension of a person's spiritual being. The natural faculties of the soul, intellect, will and memory, (that is, what we know with our mind, our intellect, choose to love with our will and hold in our memory), these constitute the natural image of the Trinity, and reflect the triune God. The soul focuses on itself on this natural image, and gradually rises to the contemplation of God himself within the soul.

The ladder up to God is the Son who is the link between divinity and creation, for all created reality is the expression of him, through whom all things are created and who holds all things in being. It's a process of seeing God in nature, taking that into oneself through the senses, into the depth of one's being and then rising through that to God within. Plunkett again wrote: "All pathways by his feet are trod, his strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea. His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn, his cross is every tree."

Each one of us is a temple of the Trinity. That is the truth of who we are as body, mind /spirit beings. If we can see ourselves as persons in whom the Trinity abides, then it should lead us to see others the same way, to look beyond body image, the clothes they wear, to the spiritual and precious reality within.

What do we see when we see a person? Each one is a child of God. Burning down inside each one is a light that goes back to eternity. The light is divine light. Each one Pallotti says is made in the image of God, a living, vibrant image of the triune God. Pallotti saw that light. Mother Teresa often said, "I touched the Body of Christ today". (*Insights from Benedict Groschel*).

Pause a moment to affirm the truth that you are an image of the triune God. Now turn to people each side of you and say, "I salute the God within you."

Body and Blood of Christ

Gen 14:18-20

I Cor 11:23-26

Lk 9:11-17

The Church every Sunday and every day, retells an event that shows the enormity of Jesus' love. Not to blunt our senses by repetition, but to awaken us to do what he has done. I is so that we do not forget, but remember, "Do this in Memory of Me." We don't remember an event so much as a person, the person of Jesus who loved us so much that he poured himself out for us. Remember!

Remembering creates our identity as a people who inhabit two worlds, this world with its struggle, but another world where we get the strength to stand by those who are suffering. Not to have it on television but to do it quietly. Character like photography develops in darkness.

What Jesus reminds us at each Eucharist is that his death is not the end. God is with us even in the worst suffering, that we are brothers and sisters of a common Father and that love will have the last word. The redeeming event that begins again at Mass not only opens for us a way into another world, but because it is a redeeming event within history, it alters the way in which we live within our history and world. We are to do what he has done, in memory of him.

All the Gospels relate this miracle told by Luke. It points to the Eucharist when Jesus took bread, blessed, broke and gave, just as we had seen him do on the hillside. "This personal God wants to be my friend", wrote Edith Stein, a Jewess who became a Carmelite nun and was martyred at Auschwitz. She refused to withdraw from the world. She wrote, "He wants to draw me to himself, to his life and love. The deeper I am drawn into God, the more he calls me to go out of myself, to go to the world in order to carry the divine life into it. The Eucharist is his greatest gift to me" and you. The Eucharist is the sacrament that both needs faith and strengthens faith. It was the Eucharist that gave her the courage to face martyrdom.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus gave us his greatest gift, the most costly gift he could give, the gift of himself. Jesus identified himself forever with bread and wine. He gave his followers more than food for thought: he gave himself. This bread is the death of Jesus, his sacrifice makes us his family, the people redeemed by his cross and resurrection. He constantly pours himself out for us in every Eucharist.

We saw it in the Gospel when he came to an isolated place for a rest for himself and his disciples to find the huge crowd waiting and needy, just like us. But no matter how put out, on seeing us his whole being is filled with compassion, he radiantly welcomes us and speaks to us about God's reign of love showing the reality of that reign by his word and by his tender healing of people who needed to be cured.

Edith Stein, after communion, and in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament would ask the Lord, "What do you want of me?" She would hold a conversation with the Lord until she was clear what God wanted her to do. As a brilliant defender of the Catholic faith, she wanted to be a Carmelite,

but her confessors told her you are doing such great things outside. It was only with the rise of Nazism that she got permission to enter Carmel in Breslau and sent for safety to Holland until arrested by the Nazis and sent to Auschwitz with her sister Roza.

The Eucharist is the memorial of the Last Supper of Jesus and of his sacrifice on the cross. It's not simply a matter of recalling past events but of making these past events really present. In each Eucharist Jesus is really present and active in the very act of his Passover, that is, his death and resurrection by which he saves us, gives his life and unites us to himself.

He literally is pouring himself out for us, to such an extent that the disciples have to interrupt him. "It's getting late, send them away to buy food for themselves." He wants us to trust him and do what he asks of us, not run away to find other things to depend on. He says to us: "You feed them your selves, find your inner resources." All we have to offer are simple gifts. He takes these, gets us to have the people sit in groups of fifty, then he asks us to distribute what he has blessed and broken.

When we receive the broken bread we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. We are united individually with Christ and since we share the one bread we are united with each other in the deepest and most intimate manner. That is why Eucharist makes the Church and presupposes we believe in Jesus. Our union with Jesus makes us his body. That is why the Vatican Council turned the altar and the priest around to face the people to stress that in every Eucharist we are the People of God, priest and people, redeemed by the blood of Christ.

Christ is in his Word as well as in the Eucharist. The readings are an integral part of the Mass. We need to hear God's word, because the word taken in is meant to stir up our faith, so that Jesus our friend in the Eucharist really becomes our personal God. With full, active, conscious participation we respond to Christ's word and with the gifts are carried to the altar with our concerns, struggles and prayers, to be one with him in his loving act of sacrifice for us. And then nourished and empowered we are sent out in mission together to bring Christ to the world.

SUNDAYS IN ORDINARY TIME

Year C

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kg 17:17-24

Gal 1:11-19

Lk 7:11-17

The woman was distraught. She had given charity to the prophet Elijah, eking out a living, scraping together flour and oil so that he could survive, and God had taken the life of her own son. What kind of a God is that? She is a feisty woman, angry, feeling used. She takes it out on the prophet – “you call yourself a man of God. Have you come to put me down as a sinner and kill my son?” What can you say? Elijah could say nothing. But he had to do something. He took the son upstairs and had it out with God in prayer, ‘Lord My God, do you mean to bring grief to the widow who is looking after me by killing her son?’ And then he put his prayer into action. Through the action/prayer of the prophet God brought the boy back to life. God hears our honest cries of pain, of frustration when we pray with confidence and act as a response of that prayer.

“Why have you brought us here to Australia, promising work for skilled workers and there is no work? Why don’t you hear my cry for my daughter’s marriage which is on the rocks, my sick son, my husband walking out on me? “Out of the depths I cry to you, O lord. Lord hear my prayer. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading” (Psalm 129).

The face of God is mercy, and it is visible in the Gospel, in Jesus. In the town of Nain, seeing the silent grief and helplessness of the mother, her son on the stretcher the men were carrying, her only security and support gone. It tore at Jesus’ heart. Perhaps he foresaw the future pain of his mother, Mary, also a widow. He immediately went forward stopped the sad procession, took the young man by the hand, brought him to life and restored him to his mother. In the action of Jesus, we see the face of mercy. Mercy comes from the Latin word *Misericordia*; *Miseria*, misery and *cordia*, heart. Jesus has a heart for our misery. In our helplessness, pain or misery, no matter how deep, God is compelled to reach down and lift us up.

Not only do we have two instances of young people being brought back to life, Paul was brought back to life. In his religious fanaticism he was in danger of destroying himself, not only the Christians whom he was persecuting. He saw himself as a Pharisee of Pharisees, studying the Torah night and day, trying to work out his own salvation, trying to lift himself up by his own bootstraps, but never succeeding. He was merciless against the Christians, but the mercy of God brought him to himself. Paul described what happened on the Damascus road in four movements, God chose Paul from his mother’s womb (**election**), called him through his grace (**vocation**), and chose to reveal his Son **in** him, not just to him (**identity**), and this call leads to **mission**, to preach the Good News about Jesus to the pagans (**Gal 1:15**). Salvation for Paul and for us is to be Jesus.

Paul spells this out more clearly in Romans 8:29: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he should be the Firstborn among many brethren. And those whom he had predestined he also called, made right with God and

glorified.” Our vocation is to image Jesus, to become more and more like him and in this we become fully alive. Jesus is our Firstborn Brother to whom we must be conformed. The more we are like Christ the more we become truly ourselves and then become the face of Christ’s mercy to others.

We have a good example in Pope Francis who is trying to imitate Jesus by showing Jesus’ face of mercy in so many spontaneous ways. He imitates the openness of Jesus to the Spirit, as he points out the places crying out for mercy: Lampedusa and the refugees dying at sea; taking Holy Thursday from the pomp of St Peter’s to prisons and shelters for the homeless, bringing new awareness to what the washing of feet should mean. In disturbing the comfortable and comforting the disturbed he wants us, the whole Church, to be a Church of mercy.

We cannot proclaim the Gospel of Mercy without the tangible witness of our life. He wants to restore the Church’s credibility, possible only if we recognise Jesus, the one who has called us, who has invited us to travel his path, who has chosen us. This is possible only if we are close to Jesus, a daily closeness to him to know, love and serve our Firstborn Brother, the first of the many who look to us for help, compassion, and mercy.

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Sam 12:7-10, 13 Gal 2:16, 19-21

Lk 7:36 - 8:3

This Gospel is about a woman who was never invited and a guest who was never received. You wonder why Jesus was invited in the first place, because all the usual courtesies, the simple ordinary signs of welcome for a Jew were absent. Jesus' feet were still dusty as he lay at the banqueting couch, there was no kiss of greeting, no oil to freshen his looks. The dust and weariness was still there. There was an iciness and reluctance in Simon's welcome which said a lot about his inner attitude – this far and no further. We are in different camps you and I, Jesus. I don't go along with your freedom, your loving, your seeming indifference to our legalism, our justification by observance of the Law. And it shows.

But for the woman it was different. Sure, Simon noticed her and his judgements were flowing about her and about Jesus, and about any other person who did not measure up to Simon's estimation. I don't know how I would have felt in Jesus' place. But that's a man's approach. A man might use a woman in the night and ignore, condemn her in the light of day. He has to keep face, status, standing. Simon knew who she was.

There was innocence about Jesus that was not naïveté. He could have shown anger at Simon's lack of respect, as well at the woman's past, but he didn't. Everything else, reputation, the whispered gossip, was of no concern.

The woman was concerned with this person, Jesus. She may have been at the fringes of the crowd when Jesus was preaching. But something had grown in her. It was the sureness and certainty that this man would bring back her sense of dignity. With her whole being, body, mind and emotion she was there behind Jesus. Her whole focus, in public, was on Jesus. Her action may have begun with an involuntary wiping away the tears that had fallen on Jesus' feet. She was tuned in with her woman's awareness to the disrespect shown Jesus, and love wanted to make up.

She was dramatic, perhaps hysteric, but she received Jesus and he allowed himself to be received. There was no power-play here, no domination and then discarding of her powers of loving. This may have been the first time in her life when her loving ministrations were received by a man. And in the acceptance by Jesus, she herself was received. Just as that woman at the well, in giving Jesus a drink, had her thirst, her yearning satisfied. The greatness of Jesus to truly receive, accept women as equal in his apostolic mission, is evident in the group of women at the end of the Gospel.

But there's more here than a woman gate-crashing and an unwelcome guest being loved. Here, there is a question of reconciliation, of Jesus' forgiveness and what he can do for us. She has loved much because much has been forgiven her. Certainly there is a sense of sin. I had heard Edwina Gately's talk about her work with prostitutes in Chicago, and heard the yearning of these women

to get out of the business, to truly be loved and accepted. You hear it in the first reading when the prophet Nathan fronts David – even at the expense of having a spear thrust through him – to confront him with his sin. But with the awareness of the past chapters of our life, we need to be aware that Jesus is here. Justification is something he is doing now to us. It is not a matter of Law, but of Jesus and his love and acceptance of us. But how?

The effect of forgiveness, you see it in the woman, is to integrate all her powers for loving. In some way the past chapters are still there, but they are rewritten in such a way that they bring a depth and a richness to our chapter today. I find this wonderful. I don't have to deplore past mistakes in trying to be a loving person. I don't have to be constantly berating myself, putting myself down, saying again and again, I am sorry. Jesus has forgiven me. I don't have to stay locked in to this past event. He gives me power to be free, to look at past hurts done to others, to forgive them and myself and forgive those who have hurt me, and then to see the wonderful positive things that God is doing in spite of all this. God is writing straight with our crooked lines.

Jesus' question to Simon, "Who would love the most?" is an invitation to this same forgiveness and freedom. But Simon's glacier-like reply – "I suppose so" - indicates that he is unchanged, unrepentant and therefore not really open to Jesus.

Jesus is straight and respectful, but he is on the side of the oppressed as he works for their freedom. Where would you find him today?

Second Homily

Have you been guilty of imputing wrong motives to the external actions of others. I know I have. Simon certainly did. He was one of the separated ones, the Pharisees, who prided themselves of keeping aloof from sinners, untouched by women, tax collectors, people with disabilities, lepers or people on the fringes of society

Simon put on a meal, as the custom was in those days, as a way of teaching the law to the outsiders who looked in at the doors and windows. He invited Jesus who had a reputation of eating with all kinds of people, tax collectors and the like. Like an old Oprah Winfrey show, Jesus on one side and Simon on the other, it was going to be an interesting discussion. Except that he didn't reckon on the woman, with a very questionable reputation, who gate-crashed the party and stole the show.

This was an affront to Simon. He didn't dare voice it, but he questioned in his mind, that if Jesus really was a prophet (the first put down) then he would know what sort of woman this is that is touching him (the second put down). Simon thought he had caught Jesus with unworthy motives. He certainly judged the woman and her motives from her actions. Any woman who lets down her hair in public, making herself open to any transaction, is questionable.

Jesus, however, is a prophet who knows the secret thoughts both in the heart of Simon and in

the woman's heart. He then reveals the motives of Simon that were expressed by his actions. Wasn't Jesus invited to a meal at the Simon the Pharisee's house? Yet Simon's invite lacked the normal courtesies implied in table fellowship – there was no washing of the feet when the sandals were taken off; no kiss of welcome and no anointing of the head. But this woman lavishly did all three.

Were the woman's tears her awareness of how Jesus was being treated; a sudden flood of tears that fell on his feet, so she knelt, undid her hair and wiped away the tears; she came prepared to welcome Jesus with expensive aromatic oil in an alabaster jar. The jar had to be broken to let the oil come out, just as she had been broken, used, abused in many transactions with men.

Jesus does not confront Simon directly about his motives and action. He tries to open him by means of a story, just as the prophet Nathan did to King David to make him face his crime of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite. Nathan's story was about a rich king who had guests. Instead of taking a sheep from his own flock he steals the one lamb belonging to a poor man. David, caught up in the story, jumped to his feet and cried, "Who is that man?" Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" Nathan was then able to reveal the extent of David's crime (in today's reading). To his credit, David admitted his crime.

The story that Jesus told Simon was about two debtors who each owed a substantial sum, one 50 days' wages, and the other 500 days' wages, and asked, "Who loves more, the one with little to forgive or the one with much more to forgive?" Both are gratuitously forgiven. Simon guardedly admits that it is the one forgiven more. The woman, not Simon, responded with her whole bodily person to Jesus' free gift of forgiveness. She loved much because her sins, her many sins had been forgiven.

If Jesus' forgiveness unified the woman's power to love, when did it happen? Was it at the end, when Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven?" Or was it when the woman, desperately in need of love and acceptance, weeping, wiping and anointing Jesus feet, found no rebuff from Jesus, like, "Get away woman," as Simon would have done? She found instead, one who accepted her as she was, and in this acceptance, offered her the recovery of her special worth, beauty and lost innocence. The woman's longing for love, taken advantage of and abused by men, that longing finds in Jesus an infinite lover who brings the madness of love into a unified focus in him.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Simon only saw a woman who was a serious sinner, and locked her into her past. That was all he saw. Jesus saw and opened up her future, not discounting her past, but seeing it as past. It's not law that makes us right with God but faith, faith in Jesus that leads us to experience his infinitely accepting love. Perhaps if we judged less and loved more, we would see changes in our children, spouses, those we wipe off as hopeless. Jesus sees the inner motives of our hearts and believes in us with so much hope, that we might be forgiven and personally experience his love.

Third Homily

A woman drove to the supermarket and found a spot in the car park. She had a big red setter in the back seat. She wound down the windows to let in some air and told the dog to stay, backing off with her finger pointing to the dog, stay, stay, stay. A driver stopped, wound down his window and said, "Why don't you pull on the handbrake!"

This is a case of seeing things differently from the outside or from the inside? The recent Forbes magazine's 10 most powerful stars, (rated from their earnings and media presence), looked at people only from the outside. But what happens, when like Paris Hilton, you are dropped off the 2007 list, and rated "of diminished brand value" by Forbes' editor, Lea Goldman? Does this mean you are less a person? Unless we develop our inner self, our character, it can all equate to other-esteem, not self-esteem. As she was led off to prison Paris Hilton was falling apart. One paper wrote "Poor little rich girl who for the first time in her life can't get her own way."

Or Tony Mokbel's fall from grace; he was once on the VIP list for the Ferrari tent at the Melbourne Grand Prix, controlled 38 companies, owned pubs, nightclubs and a fashion house. What did all this mean now that he is in the notorious Korydallos prison in Greece?

King David, too, fell from grace. God had given him power, possessions, women, influence, victory over his enemies, all the external categories of self-esteem: significance to others, competence, power to influence people, body image and possessions, but he had gone beyond the boundary. Caught up in power and passion, he thought he could do what he liked. During the war with the Ammonites, he committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and arranged for Uriah to be killed in battle.

What was the boundary? Between the outside, the purely human, socially accepted order maintained by a set of cultural assumptions, and God's order, the inner self subject to conscience and free will. God sent the prophet Nathan to charge David with violating God's order, with adultery and murder. When David faced his sin and repented, God forgave him, but he still had to live with the consequences of his action.

In the Gospel we have a woman who has none of the external marks of self-esteem. She is publicly known as a woman of bad repute. She gate-crashes the party. Simon won't touch her with a barge pole. Yet it is she, the outsider, who replaces Simon, the insider, as host in his own home. Simon disrespected Jesus even though Jesus was invited as a guest. Where Simon's wealthy and religious colleagues received the customary marks of hospitality, the bathing of the feet, the anointing with oil on the forehead and the kiss of greeting, Jesus received none. It was the woman who supplied these, lovingly washing, kissing and anointing Jesus' feet. She saw beyond the externals to who Jesus really was.

Simon considers that Jesus has gone beyond acceptable standards, has crossed a social

boundary, in allowing the woman to touch him with such tenderness. Simon has already judged the woman. But now he questions in his mind whether Jesus is a prophet. If he were he would know what kind of woman this is that is touching him. In a reversal, typical of Luke, from outside to inside, Jesus shows he is a prophet who can read what is in Simon's mind and in the heart of the woman. With a simple parable he tries to get Simon to look beyond human ways of seeing, to how God sees each person. At this moment the woman is not a sinner to be shunned. Forgiveness has unified her power to love, a love that is manifestly absent in Simon.

Jesus' radical acceptance of the woman calls forth some form of equally radical expression in her. She weeps (probably in joy) at having found herself within a new order of reality, with a new status as one who is forgiven, with someone who has seen beyond the externals. She anoints the bearer of this new order with costly oil, as if to pour out the last dregs of what is valued in the old order on the one who is of ultimate worth and value in the new order.

She too crosses the boundary. She leaves behind the status quo where women are degraded, and trusts God to reveal a new social order in which roles are changed dramatically. Hidden within Luke's tender moment of transformation are the political consequences of placing God's order into conflict with Simon's order.

The Gospel teaches us to look at people the way Jesus did; teaches us that self-esteem, self-worth is centered in being a child of God; in doing the God-like things such as telling the truth, keeping our word, giving to those who cannot repay, repenting and forgiving. Self-esteem is an inner anchoring of truth, a sense of "the deep within," an awareness of our identity as made in the image and likeness of God.

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Zech 12:10-11; 13:1

Gal 3:26-29

Lk 9:18-24

At critical moments in Jesus' life and ministry, Luke presents him in prayer, "Jesus was praying alone in the presence of his disciples" - an interesting insight into Jesus' capacity to enter into himself even in the midst of busy ministry in order to discover his Father's will and direction.

We are at a critical juncture in Jesus' ministry; his disciples must know his identity and what following Jesus and sharing in his mission entails for them. To know Jesus enables me to know myself. "Being Christian," Pope Benedict wrote, "is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (**God is Love, number 1**). In the temptations in the desert Jesus prayed and came to the decisive decision not to achieve his mission through power, possessions, and showmanship, but resolutely to follow the human way of obedience to the Father.

A lot of attention has been given to today's Gospel: the prophecy of Jesus' Passion and the costs of our own discipleship in following him. What is less investigated is the reality presumed by Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" This is Jesus' central interest more than the opinions of the crowd. He is concerned about you and me. If Peter represents each believer, it's clear that what Jesus wants is our own unique affirmation. No one else can say yes for us. Only we are able to give our hearts away freely.

The question says something wonderful about us. That we have an awesome capacity to take hold of our own lives and give them away. In this matter no-one else can take our place. We discover that we are irreplaceable and incomparable. The self-gift of a poor, old, broken down person is as valuable to God as the gift of a famous leader, soccer striker or any other personality. In our response to the question, "Who do you say I am?" being Jew or Greek, black or white, slave or free, old or young, male or female is not significant. What is significant is our freedom, that gift which images our likeness to and oneness in Jesus.

Presuming the identity of Jesus as Son of Man and Suffering Servant, Luke then directs the invitation to all, that is, to us the readers, to follow Jesus, to "renounce self, take up the cross daily, and follow." Note that what Jesus was to undergo was not only horrific suffering but rejection in suffering. An example comes from Thomas Merton's autobiography. He recounts a childhood episode the implications of which stayed with him long afterwards. He paints a picture of his younger brother watching Merton and his friends playing their games in the woods, a small boy, vulnerable and unhappy, who refuses to go away even when they start throwing stones in his direction. 'He cannot understand why this law of love is being so wildly and unjustly violated in his case.' Merton said that's what sin is: the deliberate and formal will to reject disinterested love for us for the purely arbitrary reason that we don't want it. We will to separate ourselves from that love. ...

It doesn't please us to be loved."

This is the self, the false self, the ego that Jesus is asking us to renounce in order to find our true self. It is a daily carrying the cross to strive to be the person God wants me to be. Merton repeatedly struggled with this tension between the true self and the false self. He saw the superficial self, which thinks about itself, is constantly monitoring its own reactions, and talks about itself, and is not the true "I" that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the mask, the disguise, the smoke self of that mysterious and unknown self which most of us will never discover until we die.

"God leaves me free to be whatever I like. I can be myself or not, as I please. I am at liberty to be real, or to be unreal. I may be true or false, the choice is mine. I may wear now one mask and now another, and never, if I so desire, appear with my own true face. To work out my own identity in God ... is a labour that requires sacrifice. I don't know clearly the result of this work, the secret of my full identity is hidden in him. He alone can make me who I am."

We have four basic heart wishes: to love, to be loved, to share, and to blossom out. Jesus came to answer these heart wishes, but one of the difficulties we have today is the suspicion of people regarding the Gospel injunction to "leave self behind"; to be dependent on God. To moderns it seems to imply the destruction of self. God has put these deep aspirations in our hearts and they are meant to lead us to God. "Our hearts were made for you, O God, and cannot rest until they rest in you." God knows us through and through.

The false self is a hungry self, needing to be fed by achievement, always looking for praise, greedy for adulation and acclaim. It is at the centre of all my striving for gain and satisfaction, whether material or spiritual. It has to be pandered to, cultivated, developed, and satisfied. But it's an imposter. It has to be let go. Richard Rohr, in his work with men, said that after 30, personal success is not important.

The selfish self has to be transformed; that can only be the work of God. I therefore hand myself over to God, saying as I do, "Father, not my will but yours" in prayer and suffering (***Esther de Waal, A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton, St Anthony Messenger Press, 1992, p. 59***). Find an unnoticed flower around your home. Study it, its petals, leaves, colours, and the underside of it. This is your flower. Share it with someone. You and other people are like that flower, unique, but you have to study them and yourself. So many people go unappreciated because no-one takes the time to admire their uniqueness. Each is a masterpiece of God. Through prayer and suffering we attain our true identity in God.

Second Homily

Strange as it may seem, today's Gospel centres not on Jesus' identity, but on our own. In asking, 'who do you say I am,' Jesus challenges us not only to believe, but to become like Him!

Jesus knows who He is. It's us, if we are to continue what Jesus was doing every day; his daily

cross: - the constant struggle to uphold the dignity of trampled-down people, to confront the hypocrisy and sin in human relations, the corruption, neglect of children, family break-up, political even religious connivance, then we need to know who we are.

Jesus knew that what he was doing would create enemies, people who would nail him a cross and not only make him suffer but also reject Him. Suffering can be celebrated and admired. It can arouse compassion. But rejection takes the dignity away from suffering and makes it dishonourable. We need a strong sense of self if we are to meet with rejection. Jesus knows it, knows that if we are to follow a crucified and rejected Messiah we need more than our own power.

This Gospel tells us a great deal about Jesus, his attractive personality, his radical honesty. He is not some resurrected prophet from the past. He lays his and his disciple's future on the line and still his disciples follow. In following Jesus daily, we need a deeper love and desire than our own. If we don't have a sense of Jesus' love for us, we hang on to our own love, no matter how small it is. We must. How can I renounce my fragile self? It's the only thing I've got!

Our self is like the old Aesop Fable of the sun and the wind trying to take off a man's coat. The wind blew and blew and the more it blew the more the man held the coat to himself, hanging on to the little piece within himself. When the sun came out, shone warmly upon the man, his coat fell off automatically because he felt greater warmth in the sun than he did within himself.

It's the same with ourselves. We hang on to our self, to people, as long as we don't have faith in the One who calls us forward. We need Jesus if we are to become like him.

Discipleship is linked to Christian life, to our attitudes and behaviour. Jesus is the true behaviourist. He doesn't go in for phrases like: 'I'm a pretty good bloke, I don't harm anyone.' Continually he says: 'if you want to be my disciple this is what you must do: "Dailiness" is required to walk another mile turn the other cheek, forgive, and love your enemies." It's a 12-step program. These are the concrete signs of that new relationship with God – for the Kingdom – which Jesus is making a reality.

Jesus realised that we can't do this alone. He founded a new community, a family modelled on His relationship with His Father. It was a real contrast society which expressed what living in the Kingdom was like now. Jean Vanier who created many communities for people with mental illness wrote: 'it takes time for a heart to make the passage from egoism to love, from community for myself, to myself for community, for God and those in need.'" I do it when I open myself to all others without exception, to love everyone beyond distinction, beyond my spontaneous prejudice.

You see Paul continuing this idea "Whosoever puts on Christ like a garment, has to remove all labels – no more Jew, Greek, male, female, slave, free – we could apply it to many groups in our society. There has to be an equality in discipleship which calls us to let go of the selfish self, which tends to hold on to others, cultivate some and be non-responsive to others.

Karl Menninger, famous psychiatrist, was lecturing to a packed crowd and was asked what to do

when you feel an emotional breakdown coming on? Instead of giving a learned diagnosis, he said: "lock your door, go to the other side of the railway tracks and serve those in need."

How do I love? Whom do I love?

