

Lectio divina

Praying the Scriptures in Lent

Year A, 2017

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Journeying with Jesus

In all the four Gospels we encounter Jesus as a pilgrim and wayfarer. Biblical scholars have described Jesus as an itinerant, constantly on the move and leading his disciples from one town and people to another. In fact this characteristic of movement marked Jesus' life from the very beginning, from his birth in Bethlehem on account of the Roman census and in the consequent escape of his family to Egypt under the threat of persecution. The years that followed saw Jesus journey to Jerusalem at the age of twelve and his passage over some three years of ministry from the River Jordan to the Judean desert, to Capernaum and even as far north as Tyre and Sidon, homecomings to Galilee, itineraries through the heart of Samaria, and his final journey to Jerusalem.

While Jesus is a traveller he is certainly no drifter for his journeying has a purpose! Jesus has come to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to call people to reform of their lives and to believe in the Good News of the Gospel. What is more, in proclaiming and making present the unconditional and liberating love of the Father, Jesus accompanies people on the road of conversion, offering his closeness, healing, and personal gaze as a source of comfort, challenge and ultimately hope. In bringing about transformation in the lives of others, Jesus is not a detached bystander or mere functionary but intimately involves himself in the heart of their personal circumstance.

This accompaniment is clear in the Gospel readings of Lent, generously illuminated by our Australian bishops in this year's *lectio divina*. In Jesus' facing of temptation in the Judean desert, encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, in his healing of the man born blind, and in his tears at the death of Lazarus, among other instances, we see Jesus companion and enter into our fragile humanity. Jesus thirsts and hungers, sheds tears and is moved deeply by the intimate joys and sorrows of others in a way that, paradoxically, reveals his transcendence. As Pope Francis affirms in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "Jesus' whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life" (EG 265).

Just as the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene and Mary encounter Jesus and are moved to share their testimony, so too are we invited to proclaim the difference that the Gospel is making in our lives. The conversion invited by Lent is not merely a turn away from sin but invites us to pursue holiness, which includes the courage to proclaim what we believe. We are called to run out from our wells of living water and invite others to "come and see this man" who has shed divine light on our story as sons and daughters of God. Once more Pope Francis reminds us, "A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him" (EG 266). Emboldened by the loving presence of Christ in our lives we can take the Gospel into the world with confidence and generosity.

As we journey through these weeks of Lent towards the glory of Christ's Cross and Resurrection, may we come to know and experience more deeply the company of Jesus who travels with us on the road of continual conversion.

Daniel Ang, Director, Office for Evangelisation

Lectio Divina, Sacred Reading

Reading slowly and reflecting deeply on what we read is an activity that would be foreign to many today, given the constant, speedy stream of information crossing our paths each day that we try to process as best we can.

The challenge with reading Scripture is to slow down. Rather than the Scriptures becoming words that simply flow in and out of our heads, we have to start processing them if they are going to mean anything to us.

We would never rush reading a love letter! We would savour the words, and the presence of the writer would be close to us. In a similar way, when we read Scripture, we are reading the words of a loving God.

Lectio divina goes back to the early centuries of Christianity and taps into a wonderful tradition that allows the Scriptures to connect with our lives. We enter into a conversation with God. God speaks through his word, and we are called to respond. What am I hearing, and what is my response in heartfelt prayer?

This deep listening, thinking and praying builds my relationship with God. The words stay with me and start to change me. I start to become what God calls me to be. The goal of reading Scripture is to come closer to God and to grow in our spiritual life – to be nothing less than transformed so that we can grow to be like Jesus himself, that is, to become a true disciple of Jesus.

In this resource, this process has been modelled by a number of Australian Bishops. They have kindly offered their own reflection on the Gospels, as well as what they have taken from the text into their everyday life. Sincere thanks to the Bishops who have taken part, for the generosity of their time and the sharing of the fruits of their own reflections with us.

Let's have the courage to accept this invitation to meet Jesus in the words of Scripture, to enter the conversation in prayer, and to allow our prayer to bear fruit in our life in whatever way the Holy Spirit guides us.

How to Pray *Lectio Divina*

A reading and reflection on the Scriptures which leads to prayer and transformation of life.

1 Reading

Reading – getting to know the text (senses)

The first step is to come to know the text in its entirety. We look at it as a whole, embracing all the elements of it. What is the inspired human author trying to tell us in the text? This reading is the beginning of a process that leads to meditation, prayer and the transformation of life.

- Take in all the elements of the text.
- Be aware of context, related texts, quotes.
- Who are key characters; what are key words?
- Apply all that you know about the text.
- Don't choose any one thing to work with at this stage.

Sharing: *If part of a group, you may wish to share your initial insights into the text.*

2 Meditation

Meditation – engaging with the text, making it your own (reason)

Here we begin to reflect on the text. We approach the text not from its literal meaning, but from a theological point of view. What does it say about the God who speaks to me, and how I am to respond to that God? The text here acts like a mirror; it reveals to us our own faith journey and what we need to do to live it better.

What does the text tell me:

- about the God who speaks?
- about responding to that God?
- about my faith life?
- about what I need to do to transform my faith life?

Sharing: *If part of a group, you may wish to share something of your deeper reflections.*



Prayer – let prayer emerge from your working with the text (will)

Our prayer here arises out of meditation. We are humbled and have become aware of our need for God to help us. We pray for the grace to put into practice our insight into what we need to do to live our faith life more fully.

- Our prayer stems from our reading / meditation.
- Meditation humbles us, so we turn to God in our need.
- We seek the grace we need to do what we must to transform our life.
- We acknowledge that alone we can do nothing.
- "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (cf. Philippians 4:13)

Journaling: You may wish to write your prayer in the space provided.