Third Homily

"Deny yourself, take up your Cross daily and follow Me." The Cross is part of the lifestyle of Jesus and of Christians. It marked Christ's life and is meant to mark ours. The Cross doesn't mean senseless suffering. It means purpose, although we might not always see it – God's purpose breaking into our lives and calling for a response. The breadth, length and height of God's love can make me know what my life is about at a deeper level, and cause me to donate it for God and others, cost what it may.

It is not guts that makes people stand up for what is right in moral issues, it is clarity of conscience. In any election; there's a Christian Values checklist which can assist us in our choices when we go to vote. But clarity of conscience is needed in daily life when we critique and express values that oppose political correctness or when people are trampled on – to be clear about the issues – doing what has to be done, saying what has to be said in spite of the suffering entailed, takes more than brute strength.

Khrushchev took over from Stalin and revealed the atrocities committed during Stalin's iron-fisted rule – at one convention he was loudly denouncing these atrocities when a note arrived at the rostrum: it read, "Where were you when all this was going on?" Khrushchev read the note aloud and asked who wrote it. Nobody, of course, responded. "All right," said Khrushchev, "I was where you are now." But Bukovsky in his memoirs wrote "I despised both Khrushchev and the author of that note. They both knew the truth, yet neither had the courage to say so openly...."

In response to Jesus' question, "Who do You say I am?" many Christians, like blades of grass pushing up through the concrete, are taking their lives in their hands, to speak openly against evil, to profess their Christian and social beliefs. The world takes note when Russia is being challenged by the Olympic committee regarding drug cheating, but when Christians are murdered in so many countries, it's not newsworthy, Pope Francis recently spoke of an ecumenism of blood – Christians killed for being Christian irrespective of the denomination they belong to. But they are raising our awareness – do we speak up?

More than the opinions of the crowd, Jesus is concerned about you and me. If Peter represents each believer, it is clear that what Jesus wants is our own unique affirmation. No one else can say yes for us. Only we are able to give our hearts away freely. When we put on Christ like a garment we need to take the labels off – no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, old or young, Aboriginal or Indian or Vietnamese. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Christ came as the tip of the wedge bringing all humanity with Him into that fullness of human

living and freedom that he released through the Cross. When He was lifted up He lifted up the world. We are meant to take up that task. Human rights are more than lofty ideals. They represent the rights of real live people.

Discipleship is linked to Christian life – in our attitudes and behaviour. Jesus is the true behaviourist. He doesn't go in for phrases like: 'I'm a pretty good bloke, I don't harm anyone.' Continually He says: "If you want to be my disciple this is what you must do: "Dailiness" is required to walk another mile, to turn the other cheek, forgive, and love your enemies." It is a 12-step program like A.A. – acknowledging a power greater than ourselves and doing a moral inventory of our lives each day. These are the concrete signs of that new relationship with God – the Kingdom – which Jesus is making a reality.

If we are all children of God in Christ we must be equally sensitive to the rights of others as we are to our own. We need to begin a small way by examining our consciences. Do I promote or defend the human rights of others? In subtle ways, holding down two jobs, for instance, am I violating someone else's right to work? Am I of two minds regarding the right to life of the unborn child? Do I steal from work? What have I done about the defence of Christian marriage and the confused ideas being pushed? Many of the young people need clear ideas, instead of the jargon of equality and same sex marriage or homophobia if you oppose it.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society is looking for people to visit the poor, sick, the elderly – to know their needs and to respond in practical ways. Every time we stand up for truth, for rights – we send a ripple right around the "world." We lift the world to a new level of awareness as Martin Luther King did. This calls us to ask how Christian are we? Have we opted for the good-life, the easy way or for the lifestyle of Jesus Christ? "I didn't say it would be easy to live for me and others" The Eucharist lifted up is our Eucharist – how much am I in it – lifting this world up to God.

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kg 19:16, 19-21

Gal 5:1, 13-18

Lk 9:51-62

The readings today are about following Jesus, but also about the temptations to delay, because there are a few things I have to do first: bury my father, say goodbye to folks at home. But the invitation is now. There will never be an ideal time; if we wait for the perfect moment we will miss out.

I recall hearing of a newly-opened department store that dealt in a single item of merchandise – **husbands**. A department store where women could shop for the perfect husband. There are six floors in the store, and as the shopper ascends from one floor to the next, the attributes of the potential husband on display increase. Two conditions: first: the woman can only visit the store once. Second: once she has gone up a floor she can't change her mind and choose a husband from a lower floor.

So, a woman entering the **Husband Store** finds on the **first floor**, men who are spiritual and employed in a well-paid job. "That's great," the woman thinks, "but this is only the ground floor and I'm sure I can do better." **2nd floor** she finds spiritual men who are employed in a well-paid job and who love children. "Hmmm. That's tempting, but there are several more floors to go."

On the **3rd floor** there are spiritual men employed in well-paid jobs, who love children and are extremely good looking. She's ready to settle for one of the gentlemen on this floor, but maybe, she thinks, I should see what's on offer on the next floor. And she's not disappointed. **4th floor**: There she finds potential husbands – spiritual, employed in well-paid jobs, love children, extremely good looking, and great with the housework. "I can't imagine doing better than this, but I'll take a gamble on the next floor."

On the **5th floor** –potential husbands, who are spiritual, well-employed, love children, good looking, help with the housework and who also have a romantic streak. "What more could I ask for?" she wonders but having come this far she can't resist seeing what the top floor has to offer. When the elevator opens on the **6th floor** she is confronted with a sign that reads: "Welcome. You are the ten millionth visitor to this floor. There are no men on this floor. This floor exists solely as proof that women are difficult to please."

We are all hard to please. In the face of endless temptations to wait for the right moment, the perfect person, or the ideal conditions, Jesus calls us now. When one of his disciples told Jesus that he had to organise his father's funeral; the response came as a jolt: "Let the dead bury the dead!" The disciple may have wanted to use the obligation, however far off, to postpone the invitation to follow Jesus; to keep his options open. Jesus calls for commitment.

The second challenge Jesus confronts us with "Once your hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom." At some stage in our life most of us make a commitment of

one kind or another. More often it is a commitment to another person, and for many that commitment took the form of marriage vows. When you took those vows, you made a life-long commitment. In theory you acknowledged the shadow side of that commitment. You said that you would take each other for better, but also for worse; for richer, but also for poorer; in health but also in sickness. "Until death do us part."

We **are** aware, however, that an increasing number of marriages don't last "until death do us part." One factor which has surely affected the increasing rate of marriage break-up is the simple fact that we live much longer than our ancestors. Commitments are tested by time. Relationships are under far greater strain than ever before.

The mid-life crisis often results in profound upheavals in our relationships, in our occupation and in a whole range of commitments which had given stability to our life. It occurs around 40, perhaps now at 50, at an age when most of our ancestors would have been dead. And so we experience far more acutely the tension between faithfulness to commitments made when we were young, and the existential tiredness that besets us in middle age.

The American poet Robert Frost expresses this tension in two of his poems. The poem, **After Apple Picking** describes the scene at harvest time in an apple orchard. The work is arduous and long, and seemingly never ending. At one point the person in the poem says: **"I've had too much of apple-picking: I am overtired of the great harvest I myself desired."**

Apple picking can be a metaphor of any of life's commitments, commitments we once embraced with such enthusiasm and dedication. But now, that same commitment has left us not just tired but over-tired. Will a good rest revive me, I ask myself, or is this commitment no longer life-giving. Does life now summon me to travel along a different path?

This poem must be held in tension with contrary feelings in another poem by Frost, **Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**. The poet is travelling by horse and sleigh on his way home, but stops by some enchanted woods. The woods seek to allure the traveller, but he moves on. **"The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep. And miles to go before I sleep."** Therein lies the tension that confronts us all at some stage in life's journey, "overtired of the great harvest", or "promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep." Today's Gospel is about making commitments. "Follow me" says Jesus.

What if we become overtired? Peter and the disciples did. None of them kept their hand on the plough, and yet when they came back to Jesus, all of them did great things for the kingdom. We could be overtired with our children not measuring up to our dreams for them. In the film, **Mr Holland's Opus** you see a teacher who loved music and hoped to share his passion with his newborn son, only to discover that his child has been born profoundly deaf.

Mr Holland is struggling to produce a symphony despite the heart-ache of a deaf son and the demands from involvement in the lives of his students. But if we keep our hands on the plough

leaders will emerge, the baton will be passed as Elijah did to Elisha and Jesus to us. At the very end of the film the students complete his symphony and put it on for him. One of the students says to him: "There is not a life in this room that has not been touched by you. We are the notes of your symphony, the melodies that you hoped to create."

Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary General of the United Nations wrote, "I don't know who put the question or when it was put. But at one stage in my life I said yes to someone or something. It changed the whole course of my life. Once I had put my hand to the plough there was no looking back. From that moment my life had a meaning" (***adapted from Markings***).

There is nothing to be gained by looking back on our failures in the past and allowing them to weigh us down. We have promises to keep. Our fidelity lies in the will to be faithful amid all our infidelities, to press ahead, despite the weight of the past.

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 66:10-14

Gal 6:14-18

Lk 10:1-12, 17-20

When the candles are blown out, the altar cleared, and we are driving away in our car with the stereo on loud, what has this hour we have shared in church really meant? Is it out of joint, not really relevant to our day-to-day routines? Or is it that modern daily life is challenging us to find new ways to bring Jesus to people?

For what struck me in the Gospel was that the 72 disciples were sent out ahead of Jesus, to all the places he himself was to visit. They were ordinary disciples sent out in pairs to prepare for Jesus' coming. If we have met and shared Jesus at Mass, we are meant to meet and share Jesus to wherever we are going, to prepare for his coming. This hour is meant to issue in mission. We go to where we live, work and socialize – with very little external trappings – simply the command of Jesus, to bring a message of peace, of shalom, healing and the presence of the Kingdom of God – not apologetically but with the power of inner conviction that comes from Jesus.

By the number 72 Luke wants to take us back to the Book of Numbers (**11:16-25**) where Moses was over-burdened by the care of the people. He was ordered by God to call 70 people to help him. They assembled before the Tent of Meeting where God was, and the spirit of prophecy came down on the 70. But someone rushed from the camp to say that the Spirit had fallen on Eldad and Medad and they were prophesying there. Joshua said, "Moses, stop them!" Moses replied, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!" Jesus, when he was told by John that someone was casting out devils in his name, and asked him to stop him. Jesus replied, "Whoever is not against me is with me" (**Lk 9:49**).

We're meant not just to keep the faith, but to spread it. Faith is never a hand-me-down. It has to be spoken afresh and heard by each generation. When Peter and Paul came to Rome, they found the faith already there. Jewish and Greek merchants passed on the faith; women washing at the river or sitting on the doorstep of their houses told others who Jesus was for them. *The Synod of the Laity, 1987 par 11*, said: "The Church's mission belongs not only to an elite, but to all the laity themselves." Pope Francis has repeatedly called for a synodal church, that is, the whole church walking together, in dialogue and discernment to respond to the needs of the world.

We need that prophetic spirit to discern what God wants for our church. Pope Francis' emphasis on synodality describes a church in the spirit of Vatican II, that respectfully engages all the People of God, listens genuinely to their voices and moves forward together. The process of the Plenary Council began with submissions from 17,000 groups and individuals. The Catholic community was highly engaged and the resulting document was clear in stating there was a widespread call for significant reform, especially in regard to governance in the Church and a

greater role for women. It will be a painful time of transition to a church quite different from what we have known, removing clericalism and control, so as to work together to listen to what the Spirit wants for the Church. It needs prayerful discernment by the whole People of God.

We might have felt like the Jews, Paul is talking to, who claimed that circumcision, the mark on their bodies and sign of their covenant, was their automatic claim to salvation. They did not need to change but actively resisted any change. We may have felt like this in the past. But we need the Spirit to respond to the 2021 census which notes a drift away from religion to a more secular society, a decrease among Catholics from 23% to 20% in the past five years. “Australia has become more godless over the past decade with a soaring number of people describing themselves as ‘non-religious’ (*The Age, June 28th 2022 p,4*).

In one of Paul Claudel’s plays, there’s a little blind girl who, realizing the loss of her sight, calls out to the people passing by: “You people who can see, what have you done with the light.” Many people are calling out to us – you who have the light of faith, who are children of God in Christ, sharing his life and mission: What have you done with this fantastic gift?

We can respond by seriously dealing with the submissions made to the Plenary Council, not being afraid to voice what we see needs to change, with courage to take Spirit-led steps to renew the Church and become a welcoming community.

A woman who attracted great celebrities to her parties was asked how she did it. She said I greet them with, “At last you’re here!” and when the guest leaves, “I’m sorry you have to leave so soon!” If it is genuine and done in love it has great impact.

When we welcome, become a welcoming community, what happens? People feel affirmed, that they are special, worthwhile in God’s eyes and have something to give. Genuine faith is an active belief that requires us to walk the talk. Part of our mission is to make a difference in other people’s lives; to work together to be co-responsible for being church.

Second Homily

The first reading reminds me of the time I was in New York, (*July 3rd 1986*) and by chance took part in the centennial celebration of Lady Liberty, a magnificent structure in New York Bay, standing like a mother welcoming her children home. It was a hundred years since France made the gift of the statue to America in **1886** to commemorate one hundred years from the **1776 American Declaration of Independence, although it was ten years late**. Designed by **Frederick Bartholdi**, it expressed “**Liberty Enlightening the World**.” It was a 151 feet tall copper-clad structure on a steel frame by **Alexandre Eiffel** (of Eiffel Tower fame), and standing on a pedestal on Liberty Island. The pedestal bore an inscription which resonated with the joy of arrival of the thousands of Jewish, Irish, Russian and European refugees seeing the statue as they entered New York Bay:

“Bring me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

The same feeling of joy we hear in the first reading as the exiles looked forward to a taste of freedom in the New Jerusalem, presented as a consoling mother, offering the chance for a new beginning. An idealistic picture of Lady Liberty and the New Jerusalem as a mother, but one that buoyed up their hopes. Psalm 87 puts it succinctly: ***“And Sion shall be called Mother, for all shall be her children ... and while they dance they will sing ‘In you all find their home.’”***

The same joy comes out in the Gospel as the disciples return, sensing that the Kingdom of God is coming, is moving inexorably forward, whether welcome or unwelcome, receiving hospitality or not. The kingdom of God is very near to you. This is the reality the other two images are pointing to.

Who brings about this reality? Not the Twelve, mentioned in chapter 9, nor the messengers we heard of last week preparing the way for Jesus. This is another wave, 72 disciples, me and you, not the Apostles, but all of us. We might protest over whose job it is, Someone else can do it!

It is the same in the church. We say, “It’s the job of the professionals, the priests or the religious to witness to the Good News that the Kingdom is near,” and argue that we are not trained for it. But by our Baptism and Confirmation each and every one of us, is called to discipleship, to witness, to spread the faith, not just keep it. The Vatican II ***Document on the Laity, par 6***, forcefully reminds us: ***“There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity to exercise their apostolate of making the Gospel known and people holy. The witness of their life and good works ... have the power to draw people to belief and to God.”***

The 72, like us, are sent out just as we are; no signs of status or wealth, no extra clothes, no purse to put money in. They feel vulnerable, like we do. They are given Christ’s peace, *Shalom*; to speak that peace to every home, and to bring the powerful word of Jesus to heal human hearts and root out evil. Table fellowship is Jesus’ key to the human heart, only it’s fellowship in reverse. When you go into any home eat what is set before you. Sitting down, listening to the other, and only then offering the word of Jesus and prayer in his name can be healing. As these disciples reached beyond self into the heart and needs of others, they became apostles.

We spoke of ***two images of ‘mother’*** - Lady Liberty and the New Jerusalem, and the part we have to play as 72 to welcome others. ***Well, today is ATSIC Sunday, (Aboriginal and Torres Strait and Islander Sunday) celebrated at St Patrick’s this Sunday at 11.00am.*** They want to welcome us into the land they call mother – to their spiritual connection to the land for 60,000 years expressed in culture, language and art, to celebrate their contribution to the Australian Catholic Church, and to have that accepted by us.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ***Catholics in the last census*** numbered 130,000 with ***a 186***

per cent increase in the current census. They are a growing demographic in our Church today. In the 2021 Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders numbered 812,729 with 176 languages spoken at home. **Pope John Paul II** in his address to ATSIC people and other missionaries in 1986, said: **“The Church in Australia will not be the Church Jesus intended her to be, until the Aboriginal people have made their contribution and that it is joyfully accepted.”**

They are making a contribution. **Our Pallottine Aboriginal Scholarship Fund** assisted one young Aboriginal woman among four others to graduate as doctors; and this year four Nurses, one student for the degree of Philosophy and Theology, one for Commerce and two for Bachelor of Science in their studies at Notre Dame University in Broome were awarded grants amounting to \$44,274.00.

In Victoria both political parties have agreed to a **First Treaty with the 38 clans** in Victoria. But the Aboriginal Council has delayed the process until truth-telling is completed through ‘yarning circles’ around the State, where elders tell their stories. Next year there will be **a referendum** and the aboriginal people ask for our support. Indigenous Australians realise that only they can bring that gift to help shape the identity and mission of the Australian Church – to be truly a mother who welcomes everyone. May the theme of this ATSIC Sunday, “Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!” be realized by us all.

The harvest is indeed great for those who have eyes to see it and a heart to respond to it. Every day is a harvest day. The note of joy that runs through all the readings is the effect of bringing people home to a compassionate mothering God. Jesus says to us, “Don’t ask whose turn is it to tell that the Kingdom of God is near?” It’s yours!

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dt 30:10-14

Col 1:15-20

Lk 10:25-37

The students of a preaching seminar were pressed by their professor to be on time at the auditorium, where they were to present their sermons on today's Gospel. A week later, on the way to the auditorium, they saw a man lying on the ground, covered with blood and crying out for help. The students bypassed him, rushing to get to the auditorium on time. After they had all arrived waiting to preach, the man, a professional actor, came in. His presence forcibly brought home the point of the Gospel.

"What must I do to gain eternal life?" asked the lawyer. Jesus isn't concerned about amassing wealth for heaven, but with living here and now. "Do this and you shall live." Real life for Jesus is a life of self-giving love toward the neighbour and God. The bite in this parable is not simply people's apathy, but that people, who by calling and profession should have helped the stricken man, were precisely the ones who passed him by. What prevents us from stopping? It can be the in-group who define the way we do things around here. It is not my job, I am just a parishioner. If I don't see or hear. I am not responsible.

Brendan Kiefer, 43, a city solicitor, and a Dutch 23-year-old tourist were on their way to work in Melbourne when they stopped to help Karen Douglas who was in distress. Christopher Hudson pulled out a pistol and killed Brendan Kiefer and wounded the other. Brendan died as he had lived, standing up for people. The cost of being a Samaritan might cause us to pull back from helping others.

"Don't die with the music in you," is the title of Wayne Bennett's book which says "don't die full of unrealised courageous intentions." It's faith that gives us the heart to dare something with our lives. For St Paul to be captured by Christ, was the motive, behind his life and action. He knew himself as being grasped by the Son of God in a love that was both deeply personal and supremely costly involving death by crucifixion. "He loved me and gave himself up for me" (**Gal 2:20**).

To get himself off the hook the lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbour?" It is applicable to us today. For traditional Jews in Jesus time, the neighbour was someone within the boundaries of their own racial and religious circle. To love outsiders while differing from their beliefs, was totally alien to their tradition. The issue for Jesus is not who are the ones I care for in my immediate circle, but who are the people who need my care, who need me to be neighbour to them.

Our Australian Catholic belief of accepting asylum seekers has been undermined by detention and generates the attitude that makes those who seek to help them seem to be breaking the law. These people are queue jumping, and we don't know who they are." It's our fear of the stranger, of those who are different from us, outside our group that's behind this attitude. It's pre-judgement, prejudice – lumping all the bad things on to people we have never met.

The people who first heard the parable, might have excused the priest and Levite, because if they approach the wounded man they will become unclean and unable to perform their temple duties. Other listeners, ingrained in their attitude to Samaritans would possibly have thought, "This fellow will finish off the wounded Jew and take whatever is left". To put the word 'good' to a Samaritan would have been unthinkable; but instead it is this Samaritan who exceeds the demands of generosity and care. He acts out of compassion, is stirred to action from what he saw. Loving compassion compels us to go beyond convention.

In the parable Jesus is questioning an attitude that has been taken for granted for hundreds of years, one which was enshrined in tradition and Law? And he was challenging the lawyer to be disloyal to that tradition. If your religious tradition invites you to distrust and despise other people, then if you take care of them you are disloyal to your tradition. It is precisely this foreigner who brings us believers back to life.

Will we who should have a Catholic mentality allow the attitude to outsiders be engrained in our Australian society as the attitude to Samaritans had become in Jewish society? Our neighbour is anyone who needs us. it may be a son/daughter who is in particular need of encouragement, a student who is falling behind in lessons, homeless people, the elderly lady who fell down the stairs after Mass, one who has no-one to talk to, the beggar at Woolies, those with disabilities. Jesus asks us to examine our role as Christians and be willing to do what is needed.

All this calls for a change of heart – to be challenged by this Gospel, to take it to heart and to act.

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gen 18:1-10

Col 1:24-28

Lk 10:38-42

In the hectic rush, sometimes hardly having time for a bite to eat, where are the moments of intimacy in your day: with the Lord, with wife or husband, with family? Time to relax, and get in touch with our deeper selves, and know that we love and are loved. Time alone which is so important.

Children need that time when they singly and alone have the attention of dad or mum; but couples, above all, need that time to build their relationships. There's the tyranny of work or searching for a job, the social demands. One of the first things we drop are prayer, time alone, time together. "There will be work when we are all dead," mum used to say. We need to live in the present together, not straining to get away from each other because of work's demands.

In Mark 6:45 and Luke 9:10 when the disciples report back from their mission – obviously things were hectic around Jesus – they didn't have time even to eat. What does Jesus do? He makes time. "Come apart and rest awhile."

In today's society when people are carrying such heavy emotional loads, they need time and space to unburden themselves, to let anxiety go in order to remain committed to essentials, rather than running ragged. We all know the exhilaration of getting away from things. We return and the demands are still there, but we get strength for the long haul.

Jesus needed to get away, needed time to be ministered to, as well as to minister. On the journey, as the enmity grew against Jesus, and doors began to close on him and people stayed indoors, Martha was out there welcoming Jesus. And so was Mary. Mary was also helping with serving, but she took time to be with the Lord, to listen to his teaching. In a culture where women were relegated to the kitchen, Mary sat at the Lord's feet like a disciple.

Jesus challenges Martha who, in her role of serving or ministry was making herself too busy with matters that were secondary and unneedful. He invited her to be still, to savor this time of intimacy with him. With Mary at his feet he could simply talk and recoup his strength. Mary had chosen the one thing needful. We all need these moments when we feel listened to, where we can drop roles and have the other focus on us. Where, like Mary, we focus on Jesus and learn from him.

Where are the moments of apartness in your life? It could be the solitary bubble of your car as you drive awhile without the radio on – using the road as your focus on God. It could be a busy shopping mall as you sip a coffee, or the quiet corner of your room where you have a chair, a cushion, a bible, a candle and just time to be. It can be the kitchen table when before your rise to clean up the breakfast mess, you take 5-10 minutes to read scripture, your favourite prayer or poem or simply get in touch with your feelings. It could be morning Mass here or in the city, or a sickness when you're forced to drop everything.

Yet the effect of that seeming waste of time prayer is that there awakens in us the heart of the shepherd attuned to the unexpected. As Jesus and the disciples rowed past the rocky outcrop, there they were, the crowd waiting. His heart went out to them, he took pity on them. The Greek word for pity means he was affected to the pit of his stomach by what he saw which moved him to action. Our God cares so much. “They were like sheep without a shepherd.”

The first reading and the Gospel also highlight hospitality. They show that prayer opens us to people in difficulty who may need a listening ear. Listening to others over a cuppa, isn't that what Martha and Mary did, inviting Jesus to a meal and to listen to his word.

That's what I have found. In giving time or financial help there is a reward, not necessarily financial, but through which the Lord does his healing work. We could hold back, push people away saying, “I'm too busy, I can't help.” But St Paul reminds us “Thin sowing means thin reaping. Each one should give what he has decided in his own mind, not grudgingly or because he is made to, for God loves a cheerful giver.” In giving I have never personally been in want.

Abraham was roused from reverie at the front of his tent and entertained angels unawares (**Hebrews 13:2**). Ministry, hospitality that flows from prayer has a promise awaiting us – the birth of something new in our life. God said to Abraham, “This time next year Sarah will have a child, the one promised to you despite your old age” (**Gen 18:10**).

As Christians in the modern world we need engagement with others to awaken our compassion. But we also need the time to get perspective on it, know what we stand for, and to be able to stand for Jesus and his teaching. We won't get it unless we sit at his feet like a disciple.

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gen 18:20-32

Col 2:12-14

Lk 11:1-13

The disciples were Jews. They knew how to pray. But there was something about Jesus' prayer that had a unique quality to it. It was not the words, but the intimacy of Jesus' relationship to God that they observed, when Jesus often prayed in their midst. He exhibited absolute trust and intimacy as Beloved Son. So, the disciples ask Him to teach them how to pray in this way.

Jesus does not give them magic words to pray. Instead, he teaches them about the nature of the One to whom they pray. That nature is summed up in one word: "Father". If God's name is honoured, if God is revered and acknowledged to have a claim over His people, then God's reign will be established in them. In Jesus, we see one in whom God reigns as God. Jesus always did the will of His Father. And so God's reign is ushered in in Jesus and grows as people believe in Him and gather in faith around Him.

Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan who gave his life for a Jew in Auschwitz, lived out a simple formula $w + W = S$ – my will aligned to God's Will is the way to Sanctity, to holiness, to hallow God's name in all our living.

So prayer grows out of real needs. The Lord's Prayer mentions three petitions for our needs, bread, forgiveness and deliverance. Prayer isn't automatic: "gimme more bread, more money!" The deepest reality in prayer is trust in a loving God who cares for us in our need. The Jews in the desert, however, had to do their part – each day they went into the desert to collect *enough* manna for that day. Jesus invites us to ask for the bread each day, just as he invites us to carry the cross each day.

His story opens with a friend asking for bread – three loaves of bread – but at what an hour? The middle of the night! Travellers couldn't predict when they'd arrive – there were no buses or timetables. Is God like the friend who knocks, or the one who is awakened at great inconvenience to himself and all the family? You can just see all the family huddled on the floor, under one blanket. Pulling back the bolt wakens the children, disturbs the whole household. Yet hospitality in Semitic culture was at such a high premium that not to provide for guests was a matter of honour, not, only for the host, but for the village. If friendship couldn't get the friend up to provide bread, then shame/honour would.

The honour of the village's name is at stake. It's not that God's name is at stake when we don't get our prayers answered. God is always Father. The emphasis is on persistence in prayer. He wants our trust, he engenders it. He is not capricious – acting without motive. Just as an ordinary father wouldn't trick his children by giving them stones to break their teeth on, instead of small flat

bread, or food like a snake with a sting in its tail, or a scorpion rolled up that looks like an egg. God cares for us, even more, God desires to give us the Spirit of His Son.

Jesus reveals this same trust and persistence in prayer. All night He knocked at His Father's door in prayer. Luke tells us – at critical moments in His ministry – after ministering, preaching and healing all day, Jesus would go off into the hills to pray, seeking the Father's direction and purpose in his Ministry. Our first petition is for bread.

Forgiveness is the second petition. In the Tablet an article called, "[Journey into Forgiveness](#)" tells of a young 23 year-old Texan woman, Celeste Dixon, whose mother was murdered by Michael Richard. Each day she went to the court until she heard the death sentence pronounced by the judge on the man. Angry and full of hate, she felt this sentence was something she and her family deserved.

When the trial was over and her family stood outside the court room celebrating, she looked over and saw Michael's mother standing alone and she was crying. She said "I realized then that the news that made us so happy had broken her heart. I went over and hugged her and told her I was sorry."

Celeste was deeply moved by Maria Goretti's forgiveness of her assailant in a dream and how forgiveness wrought a transformation in her murderer. Michael was at the side of Maria's mother when she was canonized. Celeste believed that God was asking her to forgive Michael and so she did. She believed that the experience helped her to see her mother's murderer the way God did. "God gave me a glimpse of what his love is like. If you understand that, it's impossible to hate anyone."

Forgiveness goes beyond human fairness. It's pardoning those things that can't be pardoned. Forgiving is quite different from excusing – people think you are letting the other off the hook! No! It's trying to live and love as God does – whose rain and sun fall on just and unjust alike.

Finally, we ask that we ourselves will not be led into temptation, into being tested beyond our endurance and so we knock, and seek in prayer. Not only does prayer touch God, it changes us. Jesus at the end of Luke's Gospel opens his disciples three times as they journey to Emmaus:

He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

He opened their hearts which burned with joy within them.

He opened their eyes to see him in the breaking of the Bread, in the Eucharist, in being forgiven and supported in times of testing.

And so we come from asking for Bread, to being nourished by the Bread of Life, Jesus himself.

Second Homily

Where is God? We find God in the ordinary! Find God in the way we see, speak to others, and deal with the world around us! Like an empty bottle floating lost in an ocean of wonders, all we need to do is to remove the cork and let the soul of the world flood in.

Last night I went to a marvellous production of *Beauty and the Beast* staged by Mazenod and Avila Colleges at the Alexander Theatre. When Belle, the lead female actress, saw beneath the outward appearance of the Beast and loved him from the heart, the spell over him was removed. The Beast and the people in the enchanted castle became human again. Abraham is aware of the humanity of the foreigners in Sodom, and pleads insistently with God to spare the city even if only 10 just men are found. Because he is God's friend he is able to be quite blunt, face to face with God, haggling over the number, testing the justness of the compassion of God.

In the Jewish Talmud there is found the tradition that in each generation there will be 36 just ones, because of whose presence God does not destroy the world. These people are ordinary, humble, unassuming. No doubt we all know unobtrusive just ones whose attitude to suffering is repairing the world. Even Lenin claimed that if he could find twelve St Francis of Assisi he could change the world.

The just one is Jesus. The disciples, seeing him absorbed in prayer, ask to pray as he does. He leads them into the experience of Abba, the encircling embrace of his Father. For Jesus everything is sacred. There is no dividing line between religion and life. And so Jesus' prayer is not an apologetic "May your kingdom come", but a strong "Make it come about that your name is kept holy, Make the coming of your Kingdom real for us." It is prayer spoken with confidence to a loving Father who will not refuse. Life does not improve for the resigned and the apathetic.

Jesus instructs us to make use of prayer to present our needs to God. The Lord's Prayer has traditionally been accepted as the perfect prayer. But resorting to prayer appears only as the prelude to Jesus' plan of affirmative action. Jesus encourages persistence, never giving up until our needs are met. He tells us to ask, to knock and to seek. Even if our prayers are not answered according to our expectations, and even if our problems continue, we will not go unrewarded for our efforts to resolve them. "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened."

Jesus weaves the ordinary events of life into prayer, asking us to use our imagination, when we pray. He asks the hearers to imagine a traveller coming to a friend's house in the middle of the night. The friend welcomes him in, but has to rush off to another friend's house because he has nothing in his cupboard, no bread. But the door is locked; the father of the house is unwilling to respond to his friend's need. The midnight host resorts to letter box diplomacy, telling of his needs through a closed door, and continues until the door is opened. If that's what it's like with so-called friends, how much more will Abba pay attention to the needs of his own Children?

A father won't trick his children into breaking their teeth on a stone which looks like bread, or taking hold of a snake for a fish, or a rolled-up scorpion for an egg. God our Father wants to give his greatest gift, his Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is to be had for the asking.

The disciples will experience how different the world is when they receive that gift: they will still have to suffer, to argue and to work through their dark times. But the gift of the Spirit is the constant assurance of the presence of God in the ordinary.

Ben Ezra worried the rabbi listening to him. He seemed to go full-on with God. The rabbi asked him how he prayed. Ben Ezra told God about his sins, yelling at his wife and kids, some injustice in business. But then he told God his sins, sending rain on the poor when the roof hadn't been fixed, disasters, earthquakes, sending the young men to war, wives left as widows and childless. Then he told God. "I make you a proposal, you forgive my little sins and I'll forgive you your great ones." He turned to the rabbi, "That was my proposal, was it wrong?" The rabbi thought for a long time. Then he looked at Ben Ezra and said, "No, it was not wrong. But why, oh why Ben Ezra, did you drive so small a bargain? For sins like these you could have asked him to send a Messiah. You could have asked him to redeem the world!" **(adapted from Denis McBride, *Seasons of the Word*, p.274).**

God did. He sent his Son, and nailed, behind his head on the cross, the record of the sins of all of us, the Sodoms in our society for which he died. He entered into the ordinary to redeem the world. That is our most precious bargain. But he needs us to pray and act as he did, to intercede with his loving Father for the pressing needs around us.

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Eccles 1:2; 2:21-23

Col 3:1-5, 9-11

Lk 12:13-21

A man was driving along the highway when he spotted a three-legged chicken. He began to chase after it. No matter how fast he drove, the chicken was always ahead of him. It suddenly turned right off the road into a farm. The driver got out, asked the farmer if he had seen a three-legged chicken. 'Sure,' said the farmer, 'We breed them.' 'What do they taste like, these chickens' legs?' 'I don't know,' said the farmer. 'We can never catch them.'

We all have our three-legged chickens, the illusions we run after. One illusion in our society is greed. The more we have, the greater will be our status in the eyes of others. But when is enough, enough? There was a cartoon in the *New Yorker* depicting a pedestal with a dollar bill enthroned on it. All the people around it are bowing down. One person who is bowing down says, "The reason I like this religion is that at least we're not being hypocritical." We Australians have the illusion that we are a religious people. Yet it's clearly evident that God is not on the pedestal here. Our system is set up on the assumption that greed at the top will 'trickle down' to the poor at the bottom, which is an illusion. Just ask the poor among us.

Pope Francis, in his magnificent Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, par 54, attacked the "trickle-down theory ... as a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile the excluded [poor] are still waiting." In paragraph 55 he called us all to say, "*No to the New Idolatry of Money*".

The warning against greed is a theme prominent in Luke's gospel. Jesus has not gone far on his journey when a man runs up and asks Jesus to arbitrate. His brother was refusing to realize and divide the proceeds from family property held in common. It's a common theme for us with divorce settlements and family squabbles. If money is our only lens, religion becomes diluted by pragmatic, win/lose and power attitudes. Jesus refuses the role of judge. Instead of dividing the inheritance between the two brothers, Jesus focuses on why the inheritance has divided **them**.

Jesus' parable seems bland, but actually it is quite subversive. In the kinship system of Jesus' day, status was achieved through the honour/shame system. In such a system you gain status, self-image and meaning primarily through how others see you. Your meaning is tied up in how your family and friends see you.

In the story of the rich man who builds bigger barns to store his goods, we might object and say that the man was only concerned with good provisioning when he had a bumper crop. His only problem was with building warehouses big enough to store the excess. The trouble is he thinks of no-one else, "I", "my" occurs eleven times in a few sentences. He does not share any of his goods or

any part of himself with others. Not even his conversation. His egotistical concerns eliminate God and neighbour from sight. It's all illusion, vanity done under the sun. His life is lived from a purely human standpoint and his own will.

Jesus' message subverts the honour/shame system and states "it is not what you have but who you are in the sight of God". The man in the story placed his security in an over-abundance of possessions. He thinks he owns his own soul and his own future. But in fact they will go to anyone but him. Fool, *idiotes* in GK, means the 'one who is left alone'.

It is who we are in God, that's important. In God we are a beloved daughter or a beloved Son' we are no longer dependent on the culture's estimation of us, or even on our own estimation. Through prayer, through our awareness of God within, we continually discover our true identity. The life we now have is hidden with Christ in God.

The man could have done so much. He did not give any real sense to his life, or to the last task in this life, giving sense to his death. Didn't he realize that there are no pockets in funeral shrouds?

St Basil bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, (modern-day Turkey) was known for his care of the poor and underprivileged. In one of his homilies directed at the wealthy members of his diocese he said: "How grateful should you be that you don't have to keep knocking at the door of others, but that others stand at your door. But now you show yourself sullen, access to you is scarcely possible, while you refuse to meet anyone for fear you might be compelled to let even a scrap slip through your fingers. You only know one phrase: 'I'm a poor man, I've nothing to give.' Yes, you really are a poor man, without riches of any sort; poor in affection, poor in humanity, poor in faith in God, poor in eternal hope" (**Homily on Charity 3,6**). If, like Jesus, in contrast with the rich fool, we spend ourselves and create life for others we make ourselves rich in the sight of God. That is what Pope Francis is urging us to do.

If I had to summarize the social teaching of Jesus in one phrase, it is the doctrine of non-idolatry. Don't idolize anything. Nothing will ever be worth your whole soul. Serve God's world but worship nothing. That is about as radical as you can get. So, what is your 3-legged chicken? One parishioner said, "To win Tatts Lotto, then I can pay off four mortgages of my children." My own experience is of people wanting a miracle from Tatts to pay an overwhelming debt, instead of faith in God who works through changing hearts even in small things and giving us the courage to trust him.

Second Homily

They say "where there's a will there's a relative." Fighting over inheritance can divide families. The warning against greed is a theme prominent in Luke's Gospel. Jesus had not gone far on his journey when a man runs up and asks Jesus to arbitrate. His brother was refusing to divide the proceeds from a family property held in common. We know this only too well with divorce settlements, and family squabbles.

If money is our only lens, then religion becomes diluted to a win /lose and power battle. Jesus refuses the role of judge; his most urgent concern is the kingdom. Instead of dividing the inheritance between the two brothers, Jesus focuses on why the inheritance has divided them.

There was a cartoon in the New Yorker depicting a pedestal with a dollar bill enthroned on it. All the people around are bowing down in worship. One person who is bowing down says, "The reason I like this religion is that, at least, we're not being hypocritical." It's obvious that God is not on the pedestal in Australia. Our system is set up on the assumption that greed at the top will trickle down to the poor at the bottom.

Jesus' parable seems bland, but actually it is quite subversive. In today's climate we could object against Jesus' attitude and say that the man was showing good management, planning for a secure future when he had a bumper crop. His only problem was with building warehouses big enough to store the excess. That word is a key, "excess." The Gospel is not an indictment against having possessions but defining ourselves, our status and worth, solely by things, with no reference to God or others. It is the "I'm alright, Jack" attitude.

The man thinks of no-one else, "I", "my", occurs eleven times in a few sentences. He does not share any of his goods or any part of himself with others, not even his conversation. His egotistical concerns eliminate God and neighbour from sight. The bumper harvest is a blessing from God, but there is no thought of God as he works frantically to build new barns. Like the refrain from Cat Steven's Father and Son, "We'll have a good time then, son; we'll have a good time then." But it never came.

The man placed his security in an over-abundance of possessions. He thinks he owns his own soul and his own future, but in fact they will go to anyone but him. "Fool", "idiotes" in Greek, means "the one who is left alone." When the things that we define ourselves by are gone, we are gone. The plane goes down and the millionaire, Steven Nott, is dead.

It is who we are in God that is important. The man could have done so much. He did not give any real sense to his life. Like a lady's very rich uncle who is afraid of going to sleep in case he dies. What kind of a life is that? Didn't he realise that there are no pockets in shrouds. Things don't satisfy. "We are suffering from overconsumption, Covid, or the influenza virus, our houses are Chock a Block" writes Anne Mann, "big houses few kids, no backyard to play in, and a TV in each room so that the kids no longer play in the streets". If like Jesus, in contrast with the rich fool, we spend ourselves and create life for others, we make ourselves rich in the sight of God. If I had to summarise the teaching of Jesus in one phrase, it's the doctrine of non-idolatry. Do not idolise anything. Nothing will ever be worth your whole soul. Serve God's world but worship nothing. That is about as radical as you can get.

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 18:6-9

Heb 11:1-2, 8-19

Lk 12:32-48

Fear about what's coming, or what people think, exam results, or a medical report can often take the heart out of us, really discourage us. We are anticipating some outcome in the future – instead of living in the present. In our worry we can fill our minds with phantoms real or otherwise.

The three-year-old couldn't sleep. The baby-sitter, for all her explanations, couldn't get the little boy off to sleep – the monster was still in his bedroom and would not stop tormenting him. A friend of the baby-sitter, who was as nutty as a fruit cake, went in to the little boy, listened to his story and asked him if he had a gun. The little boy got out his toy gun. The young man sat on the bed beside the three-year-old and asked him to point to the monster when he saw it, the boy did that, "there it is!" he shouted as he pointed. The young man aimed the toy gun at the monster and pulled the trigger. Almost immediately the little boy was asleep.

God deals with us like that – He enters into our discouragement – things that haunt us from the past, worries about the future that plague us. He wants us to face them head-on and deal with them in the present with toy-gun or whatever, but especially with his help. God only wants to encourage us, to console us, if we are living our life to the best of our ability.

I counselled a man in the States. Let's call him Bill. He had been living it up. When his son was killed crossing the street from school, he turned his life around. But there was regret, a sadness remaining with him that he could not shake off. That regret was a bogey which he needed to deal with. The evil spirit was trying to keep that regret alive, to discourage him so that he'd give up the Christian way of life he was living. He needed to give the regret away, to reject it and get to the deeper reality that he was, right now, living life to the best of his ability. God wanted to bring him to that point of strength and encouragement.

The past can even be a sixpence that a woman, I met yesterday, kept for a long time. She was repeatedly raped by her violent and alcoholic father as a little child. At six years of age, to get back at her mother for not protecting her, she stole the sixpence that was for a loaf of bread for her father's evening meal. To her horror, instead of verbal shouting, the mother was physically abused. The six-year-old thought she had caused this terrible thing – took the guilt on herself and so this sixpence still had an evil power over her. She talked it through with a counsellor and was able to get rid of the sixpence.

Many years ago in China, an American couple and their two young children were under house arrest for a long time. They lived somewhat comfortably but were not allowed to leave their house.

One day a soldier unexpectedly came to the door and, without any explanation, told them they

could return to America tomorrow, but, as he said, “You may only take 91 kilograms or 200 pounds weight with you, no more and no less.”

Only 91 kilograms! So they got out a large scale and the arguments began. Must have this vase, must have these books, must have these dishes, must have these toys and so forth. Back and forth they argued. They put stuff on the scale. They took stuff off the scale over and over again until, at last, they had exactly 91 kilograms.

The soldier as promised returned the next day. He asked, “Are you ready?” They said yes. “Are you packed?” They said yes, pointing to the boxes on the large flat scale. “Did you weigh the children?” A dreadful silence as they looked at each other and then, after a moment’s hesitation, off came the books, off came the vase, off came everything. And that’s when they realised that they had let things get in the way of people; that they had forgotten their true priorities.

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. We are asked three things in today’s Gospel:

1. Don’t be anxious about health or material security. 2. Be generous in reaching out to others, in giving alms, and 3. Always be ready for the coming of the Son of Man.

Our true security is in getting our attitude to God right first, and the other things, including legitimate concerns, will fall into place. Jesus is passionately convinced about the riches available to us human beings if we will truly open up our lives to relationship with God.

Faith for Jesus is the opposite of anxiety; trying to keep up appearances of relying on God, but underneath we are relying on ourselves, “Nothing’s going to happen unless I make it happen;” constantly trying to control everything, and getting discouraged at our failure to do so. We don’t trust that God is good and is on our side. We are trying to do it all ourselves, to lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Where your treasure is, it’s not what you say, but what you spend your time doing, that reveals where your heart is.

It is the heart, the inner core of the person that determines our attitudes and actions. If our heart is anchored upon God, then everything we say or do will reflect a sense of security flowing from this relationship – like the little boy secure when his phantom has been dealt with. With Abraham and Sarah, we are often called to trust God’s promises, and set out without knowing where we are going or what God has in store for us, except that God loves us and is pleased with us. “So fear not my little flock, it has pleased God to give you the Kingdom.”

Second Homily

We have lost the power of ritual to touch the deepest core of our being, a power that is intuitive not intellectual. Something is changed in us when we enter this ritual. Let’s listen anew to the words of the first reading which describe the Exodus: a group of Israelite slaves who celebrate the

sacrifice of the lamb and in solidarity get ready to escape from the power of Pharaoh.

"That night had been foretold to our ancestors, so that once they saw what kind of oaths they had put their trust in, they would joyfully take courage. They offered sacrifice in secret and this divine pact they struck with one accord: that they would share the same blessings and dangers alike, and they began to chant the hymns of their ancestors."

It took me back to our own ancestors who had to say the Mass in secret and gain strength in times of brutality. It reminded me of Fr Brian Gore, an Australian Columban, and his community in Mindanao in 1969. It was Good Friday and they made a commitment during the service to stand together when the human rights and dignity of the poor were being trampled on. They, called the Negros Nine, ended in jail on trumped-up charges of murdering the mayor in their district. Fr Gore was offered release, but he would not leave the prison until the others were released. The Mass took on new meaning as they faced death and united their sacrifice with Christ's.

Each Eucharist is about the sacrificial life of Jesus. Through our Baptism we are swept up into the very reality about which the ritual is speaking (not just the reading, singing, responding) but the body and living sacrifice upon the cross which is not only Jesus but mysteriously is also ourselves. The daily struggle of the cross is part and parcel of all in attendance at every Eucharist. The cares and concerns of parents, the uncertainties of the young, the loneliness and grief of the elderly, the whole human web of pain is today's cross of Christ. Like his, our lives redeem. We are given, not so much to God as to one another, committed by the covenant to build loving community.

We renew the ritual again and again. We are on a journey like Abraham and Sarah who left everything, their familiar surroundings, friends, and religious rituals. We don't always know what's ahead or the outcome of decisions we make, but it is faith in God's promise that gives substance to what we hope for.

As we're getting older, don't wait for the last ritual of death to let our lives be given to God. Create small rituals, a lit candle, a quiet time or place to be alone with God, a simple prayer I say often: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you, Amen."

Job, when tragedy and illness struck, put ashes on his head, to symbolise the dead Job that he now mourned, calling God to task, expressing his anger and grief, gradually coming through to acceptance. Last Monday, I spent time with my sister's adopted son Anthony, 26, dying of cancer. He said he was angry at first, hard to live with during the chemo, but now he wanted to talk, to explore what would happen after death. His friends wanted him to have a plane ride, sky dive, the buzz he might miss out on. What he wanted was to meet his family and friends, one by one, to talk with those he loved, to love them and say goodbye.

Abraham promised so much by God, especially the substance of that promise, a son Isaac, had

to face losing him. He trusted that God would be true to his promise. Hope in a promise seemed a flimsy thing, but not hope in the One who made the promise, God himself. Jesus invites that same hope and promise which overcomes fear, "Do not be afraid little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. That's where our heart is, the treasure we cherish that will not betray.

Do not be afraid. We all have fears, fears of the darkness. As a child during the Second World War, we had the blackout; light was not allowed from fear of enemy bombers. We lived upstairs, but in the winter a cold draft was coming up the stairs. I had to go down into the darkness, and put the mat to the door. Then I would fly up the stairs with all the witches and demons after me. Our hidden fears come out from under the stones, the fear of failure, the fear that love will not last, that we will be rejected; that we will lose our health, our job, the fear we have taken on too much. Many of these fears are projections of our shadow side.

It's faith that counters fear, gives us the courage to face fears within and fears without. As you grow you realise these fears ultimately have no substance; we can let our imagination run riot. It's faith that gives substance to our lives. God is the treasure that strengthens our hearts, quietens our minds and enables us to face life and death. As we act out our expectations in the Eucharist, as the Israelites did, the ritual.... gives us the hope to live out what it promises.

Third Homily

When you have arranged to meet someone at the footy, such as at the main gate of the MCG, you are constantly on the look-out for that person. If you don't meet up, there's the nagging thought, "I wonder what happened to him or her?" that can distract you from the main game. But when you do connect, there's the enjoyment of taking in the action together and getting more out of it.

The thrust of the readings calls us to be on the look-out for Jesus' coming; for the coming of the Kingdom and how to prepare for it. There's great imagery in the Gospel, purses in heaven, making sure our treasure and our heart are in the same place, dressed for action, lamps lit, waiting, and Jesus coming like a burglar. But the over-riding theme is, do not be anxious or afraid; the Lord has already given us the Kingdom. Go for it!

In a group I was in, that one sentence, "Sell all and give to the poor," pulled us up short. One talked about receiving a letter from the Salvation Army requesting \$125 to house and feed a family, and the to-ing and fro-ing that we do, whether to make the donation. But her car remote was broken and she replaced it for \$140.00 without even a thought. Another said, "When it's spending money on me, no problem. There is the anxiety that once you give, you are taken advantage of." But faith moves us beyond too much self-preoccupation to a wider horizon, the coming of the Kingdom and how to prepare for it.

In our own lives, sometimes we are totally helpless. We can't work out the problem. It's too

strong, it's beyond us. We have to wait in the dark, with the questions still remaining in our heart, trusting, hanging on to God. Folding the arms of our faith as we wait till the light comes, but not the arms of our action.

Jesus speaks into our fear, past or future, something whose coming we don't know when. He says, "Fear not little flock. It has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom"- isn't that the crux of the passage? God loves us, God empowers us. He is pleased to give us all and more. A lady was walking through Jells Park; she was deeply troubled and poured her heart out to Jesus. Then she stopped, feeling God so remote, and cried, "Are you really listening to me, Jesus?" Immediately her mobile rang and a friend asked, "Are you alright, I was at work and felt the need to ring you."

God wants to encourage and console us when we are living our life to the best of our ability. So right here, right now there is something we can do. – not closing in on ourselves, hoarding stuff that the moths get into, but setting our hearts generously on God and others – cleaning my room, putting through that phone call, visiting someone in hospital, or cooking a meal for someone. That action stops the fear, like a tourniquet or pad staunching the blood, till we get help.

Faith is the opposite of fear. In the second reading Abraham and Sarah did not know what was ahead of them. They trusted in something unseen, something that existed only on the word of another, they trusted in the promise of God. It is faith that guarantees the blessing we hope for, that proves the existence of things unseen. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Faith gives us the heart to dare something with our lives. Faith is an understanding as well as a trusting. It is not blind. It gives us a way of looking at life. It is putting an unknown future into the hands of a known God.

Cardinal Newman, describing life as a task, wrote: "We are created to do God some definite service, which no-one else is entrusted with. We may not know it in this life, but we shall be told it in the next." Discouragement, fear seeks to divert us from our God-given task.

This is where faith comes in. It goes beyond reasons we might conjure up, like fears in the night. If we can let go and really take in Jesus' word, how pleased God is with us, and Jesus too! He will sit us down at table and he himself will wait on us, if he finds us ready for him. Jesus identifies himself with that unseen future that comes like a thief in the night. No matter what that future thing is, he is there. There is no need to fear. He is the Bridegroom who comes after the wedding feast. Even our death need not be feared. When Therese of Lisieux coughed up blood on her handkerchief that night and knew how far T.B. had progressed and that her death was imminent, she wrote in her Diary, "It is the sign of the Bridegroom."

So "fear not, little flock, it has pleased my Father to give you the Kingdom."

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jer 38:4-6, 8-10

Heb 12:1-4

Lk 12:49-53

How do you stop the mouth of a prophet, stop the mouthpiece of God, if you don't want to hear what he says? Throw him face-down in the mud and choke the words back. When the officers cast into the well, Jeremiah, who sank into the sticky, rank, warm mud, they felt they were rid of someone who spoke out of line with public policy, who was against what the ordinary people wanted. So Jeremiah found himself struggling for life in the deep mud at the bottom of the well in the court of the Guard. When a person takes a stand for God, the truth cannot be buried.

The city of Jerusalem was being besieged by the Chaldeans under King Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah, the reluctant prophet, had the terrifying task of preaching against the symbols of national pride – the temple and its sacrifices, the city of Jerusalem and its king. The people had put all their hopes in these institutions, saying God would never forsake his temple or his chosen city. These had become absolutes or idols. Yet they would not change their attitudes or style of living and turn to the living God speaking in their time and culture. Jeremiah asked them to lay all these things down, surrender to Nebuchadnezzar and trust in God, rather than have Jerusalem burned and destroyed, and the king along with the women grossly abused. Consequently, he was regarded as a quisling, someone working for the enemy, on the other side, while remaining on this side. You had to stop his mouth and what other way than throwing him headlong into the mud.

You may stop the mouth of a prophet, but you can't put out the fire that burns in his heart, with love for his people. Jesus said, "I have come to cast fire on the earth and how am I constrained until it is enkindled," even if it causes dissension. The officials did not like what they heard; they regarded Jeremiah as a traitor, someone who could seriously undermine the morale of the army, so they decided to bury alive this causer of divisions. It was only through the action of Ebed-Melech who, with three others, saved him, throwing old rags down for Jeremiah to put them under his armpits so that they could drag him out with ropes.

The fire and division of which Jesus speaks is his way of love and forgiveness. The zeal that Jesus would enkindle is one that does not start wars but which spotlights the sin from which war and division comes. It only takes an honest person to upset a society of thieves or one who strives for the truth to create friction among liars.

A prophet is a man or woman of their time who knows the strains and ravages of their culture in their own person and yet sees a solution. But being on the edge, the growing edge of things cannot be understood and can easily be labelled as out of joint. The prophet challenges the confusion about what things are worth investing our lives in. In what direction is my human spirit going? What do I want to be, 5, 10 or 15 years from now? And we may not want to listen. There's much of our culture "that clings to us so easily" and makes us give up the race and take our eyes

off Jesus; that makes the cross seem joyless. The prophet comes not so much as a teacher but a witness. If the Christian message is to be heard it must be visible before it is audible. It is easy to smear an individual who upsets the status quo, but he or she may be a prophet burning with a deep love for Jesus, the Church and its work in today's world.

The challenge before us is to catch fire in line with Jesus' vision for all humanity. Jesus came to cast the fire of his love upon the earth and willed that it caught fire in everyone. He wanted the fire of love to burn in our hearts in response to the infinite love with which he redeemed us, a love that went to the extent of death on a cross as he carried out his Father's will. Jesus needs disciples to carry the flame he carried into the next generation. Choosing Christ today may divide us from family members. Conversion, even today, is likely to cause friction for the family, suffering or death, the baptism that Jesus speaks of.

To light a fire, it's not the big things that get it going. It is the small things that catch fire, that soon ignite the larger wood to create a roaring fire. It is the small things that can catch fire in your life, that motivate you and get you going. Robert Healy in the magazine ***Psychology Today*** received a letter from a young man who entered therapy after a brush with suicide. He was on his way to a bridge to leap to his death.