3. Prayer

Action – throughout the day

To help us throughout the day to focus on our particular insight we now choose a word, phrase or sentence. By repeating it during the day we are reminded of what we need to do, and remember that God gives to us the help that we need to do it. The goal of *lectio divina* is transformation of life, so this continuing repetition is like a leaven that brings about the transformation.

- Now choose a word, phrase, sentence.
- Bring it to mind frequently during the day.
- Let it recapture the experience of your *lectio*.
- Use it especially in situations relating to your *lectio* insight.
- "Daily and hourly till the soil of the heart with the Gospel plough." (St John Cassian)

Sharing: If part of a group, you may wish to share the text chosen for daily reflection.

4. Action

How to use this Booklet

This booklet offers a guide to the *lectio divina* process (previous page), as well as a suggested prayer to prepare for reading the text.

The Lenten Sunday Scripture texts are included on which to base your *lectio divina* process. Select a text as you wish.

A space has been provided to write down the fruits of your reflection – words of prayer, and words to take with you on your spiritual journey. Journaling is an excellent way of capturing any insights that arise, and then being able to see patterns that develop over time.

As further input, the texts of the reflections of the Bishops on the Gospels are included each week in two sections. The first section gives a reflection on the reading of the text, and in the shorter second section, each Bishop shares what they will take from the text that will sustain their faith journey in their everyday life.

As well as the written text, the Bishops' reflections have been recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au

Additional quotes and guided questions are also offered. Please use in whatever way you feel would work best for you personally, or as part of a reflection group.

Further information on *lectio divina* can be found at www.dbb.org.au

Prayer before reading Scripture

Gracious God,

In your goodness and wisdom you chose to reveal yourself
through Christ, the Word made flesh.

In Scripture, you reveal yourself through the same Word,
written in human words.

In the sacred books, you meet your children with great love
and speak with them. May I be drawn into this divine conversation and respond
wholeheartedly to its promptings.

Send your Holy Spirit into my heart so I may understand more deeply the words your
Spirit has inspired.

May I encounter Christ in these texts
and learn what it means to know and follow him.

May I be amazed by the inexhaustible newness of God's word,
and may I allow it to shape and transform my life.

I ask this through Christ our Lord,

Amen.



Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. ¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? ¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. ¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

¹⁸Then the LORD became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2

²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

6 "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Reflection – *Henri Nouwen*

How often have I lived through these weeks without paying much attention to penance, fasting, and prayer? How often have I missed the spiritual fruits of the season without even being aware of it? But how can I ever really celebrate Easter without observing Lent? How can I rejoice fully in your Resurrection when I have avoided participating in your death? Yes, Lord, I have to die—with you, through you, and in you—and thus become ready to recognise you when you appear to me in your Resurrection. There is so much in me that needs to die: false attachments, greed and anger, impatience and stinginess. . . . I see clearly now how little I have died with you, really gone your way and been faithful to it. O Lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones. Let me find you again. Amen. (*From A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from the Genesee, Gill and Macmillan 1982, p.34*)



Jesus Encounters
Temptation

1st Sunday of Lent

1st Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

⁷ Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Romans 5:12-19

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—¹³ sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Matthew 4:1-11

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he

answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Journal

- ▶ What prayer is emerging in me as I engage with this text?

- ▶ What word or phrase will I repeat this week to allow the insight of my *lectio divina* reading to find its home in me and begin to transform me?



Reflection – *Most Rev Eugene Hurley, Bishop of Darwin*

What did you hear in this week's Gospel and what does it mean to you?

Today we are looking at the reality and the unusual entity that is temptation. We all experience temptation, and it is a part of our humanity, yet in many ways we don't talk about it. It's a mystery of our humanity, and one of the things that strikes me about the Gospel today is that Jesus himself was tempted. I don't associate temptation with Jesus, rather I think of Jesus as perfect, as the Son of God, as God and man, so how could he be tempted? Well, he is human, and this is why he was tempted. You and I share this with Jesus, that we're human, and so we are going to be tempted as well.

Sometimes temptation is associated with sinfulness, that if you are tempted, maybe you're not perfect, maybe you're not holy, maybe you're not good, maybe you're not prayerful enough.

But temptation is really just part of being human, it's a beautiful thing. It's what we do with being tempted that's the real issue. This is the case even with diet. We may say, "Yes, I'm definitely not going to do this anymore, I'm going to diet," and then nanna comes around with the best sponge in the world, and we think, "I'll start the diet tomorrow." It's a temptation to overeat, and we know that it's not right. Our conscience says, "Don't eat it," and yet we say, "oh well, just this time, I will eat it." So there is a tension in our life about what's right - what we know is right, and yet being tempted to do the wrong thing, or the less good thing.

Some theologians would say that this is what original sin is about. It creates in us a darkness of the intellect, an inability to understand clearly life, God's love, and where we are going, a weakness of the will. We all experience this, for example with the dieting, or perhaps with a fitness program. We decide we are going to run every morning. On the first morning we get up, but it's freezing cold and raining, and we say, "Oh well, I'll stay in bed and start running tomorrow." We know all about this.

There can be an inclination to do the less good thing. If I see twenty dollars on the ground, my first instinct might be to look around, and if no one is looking, I might slip it in my pocket. I know that it's not mine, it belongs to somebody else. After a while, hopefully, I might take it out and take it to the police, as it belongs to someone else. But the initial reaction is that it's twenty dollars that I didn't have, and which I do now. This is the temptation to do the less good thing.

But today the Gospel reminds us that Jesus gives us a way through temptation.

Firstly, there is a need to acknowledge that it is a temptation. We think of Jesus in the desert for 40 days, and he's as hungry as can be. The devil says, "Turn these stones into bread." The thought of nice warm bread that you could almost smell would have been very tempting for Jesus because he was so hungry. Temptation comes at the most vulnerable time in our lives and in the most vulnerable part of our will. So temptation is very clever.