He stopped for a traffic light and happened to glance toward the other side of the street. On the kerb stood an elderly woman who gave him the most beautiful smile he had ever seen. Then the lights changed and he drove off. But the smile haunted him. He had no idea who the lady was. All he knew was that he owed his life to her. She was a source of blessing to him at the most critical moment of his life (**Mark Link, Vision 2000, p.23**). Who was a source of blessing for you at a critical moment of your life? What was it? And how did it change you?

John Henry Newman often prayed, "Jesus, shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my spirit." For Jesus, love and forgiveness are linked with total concern for the other, even the enemy. We need to learn how to love more completely in all those little bits of life scattered through our days, in order to see the possibility of caring for others.

Keep your eyes on Jesus, commit to him. He can teach you how to love.

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 66:18-21

Heb 12:18-19, 22-24

Lk 13:22=30

“How many will be saved?” can be the smug question from an insider who is confident of his salvation. But Jesus, on his journey to Jerusalem, suggests that there will be some surprises in the Kingdom of God. There is no automatic membership. Some of those who think they know the Master will find the door locked, but many others from distant places will be welcomed in. He challenges us to focus on that question in personal terms, “Will I be saved?”

It brings to mind Bonhoeffer’s notion of cheap and costly grace; what it really means to be a Christian. There is a choice, a cost entailed in being a Christian and it is conversion, to change our thinking, our attitudes, our behaviour. If we are going in the wrong way, Stop, and take a new direction. We are asked to get in through a narrow door that won’t stay open indefinitely. Jesus switches the question from “them” to “you.” He challenges us to take personal responsibility for our Christian lives, our own and others’ salvation.

It’s not enough to say I live a good life! Jesus wants more from us if we are in a living relationship with him. The coaches don’t say to athletes preparing for a major athletic event, that’s good enough. They stretch them to attain their personal best. The second reading from Hebrews picks up the same idea. Last week we were invited to run the race and throw off what holds us back, but this week it looks at the punishing routines athletes go through to really compete in the games, like the Olympics.

We’re not Christians by descent but by decision. We can’t say ‘I’m Jewish’ or ‘Catholic’ and expect

to get in. It is not even enough to say ‘Lord, Lord’ in church, hearing Jesus’ Word and eating at his table, when in reality we have given Christ away as past his use-by date and are searching for other diversions. We can be left outside the banqueting hall in the cold, our teeth chattering, and from inside we can hear the beat of the music, the happy chatter, the joy within.

Bonhoeffer himself faced such a choice. As a Lutheran pastor and member of the Confessional Church he opposed National Socialism and the closing of all churches in Nazi Germany. When his life was in danger he escaped to America and continued to write and preach from there. But he was faced with the question, “What does Jesus want me to do as a pastor of my people?” He went back to Germany, and ultimately was arrested and beheaded in Flossenbergr prison.

The question of how many will be saved was an issue brought up by the Pharisees who taught that not all Jews will be saved, but only special groups like the Pharisees and the Essenes. Jesus’ response was the parable of the narrow door through which we are to struggle. He turns our

expectations around to get us to look at our lives in a new way, from his point of view not ours. He is trying to make us think twice about things we take for granted. It's not enough that we have heard him and eaten with him.

There's a classic Peanuts cartoon that shows Charlie Brown getting up one morning and looking out his bedroom window. It is a lovely winter day with a good cover of snow on the ground. It is very cold but perfect for skiing. So Charlie puts on several layers of clothes. Then he puts on his big gloves and his skis. When he moves toward the door, he discovers he is so bundled up that he can't make it through the door. So he stands there frustrated, screaming at the top of his voice.

William Bausch makes the comment, when Jesus says 'many will try to enter but be unable,' we might ask, is it because of their vices, but Jesus will say because of their unused virtues. Jesus wants us to share the banquet, to be in the kingdom. It's what we are destined for.

What turns us away? It can be personal. I have met people who have been graced with a special encounter with Christ, but have let that grace slip away. Our belief has to impact our behaviour, our creed influence our conduct. When difficulties come our way, God pleads with us not to give up. "Steady your bone-weary hands and trembling knees." God needs us to do our part so that God's kingdom may come.

Secondly, people can fall away because of the behaviour of Christians, which may create the remark, "If that's what Christianity is about, they can keep it." How welcoming are we to the stranger, the refugee, the migrant? Dorothy Day recounts the case of Charlie a Jew, who came every day to the House of Welcome for a meal. When he was a little boy he wandered into a Hispanic or Irish ghetto and was bashed up. Dorothy said, "Because of his treatment from Catholics, Charlie will never know Christ."

And yet Isaiah tells us, it is the refugees coming from east and west, north and south, who enter and share not just the worship, but become ministers to all, Jew and Gentile, who come seeking God, and are welcomed by these once-considered outsiders who bring them to salvation.

Second Homily

When a ferry or a ship is sinking, or a house is on fire, we don't sit speculating who, what or how many will be saved. We act, jump for our lives, rush out into the streets, cry for help. If we delay too long, thinking about what to take or leave behind, we risk our own and others' lives. There's an urgency about the situation. The bushfires and Covid19 have taught us that.

Jesus' statement is the same. Don't speculate about who is going to be saved. The Kingdom is right here, the door is open. Strain, push to get in, squeeze past, for the door is narrow. Don't be loaded up with this world's goods, you cannot take big bundles through, otherwise the door will be closed – your time up, game/over.

The narrowness of the Christian religion can scandalize some people. But if we understand it in its biblical sense, we need not apologise for it. The heart of Christianity is incredibly rich, diverse and challenging. The footballer cannot score by kicking the ball anywhere in the field' he is limited to the space between the goal posts; the pilot can't land his plane on any field – for his safety and the safety of his passengers he needs to land on the airfield. And here, the issue is greater – it's a matter of salvation – to attain the deepest and best within us, our unique capacity within, to accomplish our significant roles in life as God intends. That's what salvation is. An acorn is meant to grow into an oak tree. With trees and animals that process is inscribed into their nature. But with humans we have to choose to be what God wants us to be.

There's the struggle of the young person seeing friends throwing off all restraints, living it up, letting it rip, while he or she might feel restricted living a moral life. They feel they are in a tunnel, on the narrow path, while their friends seem to be having a ball – like practising the piano when at times you want to be out playing. But you are gaining skills for life.

Learning to master instinctive urges, to gain self-mastery, to fully develop our minds, to keep fit physically, to go for goodness, means that at the other end of the tunnel we are ready to meet life. I've met many a young person coming off drugs who regret the years that were lost as they see their school mates practising as doctors, lawyers or teachers, doing something useful with their lives.

We need a purpose for our lives. The simple catechism answer: we are made to know, love and serve God in this life and be happy with him in the next; to serve God in service of others in the vocation we are called to. On 10 October 2020, Pope Francis beatified a fifteen-year-old Catholic from Rome, Carlo Acutis, who died of leukemia, and said, "Holiness is not a distant thing but very much within everyone's reach, because the Lord is for everyone."

Jesus switches the question from "them" to "you." He challenges us to take personal responsibility for our Christian lives, our own and other's salvation. He also switches the question concerning **the number** to be saved to the **time** of salvation. **At present** the door is still open. But once the locking-up time has arrived the chance to get in will be past.

There's a story about Leonardo da Vinci painting the Last Supper and looking for people as models for Jesus and the apostles. He met this very good-looking young man and asked him to sit for the face of Jesus. He found other people, but years later he found this evil-looking, broken-down man and thought he was a likely subject for Judas. Bringing the man in, he suddenly stopped and said, "I have been here before." He pointed to Christ and said, "That was me."

We can feel that life has dealt us a lousy hand of cards, become discouraged, give God away, and let ourselves go. But with Victor Frankl we need to ask, not "I expect nothing from life" but "What does life expect from me?" We don't live forever. Death comes into our horizon so that we make each day matter, live each day well. God pleads with us not to give up, "steady your bone-

weary hands and trembling knees.” God needs us to do our part so that God’s kingdom may come

If anyone has it tough, it is the refugee. Isaiah tells us of refugees from all over the world, strange people from strange sounding places and yet, for a Jew, the strangest thing of all – some of these Gentiles will become priests and Levites, handling sacred things, leading us to God. Isn’t that happening today? Refugees are doing their part to spread the faith.

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ecclus 3:17-20, 28-29

Heb 12:18-19, 22-24

Lk 14:1, 7-14

The main point in today's Gospel is not humility, taking the lowest place at table, "those who humble themselves will be exalted." It is something simpler and more radical. It is crossing the threshold of rich and poor and sharing a meal with them; treating them with dignity and friendship as equals.

We could easily miss the words at the start of today's Gospel: "Now it happened that on a Sabbath Day Jesus had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees." That sets the stage: Jesus enters totally into the world of the establishment on a highly regulated day, a day when all good Jews should do certain things and should not do other things. "And they watched him closely" – not exactly friends!

Holiness for the Pharisees was seen in terms of exclusion and inclusion, who's in and who's out, and who's invited. Jesus, on the other hand, defines holiness in terms of the God he has met, and that God is compassion and mercy.

The Pharisees may have been watching Jesus; but Jesus is observing them; now he critiques what he sees – the scurrying for best places, the fear of demotion, of being associated with the second-rate. To share a meal, sitting side by side as equals around a table was a strategy Jesus used to express the Kingdom of God. Table fellowship was his most consistent social action. It usually happens as he is coming in or going out of the house that he meets others who are oppressed or eliminated from society, and to whom he feels compelled to respond.

Right there as he comes in, Jesus cures a man of dropsy, and he challenges the attitudes of the group. They wouldn't hesitate to rescue a son or an ox if they fell into a well on the Sabbath, but to heal a sick man is not allowed.

Jesus instead uses the image of a wedding banquet — for a Jew a symbol of the Kingdom, but for Jesus a meal which confronts the system of dominance and power, of shame and honour, and calls us to a new social order where we literally share table differently. The Kingdom table is one where insiders are not seeking status, but which in fact, prefers the poor. The four classes the host invites: friends, brothers, relatives and rich friends who can return the compliment, are replaced by four classes: the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind who cannot repay.

Do we realise how radical a meal can be, for example, if you welcome a stranger into your home for a meal; or even more, you enter into the stranger's home for a meal. First of all, there's the food you eat or don't eat, whom you eat with defines who you don't eat with and divides people. To eat as equals around the table and sharing the same food, changes the nature of social relationships

radically, and where you sit at table becomes a symbol of how your social world is arranged.

It's easy for us to write off the Pharisees as self-righteous, arrogant people. But it isn't that. They felt bound by the shame and honour codes that shaped their lives. They were just doing what was expected. But Jesus isn't bound, so he challenges them. By eating with tax collectors and sinners and accepting no shame, Jesus is discounting the only world they know. We would react in the same way I suppose, with outrage and scandal if our world is discounted – a hot issue is not migrants but asylum seekers who have become an outside group. Are we willing to share our home and food with them?

Bishop Long, himself a boat person, pleads the cause of refugees and asylum seekers; hopes that minds and hearts will change, that we work for alternatives to mandatory detention beyond the need for initial processing; that children not be held in detention; and people released into the community on bridging visas with no healthcare, work opportunities or financial assistance, but that they be given appropriate support. Despite all the arguments against them, and admitting the need for border control, refugees are refugees; that's the main issue and if genuine they need help.

A constant cycle, in my own experience with homeless men, is: their rent is overdue, (two weeks rent required in advance), out on the street, with no room or rest, no fixed address for Vinnies to drop food vouchers off, or money for their mykie to get them to work and a wage at the end of the week so that they have a room, rest ... and so the cycle goes. If only we could provide, roof, food and work? But jail is not the answer.

Jesus' awareness of his Father sensitized him to the injustice of discrimination. Jesus' table fellowship, **his pattern of sharing meals with sinners**, eating/ breaking bread, were symbols of God's saving activity. But how are people saved, brought to wholeness? Not by throwing the book at them, but by friendship.

It was a lived-out parable of God's special care of the lost - used by Jesus to convey his awareness of the God he knew as Abba, a God whose ways are not human ways, but who cares desperately for his children; - important issues for us as we learn to live together and build our future together with people who are homeless, migrants and asylum seekers. The Church upholds the biblical principle of welcoming the stranger.

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 9:13-18

Philemon 9-10, 12-17

Lk 14:25-33

People can get discouraged because it seems as Church we are getting older, smaller and tired. Some people felt like this and went to a spiritual leader for wisdom and comfort. He told them a story. An aeroplane was carrying a group of peasants every week to work on a jungle road in Myanmar. The trip was long and boring. To pass the time they played a complicated game of cards. The upshot was that whoever lost was thrown out of the plane without a parachute. The people blurted out, "But that's horrible." "Yes", said the spiritual teacher, "but it made the game exciting" (**Joan Chittister**). We live in a time of risk that demands courage, not sitting back deploring the situation. We live in exciting times, the Spirit is at work in new and exciting ways.

The Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, starkly put the issue when he stated that Christianity is almost conquered in Britain, but challenged the Church to find new strategies to develop disciples. Eric Hodgens makes a similar point in his article, "*Grieving the Parish*" (**The Swag, September 30, 2020**) "The institutional parish may have run its course, but the Christian spark is not extinguished. It is just taking new forms. One hopeful sign is the emergence of small groups of well-informed Catholics with Church renewal as their shared objective."

You get the same sense of risk in today's Gospel. Here we are at the heart of Luke's journey narrative. At the beginning of this journey, Luke says simply in chapter 9:51, "Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem." We sense the resolution on that face, that this is the way he must go. Oh Yes! There had been and still is the swelling, yelling, enthusiastic crowd – people who had heard Jesus' voice and felt his healing touch and knew that the Kingdom of God, the finger of God, the Spirit, was present among them in Jesus. And there were others, curious hangers-on, out for the excitement.

Yet at that point of greatest impact, Peter's Confession and the Transfiguration, there's a radical shift. You can see it in all the Gospels. The opposition was growing; the people were not quite so ready to identify with Jesus. The cost of being a disciple becomes evident. It is an intent to follow, to walk in his footsteps. It needs wisdom, the ability to know and do God's will, to carry out God's plan for our lives – to let go of family, possessions, and one's self.

In Jesus, God comes to help us from the inside out, when we feel so weak. But he comes to us as a man of faith who like us really had to search whether his way of life - heading towards crucifixion and death – was what God wanted him to do.

The crisis in the Galilean ministry brings about the realization in Jesus, that salvation, carrying through the Father's plan will lead to the cross and it is from the cross that new life will draw its

power. In the face of growing opposition, his obedience to the Father's will, always first in his life, is the crux of his decision in both senses of the word. He set his face towards Jerusalem and began to speak about discipleship, taking up one's cross in imitation of the Son of Man. It was not cut and dried for Jesus, just as it isn't for us – that he would suffer, die and rise again – the rise again was not always that sure, but he trusted that God would have the last word.

You sense the awful magnitude of Jesus' decision in the garden. *Mark 14:27* says "terror seized him and he grew sorrowful unto death." It helps us to know Jesus suffered just like us. God is not a cruel God; he knows our suffering from the inside out in Jesus; God was not just watching on; he was agonising with his Son, like any father, but moreso. This is the way Jesus was going. This is God's will for him – to live God's loving compassion so that God's rule/kingdom would come about. Jesus' faith was a searching and praying through to a point of conviction in the face of opposition and it had to be done again and again.

And so he is asking us, his disciples to weigh the question personally – is this the way I want to go? Am I willing to risk it? It terrifies me and yet this is the way Jesus went. To crystallise the call of Jesus into effective action takes real wisdom. Wisdom is God's gift, but who can know this wisdom and live it? Christ crucified, says St Paul is the Wisdom and Power of God (***1 Cor 1:24***); the plan of God hidden but now revealed.

Yet isn't that just the problem – how do we know God's will for our lives? How can his plan be made clear enough so that we can act on it? How does Christ, especially Christ crucified, make this clear for us?

He doesn't at first, but Christ crucified reveals a foundational truth – a new fact in history. He reveals the extent to which God's love will go in order to embrace our human condition. The event of the cross and resurrection of Jesus is the pivot of a new world. New life begins in Jesus and he comes to help us when our wills and our world are so weak. And yet here's the paradox – Christ comes to us as a man of faith who like us really had to search, agonise, decide and ultimately surrender to God who, despite our feelings is still our loving Father who will bring us to our fulfilment and salvation, if and when we say yes.

Second Homily

Look! There's the cross. It is not an ornament. It is something we face in the following of Jesus. Martin Luther King Jnr faced it 50 years ago when he gave his famous "I have a dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on 28 August, 1963, before a huge crowd of 250,000 civil rights supporters. From that moment he became a marked man. He knew what lay ahead.

Large crowds accompanied Jesus along the way, but were not aware of what they were doing, nor aware where this way was leading? Jesus knew; a long time before he had set his face towards Jerusalem. In seeking to bring about the kingdom, the kind of world his Father wanted, he knew

suffering and the cross awaited him. So he turned around and spoke to them words that challenged both them and us: "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

When persecution comes, the crowds soon scatter. Family ties, so strong in the Palestinian culture of Jesus time, have to take second place as far as Jesus is concerned. We often get into trouble about things that seem wonderful bargains and we forget to read the small print. Jesus wants us to be quite sure that we understand the "small print" of the Gospel demands on his disciples. The first is to prefer intimacy with Jesus to all other intimacies; the second is to accept the cross – not only that of the ordinary, painful suffering that is part of being human, becoming sick, dying – but also the cross of persecution, ridicule and conflict that may come with discipleship; and the third is to surrender possessions and possessiveness.

To impress on his hearers the cost of discipleship, he tells two stories of two possible fools: one at work, the other at war. He asks them to first sit down and work out the cost; first sit down and consider, but then act.

Chiune Sugihara had a dream. He was born on a day of new beginnings – 1 January, 1900. As a boy he dreamt of becoming the Japanese ambassador to Russia. By the 1930s, he was ambassador to Lithuania, just a step away from ambassadorship to Russia. He was on his way to a successful career, a big name on the international scene with money and prestige galore.

Then one morning something happened that challenged all that. A huge crowd gathered outside his home. They turned out to be Jews who had made their way through treacherous terrain from Poland, desperately seeking his help. They wanted Japanese visas, which would enable them to flee Eastern Europe and the Gestapo. Three times Sugihara wired Tokyo for permission to provide the visas; three times he was rejected. Faced with the tragedy of the people's lives before him and the prospects of his future, he dared to disobey orders.

For twenty-eight days he wrote visas by hand barely sleeping or eating. Recalled to Berlin, he was still writing visas and shoving them through the train windows into the hands of the refugees who ran alongside. Ultimately he saved 6,000 lives. He lost his job, his fame, his money, his career, and he wound up humbly selling light bulbs of all things. But he had taken up his cross and found his deepest self, his calling (**William J Bausch, 60 More Seasonal Homilies, p. 143**). St John of the Cross wrote: "He who would give light, must endure the burning."

What are the crosses we face? One is the cross of inconvenience. We can pray for people, but sometimes we have to put ourselves out, such as taking people to the doctor; foregoing our own time to listen to people who are depressed or sending a card to tell them we are thinking about them. If we pray for world peace, but do not openly forgive those who have hurt us, how can God bring about peace not only in Hong Kong, Iran, North Korea, but in the West, where there are so many places of violence and hatred today?

In the face of so much condemnation Jeremy Dixon, on the steps of the US Supreme Court, forgave the killer of his nineteen-year-old daughter and said, "What I would wish for Jaymes Todd and what I believe Eurydice would wish, is that he gets better and realises what he has done" and "very glad there's a killer off the streets" (***Herald Sun, 2 September 2019***). Our prayer needs a level of inconvenience to back it up. It needs the cross to be fruitful.

The second cross deals with bearing witness under pressure. Everybody knows about this one, being different in a world of conformity. Ask any teenage girl! Not having the right body or looks puts tremendous pressure on her; the same with a young fellow without the right build, or not having the right clothes at parties. The tyrannies are there to force conformity – and they are there also, unfortunately, in the moral order.

The third cross is martyrdom, not just bloody martyrdom that we read about in the lives of the saints, but dry martyrdom, no bloodshed, but a wounding of the spirit. Perhaps this is harder in some ways, the martyrdom of surrendering your security for Jesus, the martyrdom of grace under pressure.

Ruth Bridges was six-years-old, the first Afro-American child to attend an all-white elementary school in Mississippi in 1960. She had to be escorted by her mother and two U.S. Marshals because of the violent mobs. She was subjected to harassment. Hate words were painted on the fences round her home. On her way to school each day, she was subjected to catcalls, harsh stares and obscene gestures. She was shunned by the white students in her class. In an interview she was asked how she kept her composure? The little girl replied that she knew all the Bible stories about holding fast to God no matter what people did to you. She knew what they did to Jesus and how he held fast. And so she put everything in the hands of Jesus. He was her rock. Still I didn't make the pressure any less (**from William J Bausch, *The Word In and Out of Season*, pp. 206-209**)

It was on the 9 October 2012, that Malala Yousafzai, a fifteen-year-old Pakistani girl was shot in the head by Taliban gunmen for defying their ban on girl's education. After recovery, on her 16th birthday she spoke to 1,000 students at the United Nations, that the attempt on her life had only given her strength and banished any fear. "I am the same Malala," she said, "my ambitions, my hopes, my dreams are the same. ...I do not even hate the Taliban who shot me. Even if I had a gun in my hand and he stands in front of me, I would not shoot him." She had learned this attitude from Mohammed, Jesus Christ and the Lord Buddha, and was inspired by people like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi and Mother Teresa.

Is our dream the same as that of Jesus? Are we willing to take up the cross of inconvenience, the cross of bearing witness under pressure, or the cross of a dry martyrdom? Jesus invites us to face the cost of following him. The reward is the finding of our life, of moral courage, whether you are 6, 15 or 33. You will make a difference. You will find Jesus and be a light to others, despite the burning.

Father's Day (Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Who needs fathers these days? Children do. Fathers are foundational for the development of healthy children and strong families. Kids need fathers just as they need mothers; they need them as role models. A father's love is different from a mother's love, and the child needs both in the same way as our bodies need both proteins and carbohydrates in order to achieve a balanced growth. Our fathers don't necessarily want a lot of praise, but it's nice for our fathers, grandfathers and those special father figures, to know, how loved they are today.

We need fathers to the end of their lives. I was privileged to be with dad when he passed away. I heard from my older sister and brother who cared for dad through his illness that he gave them a father's blessing, "Thank you my wee daughter, my wee son, for all that you have done for me." I wanted that blessing, I received it much later, but that's another story.

A friend told me of Al. He lost a son, his wife divorced him, and he was left to raise his six-year-old son, Ernie alone. It was too much for him. He became an alcoholic and died alone in a motel some years later. He seemed a failure as a father. But the friend noticed his grown-up son, Ernie, responsible, warm and capable. He asked Ernie: "I know your dad had it tough, but how is it that you have turned out so well?" Ernie thought for a while and said, "Every night when I was growing up, until I left home at 18, dad would come to my room, kiss me and say, 'I love you, son'".

Fatherhood is love's will to create and donate your life for another. There's an authority in fatherhood which comes from authorship – shared with your wife in giving birth to your children, naming them and helping them fulfil their name. But it's not an absolute authorship. To be a father is to be steward of a life or lives that are entrusted into your keeping. But it's not automatic. We parent as we have been parented, and we need to prepare for that vocation. Before we become fathers, or mother's ourselves we need to be sons and daughters, and experience being "fathered."

In our Christian tradition, the linkage between fatherhood, marriage and love has always been emphasised. The love a man holds towards his children, grows naturally from the love he shares with his wife. Dads, you have a God-given position as father to give your children a sense of belonging, of being part of the family; not having favorites but treating each one equally yet differently, awakening them by your own example to the needs of others, and welcoming the friends your children bring home. Your role, finding your place in life and work and in the enjoyment of your family leads also to the further advancement of society.

When you met your wife, fell in love and married, you were still immature. Your agenda was

your own happiness. But from the moment your first child was born, without necessarily wanting to, you started to mature. What happens is that for the next 25-50 years, every time you turn around, a number of tiny and not so tiny hands will be stretched out, demanding something of you, your time, your energy, your money, your car keys, your sympathy, your understanding, your heart. Your own agenda is put on hold. You are asked to make a lot of sacrifices; in terms of lifestyle, career, hobbies, meals out, vacations, travel, which now are enjoyed in simpler ways with the family. A father is a guy who has photos of his family in his wallet where his money used to be. Dad carries us in his heart, even though we may not see him for a good part of the day or even the week.

Your children stand before you, like Jesus before Peter, asking: "Do you love me?" and if you say yes – you are taken where you may not want to go – out of your natural selfishness and into self-sacrificing maturity. Paul in chains is able to plead effectively for Onesimus, "this child of mine" who is also in chains - a slave but now a Christian through Paul's baptism. His name meant 'Useful' and Paul in his plea says, "he was useful to me in prison as I was getting older."

The perennial question: what to get dad for Father's Day? What does dad want? I think he wants to be a good father; to pass on to his children what he and his wife value and to see that live on in their children; to hand the faith on to the next generation. He wants to engage with his children so that they can follow in his steps. It's not enough to know what a good father is. We want to know how to be a good father. (1) love your wife (2) Don't expect perfect children (3) Enjoy your children (4) Listen to your children (5) Be a good role model. The hard part of being a dad is to say No when it's needed to be said. To allow them to be disappointed, rather than rescue them from that feeling, because that's how life pans out sometimes.

In today's Gospel Jesus asks the people who follow him –what do they want? "Are you willing to walk my way? Do you know where I'm going and the cost, are you willing to pay it?" They were thinking of themselves, their families, their lives and their possessions. Jesus was thinking of the Kingdom of God, of going to Jerusalem to save the whole of humanity. Three times he puts the condition – "you cannot be my disciple unless: 1. You make me your number one Priority; 2. Take up your cross, the burdens of the day; 3. Renounce selfish attachments.

These conditions don't isolate men, but call them to be good men, real fathers, able to relate deeply to and sacrifice themselves for their wives and children. Fatherhood does that! You see it on the news of fathers in Ukraine kissing their wives and children who go to safety while they stay to defend their country. It is in such a situation that Jesus speaks to the crowd as he prepares to go to Jerusalem. Mind-blowing for the crowd then, impossible for us today! Or is it?

Fathering, in the positive sense, is not something that occurs naturally in every human society. It is God who is the one from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth takes its origin. Pop round to grandpa or grandma and listen to their stories. I did not know my grandparents. Dad's

father died at sea coming back from Canada to Scotland; mum's father died when she was six. But though their stories the grandparents we did not know both live and continue to inspire us.

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ex 32:7-11, 13-14

I Tim 1:12-17

Lk 15:1-32

Just as at the heart of Mark's Gospel is the revelation of Jesus' identity as Messiah and Beloved Son (8:27-30 and 9:2-8), so at the heart of Luke's Gospel is the revelation of the Father as a God of Mercy. It consists of three stories of seeking what was lost and the joy of finding, followed by a communal celebration: a sheep that went astray, a coin lost from a woman's dowry, and a son who went his own way and only found himself as son when he returned to his father.

The context for the stories is found at the beginning of chapter 15, in the scribes and Pharisees' grumbling about the tax collectors and sinners attracted to Jesus and celebrating with him because of his welcoming invitation. The stories reflect Jesus' own ministry of seeking out and bringing joy into people's lives by helping them find God and themselves. The scribes and Pharisees deny they are lost, they only want to enjoy Jesus' scintillating, all-embracing friendship, but they will not mix with the riff-raff around Jesus, and so Jesus resorts to the three stories, especially the third story known as the parable of the Prodigal Son in order to reach them.

The younger son's demand for his share of what was in his father's will was really a death wish. You only get a share when a parent dies, but he wanted his share now. The father gave it and the son went off and his group of friends joined him in living it up. But as soon as the money was gone, so were the friends. We have to face the consequences of our own actions, but God is always concerned for us, like parents in many instances over a son or daughter.

When the famine struck, the son hired himself out to a pig farmer and would have eaten the pig swill if offered, something repugnant to a Jew, revealing how low he had sunk. It was then that he came to himself, discovering his true self as the son of his father. But even his intent of offering himself as one of his father's servants, was still self-serving – at least he would have a roof over his head and enough to eat. He prepares his self-deprecating script, "Father, I have sinned against you, I am no longer worthy to be your son. Treat me like one of your hired hands!" And he set off for home.

While he was still a long way off, the father sees him, throws off any sense of dignity, runs towards him and embraces him. Shouldn't he have stayed aloof and given the boy a good ticking off for all the pain he caused the family? No! we are dealing with a Father of mercy, the Father Jesus knows intimately and whose loving mercy Jesus embodies.

The son begins his self-hating script, but doesn't get to finish it, for the Father, filled with compassion, simply says "Quick!" and puts on him the best robe that restores his dignity as son; puts shoes on his feet - he is no longer a slave; and gives him his signet ring - he has become a co-

heir with his older brother. Once received, the son restored, then the celebration can begin.

That is what irks the scribes and Pharisees. They work all their lives to gain God's approval, keeping themselves aloof from any association with wrong company. And here are these sinners getting into the Kingdom scot free. Their attitude is captured in the elder son who hearing the music and laughter becomes very angry. He dissociates himself from his father. "Look I have slaved for you and never once had a kid to celebrate with my friends, and here is *this son of yours* ..." and puts down the younger son "who has devoured your property with prostitutes..." The elder son, like the scribes and Pharisees, has a slaves' heart "I have slaved for you", but the younger son knows the father's heart; and though he has offended him, has come back.

The father does not reprimand the elder son, but offers him the same promise of everything he possesses and welcomes him into the celebration; it's the same Father Jesus witnesses to in all his ministry. When Jesus received only refusal from those who were the leaders and holy people among his own people, it must have stung his heart. No wonder Jesus wept on that slope looking over Jerusalem, "Oh Jerusalem how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing" (**Lk 13:34**). And because Jesus persisted in his ministry of mercy, letting sinners enter the kingdom before the scribes and Pharisees, it became one of the reasons for getting rid of him. Jesus is aware of this as he prefaces his lament with, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it" (**Lk 13:34**). Salvation cannot be earned; it is God's free gift, but once given, we must persevere in living this filial relationship with God the Father and with Jesus in the loving embrace of the Holy Spirit.

Second Homily

While the scribes and Pharisees come to complain to Jesus, the tax collectors and sinners come to hear what Jesus has to say. Jesus goes in search of the lost. Unlike the Pharisees, he knew that rejection and judgement never help to change a person. If a child is wet and starving, he doesn't need a lecture. He needs warmth and food. We can focus on morality, but people can get lost in many ways. What makes it so frustrating is the fact that usually they are not far away. They are lost in our midst, lost even within the bosom of the family. Yet no-one seems able to reach them. Some are lost because no one took an interest in them.

On Thursday I celebrated the requiem of my nephew Anthony Cameron. Anthony was adopted by my sister, Rose-Marie, at the age of six. He was withdrawn, stiff as a board, insecure because Anthony's mother had put him into foster care as a very young child and kept his younger sister. Anthony didn't know his father. He was put into one home after another to be fostered, and the same pattern followed. He was loved at first, but when a younger girl came to the house to be fostered, he was rejected and moved on.

With this history of rejection, he came to Rose-Marie where he was brought into her family and he was accepted as a brother by Rose-Marie's husband and five children and eventually adopted. He was part of all our family celebrations. It took a long time for him to accept being loved.

Jesus used every means to tell people of the unconditional love of his Father who poured out his love, his sun and rain on good and bad alike. He showed it by his welcome to both Pharisee and sinner. His story of the two sons: one who leaves home in the fond hope that he will experience happiness in the unfamiliar, only to find it is discovered in the heart of the familiar. The elder son who refuses to accept the lost one back as a brother, and alienates himself from his father with the words, "you and this son of yours."

In grade 7 Anthony made friends with Michael Kirby who invited him to come to his place. He was accepted by the family and he'd often visit, and go with them on excursions. The friendship continued into young adulthood. Anthony worked, enjoyed music, big band concerts, cars, bunji jumping from Karawau Bridge, Queenstown, NZ. Anthony left home at 24 and stayed in the flat behind the Kirby's house. He met Michelle and she said it took her a long time to crack his shell. Anthony always wanted to be independent.

Anthony graduated last year from Victoria University, Sunbury campus, with a degree in Music Technology and Sound Engineering. He was offered a job as sound engineer in the uni, but his hopes were cut short. In December, he was diagnosed with an aggressive tumour. He was angry at God and at his family. "I've had a shit of a life," he said. Just at the time when everything was coming together for him, he had friends, a girlfriend and future prospects. He was 27, just short of his 28th birthday.

When he was diagnosed, Rose-Marie brought him home to her granny flat, gave him her room and put her own plans on hold to nurse him with love, prayer and faith, assisted by her two daughters. Rose-Marie did not want to send him away again from home to die in hospital, but to care for him in the family.

Suffering breaks us open to let God in. We can see our life at such moments as a vase with an ugly crack ruining it. But the crack lets the light shine through. Like the younger son, he returned home and came to realise that he was part of the family; that he belonged as a son. Initially Anthony had said he was not into organised religion but gradually through his pain, he got to know that the family really loved him and he got to know Christ.

In Jesus' story, coming home to himself will not save the son; coming home to the Father will. And that is what I want to finish with. Anthony asked me what would happen after death. I spoke to him about coming home to the Father, seeing God face to face and becoming like God. Last Sunday, I can only call it divine providence, I came to Rose-Marie's place; the family were there. I anointed Anthony, gave him viaticum, eucharist, bread for the journey, and prayed with him. I prayed Psalm 23 in personal terms, that "even though I have to go through the shadow of

darkness, I will fear no evil for you are with me with your shepherd's rod and staff to comfort me". I told him it was okay to go. He nodded with half closed eyes.

I left for my brother's place, fifteen minutes later, they told me that as Anthony was dying, his eyes were wide open in awe and wonder at his Father God who was coming to take him home. I had used human words before, but the experience was so real and much more profound for Anthony. He died in peace, the hint of a smile on his face. It was an event of tears but also of much joy. He had learned to let go of his defensiveness and was able to be his vulnerable, unadorned and unmasked self, able to receive and give so much love.

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amos 8:4-7

1 Tim 2:1-8

Lk 16:1-13

In our lives we can come up against blank walls, dead-end streets, doors that will not open, accompanied by feelings of the emptiness and futility of our lives. An old word for it is 'acedia' – a couldn't care less feeling, a tedium in regard to life.

There's something of this underlying the readings. Amos observes his fellow worshippers. Their attitude is: "Get these religious observances over with – the Sabbath, the New Moon – so that we can get back to what we're doing." And what are they doing? They are exploiting the poor; taking advantage of those who can't defend themselves.

The manager in the Gospel has gone slack; not really up to the task at hand. The master hasn't called in for a long time; there's little meaning in what he is doing – "so what the hell!" There's the kind of 'double-mindedness' in him that Kierkegaard talks about, not always conscious because there's a vulnerability within and a fear without if he is found out.

The master hearing that the manager has been embezzling him, dismisses him on the spot, so that the manager cannot cheat him any further. The owner doesn't inspect the books; he knows the manager hasn't been a good manager, he simply asks for the ledger books to be handed over.

When confronted with his crime, however, the manager says not a word, doesn't try to defend himself, but he knows that he is out of a job. His concern is not how to get his job back; his only focus is the future. So he goes away talking to himself, considering all his options. Then he hits on a solution. "I know what I will do I, I will continue to act as manager of my boss's farm" But he has to act quickly. No-one knows yet that he's been dismissed. He sends lesser servants to call the renters of the land.

He calls them in one by one. If they got a whiff that something was up, they could work against him. He has to act quickly. You get a sense of the haste in the manager's words. No polite, "Good morning friend," it's simply: "How much do you owe my master?" "Make that 50! How much do you owe? Make it 80! Something coming from outside, creating dread, can eventually lead to a different quality of life, a new way of doing things.

Here it seems the boss is giving them a mighty slice off the rent even before the results of the harvest. The manager gets the renters to change the bill in their own hand. You could imagine how this reinstates the manager's image in town.

When it's all done, the manager returns the books. The master who would have known the original contract now sees what the manager has done, and that he has him over the barrel; for the master is receiving glowing praise and thanks from the townspeople. If he turns around and

says, "It's all been a mistake," they would be angry with him and call him a mean skinflint. So, he keeps silent and has to admit the shrewdness of the manager who gets a back-handed compliment from the master and looks after his own interest.

What does Jesus want to tell us through this parable and the poem about money which follows? We have to act with urgency today, look to the future, act as real stewards giving honour to the master, and know what our heart is set on? For Jesus his priority is the Kingdom. "The Church exists," says Rahner, "not for its own glory, but for the Kingdom." The riches of the Kingdom belong to the poor, said St Basil, - those extra shoes and coat in the wardrobe; we can dispose of the master's things.

In our society it's easy to run away from responsibility for our world. But the task facing us is the journey inward to the inner person of the heart (*1 Pet 3:4*), staying with what is happening to us, accepting it as ultimately creative of something greater.

Virginia Woolf's image, in her book ***To the Lighthouse*** of "a fin rising in a wide and blank sea" was not only a signal triggering fear that another bout of manic depression was on its way, but was also a positive sign of perhaps, as she put it "an impulse behind another book." Our response to depression should evoke not only foreboding but a feeling of expectation. The thing we dread can lead to the creative employment of our gifts. We experience depression as a prelude to painful decisions. Once we've made our decision there's a new freedom, the heaviness is lifted. The master's dreaded coming forces the manager to act.

The dreaded Day of the Lord who would not forget our darkest deeds was for Amos more than a personal call to change. For the prophet, asceticism, discipline was a political act. It affected and brought about right order.

Thomas Merton, writer and monk, thought the same. "He was convinced that the suffering required for sanctity in a secular age must originate from the pain of the world. The discipline that was demanded was identification with the anguish of the world in its search for meaning" (**Padavano, *The Human Journey*, p. 22**). If we really are brothers and sisters, said Amos, created as his people and given this land equally, then the nobles, merchants and priests (because of a privileged position with the king), cannot exploit the poor. Conversion to God is to be made real in our dealings with one another.

Our pain and weakness is to make us open to the pain and weakness of our world. In our depression, feeling so remote from the world, the outcome can be that we are now more deeply immersed in it – with a renewed insight and deeper integration. We don't have an asceticism which overcomes the tension we feel by taking it out of the body or on others. We have an asceticism of wellness – working to make our whole person better as we work to make our world a better place.

Second Homily

Caught, his worst fears realised! He was reported for embezzling the Master. A gambling problem, high-flown schemes that didn't work, or simply living beyond his means, caught up in status and grabbing for more? We don't know, but it's common enough in our day, not only with individuals, but with big businesses, such as big banks engaged in high-risk trading, farmers burning down the Amazon forests for pasture, driving the indigenous and the animals from their natural habitat, in direct contradiction to the Psalm response: Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor."

Jesus isn't praising the wrong done by the manager, but the shrewdness he exhibits, his clear-headed summing up of his situation and the quick action he took to ensure his future. He's street-smart, he knows how to survive, find a way out of a desperate situation. The manager, brought to account, still had the ledger, the books. He quickly and secretly summons his Master's debtors, one by one, and gets them to rewrite the bill. "How much do you owe my Master?" "One hundred measures of oil!" "Here take your bond; sit down straight away and write fifty." He didn't write for the person, he got him to rewrite the bond, and caught him into collusion with him, so as to ensure that when he's sacked he will still survive, have a roof over his head. In this way he reduces the debt of those who owe the Master and by this one action puts the Master in debt. How?

In an honour/shame culture at stake is the Master's good name, which went up in the estimation of his debtors; the manager must have been acting on the Master's behalf in reducing their debt. Will the Master risk the loss of his name by recalling the bills of transaction and demanding the whole amount be paid?

Jesus used the parable to tell us to be astute as well in our own spiritual survival. But he laments that the children of light don't have the same decisive action in order to have an eternal dwelling, after death. We are not to assume an attitude that everything is corrupt, and retire from public life, not handling this tainted money. His answer is no, we should not opt out, but use money, influence, for the business of God's Kingdom and for the saving of our soul, the care for people and our world. Often we turn a blind eye as long as our lifestyle isn't affected. Are we living beyond our means and will we have to account before God?

Pope Francis spoke of our shared Gospel commitment to the poor of the world. Where are the real faces of poverty to be found today? There are five areas where we need to focus our active concern: those who are hungriest; those most vulnerable to disasters and climate change; indigenous peoples; those with disabilities; and those uprooted from their homelands by conflict or oppression. What impact will it have? In the choice between God and mammon, only God is the ultimate. We do not own our world or lifestyle. We are meant to choose God first if he is Lord, then we are his servants, and let that influence our choices.

The demands made by our consumerist affluent lifestyle have a direct effect on the lives of the

world's poorest people. Our belief in the gospel of development presupposed an infinite supply of resources. What needs to be proclaimed by the Church, in contrast, is a gospel of sustainability, recognising the limited resources of the planet – and the clear indictment both in Hebrew and Christian scriptures that the fruits of the earth are for the good of all. And such an attitude is indissolubly linked to world peace and security.

The Pope described how he chose his name: "Francis of Assisi for me, is a man of poverty and peace, the man who loves and protects creation. He is the man who gives us the spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor. We cannot forget our brothers and sisters who are poor. The ones we are challenged to see and love are the people who are not allowed inside the gates of the world's decision-makers, the ones who do not sit at the table of affluence. These are the men, women and children living in poverty around the world."

Pope Francis has set us a wonderful example, seeking to welcome persons who are hurt and marginalised and to open the gate to them. His active concern, that the media initially picked up, focusses mercifully on the needy person, trying to enter into the life situation of these people. By his actions he brought hope to our Church and world. In one sense he found it easier to reply to the poor who having very little, are more open to change not only for themselves but their overall existence, but he finds it more difficult to change the culture of those entrenched in power and privilege, even within the Church.

He is not undermining the Church's teaching but seeking to win people back to the Lord. We need to catch his pastoral concern for all God's creatures and to try to see them as God does. He admits simply that we are all sinners and in need of God's mercy. Pope Francis is living simply, dealing personally, not laying down laws, and he's upsetting many by his style. He needs our prayers. Say a Hail Mary for him each day as he seeks to serve God and all of us.

Third Homily

I wonder if you have felt like me. Those times in my life when I felt like the steward in the Gospel, unsure of what to do, where to go, what is my direction in life was. I needed a vision to live from, that would take me into the future with purpose. We live in a market world where you have to compete. Not everyone, however, is able to compete. The film, *The Pursuit of Happiness* was about Chris Gardner, a self-made millionaire who worked his way out of poverty to become a wealthy stockbroker, but many of the poor he associated with had no such opportunity.

We are part of a globalised world where the economy takes care of itself. Just let the market forces operate. But this globalised world has no direction either. We are part of a runaway world. We have reached a new stage where technologies we have introduced, like global warming, pollution, unstable markets, the consequences of genetic engineering are unforeseen. It is like the big wheel at SeaWorld on the Gold Coast, it takes you round and round but it's not going

anywhere. You can escape from your anxiety with the thrill of the view and the diversion of the rides, or lose yourself in the footy, or a video, or the latest gadgets.

In my sense of lack of direction, I was heartened by a word from Basil Hume, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster who had a great impact on the society of his time. He wrote:

“We do not see ourselves as having any particular mission or function in the Church. We do not set out to change the course of history. We are just there almost by accident from a human point of view. And happily, we go on ‘just being there.’ That’s the pursuit of happiness I want!”

And for me to be there **as love**. That’s all the Little Flower, St Therese of Lisieux, did. She never left her Carmelite convent. Her vocation was to be love in the heart of Mother Church. Her influence was world-wide.

To be there as love for the sake of the Kingdom. The steward in the Gospel was willing to forego the interest that he would accrue so that he could be received into people’s homes after his dismissal. Usury was accepted practice. The steward acted for the absentee landlord taking 100% interest for olive oil or wheat. In reducing the debt he increased the landlord’s good name and his own as well.

Jesus is not praising the wrong done by the steward, but the shrewdness he exhibits; his clear-headed summing up of his situation and the quick action he took to ensure his future. Jesus uses the story to tell us to be astute as well; to use our possessions for the business of bringing people into the kingdom, into community with God.

An application of the Gospel story was in the news recently. Most clubs claim that their survival depends on Pokie machines. Russell Crowe and Peter Holmes a Court intend to cut out pokies in the South Sydney League’s Club which they own, refusing to build a club on the plight of problem gamblers. They have summed up their situation and taken action in spite of the ingrained culture. Jesus met with even more opposition as he sought to change the culture.

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amos 6:1, 4-7

I Tim 6:11-16

Lk 16:19-31

The top executive of a multinational corporation, in a promotional ad, sank the sludge fund into the team they sponsored for the Grand Final. The sludge fund was only used to help homeless Arabs in that sector where the corporation had huge oil assets. When he died, the executive was confronted with the image of one Arab. His reply to the Lord was, "I didn't even know he existed." "You should have," said the Lord, "your sludge fund used to give him one meagre meal a day. You snapped the thread of his life. You are responsible for his death."

Albert Schweitzer, at the height of a brilliant career at 24, as organist, theologian and philosopher, was so struck by the parable of Dives and Lazarus that he gave everything away, studied medicine and opened a hospital at Ogowe River in the Congo, Equatorial Africa. "We in the West are like that rich man," he said, "while our poorer brothers and sisters in Africa die from disease and lack of medicine."

This is the only parable in which one of the characters is named. The other was a rich man, dressed in purple and fine linen. Roman law dictated how much purple a person of rank may wear. So he was pretty high up. I imagine him stepping with disdain over the human flotsam and jetsam that lay outside his security gates. The prophetic impact of Mother Teresa was that she did not step over bodies lying in the streets or pass babies abandoned in the slums of Calcutta. She took the poorest of the poor into her care. She touched the body of Christ in the morning Eucharist and touched the body of Christ in the most abandoned she fed and cared for. She recognised the innate dignity of each person as made in the image of God.

Is the point of the parable the reversal of fortune? The one living in luxury, eating sumptuously each day, with no regard for anyone else, suffering the punishment of omission, and is now in agony in flames, asking for a drop of water to ease his thirst, and Lazarus, who wasted away as he saw the waste from the rich man's table, but who now is living in intimate relationship with Abraham.

NO! The point of the story is what are the other brothers going to do? What are we going to do? We have the law and the prophets, the word of God that challenged Albert Schweitzer who left a brilliant career to work in the Congo and Mother Teresa who moved out of her Loreto convent to work in the slums of Calcutta.

The parable could equally well have featured a politician with his power, or an academic with his brains, or a preacher with his eloquence, or a lawyer with his persuasion; anyone with any kind of resource or skills who use them selfishly, not for the service of others.

We all are gifted, even if it's no more than a heart, a hand and a span of life. At some stage in our life we are given some "Lazarus at our door," a test case as to whether we will use our possessions, gifts, rightly or wrongly, with love or with self-indulgence, bringing God's will into the matter or leaving it out. Will we bring eternity into the consideration of this time?

Lazarus never speaks in the parable. The poor, in whatever way they expose poverty have no power to voice their need. Years ago when Bishop Helder Camara, bishop of one of the poorest churches in Brazil, was given an honorary doctorate of law at Harvard University for his defence of human rights, his speech was almost totally ignored by the media. "Am I being honoured or mocked?" he asked, because law is misused so much, especially in the area of human rights.

Paragraph 27 from the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* widens the notion of the poor to include the aged, the refugee, foreign workers, starving people, the unemployed. It asks us to look at our neighbour as another self, especially to help him/her live in a dignified way – so that we don't follow the example of the rich man who ignored Lazarus. We are to be like Jesus who refused to accept the Lazarus' with their poverty and pain as part of the landscape and was concerned passionately, totally, personally.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, walked home one Christmas Day, 1868, after preaching at Whitegate Chapel. He saw the poverty in the workhouses, the sweat shops and said, "That is the last Christmas party I will ever celebrate." He walked the markets at three in the morning begging for discarded vegetables for his soup kitchen that fed a million people. "We saw the need," he said, "We saw people starving, going about half-naked and we set about bringing a remedy for these things. We were obliged, there was compulsion. How could one do anything else?" Or Mary MacKillop who never saw a need without doing something about it.

Who are the Lazarus at your door?

Second Homily

Caught up in the grip of Grand Final fever I've repeatedly turned on the television, not only for the footy, but out of concern for what's happening in Hong Kong, West Papua and climate change. In both cases I wanted to discover the drive behind the tremendous energy of the players and the courage of the young people in Hong Kong. For one, it is the cup and the glory of being premiers, and for the young, it is their fight for fundamental rights and for their future.

Social Justice Sunday for 2019-20 entitled "**Making it Real. Genuine Human Encounter in our Digital World,**" was published by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Young people are at home in the digital world and can show us many ways social media can be harnessed. I want to focus on one point from the Bishops' Social Justice statement. **Digital platforms have a role to call communities to action in the face of human rights abuses.** Just think of the mass protest, the peaceful sit-in of thousands of young people in Hong Kong airport designed to secure

international backing for their movement then at its tenth week. They opposed Beijing's thrust for power and the brutality of the police. In West Papua the Indonesian military are more brutal firing live bullets on unarmed youth. But now it's captured on camera no matter how much those in authority seek to shut down the web.

Pope Francis encourages us to "boldly become citizens of the digital world," to make real the love of God in the virtual neighbourhood, that is, to work for solidarity, not isolating people, especially the elderly. Our world is becoming increasingly digital, paying bills, shopping online. Try to find a public phone in the airport terminal. The internet is the public square where people share their concerns, especially excluded groups, provided they can access a mobile or a computer.

The Gospel today highlights a situation of exclusion. Jesus could not be more trenchant in placing the rich man in hell and the poor man in heaven. Neither man did much, so why the condemnation and the reward. According to this parable the Gospel measurement for heaven or hell is **seeing**. Spiritual blindness, spiritual indifference condemns people. We've heard it before in Matthew 25: Lord when did we see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison, and didn't take care of you?

The rich man saw Lazarus hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked and sick – but he chose not to see him. He was spiritually blind. In not seeing he did not act and in not acting, he omitted the compassion and sharing he should have given Lazarus. And so the rich man is condemned for his sin of omission. The parable challenges us to open our eyes and see, then to act on what we see. Young people have a seismic function in society to sense the underlying friction and rumblings in society and to voice it. Greta Thunberg at the UN spoke scathingly about world leaders' inaction on the issue of climate change. Youth bring the drive, but they need those in authority to enact change.

The need is: move from the net to real action in the neighbourhood. Mother Teresa found a woman on the streets who was covered with sores that were dirty and infected and crawling with insects. Mother Teresa took her in and began cleaning her up. All the while, the woman was screaming at her, showering her with curses and insults. At one point the woman screamed: "Why are you doing this? People don't do things like this. Who taught you? Mother Teresa said, "My God taught me." The woman quieted down and asked who her God was. Mother Teresa responded: "You know my God. My God is called love."

This God of love inserted himself into our global network in Jesus of Nazareth. It was a personal intervention of God "for us and for our salvation." God entered history for you and me, for all humanity." The incarnation means that Jesus, truly human and truly God had a place, a neighbourhood he called home. To be a Catholic is to be unique among the world's believers, we are part of history, part of a vast historical project. Since the beginning of time God has been working out his own hidden purposes in the history of nations and in the biography of every

person.

Rodney Stark, a self-professed atheist and a leading social scientist, in his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, concluded that the early Church conquered the Roman Empire by the force of her beliefs. The most radical Christian belief, Stark said, was the belief in God's love and the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. It was something new in the history of religion. Never before had a religion taught that God loved people personally and that God's love began before the person was even born. Before Christianity came on the scene, no religion had ever taught that God could be found in our neighbor. The world ignored the poor, the hungry, the stranger and the imprisoned. It still does. And yet Jesus said that we find God in these least brothers and sisters of ours.

"Hey!" cried the rich man in hell, "get a message to my five brothers so that they don't end up here. Let me come back from the dead and scare them into seeing like Marley's ghost". "No can do," replied Abraham. "Let them listen to Moses and the prophets!" But they didn't. In our own time, Jesus came back from the dead; yet it hasn't made much of a difference to some. No, if you want to rescue your own five brothers – your children and grandchildren – you have to do it by example and leadership.

Can you bring your children, so protected, well-off, brain-washed by consumerism, face to face with the Lazarus at the door? Sponsor a child through Caritas; encourage your teenagers to help at our aged-care places; Ask your uni-age children to give a year as volunteer in the Kimberley or overseas. It takes some effort to be a global citizen. Begin with love. Do everything for the love of God, even the little things you do each day. Love those who don't love you. Love expecting nothing in return. Love and you will find Jesus. Love and those you love will find Jesus, too. Love and through your actions God will change the world.

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Hab 1:2-3; 2:2-4

2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14

Lk 17{5-9}

Frederick Nietzsche, the philosopher, told this story about a mad-man who lights a lantern and, in broad daylight, rushes into a crowded marketplace shouting: “I seek God! I seek God. But the people in the marketplace ridicule him. “Has God got lost?” asks one. “Did he lose his way like a child?” asks another. “Is he hiding? Or is he afraid of us?” the people yell and laugh at him.

Then the mad-man turns at them and shouts: “God is dead, I tell you, we have killed him, you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away an entire horizon? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned, has bled to death under our knives.” Then he smashes the lantern on the ground and announces: “I have come too early”.

We now live in a culture that, for the most part, no longer imagines God's existence, and generally thinks that this means both that it has lost its faith and that God doesn't exist. It's a notion prevalent everywhere. We know a spouse, child, colleague or neighbor who is convinced, consciously or unconsciously that God doesn't exist, or can no longer conjure up God at the level of imagination or feeling. But God exists independent of our perceptions. Faith is something deeper than imagination and feeling. Pope John Paul II said we live in an alternate culture in which people act as if there was no God. Yet we cannot untangle the mess we are in, like the entangled roots of the mulberry bush without faith. Given even a little faith can help us find a way through.

“With what kind of sponge did we wipe away an entire horizon?” How did we move from a condition wherein God's existence dominated an entire culture and consciousness, to a situation within which our normal consciousness contains little or no awareness of God?

When we struggle to experience God, it's not so much a question of God's presence or absence, so much as his presence or absence within our awareness. God is no less present in a pub than in a church, but generally we are more present to God in a church. God is present to us, but we are not present to God. We are so busy, our lives full, like suitcases bursting at the seams, with work, meetings, family concerns, deadlines to meet. We are self-absorbed but unfulfilled. That was until the pandemic struck our world!