But we see Jesus, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, being able to turn that temptation into something beautiful. And for all of us, we will be tempted, thank God, because we are human. But we have the strength through Confirmation, and all the other Sacraments – the Eucharist,

our prayer, our example of other people around us - to rise above those temptations so that it can become a real means of holiness. Yes we're tempted. For example, we may be tempted to be miserable to people. Yet, with the grace of God we can actually be really quite pleasant to them, and we get life out of that.

So today, as we consider this Gospel, and it's a beautiful Gospel in many ways, it highlights the humanity of Jesus; it highlights that temptation is part of our humanity; and it gives us a beautiful way through that into a new place where we sense our own goodness, and the presence of God and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

What will you take away that will sustain you personally in your faith journey?

From this Gospel, I take away that the reality of temptation is human. To be tempted is not bad, but it also gives me the strength to look at my own life and see what are the temptations in my life; to see people intruding in my life, and to say that it's not an intrusion, but rather an opportunity to meet those people and to listen to them. I have a lot to think about in the Gospel today, to transform some of the ways I look at life and look at people.

This reflection was recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au.

St Teresa of Avila

It is here, my daughters, that love is to be found - not hidden away in corners but in the midst of occasions of sin. And believe me, although we may more often fail and commit small lapses, our gain will be incomparably the greater.

St Philip Neri

Do not grieve over the temptations you suffer. When the Lord intends to bestow a particular virtue on us, He often permits us first to be tempted by the opposite vice. Therefore, look upon every temptation as an invitation to grow in a particular virtue and a promise by God that you will be successful, if only you stand fast.

Reflection Questions

1. What might be the difference between "doing the wrong thing" and "doing the less good thing"? What are our points of reference in discerning and making decisions?
2. In what ways do you think that "temptation is clever"?
3. How can temptation be a way to holiness? Have you had an experience of this?
4. Relationships with people close to us are often places where temptations arise leading to conflict and bitterness. How might the Gospel lead us to live in a different way?
5. For personal reflection: Where in my life do I feel the inclination to "do the less good thing"? Could I take a step towards making a better choice this Lent?



Jesus Encounters
Glory

2nd Sunday of Lent

2nd Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12:1-4

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

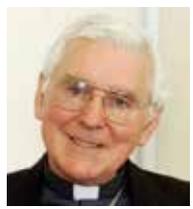
2 Timothy 1:8-10

⁸ Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Matthew 17:1-9

17 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."



Reflection – *Most Rev Peter Ingham, Bishop of Wollongong*

What did you hear in this week's Gospel and what does it mean to you?

I like to take the First and Second Sundays of Lent together. On the First Sunday, the temptation of Jesus by Satan emphasises the humanity of Jesus who is like us in all things except sin. On the Second Sunday, the Transfiguration, Jesus is revealed in his glory emphasising, of course, the divinity of Jesus. He is the eternal Son in whom the Father is well pleased.

Now there is only one Saviour of the universe, Jesus Christ who is truly God and truly human. These first two Lenten Sundays then, taken together, help us focus on Jesus Christ the God-man, and also why we call the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of God.

The Transfiguration Gospel of today reminds me of my trip up that narrow winding road to the top of Mount Tabor in Galilee, where over the altar in the lovely Church of the Transfiguration there is a magnificent mosaic of today's Gospel scene. In a separate north Chapel, there is an image of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai; and the south Chapel is dedicated to the prophet Elijah with an image of his confrontation with the pagan prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Moses and Elijah of course represent the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets.

As I look at this Gospel, I then hear Peter wanting to freeze the frame of this vision and build three tents. He wants to hang onto it and immortalise it. How often do you and I want to live happily ever after, but life moves on, and dark clouds at times can block out the sun. Jesus, too, faced his suffering and his death.

The heavenly Father in this Gospel identifies Jesus as his divine Son, and he tell us to listen to him. We may always want to talk, but are not always good at listening. To really listen takes courage. It may cause us to re-evaluate how we live our lives in union with our Saviour and in the light of Jesus' teaching.

I take away from this Gospel the fact that Jesus took Peter, James and John apart with him up onto Mount Tabor and was transfigured before them. Now think about the other occasion in the Gospel where Jesus took Peter, James and John apart with him - it was the garden of Gethsemane. They, who beheld his glory on Mount Tabor are with him when he is on the ground in the garden. Why? Because to survive Gethsemane, they needed Mount Tabor. Today's Preface in the Mass says that "he revealed his glory to strengthen them for the scandal of the Cross."

You and I also need remembered moments of glory - some indication that we have experienced the presence of Jesus to keep us going, so that when a crisis occurs or has passed and everything would be alright again, we have this vision in our experience to hang on to, some experience that has really tied us to the Lord.

What will you take away that will sustain you personally in your faith journey?

What sustains me here is Jesus saying, "do not be afraid." St John says, "perfect love casts out fear," and if you and I have cultivated this personal relationship with Jesus our Saviour during

our lifetime, then we are not going to be frightened to meet the Lord at the end of life in death, because we will be meeting up with a very familiar friend that we have cultivated throughout our lifetime.

God bless you and I pray that the Gospel will help you and I in our prayer this week.

This reflection was recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au.

St Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things,
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

St Augustine

Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.

Reflection Questions

1. How well would I say that I listen to God or to others? How might I better listen to what God wishes to reveal to me?
2. Do I feel able to call Jesus 'friend'? How might I develop a true friendship with Jesus?
3. Where is my 'mountaintop' where I go to be with the Lord?
4. Have I had a faith experience that has given me something to hang on to in the face of difficulties?
5. For personal reflection: Do I feel a 'dark cloud' above me at the moment? Bring this situation to God in prayer in the confidence of the glory of God to shine through the darkness.

3rd Sunday of Lent

Jesus Encounters
the Woman at the Well

3rd Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7

³ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"⁴ So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."⁵ The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Romans 5:1-2; 5-8

⁵ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

John 4:5-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this

mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.” ³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.”