God can seem absent when we see what's happening in our world and we are so helpless to control it; on top of the pandemic and the deaths of loved ones, there's bushfires and floods, and wars that continue unabated. If there is a God, why can't he help, screams Habakkuk; why is he so powerless to stop the violence, alleviate famine and suffering? The prophet speaks on behalf of his people who have suffered years of exile in Babylon, the calamity that his people had called down

on themselves as a result of being unfaithful to God's covenant. We want to bring God to act as we want him to act.

A man went into a store wanting to buy power to change things in the world. He came to the counter; God who was serving simply said, I'm sorry, we only sell seeds. Yet that simple mustard seed gives the power to us to face the tangled web, the mulberry bush, or the mountain, and overcome.

God's answer comes through slowly. But the vision has to be embodied in real people. And the most real person was Jesus, especially Jesus crucified, who was no stranger to our suffering. He embraced our human condition in a world similar to our own. Without God our vision is confined to a narrow sphere; we lack transcendent awareness of the greater Good, of God and God's will. The chicken which pecks itself out of the egg knows instinctively that its world and life is greater than the inner confines of its shell. Our struggle to make God real in our lives, is really a struggle with contemplation – getting beyond my self-absorption, that what I choose is all my doing, - to an awareness of others and the Other, God. "Wake up!" the old monk said to the young man who wanted a comfy life, who thought he had plenty of time. "Wake up, before death wakes you up."

We need faith to live, and with the apostles we ask, "Lord increase our faith!" Jesus' response highlights, not the amount, but the quality of faith; faith the size of a mustard seed, needed, not necessarily for great miracles but in order to live and serve; faith that requires openness to God's will, a personal yes, obedient to God's working in our lives. It is because we believe that with Habakkuk we can cry out to God. And in Jesus we see that faith is not something that takes us out of life and makes everything rosy, but takes us into the heart of life itself and gives us vision, no matter how obscure, to do what we know we must. Faith is trust, not certainty; trust in Jesus, in God our Father, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. People don't have to understand a work of art to be inspired by it. It's not the size of our faith, but the quality of it that matters. With faith, what looks impossible, becomes possible. Gandhi wrote: "Those with a grain of faith never lose hope, because they believe in the ultimate triumph of truth."

Faith doesn't come to us fully grown at the start. Faith has to grow and as it grows we clarify our own vision, what we stand for which we test against reality. This faith is a gift which is freely given, because we are servants. We did what we had to do. Don't make faith a proposition only. Find it embodied in the person of Jesus. That's what transforms us. The just person lives by faith writes Habakkuk, and Paul in Rom 1:16-17, applies it to the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith. A deep love of Holy Scripture, loved with all our heart sustains us and in it we find the source of life. Faith doesn't necessarily take the suffering away but gives us strength to cope.

Fr Walter Ciszek, an American Jesuit, was sent to minister to Catholics in Siberia, but was taken by the KGB, ultimately spending 21 years in prisons. At the KGB Lubianka prison, the solitary confinement and the intense interrogation night and day was wearing him down.

Knowing he was not guilty of espionage, he thought all he had to do was tell them. But the interrogators hammered at him like a pile driver and were cold to his defence. It became too much for him. He quit. He signed an admission of guilt – just to get it over with – and received the sentence of 15 years hard labour in Siberia.

Back in his cell, he realized his motives had been selfish, filled with ego, he had lost much awareness of God’s love and care. But his relief was short-lived. He was told he had four more years in Lubianka prison to “clarify” some of the issues to which he had confessed. The deafening, soul-splitting interrogations began. An overwhelming despair descended on him, a loss of faith and hope. He was at rock bottom.

At this point in his life something happened – he stepped across a boundary line – No! He was carried over. In that moment he remembered Jesus in Gethsemane who, in the face of looming death, had collapsed, had hit rock bottom. Through Jesus’ surrender, through his self-abandonment, Jesus was rescued, he was freed. The horrific suffering and death were not taken away, but something shifted deep inside. A freedom, a humble confidence lifted his soul, because the eyes of a deeply loving, caring Father were still gazing on him, even in his utter helplessness. He knew that no depth of suffering would ever be beyond the loving, life-giving gaze of his Father.

Walter Ciszek’s contemplation of Jesus’ agony in the garden – a prayer that just came upon him – gave new meaning to his own despairing helplessness – his fear was transformed into freedom; his feelings of despair and danger became feelings of confidence and happiness – “I am ready for anything,” he said. This experience has happened to thousands suffering and it can happen to you. “Lord increase my faith.”

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Kg 5:14-17

2 Tim 2:8-13

Lk 17: 11-19

Naaman, the great Syrian general was angry. He came this time not for conquest but for help. From positions of power he had lost everything. He had leprosy. If the prophet Elisha had asked him to do some strenuous, physically demanding task, he could have returned feeling, "Now I deserve this healing." But to be told to go down to the river and let the cool water swirl around him, as he scoops it up and washes his leprous face and limbs, was humiliating. "I should never have listened to that Jewish slave girl who sounded so convincing. I've already come, cap in hand, with gifts of gold and ornate clothing, but the prophet doesn't want these things. I have to go naked and simply receive." But Oh! the wonder of it! "Seven times I bathed and then I was healed!"

We find it difficult to receive. It's only when we are desperate enough, when we have suffered loss of health, job, marriage, dignity or self-esteem that we call out to others for help, like the ten lepers: "Jesus, Master, take pity on us." They may have heard of an earlier incident (Luke 5:12-16) when Jesus cured a Jewish leper. Destitute people have their own network, and the word had got around. A Samaritan is one of this desperate group – it's not race but leprosy that is the debarring element. They may have heard of the single leper who cried: "Jesus, if you want to you can cure me," and of Jesus' reply: "Of course I want to, be healed."

I invite you to relax/breathe/close your eyes.

Let's pause to see how Jesus dealt with one leper. Imagine the leper, in Luke 5, saying: "Sir, if you want to, you can heal me!" See the ragged, sick man, on his knees, present before the Lord. See the fear on the faces of the disciples confronted with this disease. And hear Jesus say, "Of course, I want to..." see the compassion in Jesus' eyes.

Let's go a little deeper: identify with the leper, be very conscious of the leprosy of my own sinfulness. Experience the intense desire to be healed as I cry out: "Jesus, if you want to, you can heal me!" As I lose myself in the leper – it now becomes an encounter just between me and Jesus. I experience the compassion of Jesus, his deep concern for me: "of course I want to, be healed." And the personal discovery that the area in me that troubled me deeply has been healed and I can live again." (Open your eyes).

Now there's not one but ten lepers, crying in their need: "Jesus, Master, take pity on us." There's demand in their voices. They know Jesus can heal and they come to get. And they receive a simple instruction, given in love: "Go, show yourselves to the priests," go to the temple's skin-disease checkpoint. There's nothing spectacular about Jesus' instruction. And as they go they are healed. I wonder when did they first notice the healing? Was it sudden or gradual? I don't know. All I know

is that they were cured, not right away, but on the way, on their life journey. This is how it often happens for most of us.

Some people with the leprosy of depression or sadness, the loss of loved ones, the drying up of faith, the slavery of addiction to drugs or alcohol or sex, at their wit's end over a sick or wayward or difficult child, some cry out "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" And he does! For some right away. They find immediate healing. For others, perhaps few. But the hope of this Gospel is that, almost unconsciously, imperceptibly, along the way, just like these lepers, healing does happen, will happen, in strange and different ways.

It's interesting that with the seeming return to normality, race now becomes a bar. The Samaritan cannot enter the temple for a check-up; he would be refused entry. He returns to Jesus. The outsider is the only one to say thanks. It is someone outside the group who does not take things for granted. His heart is overflowing with gratitude. Gratefulness is an attitude that springs from a heart that senses everything in life is a gift. It's a shift from self-centeredness to looking beyond self. It's not a once-in-a-while response for having received a favor. It's an attitude of heart.

Not only do we find it hard to receive, but also hard to say thanks. It's a discipline, something we have to learn. The other nine went back to what they did before – their shop, farm, family, university – they may have pointed out their healing to family and friends – but that was Jesus' job. The change in them had only gone skin deep.

The Samaritan turned back to Jesus because he realized that Jesus is the true source of his wholeness. He does not return to his old ways. When Jesus says: "Stand up and go on your way, your faith has saved you," what is saved? Not his skin but him, not the surface but his heart, his mind. He, the outsider, follows Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. He lives a new life with Jesus. When we live gratefully, with a readiness always to give thanks, our life can change dramatically.

Naaman was touched and his gratefulness of heart brought him to God. He will not worship on the land of his old gods but on the soil of the living God. To become grateful and to remain so leads us to God; and demands of us an asceticism of joy, counting our blessings, receiving everything – life, health, others around us, love, friendship, food, drink, sexuality, beauty, as gift.

Today we are challenged to become more grateful. The Samaritan was touched by Jesus, Naaman was touched by God. Think back on the ways you and I have been touched, otherwise we wouldn't be here. How deep did our gratitude go?

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ex 17:8-13

2 Tim 3:14-4:2

Lk 18:1-8

Pope Francis promoted World Mission Day's theme for 2019: "Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World." Every word has meaning. Our Baptism is not merely a social event. We are baptised into Christ, baptised into the purposes of Jesus Christ whose whole life purpose was in being sent. Jesus was sent by the Father to bring about the kind of world the Father wanted, even in the face of a world that killed him. But he rose again to vindicate his claim that he truly is the Saviour of the world.

We are baptised into a community that is on mission in the world, right here right now. We can bring the Gospel to all the places we frequent. If our faith is alive and our heart is open, the challenge of mission can be quite stirring. Pope Francis says to all of us, "We are not in this world by our own choice. Each one of us is called to reflect on the fact that I am a mission on this earth; that's why we are here in this world." We didn't get here by our own steam. God sent us. To be attracted and sent are two movements of the heart that hold out promise for our future and give direction to our lives. Young people in so many places are calling the adults who have the power to change things, "You Are Mission! Be part of it!"

A little seven-year-old girl who had never been to church, was at a Baptism. She hurried home to her mother, "Mummy, mummy, the priest took the baby and plunged it into the water once, twice, three times. And you know what, mummy, that child is a child of God." We are. In Baptism we were made children of God, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but our relation to the Trinity is not a private affair; Trinitarian life is a treasure to be given, communicated and proclaimed: that is the meaning of mission.

Pope Francis tells us how. He is calling for a Church with its doors open, one dispensing mercy like a field hospital after battle, with the ability to heal wounds. This is most needed today. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you, and we and the Church must become ministers of mercy. He is calling us to be Spirit-filled evangelisers, out in the streets, getting our feet dirty, bearing the smell of the sheep as we reach out to those in need. For us to reach out and tell the Good News of our salvation in Jesus we need passion, a heart that is on fire for love of him and an awareness of the needs in our world.

The determination of the widow in the Gospel came from a heart that was on fire. She wanted not just equality, that we are all the same, but equity, just treatment to enable her to have a decent life. Her persistence did not just wear the judge down, but the word 'wear down' meant she was ready for a fight to get her case heard. Jesus tells us his Father is much more open to unceasing prayer and will grant it speedily. But will he find faith on earth. And that's where we come in – to

promote faith in Jesus who enables us to conquer resistance. Moses in the first reading shows us that unceasing prayer enables us to win our battles.

Do you remember the story of James and John wanting the key positions in the Kingdom? Jesus asked them, “Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink or be baptised with the baptism with which I must be baptised?” It is a question God is asking each of us here today, “You say you love me! Are you prepared to join me in shouldering the suffering of the world in order to bring hope and healing, to bring my mercy to the world?”

Rarely, perhaps, has there been a greater need than today for each one of us to heed this call of Jesus and step up to a higher level, to utter our own personal WE CAN to greater commitment to the person and mission of Jesus in the face of the suffering of today’s world.

When we look around us, we can’t help asking, “What’s happening to us, to our world, the hopes we once held for our future and the future of our children. The world we used to know, that world with some semblance of peace and order seems lost. In the growing separation between religion and our increasingly secularised culture, “It is as if,” in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran Pastor, killed by the Nazis days before liberation, “It is as if God is being forced more and more out of the world and on to the cross.”

Pope Francis said, “For those who stand by Jesus, evil is an incentive to ever greater love because from the cross of Jesus we learn the divine logic of self-sacrifice as a proclamation of the Gospel for the life of the world. By Baptism we have received the mission to bring the Gospel to everyone. At the heart of the Church’s mission is the infectiousness of love, where joy and enthusiasm become the expression of a new-found meaning and fulfilment in life.” Lord, let us be challenged by the enthusiasm of Pope Francis to become missionary disciples.

We want to learn from Jesus, who gave his life as a ransom for all. Can we promote Christ’s and our mission as Church to the world today, not alone but in groups who, as in the second reading, are inspired by Scripture to become fully equipped and ready for any good work. Can we together proclaim the message, welcome or unwelcome but do it with patience and the intention of sharing it, in Jesus’ name? Amen.

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ecclus 35:12-14, 16-19

2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18

Lk 18:9-14

A young father and his two-year-old son had gone out for a walk. But they came home very soon in a frantic state. The little boy had discovered a dark shape, connected to himself. Wherever he jumped and yelled to get rid of it, there it was, projected outwards, its dark silhouette, mysterious, reflecting back his total self. He had discovered his shadow. There are times, because of things that have happened to us that we glimpse a darker side to ourselves and we're afraid of what we are seeing or feeling.

Carl Jung said that in the second half of our life – when we've climbed the ladder, consciously achieved ego-ideals, what we have striven to become and by and large have become, there comes a time to redress the shadow side of ourselves, to realise our true selves. We might have made it in business, teaching, trade or profession, but we have sacrificed, pushed down other aspects of ourselves which painfully are now clamouring for integration, wholeness, harmony, in ourselves.

The comparison in the Gospel is partly this. It's between a devoutly observant Pharisee and a tax collector shunned by Jewish society as a Roman collaborator. No wonder the Pharisee could compare himself favourably. "Thank God, I'm not like this tax collector." Then he extends it to all the rest of humanity. "I have consciously worked at being good, fought greed, gluttony, observed the laws minutely – fasting, tithing, studying the law. I have worked hard and made it. I am in control." Yet there's harshness in him. The shadow side of his own person is projected on to others – "I thank you God I am not grasping, crooked, and adulterous." All the rest are!

The Pharisee gets caught up in how well he is doing and forgets the context – he is here to pray; right here in the temple, he forgets that all life is a grace and God is the source of his harmony. Instead of that he puts himself centre stage – God should praise him – the applause cards go up.

But God does not praise him. He points out the Pharisee's inner condition. He was not like the rest of men. He rubbed out his connection with humanity and rubbed out himself. That's just the puzzle. We feel before God we have to put our best face forward, wear our decorations; show our trophies, but not our essential weakness. We cannot allow the dark side of our personality to show. We feel people only accept achievement, what we do for a living, how successful we are, but they do not want to know our real selves. We live at a certain distance from ourselves, whereas the task is to integrate the ego (what we've done with our lives) with the deeper self within, what Jung calls the process of individuation.

The shadow might come out in an inability to sleep, like the man who knocked down a little girl at a pedestrian crossing because he had too much to drink. When his psychiatrist suggested he go to the girl and tell her he is sorry, he retorted angrily, "Sorry for what? My lawyer told me I am totally in the clear!" To which the psychiatrist replied, "Then legally you ought to be able to sleep."

It's only as he owns his guilt, his shadow side, that he can be and live with himself. Max Zeller in his article, "Some aspects of the individuation process," writes, "Behind a couple's constant fighting may be hidden a tendency towards separation, not in the sense of splitting up the relationship, but a psychological separation for the sake of a creative, more individual development in both of them which in turn would lead to a true relationship."

The tax collector admits both his shadow and his self before One who is greater. He opens himself in his weakness and God floods him with his love. Divine Self-Giving is poured on him and he goes away justified. This insight into our shadow side, the realisation of our weaknesses are also gifts – it's not something we make or do, it is given to us. We realise the prayer, "Whatever you do to the least" – refers at times to ourselves – we need time to let the painful, repressed aspects of our character be prized and integrated.

To discover our essential wholeness and harmony is not the work of our conscious reason. We tend to compartmentalise life, whereas our desire for wholeness can be found in silence, in prayer. The prayer of the tax collector: "O God be merciful to me, a sinner," is traditionally called 'the Jesus prayer' which has as enemy, not the body but the controlling rationalist mind to which the Jesus prayer is an antidote. It becomes a wordless prayer, first on the lips and then sounding in the mind, which links with our breathing and our heart-beat and centres our self as we go about our daily duties. We gain harmony by self-less attention to God in prayer, by allowing our unity to be restored and to return to its proper alignment with the centre of our being. A power is released. When one is united to the Spirit, there a new world is created.

When I am too tense, not able to sit still, I try this prayer walking up and down slowly whether in the lounge at home or out in the park: "Lord Jesus Christ" (Breathe out all your tension); "Son of God, Saviour" (Breathe in); "Have mercy on me" (Breathe out); "A sinner" (Breathe in his love and mercy). I walk slowly, breathing in and out while saying the prayer first spoken and then gradually sounding it in my mind. It takes time to get into the rhythm. I find it helps me, but you have to find your own way of praying. This is one way, out of our rich Catholic tradition.

Vincent Pallotti, after each Communion, humbly prayed, "Who are you, O God, and who am I before you? What are you calling me to be and do, and how have I responded?" Vincent was a Roman priest who died in 1850. He was very aware of the needs of his time. He wanted to reach out to all, but he couldn't do it alone. 120 years before Vatican II, he called Catholics / Christians to be apostles in their everyday life; to be a Church without spectators. The energy and inspiration behind his and his followers' actions was the exuberant, joyful, all-embracing love of God. Have you been in love? What a change it makes in us.

Vincent discovered God's whole being as a Being-in-love, creating life and love in everything God touched, just as a bushfire ignites the dry bush that's ready to receive it. Created in the image of such a Being changes us with the obligation to reach out and lovingly serve others. Vincent

wrote: Without love there is no apostolate. Without love we undermine Jesus' mission to bring God's love to a hungry world.

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 11:22 - 12:2 2 Thess 1:11 – 2:2 Lk 19:1-10

There were two things about Zacchaeus. He was rich, with money he made from being not just a tax collector for the Roman occupying force, but from being a senior tax collector. If tax collectors were hated by the Jewish people, how much more one of the executives. Jericho was well situated for traffic and for trade. You would expect the tax collector to be where the toll could be collected, and where better than at the city gates of Jericho.

Zacchaeus notices the crowd coming into the city, and the figure at the centre. What is the source of this man's attraction? Certainly not money, that Zacchaeus has plenty of, yet is rejected for. Jesus' poverty is radiant; the dust, the flies and the sweat, do not detract from the freedom, the sense of purpose, the joy of Jesus, and the ease with which he deals with people. This man, Zacchaeus must come to know!

The second thing about Zacchaeus is that he was short. He wants to see Jesus, but the crowd blocks his view. He throws dignity to the wind, runs ahead and awkwardly climbs a sycamore tree which grew along the way Jesus will come.

When we read and pray the life of Jesus, we are struck by the extraordinary way he 'recognised' the different individuals who came his way. "No man ever spoke as this man," his contemporaries said. Neither did anyone see people as he saw them. Regardless of how they were perceived in society, he looked beyond the labels into their very souls. Zacchaeus was seen, and enabled to see himself in a new way, by Jesus.

Jesus must have looked ahead and seen the eagerness yet the awkwardness of this little man. When Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus in the tree, there must have been laughter in his eyes, a chuckle that was quite different from the mocking laughter of the crowd. Jesus' recognition was an act of love. And so was his request, "Come down! Hurry because I must stay at your house today." The power of that word, "Come!" The charismatic personality of Christ was drawing him towards him.

It was an invitation, a moment of conversion! There comes a time in all our lives when we must act and come to Jesus, no longer think it over and over. Sir Kenneth Clark, the famous presenter of the TV series **Civilisation**, a dedicated secular humanist, had a religious experience in the Church of San Lorenzo in Italy. He wrote, "For a few minutes, my whole being was irradiated with a kind of heavenly joy, far more intense than anything I have ever known." The whole event enthralled him, he felt quite unworthy, but then he thought what his family and his colleagues in the BBC might think, so he turned his back on this invitation.

Camillus de Lellis, the founder of a healing community was such a case of not delaying but responding to Jesus. His dad was a soldier, a mercenary. He took his son along, and soon in the

camp life Camillus fell into drink, gambling, the wild life with other companions. One day he turned to Christ, left the army and found work labouring and laying bricks. It was hard work, but it had to do for the time being, till he found his way. A while later, one of his companions came by, and talked Camillus into rejoining him in camp life. Camillus walked with him out of the town. Suddenly he turned around and ran back to the new life where Christ had called him. It was a matter of life and death. His life. Zacchaeus hurried down. His welcome was only a reflection of the welcome Jesus had given him.

Then the recriminations start! First, towards Jesus, “He eats with sinners and stays with them,” and indirectly at Zacchaeus the so-called “sinner.” But see the change in Zacchaeus! There’s a new resolve in him – he stands his ground and immediately he gives half of his possessions to the poor, and if he’s wronged anyone he makes restitution fourfold. It’s not a matter of he “will” make amends. He does it right there and then.

What is this change in Zacchaeus? Often the words we use keep people trapped in their social situation, like the woman bent over for eighteen years. If we can imagine people differently as Jesus does, then something can happen.

Jesus says to the bent-over woman, “This is a daughter of Abraham.” She hears that word and under the power of Jesus’ word and his healing touch, she takes that word to herself and straightens up, in spite of the people’s opinion of her.

To Zacchaeus, Jesus says, “This man, too, is a son of Abraham.” In other words, the promises God made to Abraham are equally available to this marginalised tax collector.

Salvation becomes not something in the future, but ‘Today.’ “Today, salvation has come to this household.” And then those tremendous words by which Jesus identifies with us. “The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.”

By our own seeing, by our words of welcome, can we change our ways of relating to people we considered were lost? Can we become the means of salvation for others, not later in the future, but Today?

Second Homily

On this Remembrance Sunday (All Souls), when we are praying for our beloved parents, spouses or friends who have died, what did Zacchaeus remember?

You must recall that he was the chief organizer of all the tax collectors in Jericho which was well situated for traffic and for trade. You’d expect the tax collector to be where the toll could be collected, and where better than at the city gates of Jericho. But if tax collectors were generally hated by the Jewish people, how much more one of the top executives like Zacchaeus. Money was his game. He was very wealthy. His neighbours would have looked at the extensions and

decorative work that he did on his home and they would have been envious and angry. After all, it was their money he was using that he took from them.

The result was that Zacchaeus was up a tree, out on a limb as far as the crowd was concerned. He was wealthy and shunned, as chief revenue collector for the Romans he was put in the same category as robbers, murderers and prostitutes. The Romans were his master and he was accountable to them.

He was used to assessing people, observing from a distance, taxing people, not getting too close to them to hear their anguish under the burden of taxation. He was short, so the sycamore tree was a secure vantage point to observe the prophet of Nazareth who was passing that way, When Jesus stopped under the tree, Zacchaeus got a good look at Jesus, but Jesus got a good look at Zacchaeus, Jesus assessed him, beyond the outward appearance into the heart and soul of this wealthy but lonely man.

What was it that Zacchaeus remembered? He remembered those exciting words, "Hurry. Come down. I must be at your house today." He remembered that on that day he was accepted. He Zacchaeus, the rank outsider, was accepted by Jesus. Jesus accepted him despite the murmurings of the crowd. The power of that word, "Come." The charismatic personality of Jesus was drawing Zacchaeus towards him. It was an invitation, a moment of conversion.

There comes a time in all our lives when we must act quickly and come to Jesus, not put the decision off through thinking too much about it. So many things can delay us. What did it do to him? It took him away from the preoccupation with money or management, status, whatever it was that took over his whole vision. He was opened up and beyond his one-dimensional existence.

When Jesus becomes the host and invites Zacchaeus to a meal in his own house, it bespoke the most intimate relationship. At a meal, if you get rid of the mobile phone that takes you away from the other, your whole attention can be on the other. You get close, take the other in, in the words that accompany the meal.

If we can imagine people differently as Jesus does, then something can happen. To Zacchaeus, Jesus says "This man is a son of Abraham." In other words, the promises God made to Abraham are equally available to this marginalized tax collector. He is not outside God's saving mercy. Those words called forth the innate dignity, the destiny of Zacchaeus. Salvation becomes not something in the future, but today! "Today, salvation has come to this household." And then those tremendous words of Jesus by which he identifies with us, "The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost." By our own seeing, by our words of welcome, can we change our ways of relating to people we considered as lost. Can we become the means of salvation for others?

It creates a new freedom. Money is no longer the be-all and end-all of my life. I give half to the poor and if I cheated anyone, I will pay back four times the amount.

When we come up to light our candle. In faith we have the confidence that God is calling our

beloved one into the most intimate relationship with him, and leading each one to their final destiny. That word *must*, “I must come to your home,” is the power of God’s love intent on our salvation, and ends with, “*Today*, salvation has come to this house.” The same word Jesus speaks even to a thief crucified with him, if only he is open to receive it, “Today you shall be with me in paradise.”

Third Homily

With a proposed reconsideration of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), for people who are doing it hard, it can open up a whole range of emotions regarding bills for food, clothes, rent — anger and hate directed at the tax agents who send emails on overdue payments. And if that's what people feel about tax agents, think how they might feel about the Commissioner of the Tax Office who sets the guidelines. This example gives us some understanding of the crowd's attitude to Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. What added to their anger and hate was the fact that he collected taxes for the brutal Roman occupying force.

The crowd blocks Zacchaeus at every turn from seeing Jesus and raises an outcry when Jesus invites himself to a meal at Zacchaeus' house. But why the urgency in Zacchaeus to see Jesus? Sure, he was short, but for the tax commissioner to climb a sycamore tree? Zacchaeus may have heard down the line that one of his tax agents, (word gets around in the office), Matthew, had become one of this man's apostles. He must see what this Jesus is like! The deeper reason might have been, that no matter how rich Zacchaeus had become, at the expense of other people, it is damned lonely up top.

Nicole Kidman, talking about the 2001 world premiere of *Moulin Rouge*, said, "It was the high point of my career and the loneliest time in my life. I understand how famous people, celebrities who go to their hotel room, order room service, and have no-one to laugh with or share it with. And that's where you go: Gosh, is this what it is, uh?"

There's a yearning in Zacchaeus that no amount of money or things, or even ambition can satisfy. It is that look on his face that Jesus knows so well! He had seen it on many faces - loneliness, self-destructing behavior, feeling different and acting differently.

With laughter in his eyes and a smile of recognition, Jesus invites Zacchaeus to come down from his lonely perch. "Hurry Zacchaeus. There is no time to waste. This is a critical time for you. I must eat at your house today."

Jesus does not confront Zacchaeus with what he's done wrong. Jesus does not want to create a new social order. He wants to be a new social order. The injustice that Zacchaeus is part of can only be rectified in the person and from Zacchaeus himself.

How does Jesus do this? The strategy he uses is table fellowship — to eat and drink with anyone who will accept him, so that in the intimacy of a shared meal an atmosphere of acceptance may

provide an opportunity for repentance. How often Jesus' teaching ministry is in the context of a meal and concludes with the Eucharist within a meal-setting on the night before he goes to his death.

Jesus sent his disciples out with nothing but the Good News and commands them to eat what is put before you. There's so much contention about food: "I don't like this, I won't eat that." When you are invited to a meal you are at the mercy of the one who provides it. One great step for the disciples is to step over the threshold into a strange person's house and eat the same as the poorest. The hot spices of India, or the mice cooked by desert workers in remote areas, as Carlo Carretto narrates.