Journal

► What prayer is emerging in me as I engage with this text?

► What word or phrase will I repeat this week to allow the insight of my *lectio divina* reading to find its home in me and begin to transform me?

Reflection – Most Rev Greg O’Kelly SJ, Bishop of Port Pirie



What did you hear in this week’s Gospel and what does it mean to you?

The Gospel we are looking at today is that of the Samaritan woman. It is the story of Jesus going back to Galilee from Jerusalem, and he passes through Samaria. This was a place that the Jews normally avoided because there was much antipathy between the Samaritans and the Jews for historic reasons. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as failures as Jews, as having abandoned the true religion. They were even seen as lesser than Gentiles.

You may know the Benedictine method of *lectio divina* that involves reading the Gospel several times, listening to the words that are said, looking at the people who are saying these words, and looking at their gestures. This method is Ignatian as well as Benedictine, and St Ignatius includes this method in the Spiritual Exercises. I will be using a combination of these methods, looking at what we can discover through the words, through the persons, and through their actions.

The first thing we see is that Jesus sits down on the side of the well “thus tired”. I remember the Latin from many years ago as a novice, translated in this way. This is an elaboration of the fact that Jesus is so tired and worn out by his ministry.

It is midday, the hottest part of the day, and here is an almost fragile Christ sitting down, thirsty. He says to the woman, “Give me a drink”. Jesus is starting from a position of weakness, a position of being somewhat fragile. Now it was unheard of for a Jewish man to speak to a woman in public. The rabbis would not even talk to their wives in public, let alone a Samaritan woman. So she is astonished when Jesus says to her, “Give me a drink”. She is somewhat stropic and aggressive with him, and she says, “Why are you speaking to me?” In Jesus’ relationship with the woman, he is coming from a position of weakness, and he uses no condescension, no condemnation, no put-down, no way of humiliating or lessening the woman’s stature. They start a conversation.

Jesus treats her with respect. This is a broken woman, and she comes to the well at midday. Jewish women would go to the village well twice a day, at early morning and late afternoon, to fill up urns for their water. Yet this woman comes at midday. She is avoiding the women of the village, avoiding their snubs and snide comments, because she’s had five husbands as well as a current partner. She has had a life of broken relationships, and she is someone who has probably been used and abused, but certainly has not been given a context of love in which to flourish and grow. Jesus does not even mention this until it comes up later. His initial response to her is acceptance, and it brings out the point that when Jesus looks at us (and if you get a chance in the Gospels, look at the number of times Jesus gazes or looks at someone, like Peter, or Judas, or the rich young man), he looks at people and he sees them not for who they are now, but for what they might become. He sees that in the Samaritan woman, too.

He asks for the smallest of things; he asks for a drink. She gives him a drink, and then this conversation starts. It is the longest spiritual conversation in St John’s Gospel, and through it, she progresses through different stages. We have to emphasise here that Jesus is taking her so seriously, and that he has a lengthy conversation about her spiritual life.

He knows he is dealing with a woman who is thirsting, too. Jesus was thirsting, and the woman is thirsting. Jesus was tired and a bit broken, and this woman has a life of broken relationships, and he realises this. He talks to her in a way that allows her to see that she has been looking for things on the outside to fulfil her. She has been looking for things of the material world and things outside herself in order to find contentment and peace. Jesus turns it around to a journey back to her heart, that her thirst is a thirst of the heart. She has a thirst too, a deeper thirst, a thirst of the heart for love.

As she talks to Jesus, she goes through a progression. We remember her first words in the passage where she says to him "Are you a Jew giving me a drink of water?" She refers to him as a "Jew". After this, she thinks that he could be the Messiah, "the Christ"; and then she refers to him as "the Saviour", the person who takes us out of ourselves and shows us a different future. She goes through a journey from recognising Jesus as a Jew; and then as a Prophet, because Jesus knew that she had been married five times and that she had a current partner. She then moved to recognising Jesus as the Messiah, the one who is to come, the anointed one; and finally recognising him as the Saviour. He gives her a whole new dimension, and she runs back to the village no longer frightened of them, but goes back and tells everyone the news: I think I've found someone very important, and the first of these people begin to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. This is something for us to do as well.

A few key points:

- + Jesus starts with us almost from a position of weakness
- + Jesus accepts from us any gift we give him
- + Jesus sees us for who we might become, not what we are
- + Jesus wants to share words of eternal life
- + Jesus wants to take us on a journey that we go from seeing him on the outside as a Jew, then a prophet, and through seeing him as Saviour, the one who redeems us

I hope some of these thoughts will help you, and that they make the Gospel come alive. You will have your own way of looking at it, and your own way of hearing these words, your own way of seeing the actions, your own way of seeing what Jesus was like there, sitting tired on the side of the well. This is the Holiest of Holies, the Son of God, for "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son", and this is the one, he is sitting on the side of the stone well. The well is still there, it's a genuine place where I have been myself, and it is a really wonderful thing to say "He sat there".

I hope you will now take up this meditation in your own way.

What will you take away that will sustain you personally in your faith journey?

I mentioned above how in reflecting, we listen to the words, we see the persons, and then we see what they are doing; their actions. What I am taking away from my own reflection are the words where Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, "If you only knew the gift that God wants to give you." It links with something Mother Mary MacKillop said, "Let us recognise all the love which God has put around us."

Let us recognise all the signs of God's love around us. This is what I will take away: to know better the gift God wants to give me. He wants from me a drink of water, and he wants to give me the fullness of life.

This reflection was recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au.

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop

Let us help one another, and bear with one another, and ever strive to become what we should be, and what with God's help we can become.

St Ignatius of Loyola

Few souls understand what God would accomplish in them if they were to abandon themselves unreservedly to Him and if they were to allow His grace to mould them accordingly.

Reflection Questions

1. What can we learn from the humanity of Jesus as revealed in this passage? What is your reaction to Jesus who thirsts and is in need?
2. The identification of Jesus first as Jew, Prophet, Messiah, and then Saviour show us different and progressively more profound understandings of Jesus. How do I relate to Jesus in my life?
3. In my relationships with other people, can I think of a time I have looked past a person's current situation to focus rather on what they might become? How easy or hard is this to do?
4. The Samaritan woman overcame fear to tell the Good News. What is one way that I can take my enthusiasm of knowing Christ and share it with other people this Easter?
5. For Personal Reflection: What am I thirsting for? Hold this in prayer today. How can I be more open to the gifts that God wants to give me?



Jesus Encounters
a Blind Man

9th Sunday of Lent

4th Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

16 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord."

⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these."¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

"Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you."

John 9:1-41

⁹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to

me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Journal

▶ What prayer is emerging in me as I engage with this text?

▶ What word or phrase will I repeat this week to allow the insight of my *lectio divina* reading to find its home in me and begin to transform me?

Reflection – *Most Rev Anthony Randazzo, Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney*



What did you hear in this week's Gospel and what does it mean to you?

In the Gospels, the characters often represent ourselves, and the Scripture commentators tell us that we can find ourselves in each one of those characters. In today's Gospel, we look at the characters that begin with Jesus himself. And with Jesus, we see a man born blind, we see disciples, neighbours, Pharisees, and we see the parents of the man born blind. They are the characters that we come across. With those characters, we also see a lot of interaction, of dynamic relationships that are existing, not unlike our own. We see connections between people, like Jesus and the disciples; Jesus and the man born blind; the neighbours and the man born blind; and the Pharisees also with the man born blind. These characters are all encountering each other in human relationships, and we can see ourselves in each one of them.

When we begin the passage, we see that Jesus is walking along, and as he's walking along, he sees a man born blind, someone who had never seen, who is always enveloped in darkness. The disciples question Jesus, and when they question him, they ask questions about the law: "Why is this man like this? Whose fault is it?" These are legal questions. They are not actually challenging the law itself; what they are trying to do is ask Jesus to illuminate their minds, to shine a light into their own hearts so that they might be able to interpret the law for themselves so that they can live full and wholesome lives.

Blindness in this Gospel can represent the darkness of not knowing God. It can represent the darkness of not knowing others; and blindness can also represent the darkness of not knowing myself.

The Pharisees in this particular passage come across as being quite harsh, and they are often mistreated when we look at them, or just pushed aside as extras that we don't really want. But again, if we look closely, the text allows us to see that the Pharisees have the potential to be our friends. Why could they be our friends? Well, they ask questions, and they ask really probing questions. They ask strong questions that lead us to see where we might be with God, where we might be with others, and where we might be with ourselves.

These Pharisees point the way into relationships, and most importantly, they find us in those relationships asking the same questions. They ask things like, "How then does this man born blind see?" They challenge Jesus' authority, and when they do, they say things like, "We know that this man is a sinner." They enquire, "What did Jesus do to you?"

The passage begins and ends with Jesus, so he becomes bookends for us as we read through the text, and in between Jesus at the beginning and the end, we find ourselves. The key for me in this story, is that despite my darkness, my darkness with God, my darkness with others, and my darkness with myself, Christ is the light who meets me where he finds me in the same way that he meets the man born blind in the Gospel. Christ is the light who liberates me with the Word of Life, Jesus himself, and he liberates me with that word, showing me the works that God is doing in and through my own life. Christ is the light who radiates through me so that others may move beyond

blindness or darkness to the clear vision that God has for each one of us and for this world.

What will you take away that will sustain you personally in your faith journey?

The line that leaps out of this Gospel for me that will carry me along in my faith is that line from Jesus who says very simply, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." It sustains me because my life is not in darkness, but there are many shades of grey, and the thought of Christ lighting up my life along the way gives me great hope because it means I am not going to fall back into the shadow. I'm always going to be coming closer to what God is calling me to be.

This reflection was recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au.

St Thomas Aquinas

No person is in such darkness as to be completely devoid of divine light. The divine light shines in the darkness and radiates upon all.

St Catherine of Siena

Drive out darkness and spread light. Don't look at your weaknesses. Realise instead that in Christ crucified you can do everything.

Reflection questions:

1. In Jesus' encounter with the blind man, he brings the gift of sight. In what ways does Jesus bring light to my life? What difference does Jesus make in the way I see things?
2. In this passage, the disciples and the Pharisees asked pertinent questions in their desire to know God. In what areas of my faith do I hold questions? How might I begin to shed light on these?
3. The interactions in this Gospel speak of our own relationships. How can I see myself in the parents of the blind man in their response in fear to the Pharisees? In the Pharisees' questioning? In the blind man, and his response in belief to Jesus?
4. Do I allow the light of Christ to radiate through my life? How so? What is one way I can help bring this light to a person I know who is despairing, lonely or unhappy?
5. For Personal Reflection: Where do I see shadows and negativity in my relationship with God? In my relationship with another person? In my relationship with myself? Can I begin to allow the light of Christ to enter into these situations through prayer and reconciliation?

The background is a soft, warm-toned bokeh of light spots in shades of orange, yellow, and white. A wooden cross is visible on the left side, and a hand is reaching up from the bottom right corner. The overall mood is spiritual and hopeful.

Jesus Encounters
Lazarus, Martha and Mary

5th Sunday of Lent

5th Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:12-14

¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

¹³ And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

Romans 8:8-11

⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

John 11:1-45

¹¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.

Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."³⁵ Jesus began to weep.³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Journal

► What prayer is emerging in me as I engage with this text?

► What word or phrase will I repeat this week to allow the insight of my *lectio divina* reading to find its home in me and begin to transform me?