Accepted by Jesus, Zacchaeus makes restitution. Why didn't Jesus ask Zacchaeus to sell all as with the rich man? Perhaps in making good all that he has taken from others, there might be not much left for Zacchaeus and his family.

Against the grumbling from the crowd, Jesus cuts through the social categorizing with the powerful angular words of Sacred Scripture — "This man is a son of Abraham!" It is a reinstatement of dignity, of belonging after years of being marginalized, and Zacchaeus takes hold of that word and acts on it. Jesus began with "I must" and ends with "Today." Jesus' joyful comment is, "Today, salvation has come to this house."

People were asking Zacchaeus' wife why did Zacchaeus do what he did. She said that it was because here, in the house, he met Jesus and it changed his life. The warmth of Jesus' welcome did something to Zacchaeus and to us his family as we sat down together to a meal. What happened at that table? Suddenly it became an operating table, a heart operation happened. Zacchaeus' heart that was marked with greed, injustice, resentment, loneliness was replaced by Jesus' heart. Christ was now in him —Christ's generosity and justice, Christ's concern for others.

And she said proudly, "Look at the change in Zacchaeus!"

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Macc 7:1-2, 9-14

2 Thess 2:16 – 3:5

Lk 20:27-38

A little girl was hopping along as she went through a cemetery. Someone asked if she wasn't afraid to be there. "Oh no," she replied, "I'm just skipping through on my way home." It is a fitting story for this month of All Saints and All Souls, as the Liturgical Year nears its end, and celebrates the beginning of Christ's eternal reign. The readings put before us the future of believers: Heaven, the after-life, resurrection life, the hot topic for today's readings.

The Christian life is not so much a search for God, as a response to a living God who searches for us. After 40, death becomes part of our horizon. We experience our frailty and that of parents and others. We want to go to heaven, but not yet. Having death on our horizon is not to frighten us but to help us to see each day as gift and to live it well.

In the human tragedy of the twin towers of the World Trade Center (**9 September 2001**), were two Catholic men, brothers Joe and John Vigiano – Joe a highly decorated member of the New York Police Department Emergency Services Squad, along with his older brother, John, of the Bedford-Stuyvesant's Fire Brigade. They both rushed to the scene as soon as the first building was struck and were still helping people to evacuate when the towers collapsed. Each of them had been taught by their father, also a policeman, to kiss their wives and children and say goodbye before leaving home, because they may not return home that night.

It was their Christian faith that enabled them to stay at their post a number of times and face death, in spite of fear. It was faith in the resurrection that gave them their courage. They witness to Jesus' teaching today who, in the face of ridicule, proclaimed a God who sustains life beyond the grave.

The Sadducees attacked Jesus' belief in the Resurrection. They were fundamentalists who took their authority from Moses and the first five books of the Bible in which there was no mention of resurrection. They held there was no hereafter to worry about, no heaven. And, if in fact there was one, they posed this crafty riddle to Jesus to show that it would be an absurd concept anyway. They wrongly understood the next life to be like this life. Procreation was needed to continue the family name and line. They took to absurdity the Levirate Law which commanded that a man must marry a dead brother's wife, have children by her so that the brother's name would live on.

Look what Jesus says to them. He says that the woman in the story is not going to be anyone's wife, and in effect that their whole question is irrelevant. Why? Because things will be different, people will be different, heaven will be different. In a word, forget about your questions, because what the afterlife will be is beyond our questions, beyond our imaginations. Jesus takes the whole

idea of life after death to a new level. The next life is of a totally different order. Only faith in Jesus risen is our proof and our certainty. Paul's words echo that of Jesus, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him (**1 Cor 2:9**).

A Man was walking the beach and found a magic lamp. He rubbed it and a genie appeared, ready to grant any wish. He asked for a copy of the stock market page from a newspaper printed one year later. Suddenly the paper was in his hands. The genie had disappeared. Greedily the man scanned the columns, deciding what to invest in, knowing ahead of time what profitable stocks he could buy. He turned the page and noticed the obituary column. His name was at the top of the list. What difference did death make to his life?

For the Sadducees it made no difference. Life goes on as normal after death. But it does not. Jesus portrays resurrection life as something completely different from what we might expect. There is no need to continue the family line. All are alive to God, sharing divine life. Jesus uses the very scriptures the Sadducees use to deny resurrection, to demonstrate his faith and confidence in the life-giving power of God. In the appearance of God to Moses in the burning bush, God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – all are in fact alive to God with the new life that God gives them. The Sadducees deny resurrection. Jesus lives it. God is a living Go

We can live as if we are accountable to no-one. The one who created us, however, will ask what we have done with our life. I liken it to exams. We still have to front up to the examiner. We can dread this moment, seeing it as punishment for not putting the study in, or we can see it as an opportunity to grow, to extend ourselves and to shine. Isn't that what a good examiner wants?

An old piano teacher, in teaching a piece of music, got her students to go over and over the conclusion. They grumbled at having to repeat the last measures of their piece of music again and again. But she said, "You can make a mistake at the beginning or you can make a mistake in the middle. But the people will forget it, if you make the end glorious." On the issue of heaven, it comes down to this: believe deeply that Jesus loves you and that Jesus' love endures through time and eternity. Let the curiosities about heaven take care of themselves. Just be prepared for the surprise at answers you never had questions for. Take heart that the one life you share from God makes you immortal.

Second Homily

"Some people come into our lives and move our souls to dance. They awaken us to understand the passing whisper of their wisdom ... They make our world more beautiful ... leave footprints in our hearts and we are never ever the same again." A good death can provide comfort to our family, but it needs a contribution from our self as well as from the medicine.

The poem ***The Broken Chain*** shares some of our feelings:

*"We little knew that morning that God was going to call your name,
In life we loved you dearly, in death we do the same.
It broke our hearts to lose you You did not go alone.
For part of us went with you, The day God called you home.
You left us precious memories, Your love is still our guide.
And though we cannot see you, You are always by our side.
Our family chain is broken, And nothing seems the same.
But as God calls us one by one, The chain will link again."*

But what happens when the chain is abruptly broken. I visited a friend at Monash who was near death. She was having seizures every 30 seconds and wanted someone to end her life. I told her that I would walk with her through this frightening illness which I did. Isn't that what Palliative Care does, creating a home-like setting where the family can be at the person's bedside, keeping vigil, respecting their dignity, easing their pain. Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning. In Jesus who died a horrific death the God of love and mercy is with us, embracing and accepting us no matter what our life before had been. All of us have a fear of diminishment and loss but it is the way to life. At our lowest point, Jesus' death wants to bring life and healing to us.

At the end of our lives we look back at the events and people who have shaped us for good or ill and there is the desire to finish unfinished business. We share the fears and struggles not only of the dying person but of the family; a recapitulation of earlier fears of abandonment that I saw with my mother, that cry for reconciliation and peace. As a priest it is a very privileged moment and place to be. You sense their relief that Father is here.

The time of our death is the time given by God for us to come to acceptance and peace. The push for euthanasia, on the alleged grounds of compassion, cuts short this process. Paul Kelly in (***The Australian*, 1 October 2016**) said, "Legalise euthanasia and a compassionate society dies too."

The justification for euthanasia lies in human rights, individual autonomy and relieving pain - all worthy ideas, and that may prompt the question: why then is euthanasia still opposed by most nations, most medical professional bodies around the world and the Australian Medical Association?

The reason is not hard to find. It is because crossing the threshold to euthanasia is the ultimate step in medical, moral and social terms. When a jurisdiction legalises killing, a society is never the same afterwards. It changes forever the doctor-patient bond. More people will be put at risk than will be granted relief as Beneficiaries.

Euthanasia leads to a less-compassionate society that creates a new series of moral and

practical hazards for itself. It is a disproportionate response to the real problem of pain. It may seem to benefit a few, but the negative effects on society and morals puts society on a downward slope. Certainly, patients need individual autonomy and should be able to make choices over their medical treatment. But euthanasia is different: it is an act that terminates life. It is by definition not a private affair, not just about the patient's right. It is a public and society-wide issue because it involves the state legalising killing, subject to certain conditions. That is a grave step and it affects everyone. Life is a precious gift from God and as Christians we believe that we have no right to dispose of it as we please. In the first reading the Jews faced death because of their faith in the resurrection of the dead which the Sadducees chose to reject and ridicule.

There are three foundational points in this debate. First, in relative terms, the proportion of people dying in acute pain is declining because palliative care methods have been enhanced. Most physical pain at life's end can be managed. Second, where euthanasia is legalised, the record is clear. Its availability generates rapid and ever-expanding use and wider legal boundaries. Its rate and practice quickly exceeds the small number of cases based on the original criteria of unacceptable pain. In Belgium, figures for sanctioned killings and assisted suicide rose from 235 in 2003 to 2012 by 2015. In the Netherlands they rose from 2331 in 2008 to 5516 in 2015. The threshold event is the legalising of euthanasia.

The claims made in Victoria that strict safeguards will be implemented and sustained are simply untenable and defy the lived overseas experience as well as political reality.

Third, culture and values will change to justify the death process. If you sanction killing for end-of-life pain relief, how can you deny this right to people in pain who aren't dying. If you give this right to adults, how can you deny this right to children; to people with mental illness, to people exhausted with life, tired of life. The entire debate is about how to interpret love and care in the context of death.

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mal 3:19-20

2 Thess 3:7-12

Lk 21:5-19

We are almost at the end of the year and the focus is on the Last Things. It is commonly said that Jesus and most of the New Testament authors, especially Paul, believed that the end of the world was right around the corner. That was their expectation, but not in the way we think. It would be much closer to the truth to say that because the old order of the world (cultures based on money, power and mere religiosity) had now been so clearly exposed by the Jesus event, they thought it was only a matter of time until everybody could see through it all. Jesus and Paul would be disappointed that it has taken us so long to defeat the lie.

Today's Gospel begins with Jesus reaching the city of destiny, the prophet's destination; with his disciples and others marveling at the temple structure completed six years before with gleaming white walls mounted with shields of gold that shone on them. (Luke's Gospel begins in the Temple with devout worshippers, Anna and Simeon, Elizabeth and Mary, and ends with Jesus cleansing the Temple of merchants and money changers). The Temple represented the entire system. The disciples were still rooted in the entire system that the Temple represented.

Jesus' reply to them is "All these things you are marveling at now; the time will come when not a single stone will be left standing." Luke presents the end as coming in three stages: the first stage, the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD by Titus, who ordered one wall to be left standing for the Jews to wail at. It is still there today. The second stage is the persecution facing Christians that's still going on, and the third stage, the end of the world.

The apocalyptic announcements of Jesus (how everything is going to fall apart) refers to the world as we know it which must and will end. We're speaking not so much of a final end but an end to our own personally constructed world. If it is swept away like the Temple, this cutting away of the idols we worship and marvel at, clarifies what is essential and represents an experience that must happen spiritually. It must happen in our psyche, in our relationship, in our culture. It's the moment of conversion, when all of a sudden you realise, not just in your head, but in your guts that everything in this world is passing away. Sadly, for many of us, it doesn't happen until we confront death, the death of a loved one. You realise it's not just the death of loved ones, but the world itself is passing away. All is relative except God.

Jesus' teaching is that a new world order has already begun and he is its herald and its personal assurance. His preaching of the Kingdom, the reign of God is his way of describing God's dream for the world. Yet it can only come about through pain, suffering, persecution or death.

The religious culture that Jesus subverts is what kills him. But it could easily be a secular culture,

a militaristic, economic, or political culture that kills him, one that legitimizes the in-group and increasingly marginalizes more and more people. Yes, we're slow to hear Jesus' warning: our ego, our kingdom gets in the way, makes us prone to denial or to be easily deceived. We cannot say "Thy Kingdom come," unless we say, "my kingdom go."

But why evil, why suffering? St Catherine of Genoa, the mystic, asked Jesus in one of her locutions, "Why Jesus, is there so much pain on earth? Why do people have to suffer?" And Jesus said back to her, "Catherine, if there were any other way, I would have thought of it long ago." There's no other way to let go and learn compassion. There is no other way we will give up control until we are led to the limits of our own resources and must rely on Another, on Jesus, on God.

The amazing thing is that in very difficult circumstances, confidence grows, a confidence that comes from faith and hope like in Ukraine. It is not something we do, but we fall into it. There will be suffering.

But discipleship is not deliverance to some exotic state of rapture, but a call to bear witness. "You are not to prepare your defence," Jesus said. "I myself will give you the words. Not a hair of your head will be lost. Your faithful and hopeful endurance will win you your lives."

And then those words we heard sounded in the First Sunday of Lent in Luke's Gospel, sound now again today at the end, "Stand erect and raise your head, because your redemption is close at hand." Such great confidence! There is a Chinese saying: "Christians are like tea – they get stronger when they are in hot water."

We will need faith, hope and endurance, after the Covid19 pandemic is over. It will be a new world and we will need to go out again into the streets, to house-visitation, to real humble and healing compassion, because our Church will be smaller; older people, the backbone of our communities, may still be afraid to gather in groups, such was the terrible scourge, the lonely deaths of thousands. We need to sound again and truly believe Jesus' words "Stand erect and raise you head, because your redemption is close at hand."

Second Homily

Jesus arrives at his place of destiny. In Luke's Gospel, his journey began in the temple and ends in Jerusalem. He now prophesies into the future, the destruction of the temple, the struggle and witness of Christians and, like looking through a telescope, the end of time when he will come in glory.

Is it the end? It would feel that way when everything is falling apart. The temple which the disciples marvel at, with its gleaming white walls mounted with shields of gold, had been completed just six years earlier. It would be destroyed by Titus in 70 A.D. with only one wall, the Wailing Wall, standing. For Luke, it is not the end. It is a new beginning. It is the time in-between the end of the temple and Christ's coming. The Church will go out from Jerusalem to bear witness

to the ends of the earth which Luke describes in the Acts of the Apostles.

What gives an enormous source of courage and hope for Christians of any age, helping them be alert and ready, persevering and faithful is the fact that in Christ the decisive victory has been won. Jesus tells us, "Your endurance will win you your lives." Don't be frightened but trust; "not a hair of your head will be lost."

Avril Regan, one of our parishioners from Syndal parish, who battled courageously with cancer until her death, gave me a book, "30 Days with Teresa of Avila." Each day begins with the words "My day is beginning" and ends with "My day is ending." It's the rhythm of our lives. Under one phrase in the book, "A whole lifetime is short. I cannot depend on anything that passes away," she wrote: "Lord, help me to make time to know you, so that in knowing you I am able, indeed I am glad to depend on you, to trust you."

The days may slip away, but memory is where the vanished days secretly gather. In the Natural History Museum of London there is a sliver of the diameter of a giant redwood from California. The tree's memory (counting the rings) reaches back to the 5th century when St Columba went to Iona. Its great memory enfolded 12 or 13 centuries of time within the texture of its timber. The beauty and invitation of illness or old age offers a time of silence and solitude for a visit to the house of our inner memory, with its memories that are sacred and personal. We can revisit our past.

As a young priest, I enjoyed visiting an older man in his shop. In his company, as he thoughtfully drew on his pipe, he would share his wisdom. Old age is the harvest time where our times and their fragments gather. In this way we unify our self, and achieve a new sense of belonging. It is a time of coming to our deepest self where all our vanished days are secretly gathered awaiting us.

Pope Benedict, despite his age, encourages us with words of youthful enthusiasm, such as "Do not give up your dreams! The gifts and riches that the Lord has enclosed in the heart of each one of you, moulded by the encounter with Christ, can bring authentic hope to the world." And again, "Christ takes nothing away from what is beautiful and great in you, but he brings all to perfection for the glory of God, the happiness of humankind and the salvation of the world."

In this inner harvesting there is a need for self-compassion as you sift, group and integrate the memories. We can cling to our regrets, like at the wailing wall, things we found difficult in our lives, mistakes, hurts and wounds. We need to bring compassion and not blame ourselves, because sometimes we have grown unexpectedly through these mistakes. We need to forgive ourselves, and allow our inner wounds to begin to heal. We come out of the exile of hurt into the joy of inner belonging. Trust your inner voice to know which places you need to visit **(thoughts drawn from Joan Chittister's book, *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*, 2010).**

In troubled times we need to keep something beautiful in our heart, said Blaise Pascal. Often regret is very false and displaced, imagining the past to be totally other than it was. A woman had a very tough life, but she said, "I don't regret one bit of my life. It is my life, and in everything

negative that happened to me, there was always something bright hidden.”

The passionate heart never ages. You find old people who have hearts full of devilment and fun; there is a sparkle in their presence. They still have the fires of longing burning brightly and beautifully within them. Their wisdom is often associated with the harvest time of life. So to all elderly, to all who are struggling with health or other issues, the Lord says: “Stand erect and raise your head because your redemption is at hand.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King

Sam 5:1-3

Col 1:12-20

Lk 23:35-43

Were you there when the crowds screamed themselves hoarse at the man on the cross, a rough crown of thorns pushed brutally into his scalp, the butt of the soldiers' cruel sense of humour? If this is Jesus of Nazareth, the supposed King of the Jews then give him a crown.

The crowds were there in a mob, yelling out in their fury, pushing against the soldiers to vent their rage on him, who hung defenceless upon the cross, but held back by the steel wall of shields and armour surrounding the three crucified men.

Their leaders hurled his own words back at him, the words he heard at his Baptism, loving words from his Abba Father, "This is my Chosen One." They now were barbs, dipped in venom and shot from snarling lips, like poisoned arrows. With mocking words they yelled:

"He saved others, he cannot save himself! Yes, he healed the cripple. Yes, he gave sight to the blind. He made withered arms whole again. He even brought back the dead, but he cannot save himself. Perform a miracle now, Miracle Man! Come down from the cross and we will believe you. Aha, you would build the temple in three days ... You have nails in your hands, You have wood ... go and build your temple. If you be the Christ ... come down from the Cross!"

The soldiers joined in the mockery and the jeers, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." One of the thieves snarled, "Are you not the Christ, save yourself and us as well." All of them thinking only of self; save me from the pain, this mess I'm in.

A group of women were there, their faces half hidden by their veils, but their grief could not be hidden ... some were sobbing ... some were praying. Some of them had children by the hand and kept saying over and over "He gave my child back to me. How can they be so cruel?" "I know he healed my child – what harm could there be in that?" Men were there, cripples he had healed, others who were blind, carrying their stick, but blinded now by their tears.

This group witnessed to the fact that at times we do not follow the party line but stand in solidarity with him, for life. He gave his life that we might live. He taught compassion for the weak and the powerless and gave the most powerful example of it as, not only by word, barely heard above the shouting, but by act as he turned to the thief who asked, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," and said, "This day, this very day, you will be with me in paradise."

It was how he had always lived. "I am totally yours, Father. Not my will but yours." To come down from the cross would be the denial of all that he stood for, the denial of all that we can become through his death. Even in his shattered, bloodied body, feeling abandoned by God and man, he could still think of others beyond himself, to save them.

The centurion, inured by the hatred and brutality of war, was compelled by what he saw to acknowledge: "This man was indeed King" not only of the Jews but of all whom he had come to save.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? When we consider who were there, and when we are honest with ourselves, we know that we were there, and that we helped put Jesus on his cross! Every attitude present on that hilltop that day, is present in our midst now!

Every sin was in a nail, or a spear, or a thorn, and pardon for them all in the Blood that was shed. His death was not an induced abortion, or an assisted suicide to get rid of the pain. He chose to die for us and our salvation. But he died for life. More than 2,000 years have passed. The cross itself has long since gone. Yet it stands again when we choose our own Calvary and crucify him all over again, with every sin of commission or omission.

Every wrong attitude ... every bad disposition ... every time we say, "I am not totally yours. Not your will but mine," and allow ourselves to be drawn into the new addictive slaveries of gambling, pornography, child abuse; the forced compliance by law such as mentioned in *The Age*, 7 October 2010, of a hospital trainee required to drop a live fetus into a bucket of formaldehyde.

Christ's kingship on the cross gained you and me; are you and I ready to be his? Yes! Calvary still stands, and the crowd is at the top of the hill.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? I was ... were you?

Second Homily

Christianity is like the grain of sand in the oyster; it upturns our ideas of power, reward, authority; as irritating as Jesus on the Cross, the jibe of Pharisee, priest and robber – nailed at last - who yet rises from the dead. We can't seal ourselves off from Christ if we are Christians. And it is precisely this irritation which is set up in the oyster which turns the grain of sand into a pearl.

Christianity is that process working in us that has power to transform us, just as it changed the repentant thief at the last moment of his life, no matter what his life before had been. Central to that process is Jesus. If we let him in, like the grain of sand in to the oyster, the process of change can begin in us.

The words, "King, Messiah," "Chosen One," the very source of his identity are hurled like rocks at Jesus to bring him down, "save yourself," "save yourself and us" – but where is this Kingship or Salvation in Jesus? There is nothing regal about this face and body, bruised, covered with open wounds, blood and spittle. There is no power in this weakened man, twitching and groaning in his agony and death-struggle! No! but it is the way Jesus dies that shines through – the robber recognised it, "This man has done nothing wrong." There is something special about him, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." And then those royal words of authority, "This

day you shall be with me in paradise." Isn't that what Jesus wants for each of us, why he died for us?

What the thief saw is something we need to see, I need to see, again and again, is that Christ's kingship lies precisely in his abasement, his self-emptying, that this grain of sand has power to be a pearl. Never was there a goodness, a love than this man had. It shone out. He's done nothing wrong. God fighting with no other weapons than our human weakness. It's irritating! This way of God's – it never works, suffers defeat, and yet in the end it wins out. "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it will not yield a harvest" (**Jn 12:24**). Jesus is the sign held up: Jesus is King. God's kingdom of reconciliation and peace would come about by Jesus' refusal to come down from the cross. Just as he refused to compromise all his life.

Christ became King, precisely because He became obedient unto death, death on a cross. While others ridiculed the title above Jesus' head 'the King of the Jews' – the thief looked with hope at this new kind of King and kingship and asked with great desire, "Jesus remember me, when you enter into your kingdom."

The early Church meditated on that mystery and came up with the earliest Christian creed about Jesus. It was built into the Liturgy:

*"Although he was Son of God, He did not cling to his divinity
but emptied himself and became obedient unto death, death on a cross.*

*Therefore did God in turn immeasurably exalt Him
- giving Him the Name outweighing any other name*

*That everyone at Jesus' name should bow
And every tongue take up the cry "Jesus is Lord"*

Thus glorifying God His Father."

Salvation is not something outside of Jesus, carrying the cross like a bag of our sins on his back. No! salvation is something achieved in the person of Jesus himself. Although he assumed human nature, in his concrete humanity he worked through our sin bringing our humanity back to the Father by the skin of his teeth as he hung there on that cross; taking us into right relationship with the Father.

Jesus is Lord, the very name Jesus –Jeshua, means 'Yahweh saves'. In this man, God is at work saving us. Jesus lives. He has no use-by date. He is contemporary, forever up to date. He wants to be Lord in my life, in the ordinary things of my life, work, family, home, car, relationships with wife, children. In the irritations we face and overcome, Jesus can change them into a pearl beyond price. Where is God calling us to obedience to him, making him Lord in our heart and life?

Jesus is the sign held up that the grain of sand has power to become a pearl. Jesus is the Son of

God who chose to remain human for all eternity, so that formed in him we can be brought to the Father through the power of the Spirit. He is the pearl beyond price in whom we find our value, worth and dignity.

FEASTS

Year C

The Birth of Saint John the Baptist

Jer 1:4-10

1 Pet 1:8-12

Lk 1:5-17

The birth of a child touches something deep within us as the child emerges from the hand of God. Every child growing within the mother's womb is part of the eternal loving plan of God the Father: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you **(Jer 1:5)**" (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia par. 168*).

Luke writes that the hand of God was on John at his birth. In his birth, like the births of Samson and Samuel, the ancient promises of God to come and liberate his people, are being accomplished. Even in the womb he points to someone greater, Jesus yet to be born. Zechariah proclaims it in his song..."God has visited his people." Not a political liberation but a change of society through the holiness of those who wait for his coming. And God's salvation would come in the most improbable way, in a birth from an aged barren woman, in a Messiah who would suffer. God breaks through human conventions to bring about unexpected outcomes. Just one simple example, this son will not be called, as was the patriarchal custom, after his father Zechariah, but "John," the name given by the angel. which results in the wonder and amazement of the people, "What will this child turn out to be?"

John stands at the juncture of the Old and New Testaments, at a critical transition time. He is to be the voice for the One who is the Word, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord." He stood for the truth and called people back to allegiance to God, speaking quite directly to the various groups who came to him for a baptism of repentance, soldiers, tax collectors, righteous Pharisees who put themselves above the others, "Don't presume to say we have Abraham for our father." John's role in salvation history was to be "a sharp sword" a sharpened arrow, servant and light to the nations."

"His name is John" was the title of Cardinal Suenen's panegyric at the death of Pope John XXIII who initiated a critical transition in the Church from a narrow, euro-centric vision of Church to its identity as a world church. You could see that in the 2,500 bishops from all over the world, as well as the many theologians and representatives from all the Christian churches. Vatican II reached out to dialogue with the culture in order to proclaim the Gospel.

How are we to transform our culture into a civilisation of love? Was John the Baptist a fool for standing up for the sacredness of marriage? He knew the effect of Herod's action on the culture. But Pope Francis contends, "We are speaking not simply of the love of a father and mother as individuals, but also of their mutual love, perceived as the source of one's life and the solid foundation of the family... They show their children the maternal and paternal face of God the Creator. Together they teach the value of reciprocity, of respect for differences and of being able to give and take ... the lack of one parent that affects children and young people is much deeper than

we think.” **(A.L. par 172).**

Pope John Paul II insisting that Catholic people must be 'a people of life and a people for life' outlined the mission of the Catholic people in the conversion of culture: to witness to truth, conscience and to the possibility of building a culture of life. He asks us to take on the program of Jesus – to become a heart which sees. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. Really meeting people in need is an opportunity to create a civilisation of love, one person, one act at a time.

Research shows that marriage is the most enduring of human sexual relationships – more stable than male-female cohabitation and far more stable than homosexual cohabitation. John the Baptist gave his life to defend marriage against Herod, the ruler of his time. We need John's courage today.

Second Homily

John the Baptiser, whose birth we celebrate today, is a model for us as Church at this time. At the Second Vatican Council the Church struggled to officially state its identity as a world Church. It opened its windows and entered into a dialogue of salvation with present-day society. Dialogue brings so many voices, ways of seeing and interpreting the surrounding world and our place in it that it's quite bewildering. Change has pushed beyond formulated tradition, traditional formulations. Since Vatican II the Church has been grappling with immense changes so as to bring Christ into this changing world and culture. Like John the Baptist standing at the juncture of the Old and New Testaments, we are at a critical time.

Since the '60s we have accepted the assumption that we live in a secularised society. Yet sociologists like Lasch, Bellah and Greeley insist that never has there been a time when people have believed so much. The modern world is not secularised at all, but is essentially sacred. What is different is that the sacred is now the private. We live in the secular, in the world. It is not only to be converted but encountered. It's there that we give most of ourselves. If there is no sacred in the heart of the world, then the sacred is an insignificant experience for everyone.