Reflection – *Most Rev Paul Bird CSsR, Bishop of Ballarat*

What did you hear in this week's Gospel and what does it mean to you?

There's great drama in this Sunday's Gospel, the story of the raising of Lazarus. Perhaps the most dramatic scene is right at the end when Jesus comes to the tomb and he calls out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man comes out of the tomb. This is an extraordinary event, the raising of someone from the dead. And yet when we look at the whole of the story, we find that there are a lot of ordinary elements in this narrative. You may recall that the story begins when Lazarus is unwell, and his sisters, Martha and Mary, are very concerned about him. That's something I'm sure we can identify with in our own life. When someone we know is not well – it might be a member of our family or a good friend – we know the concern that we have. Jesus shared this concern with those who were his very good friends.

As the story unfolds, we find that Jesus arrives too late to greet Lazarus before he has died. And it seems to me this is an extra sadness for Martha and Mary. They have the grief of the loss of their brother but they also have the grief that a good friend whom they know is very close to Lazarus hasn't been there in those final days. We too can identify with that, and share their kind of grief. We might think of the death of someone in our family or a good friend and we know the tears that can come with that and maybe that's sometimes compounded by the fact that someone wasn't able to be there to say farewell.

Then as the story continues, when Jesus does arrive, he's moved deeply with sympathy with Martha and Mary, and the text tells us that he saw Mary crying and this set him crying as well. He saw Mary weeping, and Jesus himself began to weep. This again, is something I'm sure that we could identify with. We may have been at a funeral of a good friend and we've seen those who are very close to that person in tears and their tears maybe bring tears to our eyes.

So in all of these ways, the story is a very ordinary story. There's the love of friends, there's the concern when someone is unwell, and there are the tears when we lose a friend. And yet, in the midst of all of that, we have the extraordinary conclusion that there in the middle of all those ordinary things of life, and joys and sadness, Jesus brings the extraordinary power of God. He stands there and says, "Lazarus, come out!" and the man who has been buried comes forward from the dead. This is something extraordinary in that very ordinary scene that we can identify with.

And the thought that comes to me from that is that Jesus does promise to be with us in our joys and sorrows, but more than that, he brings the power and the mercy of God right there in the middle of our daily life.

I hope these thoughts may have prompted some thoughts in your own mind as you reflect on the Gospel for this Sunday.

What will you take away that will sustain you personally in your faith journey?

So as we now think of a message or two that we might take away from the Gospel for this Sunday, one that comes to my mind is how Jesus shares the joys and sorrows of our life and if I make that

personal for myself, it's how Jesus shares the happiness and sometimes the tears that come in my life. We read very clearly in this Gospel the sympathy, the empathy of Jesus for our happiness and for our tears.

And another message that I do take away from this is an extraordinary example of sympathy for other people. And of course, that's a call for, I believe, all of us. As Jesus was sharing in that joy and sorrow of Lazarus and of Martha and Mary, I'll be doing what I can to share in the joys and sorrows of the people that I meet day by day. I hope you can draw some lesson or a message yourself from this reading.

This reflection was recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au.

Mary MacKillop

There where you are you will find God.

Pope Francis

We face so many challenges in life: poverty, distress, humiliation, the struggle for justice, persecutions, the difficulty of daily conversion, the effort to remain faithful to our call to holiness, and many others. But if we open the door to Jesus and allow him to be part of our lives, if we share our joys and sorrows with him, then we will experience the peace and joy that only God, who is infinite love, can give.

Reflection Questions

1. In my times of sorrow and my times of joy, do I have a sense of Christ present and sharing in these situations? In which of these do I find it easier to know of the closeness of Christ?
2. Do I find it easier to empathise and share in the sorrow or the joy of others? What might prevent me from sharing myself fully in these situations?
3. In this passage, we see Jesus' humanness through his tenderness and affection. How does this passage enrich your understanding of who Jesus is?
4. Can I name an example of the extraordinary power of God in the midst of the everyday, ordinary things of my life?
5. For personal reflection: Is there a situation in which you feel bound and long to hear the words, "<<Your Name>>, Come Out!?" Bring this to Christ in prayer, that the extraordinary power of God might enter into this situation to bring new life.



Jesus Encounters
Suffering and Death

Passion Sunday

Passion Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-7

⁴The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

Philippians 2:6-11

⁶Though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 26:14-27:66

¹⁴Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹⁷On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. ²⁰When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹and while they were eating, he said,

"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."²² And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?"²³ He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."³⁰ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'³² But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."³³ Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you."³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."³⁵ Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated.³⁸ Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."³⁹ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him."⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.⁵¹ Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and

you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end.

⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" ⁶²The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" ⁶³But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy.

⁶⁶What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death." ⁶⁷Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, ⁶⁸saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." ⁷¹When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷²Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." ⁷³After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." ⁷⁴Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

²⁷When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. ²They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor. ³When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." ⁷After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. ⁸For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. ¹⁵Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd,

anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ¹⁸For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." ²⁰Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²²Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" ²⁴So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

²⁶So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. ²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. ³²As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁶then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³⁷Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ⁴²"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" ⁴⁴The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. ⁴⁵From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

⁵⁰Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to

many.⁵⁴ Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"⁵⁵ Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him.⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus.⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate⁶³ and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'⁶⁴ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first."⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can."⁶⁶ So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Journal

▶ What prayer is emerging in me as I engage with this text?

▶ What word or phrase will I repeat this week to allow the insight of my *lectio divina* reading to find its home in me and begin to transform me?

Reflection – *Most Rev Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE, Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes*

What did you hear in this week's Gospel and what does it mean to you?

What will you take away that will sustain you personally in your faith journey?



Dear friends, our Gospel passage is the Passion. It's very long, and it's very heavy. My initial response in reading that passage was one of depression. There seemed to be a litany of human failure. First of all, we had Judas' betrayal; that's what it starts with, and it goes downhill from there. We have the disciples who weren't able to stay awake for Jesus when he really needed the support of his friends and his followers in the Garden of Gethsemane - they couldn't even stay awake; failure. The Chief Priests and the Council; failure. These were the religious leaders, the ones who should have been Jesus' greatest supporters in time of need, but they were his persecutors; failure. Then his capture; what a failure. The people that he came to serve were the instruments of his capture by the Romans; failure. Even one of the thieves who was crucified with him had a go at him; so this litany of human failure. St Peter denied him three times; his number two; failure. It's a depressing story, really.

This litany of failure culminates in, of course, our Lord's death, Jesus dying on the Cross in the most terrible way that someone could be put to death. All his friends, where were they? Where were all the people he healed? Where were all these people that he served, that came in their thousands to listen to him? They're not there; just a couple of his hard-core followers and his mum; I found that very, very sad; very distressing. I read it every year, but still, my response to that was, "How would Jesus have felt when so many people had let him down and failed him?" And I thought, wow, that's the story of our life, really, because we all fail Jesus.

But despite that litany of failures in that Gospel passage, Jesus loved each and every one of them. He didn't turn his back on them and say, "Well, if you don't want me, I'm off, you're on your own." He loved them that much that he went through all this, he endured their failures, he suffered and he died for love of all people, even those who rejected him.

I think the saddest part of that Passion was Judas who failed Jesus, who betrayed him, but he let his failure keep him away from coming back to Jesus and saying I'm sorry. And that was really, really sad because he was one of the Apostles; he would have known that Jesus would have forgiven him. He should have known, shouldn't he? But he let his failure and his sin keep him away from Jesus, and ultimately he hung himself. I find that profoundly sad.

But I think for the rest of us, the good message from that Gospel is that it doesn't matter what we do, Jesus loves us, and he died for us. So with Jesus, failure can be turned into something good because it can give us humility, to realise that even St Peter failed. But Jesus transformed that failure through grace into success; into holiness. And I think that's the essence of the Gospel for me. So while it is distressing, it is sad, it's a bit of a depressing look at human nature, I think the real message of that Gospel is one of hope for us all. It doesn't matter what we do or what our failings are, Jesus loves us despite ourselves.

This reflection was recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au.

Pope Francis

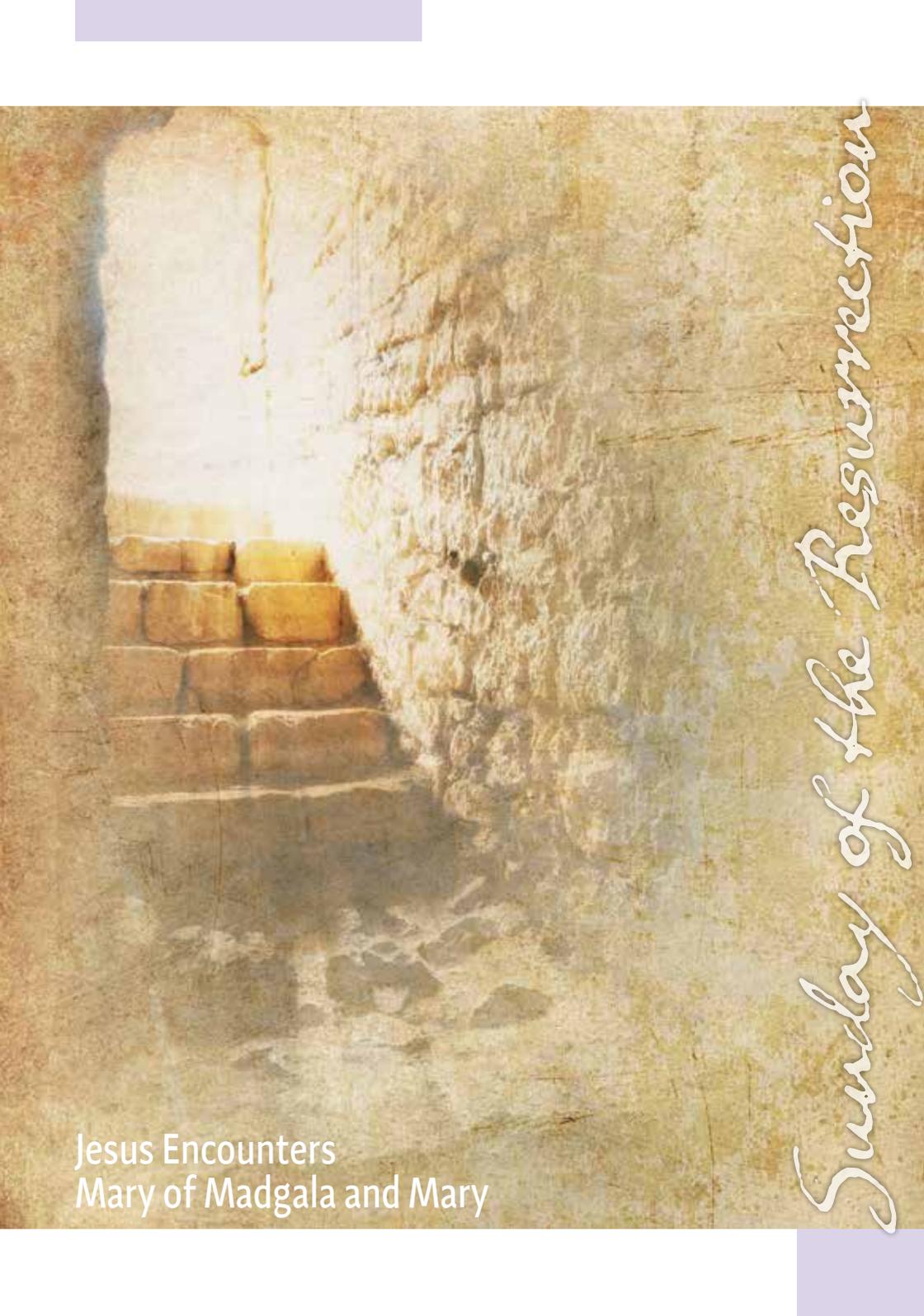
Someone might say to me: "No, Father, I did so many reprehensible things ... I am a great sinner... I cannot begin from scratch!" You are wrong! You can begin from scratch! Why? Because he is waiting for you, he is close to you, he loves you, he is merciful, he forgives you, he gives you the strength to begin again from scratch! Everybody! And so we are able to open our eyes again, to overcome sadness and mourning to strike up a new song.