And John is right there straddling the old and preparing for the One who is to come. He knew the inner heart condition of those who came, attracted by his preaching. He challenged Sadducees and Pharisees to repent, not presume they are right with God because they are descended from Abraham; he called the crowd to give to the poor by sharing clothing and food; the tax collectors to collect no more than the amount prescribed; and soldiers not to threaten or extort but be satisfied with their wages **(Lk 3:7-14)**. He was not preaching an a-worldly message, but one that was in the heart of his world.

I think the tragedy is that we've accepted secularization as the real; we've settled for things; we've written off John and Jesus' invitation to enter into a deeper relationship with God the Father;

we've dismissed as irrelevant or not for us, the invitation through Jesus to experience an intimate relationship with God as sons and daughters through the powerful experience of the Spirit within the Catholic Church. People give away the Church and look to other traditions to give them the private religion they want. And in my view that's tragic.

the development of the fully human; a response to the world all over, and a depth of the Spirit not only in the various spiritualities and charisms, but in the teaching and tension within the global Church. We need to express the sacred in our lives. Our Catholic worship is public worship or it's nothing. We need to make religion real in our lives. The Holy Spirit and John the Baptist are behind the yearning to make church structures more relevant for our time, which is the desire behind the thrust for a Plenary Council, not only in Australia but in many countries throughout the world. People have embraced the teaching of Vatican II and are meeting in gospel discussion groups with the prayer, intent and action of moving the Church forward.

What is encouraged for parents who need not be a holding influence on their children, holding back, holding on, but who need to be pioneers of faith as John and Jesus were, like shepherds going ahead to find new pastures and drawing their children after them by the relevance of their lives; so the same needs to be spoken to our Bishops' conferences.

We have grown up in an era of centralization under Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but Pope Francis is calling the Church to be a synodal Church, discerning in dialogue with all the members of the Church, what we need to let go and to discern the way forward with the Help of the Holy Spirit and prayerful action. May John prepare the way again for Jesus and for his Body the Church to regain our spiritual vitality and really be a Church in the world in this change of an era, not simply an era of change.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus

Ezek 34:11-18

Rom 5:5-11

Lk 15:3-7

June is the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. James MacAuley, the Australian poet captured the theology well in his words put to music by Richard Connolly: "**Jesus, in your heart we find, love of the Father and mankind, These two loves to us impart, divine love in a human heart.**" The Sacred Heart devotion has as its foundation the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon which state that there are two natures, human and divine in the one person of Jesus. And so in adoring the Sacred Heart we are adoring the God-Man Jesus Christ. As man he feels what we go through; as God, through faith in him, he heals what we go through.

The biblical foundation for the Feast comes mainly from John's Gospel: "from his breast will flow fountains of living water" (**Jn 7:37-39**); "The disciple Jesus loved ...leaning back on Jesus' breast" (**Jn 13:23**); and "blood and water that flowed from Christ's pierced side" (**Jn 19:33-38**). Pius XII quoting Leo XIII (*in Haurietis Aquas*) "in the Sacred Heart we see the image of the infinite love of Jesus Christ which moves us to love in return."

This devotion from the Fathers of the Church, and the early and late Middle Ages, sowed the seed for the revealing of Christ's Sacred Heart to St Margaret Mary Alacoque. Her visions did not centre upon a personal grace for her own growth in holiness but rather upon a mission to the Church.

Margaret Mary Alacoque was a French Visitation nun and mystic who promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart in its modern form. In the Visitation convent in Paray-le-Monial, between 1673 and 1675, she experienced four visions of Jesus Christ, concerning devotion toward his Heart as symbolising his love for humankind, which people so often rejected. She was charged to promote this devotion. Jesus revealed his burning love for Margaret Mary and told her, "Behold this Heart which has so loved all people that it has spared nothing, even to consuming itself, in order to testify its love... But what I feel most keenly is that it is in hearts that are consecrated to me that treat me thus..."

These revelations accidentally became known to the other nuns, some of whom looked on these as delusions, and Margaret Mary had much to suffer, not least when in 1677, she told them with fear and trembling that Christ had twice asked her to be a willing victim to expiate for their shortcomings. But she had the support of a holy and experienced Jesuit, St Claude de la Colombiere, and by the time of her death opposition in her community was at an end. All the Visitation convents promoted the devotion.

The remaining four years of Margaret Mary's life were filled by her efforts to spread the devotion. The uniqueness of these visions stem from the fact that they were directed beyond the saint to the universal Church. They resulted in the defeat of Jansenism which held that only a few, (the elect)

would be saved, the rest were damned. The popes ratified the visions and, from Pope Leo XIII on, promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart, ultimately raising the Feast of the Sacred Heart to a solemnity.

Vincent Pallotti often placed in the wounded side of Jesus every needy person he met in his apostolic work. Pope Pius XII, John XXIII, and John Paul II especially, have promoted the devotion to Divine Mercy, the twofold-fount of grace from the Heart of our Saviour. Pope Francis repeatedly in ***Gaudium Evangelii, (EG 86, 183, 283)*** mentions the Heart of Jesus. "God's heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself became poor; and shows the poor his first mercy" **(197-8)**.

Karl Rahner wrote: "All the ingredients of devotion to the Sacred Heart are borrowed from dogma, and in this sense is valid for all ages of Christianity. These elements are so important and suggestive and they fit so naturally under the concept of heart, that one can truly say: Just as there always has been a certain devotion to the Heart of Jesus, since the earliest days, so will there always be one."

Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Acts 12:1-11

2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18

Mt 17:1-9

I often wonder how two men so different as Peter and Paul could be celebrated together as the pillars of the Roman church. The blood of martyrdom united them, Paul by the sword in 62 and Peter by crucifixion in 64 during Nero's persecution. Pope Francis referring to present day martyrs, said to the patriarchs of the "Armenian and Orthodox Churches, "The blood of martyrs is the seedbed of our unity." Peter and Paul are revered because of their dynamic leadership and preaching. By their witness the primitive Christian community came to be not a memorial society with its eyes fastened on a departed Master; but a dynamic community created around a living and present Lord.

In some sense Peter and Paul were ordinary men, people like you and me, with gifts and failings, strengths and weaknesses. Who would have chosen a fisherman to head his church or a persecutor to spread the Gospel? What made the difference was meeting Jesus and being chosen by him, and they, despite setbacks remained faithful to that choice.

That was certainly true of Paul who met the Lord on the road to Damascus. The risen Lord turned Paul and his plans upside down. It was true of Peter right at the beginning. The eyes of Jesus penetrated Peter's inner being and saw his heart. Right at the start in John's Gospel; Jesus called him no longer Simon son of Jonah but Rocky Johnson, Kephas, Petros, "rock." Matthew has this same story, as does Mark, at a pivotal point of the Gospel. If Christ's work is to continue, he needs people who know his deepest identity – and this knowing is the graced work of God. On Peter he builds his Church on his faith yes, but also on the man. Jesus met Peter and Paul many times in their own ministry, like he does with us, to take them deeper.

In the first reading we see a change of attitude toward the Christians in Jerusalem. In 45 AD as Claudius was overseeing his soldiers in the capture of London, his supporter Herod Agrippa to whom he conferred the Judean territory, was overseeing soldiers in the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem. James was beheaded and Peter cast into prison. Things looked grim for the early Christian community. They resorted to prayer and God delivered Peter. God and Christ were working in his life. Peter came to recognise this. He was sifted through suffering and persecution to be the one who could hold the community together in its fundamental faith in Jesus.

There is a little church on the outskirts of Rome called, Quo Vadis where Peter escaping Rome, met Jesus. He asked Jesus, "Where are you going, Lord? (quo vadis, Domine)" Jesus replied, "To Rome to be crucified again." Peter turned back and followed him.

Peter and Paul surrendered their own life plans to take up a higher destiny – they went with and for Jesus. His concern became theirs – to bring forth God's kingdom of justice and love. It's the same question Jesus asks you and me – do you want to give your life to Jesus?

They brought their gifts to Jesus: their own character, who they were. Paul went to the end of the road, to the end of the world. Once a fanatic, he became an ardent apostle – his passion was channeled into new creative ventures under the lead of the Spirit. No half-measures for Paul, he could stand up to anyone, even Peter, for the sake of this fundamental Christian principle: that salvation is in Christ Jesus; but he never questioned Peter's authority to lead the Christian community. Paul's passionate character, charged with zeal for the Gospel, comes out in those 3 phrases: "My life is poured out, I have fought the fight to the end, and I have run the race to the finish." That's why he and Peter are models for us.

Both men had risen again to new heights. Peter was Jesus' choice to head the Christian community and be its source of unity; Paul was Jesus' choice to take his message to the Gentiles. It's happening today – as Christians pray "Jesus, please choose me, use me" for this they were thankful.

The Transfiguration of the Lord

Dan 7:9-10, 13-14

2 Pet 1:16-19

Lk 9:28-36

The Transfiguration captures that moment when Jesus embraces the exodus he will accomplish in Jerusalem. The original exodus was where his own Jewish people were released from slavery through the blood of the lamb. We are invited to look at the glory of God shining on the face of Jesus. The Eastern Church sees the Transfiguration as the goal of our spiritual life. We are to be transformed in Jesus into the likeness of God.

I want to focus on the Transfiguration as the goal of our spiritual life. The two poles of being Beloved of the Father and the other, the Entry into the Darkness, into the Cloud, where the disciples are terribly afraid. The cloud is a premonition of Gethsemane where Jesus wrestles with the will of the Father for him and for our salvation.

The image of the Cloud, the Dark Night, according to John of the Cross, is our being taken beyond our habitual way of experiencing. In fact, it is not an experience at all, but the absence of our ordinary way of experiencing through our senses and our intellect. God is spirit and so our usual way of praying to God no longer works. We are left dry, without consolation. Our prayer becomes wordless prayer, intent in faith in the God we can no longer see. Our desire for God and the things that please him becomes our only prayer, like being on a phone conversation with no response from the other end, but only your desire to be in contact with the beloved.

One of the brightest stars of the 19th century when faith was in crisis was Therese of Lisieux. She gives a human glimpse of the two poles of being loved in the midst of the cloud, the Dark Night. Her little way was not mere sentimentality. The certainty of being loved, received at first from her parents, and at their death, transferred to God, never left her. She had the confidence of a babe in arms who rests secure in the felt knowledge that it is cherished.

When the storm and the darkness did come to her, (The onset of tuberculosis occurred in April) she coughed up blood on her handkerchief, and wrote, "it is the sign of the Bridegroom coming" but she pictures Jesus asleep in her heart. She does not want to disturb him until he awakens. Let the storm rage and roar, and the night run its course she will be as undisturbed as Jesus.

In 1896 Therese had been surrounded by darkness for six months. From the Easter of that year she found herself in the darkest storm. She wrote to one of the sisters. "Children are usually afraid of the night." Her advice in the nightmarish darkness is not to complain that one cannot see, but actually to "decline the desire to see and to dare to close one's eyes; to surrender oneself in the certainty that we are being carried; and to counter the empty fear.

But Therese in her own darkness describes her trial of faith. It felt as if an iron curtain had come down between her and heaven, that she was crawling through an underground tunnel, travelling through thick fog, or into a black hole – "everything had disappeared." The horror of the

Gethsemane would end only with her death. Its disorientation deprived her of all feelings of God's presence. She was despoiled of every support, her only bearings being the certainty of being loved which she would not relinquish. Her only prayer was "Abba, Father".

She described this time as a night of nothingness; she does not want to waken the sleeping Jesus, but she meets the trial with more trust. The more deafening the darkness she will push her confidence to the point of no return. She refused to let go of the hope that she was being held in his arms. She said "It is trust and nothing but trust, that must bring us to Love".

The accounts of Therese' last days testify to the extremes to which her trust was exposed. On 30th September 1887, the day of her death, those around her witnessed the terrible force of the disintegration and discouragement she was facing "I can't take it anymore... I can't take it anymore... I am reduced..." But they also found themselves face to face with the terrifying force of her trust in God and the full extent of her surrender – "I am not sorry for delivering myself up to Love. Oh! no, I'm not sorry, on the contrary... ". When she died her face shone with great beauty like her Beloved Jesus.

The Cloud, the Dark Night, is God bringing us closer to himself through all the trials we face. He wants us not to lose the certainty that we are his beloved. He wants us to be our true selves and to find it in prayer not only without words but in our deepest desires for God.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Apoc 11:19; 12:1-6, 10

1 Cor 15:20-26

Lk 1:39-56

Assumption means being taken up. Mary was taken up body and soul into heaven, Why? Because she shared in the struggle of Jesus' overcoming evil to set us free. She became the way that the Redeemer of the world could come into the world to save us. She did it by saying yes to God in faith and by giving birth to God's only Son. She was a channel of God's grace as she brought forth Christ, the salvation of the world, through the operation of her faith.

John's Apocalypse was written at the time of the Emperor Domitian who, through persecution was forcing people to adopt the Roman way, just like Hitler did in his time. In the Apocalypse the dragon is all the force of the Roman Empire directed at weak Christian churches. Mary herself had to flee from Herod into the desert to save her child. The Woman giving birth to a child who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron is clearly Jesus in his struggle with evil; the Woman is both Mary and the Church who has conquered evil through Christ as she stands on the moon and blots out the sun; she is a refuge for all who face persecution against Christ and the Church. It was being raged against the Church in St John's time and continues in ours.

Pope Pius XII referred explicitly to this history. He deplored the destruction of human life, the desecration of bodies and the increasing loss of respect for the God-given identity of every human being. And he said, "What I intend is that the celebration of the Assumption might make clear the sacredness and the high destiny of every single human person. In 1950 Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption as a dogma, as a teaching of the Church: "At the end of her life, Mary, preserved free from original sin, was taken up body and soul to heaven, called queen of all things, so that she might be more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death. The Assumption of Mary is a very special sharing in her Son's resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians."

In our life, Mary has again and again come to people when they were no longer praying or believing in God. She came to Lourdes 1858; in 1917, Mary, at Fatima, asked for prayer before the Russian revolution and when people were against God. When she comes, miracles and healing happen. But Mary is not alive in statues or pictures **but in the real and powerful change that can be brought about in the world when we say yes to God and put him first in our lives.**

Over 20 years ago when Pope John Paul visited Latin America, including all the then military dictatorships, he found his visit carefully censored by government officials. One text was removed from his planned visit. It was never allowed to be read, never allowed to be heard. It was today's Gospel: Mary's prophetic words "Our God has shown the strength of his arm and has scattered the proud in the conceit of their hearts. He has put down the powerful from their thrones and he lifts

up the lowly. He fills the hungry with good things, and the rich he sends off empty handed.”

We are born for immortality. Just as Jesus rose victorious over death and won eternal life for us, so Mary was the first among us to be taken up body and soul to heaven without corruption and shared that privilege. Here we enjoy fragmentary experiences of life, meaning and love. Beyond death those fragments will come together in a full and final pattern. We will be in a relationship with God that will never end. Eternal life will mean becoming fully alive and finally free.

There are two driving forces that come up again and again in our lives and in our society. One is the sheer self-interest and the other is the use of power to get our own way. And that needs to be challenged again and again in our society and in our own hearts. We need to keep in tune with the values and vision of the Gospel and to keep ourselves in harmony with the song of Mary, who celebrated and became an instrument of a God who raises up the lowly and is faithful to all people. May our lives magnify the Lord. May our spirits rejoice in God, our Saviour. Amen.

Second Homily

A long time ago I went to Mexico. In all the churches there was a picture of our Lady of Guadalupe which has special meaning for the native Indians. It said to them that we have a mother in heaven, her name is Mary, Mother of God, and she really cares for us.

In 1519, the Spanish had conquered Mexico and the Indians were treated very badly, working in the silver mines as slaves and not even considered human. One day just outside Mexico City, our Lady appeared to a poor Aztec peasant, Juan Diego. She spoke to him with great love and said, Beloved and honourable son, you must go to the bishop (Zumeraga) and ask him to build a church here. The poor man was afraid but went to the bishop. The bishop wanted proof; he wanted roses in December even though it was not the season for roses. Juan Diego went back, and Mary pointed up the hill where beautiful Castilian roses were blooming. He put them in his cactus fibre cloak and brought them to the bishop. When the roses fell from his cloak, there was a picture of the Lady Juan Diego has seen on the hill.

Hurrah! She's one of us. She speaks our language (Aztec) and she dresses like us. Mary appears as an Aztec princess. You get a sense of the love of Mary for the downtrodden. She stands on the moon and blots out the sun (the Aztec gods to whom thousands of native Indians were sacrificed). She is pregnant but in prayer before God and she wears a special brooch with a cross at her neck, the cross that the natives saw on the Spanish ships in port.

When photographers examined the picture on the tilma and magnified the reflection on the iris of Mary's eyes, there was the image of her faithful son, Juan Diego, his interpreter and a family. Mary looking on him with love, just as God looked on Mary in her lowliness. It's like the image of the Apocalypse – the woman giving birth to Jesus, the struggle with evil that continues until today. But Mary is not alive in statues or pictures but in the real and powerful change that can be brought

about in the world when we say yes to God and put him first in our lives.

In 1950, Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption as a dogma, that is a teaching of the Church, saying that, “At the end of her life, Mary, preserved free from original sin, was taken up body and soul to heaven, called Queen of all things, so that she might be more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death. The Assumption of Mary is a singular participation in her Son's resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians.

In our life, Mary has again and again come to people when they were no longer praying or believing in God. She came to Lourdes 1858; in 1917 to Fatima asking for prayer before the Russian revolution and when people were against God.

Love recognises the real truth about people we love, that even if they die, they will live forever. Love doesn't create the truth; it sees the truth that we are born for immortality. Just as Jesus rose victorious over death and won eternal life for us, so Mary, the first of the redeemed among us, shared that privilege and was taken up body and soul to heaven without corruption.

Here we enjoy fragmentary experiences of life, meaning and love. Beyond death those fragments will come together in a full and final pattern. We will be in a relationship with God that will never end. Death is a passage from this life to a fuller one. Eternal life will mean becoming fully and finally free.

Third Homily

A chicken within the shell could think that its whole life was within the confines of the shell. Yet it pecks away and suddenly discovers a new and bigger and greater life. From being enclosed, it enters into the glorious sunshine and air and takes wing.

Mary does that for us today as she is taken up to heaven, body and soul, to open up for us a new life with God. We celebrate the Assumption of Mary. Mary was the first believer, a true disciple and for this reason was taken up to glory in a body that did not experience corruption and was united with her Son in heaven.

In the readings we see the beginning of Mary's journey and its end – the girl suffused with joy, the woman clothed with the sun. Mary's greatness is also in the untold story of the in-between time, the woman of courage and imagination, the relentless pursuer of truth. The one who opened her whole life to God in the birth of Jesus, God's Son, and who followed him all her life to the cross and to the resurrection.

The Brazilian theologian Clodovis Boff told the story of a basic Christian community in the Amazon jungle of Brazil. They were reflecting on the scripture readings for today's feast. Mary seemed to them to be like themselves, sharing their experience, a person who hacks a path through the jungle with a machete, clearing a path, blazing a trail for others. We can focus on the

glory of Mary and miss the hardships and struggle of her in-between time. Mary shares the first fruits of redemption, achieved through the death and resurrection of her Son, precisely because she was intimately involved in her Son's life and struggle to bring us to birth in God. Mary was so keen for the work of Jesus to be completed that she willingly offered Jesus and united herself with him for the salvation of all.

Mary is our mother, but not only of Christians. A young African Muslim left this note in the grotto of Lourdes. "Mother, hear me. I am your daughter. Like us you went to the spring with a jug on your shoulder, singing as your bare feet moved over the stones. And perhaps you suffered hunger as we do when your Joseph had no work. Take my longing into your maternal hands. Thank you.

Mary prayed: "God, who is all powerful, has looked on his lowly handmaid, and done great things for me." Just think of the way God looks down on each one of us, loving us, affirming our dignity and destiny and encouraging us to follow the way of Mary so that we will share Christ's risen life. To do that we have to step out in service as Mary did toward Elizabeth. The Spirit only became manifest after Mary's initial stepping out, her greeting. Mary is the fore-runner of the fore-runner. She has been here before, modelling a way, showing us how to bring Christ to people.

All Saints

Apoc 7:2-4, 9-14

I Jn 3:1-3

Mt 5:1-12

"For all the saints who from their labours rest", are the words of our first hymn on this Feast of All Saints. The Second Vatican Council put before the whole Church (the People of God) a two-fold call: to holiness and to mission. In talking about holiness we can no longer depreciate our calling by saying, "Yes, but you're a priest or a sister, you're much better than we are." The vocation of priest and religious is no longer seen as an elite vocation, but is rather to be situated not above but among the people of God in service to them, in a common passion for bringing about the reign of God. We are all called to be saints in the particular vocation we have been called to: Marriage, single life, religious life, priesthood, being a young person; five states of life, each with its own dignity and value before God.

The lives of the saints teach us that holiness comes in all shapes and sizes: rich and poor, warriors and peace-makers, hermits and organisers of charities, parents and celibates, scholars and those who can't read. Every era has its saints. The struggles may change; the heroes are still among us. In some ages the heroes stood for doctrinal truth; today they stand for the sanctity of life; justice and peace, and ecology.

It's good to recall how this feast originated. At first only the martyrs (including the apostles) were venerated on their anniversary day and at the place where their deaths occurred. This practice was extended to places where relics of the martyrs were venerated. During the persecution under the emperor Diocletian at the beginning of the 4th century, the number of martyrs was so great that a separate date could not be assigned to each one, so the Church established a common feast day for all the martyrs on the Sunday after Pentecost.

At first only the martyrs and St John the Baptist, were honoured by special feast days. But then other saints were added, the great confessors of the East, Anthony of the desert, Athanasius; and in the West, Martin of Tours and Augustine, to mention a few. The first mention of a feast to honour all the saints on November 1st seems to have come during the pontificate of Pope Gregory III (731-741). In 732 he consecrated a chapel in the Basilica of St Peter dedicated to "all the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and all the just and perfect who are at rest throughout the whole world" and fixed the anniversary for November 1st. A century later Pope Gregory IV (827-844) extended the celebration to the universal Church.

Do you feel that Christianity is not touching our lives? The culture we live in with its pull towards getting things, success, material success, has a greater pull on us than the demands of Jesus Christ. If you have a quiet half hour, which wins out – the quiet or the TV? It's only when there's a crisis of some proportion that we know we need God; and then we put time in to finding God, Jesus and Mary and Joseph or those saints you have a special devotion to.

The canonisation of St Mary of the Cross Mackillop in Rome with five other saints, her life portrayed in many different ways, inspires us. There's an energy in the saints for the things of God. They see what has to be done and they do it. St Mary Mackillop told her sisters, "Never see a need without doing something about it." They create a counter response to the culture. What Mary and her sisters did in the outback, in the cities among orphans and prostitutes; unsung in her day, now finds her taken to the heart of Australians, Catholic or other, as their saint. She inspires us to say that if Mary can do it in her time, then we can do it today.

Mary teaches us that holiness is seeing with the eyes of Christ. Holiness is being Christ. Saints are those who see and act on what they see. In so doing they see what is important, what matters, what takes priority, and hints of the divine. There are saints around us, who at crucial moments in our lives, were there for us. They listened, held, supported and challenged us, providing just what we needed at that time to be healed and to grow.

The Beatitudes in today's Gospel get us to look at not just at what we do, but at the sort of people we are. What part does gentleness and compassion play in our lives? What example can I offer of hungering and thirsting after justice? In the Beatitudes there is a strong underlying urge to identify with the poor paradoxically through the recognition of our own weakness. Looking at how we have been helped in our weakness increases our understanding of how we can respond to those in need.

The Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day)

Is 25:6-9

Rom 5:5-11

Lk 7:11-17

Some people come into our lives and move our souls to dance. They awaken us to understand with the passing whisper of their wisdom... They make our world more beautiful... leave footprints in our hearts and we are never ever the same again.

Today on All Souls Day we especially remember family, friends, even enemies who have gone before us. "It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins" (**2 Macc 12:46**). I have seen the joy in persons at their death as the Lord comes to meet them, like Anthony 27 years old, his dreams never realised, his mother had abandoned him, but now he was going home, and joy erupted in his face. The God of love and mercy had come, embracing and accepting him no matter what his life before had been.

At the end of our lives we look back at the events and people who have shaped us and there is the desire to finish unfinished business. I have also felt the fears both in them and in their family members at the moments prior to death. Kath was an only child; her mother, dying of cancer, had become jaundiced, her mouth wide open. I met her rushing out of the hospital terrified as I was coming in. I invited her to come back again and, as I ministered to her mother, her fear diminished.

My mother was an only child. She worked in the big houses and her widowed mother was working in another big house. She caught pneumonia and was dismissed, going back to a cold and empty house for weeks. At the end of mum's life in the Royal Melbourne she was constantly saying, "I want to go home, I want to go home". It was a recapitulation of her earlier life. She did not want to die abandoned. Helen my sister took her home despite the nurse's warning, and she died in the embrace of her family.

All of us have a fear of diminishment and loss but it is the way to life. When the soldiers pierced Jesus' side blood and water came out. In Ezekiel the water that came from the right side of the temple became a river that brought life and healing to the Dead Sea which is the lowest point of the land. At our lowest point, Jesus' death wants to bring life and healing to us.

In a technological society as rational as ours, death is hard to accept. How many of us have known the experience of separation through death? It's not in our consciousness, and so thinking about the end of life for the 18, 20 or 30 or even 40-year-old, is unthinkable, because they have never expected it. With the Covid19 epidemic it has become a frightening reality, but personally still unknown.

How rare it is to meet an older person who can feel the approach of death, can predict the

moment of its coming and await it with relatives. So many are called back by medicine or machine – so many false exits. How can you keep enduring an imminent separation that keeps being postponed? So we bypass death – in our society we dismiss the problem by pills, life-sustaining machines or now by euthanasia. Jesus wants us to face death – “Don’t see it as a problem,” he tells us, “See it as a human experience to be lived together, the mystery of a person facing the last and most momentous decision of his or her life, to give oneself away.” The time of our death is the time given by God for us to come to acceptance and peace.

But we don’t know what to say all the time. We are uncomfortable with the silences. We ramble on and mistake it for meaningful conversation which does not really concern the dying person. The old ritual- the rosary around the bed of the dying person, allowed something to be expressed, and allowed those gathered to feel in communion with each other; – some scripture or simple prayer in the ritual lets each person get in touch with what he or she is living. This time should not just be prayers for the dying person, but a simple prayerful living together of a mystery which has assembled a community. John or Mary is dying and we gather, family, relatives, friends. It was the news of John the Baptist’s death that made Jesus gather the Twelve and go off to a quiet place. Those few words indicate the depth of feeling in Jesus. He wept as we know at Lazarus’ death, how much more over John’s.

A few centuries ago our culture was more capable of confronting death and separation. A person about to die, called his relatives to his bedside and bade them farewell. The French word ‘adieu’ - ‘to God,’ farewell, is appropriate because it expresses the idea that life is, in the end, abandoned to God, in openness to the future. But it is not easy to accept the loss, the separation either, on the part of the dying person. When Jack Ferguson was dying and his wife Margaret said to him, “You can go, love.” He said, “Yeah, that’s the cruel bit.” When you love deeply, you don’t leave family, friends, this place, without tears. Grief is the price we pay for love. The best we can do is to ask the dying person to bless all those around his bedside. Now he or she can rest forever after their labours, the Spirit says, since their good deeds go with them” **(Rev 14:13)**.