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop

We feel our crosses hard at times, but our courage should rise with them.

Reflection Questions

1. This Gospel lists a 'litany of failures'. Which of these stood out for me the most in listening to the Gospel today? Why?
2. What new insights about Jesus have emerged for me from reading this Gospel?
3. How is this Gospel a 'message of hope'?
4. Can I think of an example where failure towards God was transformed, through grace, into success and holiness?
5. For personal reflection: Have I allowed my failures to keep me from God? Am I able to place my trust in our loving God and be open to God's forgiveness this Lent through prayer or the Sacrament of Penance?

A painting of a stone staircase leading up to a bright light, symbolizing the Resurrection. The scene is set in a dimly lit, stone-walled interior. The staircase is made of large, rectangular stone blocks and leads up to a bright, glowing light source at the top of the stairs. The walls are made of rough, textured stone, and the floor is also made of stone. The overall atmosphere is one of hope and divine light.

Jesus Encounters
Mary of Madgala and Mary

Sunday of the Resurrection

Sunday of the Resurrection

Matthew 28:1-10

28 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."



Reflection - *Most Rev Michael McCarthy, Bishop of Rockhampton*

What did you hear in this week's Gospel and what does it mean to you?

The Gospel of Easter Sunday brings great excitement and for me, it's one of the exciting Gospels to read. It describes how at the empty tomb they found only the bandages, and yet the announcement was, "He is not here, he has risen". Surprisingly, Mary of Magdala and Mary discover it is Jesus who greets them at the door of the tomb, and says to them "Go and tell the disciples that I have risen." Mary of Magdala and Mary were entrusted to tell the good news. They were the ones to pass on that Resurrection faith that we celebrate on this Easter Sunday.

They hear Jesus' words, "Do not be afraid." And there we see the risen Jesus, there in the midst of life saying, "Do not be afraid." It is the risen Jesus who walks with us Sunday after Sunday, day after day, he is there among us, through our joys and sorrows he says to us, "Do not be afraid."

For me, this has been a marvellous Gospel to reflect on, especially now for the next few weeks as we discover how the early disciples like Peter and Paul put into practice the risen faith, and as they sighted new communities and invited more and more people to become disciples of Jesus Christ. For me, this transforming Gospel says, "Do not be afraid, I am with you." It is the risen Christ who accompanies us throughout the whole of our life.

What will you take away that will sustain you personally in your faith journey?

For Mary of Magdala and Mary, their life was transformed when they met the risen Jesus. They had the confidence to go out and tell the disciples and proclaim that Christ had risen. It is with this confidence that we go forth at Easter time knowing that Christ has risen from the dead, and it's the same Christ that walks with us day after day in our midst, and who transforms all of us today. Do not be afraid, because he is with us.

This reflection was recorded and can be viewed at www.dbb.org.au.

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop

Whatever troubles may be before you, accept them bravely, remembering Whom you are trying to follow. Do not be afraid. Love one another, bear with one another, and let charity guide you all your life. God will reward you as only He can.

Julian of Norwich

In my folly, before this time I often wondered why, by the great foreseeing wisdom of God, the onset of sin was not prevented: for then, I thought, all should have been well. ... But Jesus, who in this vision informed me of all that is needed by me, answered with these words and said: 'It was necessary that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.'

Pope Francis

All of us are invited to “go out” as missionary disciples, each generously offering their talents, creativity, wisdom and experience in order to bring the message of God’s tenderness and compassion to the entire human family. By virtue of the missionary mandate, the Church cares for those who do not know the Gospel, because she wants everyone to be saved and to experience the Lord’s love. She “is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 12) and to proclaim mercy in every corner of the world, reaching every person, young or old.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus comes suddenly and surprisingly to meet Mary Magdalene and Mary in this Gospel. Does my faith have room for the newness and surprise that God wants to show me?
2. Do I have the confidence to tell other people about the Good News of the Risen Jesus? Can I name a time when I did this? What was the response?
3. How might fear hold me back from being a witness to my faith? Can I hear deeply Jesus’ words “Do not be afraid”?
4. Do I have a sense of Christ journeying with me each day? What difference might this make to my life and vocation?
5. For personal reflection: Where in my life am I longing to experience a newness, a freshness, new life? Bring this in prayer to the Lord during this Easter Season.

Easter Prayer

*Christ Jesus, you are the light of the world –
set us on fire with your Spirit as we proclaim the wonder
of your Resurrection.*

*You triumphed over sin and death –
be present in our midst with your eternal life.*

*Come to us with your untiring strength –
and reveal in our lives the loving-kindness of God.*

*You have ended death forever and given us new life –
Guide our steps today along the path that leads to God.*

*You alone can reconcile people and create a new spirit
within them –
end the conflicts which divide our world.*

*In your risen body you brought the good news of
salvation to the women and the apostles –
let us be your witnesses in the present age.*

Amen.

The Gospel of Easter is very clear: we need to go back there, to see Jesus risen, and to become witnesses of his Resurrection. This is not to go back in time; it is not a kind of nostalgia. It is returning to our first love, in order to receive the fire which Jesus has kindled in the world and to bring that fire to all people, to the very ends of the earth." (Pope Francis, Easter Vigil Homily, 2014)



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