

# SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 29

Hello all!

As I settle to write this week's Parish Letter, that song that I've referred to before has just come on: 'Stuck inside these four walls, sent inside forever, never seeing no one ...' (*Band on the Run, Paul McCartney and Wings*). Our resilience is being tested, isn't it? Some signs are showing up to keep us urging hopefully onwards – VCE students at College for their GATs, other levels coming back to School next week: I can imagine that amongst the reorganisation this means for family life, there may be some relief: I hope so. And it is encouraging for others who aren't involved directly in Schools/Colleges, too.

As I was sending last week's Letter I noticed that the 'International Day of the Older Person' had just passed. I wonder when you come to consider yourself as 'an older person'? Getting a Senior's Card? the Aged Pension? I have both, yet don't feel that I'm 'old'. I'm in the age category when I'm 'vulnerable' to the Virus, they say. I'm older that I used to be! We will all be an 'older person' one day. Am I there yet?

Whatever about our own personal situations and how old we 'feel', we have all become concerned about the quality of care in our Aged Care system. Justel and I observe great care being given to residents in the five facilities in our Parish when we visit for Mass or are called for the Sacrament of Anointing. The Royal Commission is telling us that there are some terrible situations, too, across Australia.

One of the dedicated Ministry groups in our Parish is the twenty Parishioners who visit our local Aged Care each week – in 'usual' times: currently that Ministry is suspended because of the number of visitors permitted. So, too, our Ministry to those in their own homes. These Parishioners share their friendship, their care, their faith-in-action, their prayer, Holy Communion and the life of our Parish with these people – who repeatedly express great appreciation for their visits!

An attachment with this letter challenges a point of view that has been reported in the COVID crisis: *Putting a lower value on older lives is unethical.*

Another type of reflection is in the attachment from an older person: *Crabby Old Man ???*

It's often the case that Justel and I are called as a person is approaching death, and they or their family have asked for the Sacrament of Anointing. We have been permitted to continue this ministry during the lockdown. It is a privileged moment when the family prepares to hand someone they have shared life with here into the New Life promised in God who will always be faithful. When we say that Jesus is the model for life, as well as meaning the way in which we live our lives here and now, we also mean that His death and resurrection into New Life models what happens to us when we die. "May the Lord touch your spirit so that you know that, whatever lies ahead, you will be safe in God's care."

I like the way Billy Graham reflects (American evangelist who preached to 130,000 people at the MCG in 1959 – the record for the largest crowd there):

*"I see death as a 'change of address'.*

*I'm not looking forward to dying;*

*I am looking forward to what it will be like when I am held by Christ in Resurrection.*

*And I might finally know why there is such pain and suffering in life here, and why evil has such an influence here."*

*This 'changing of address' will mean having to leave behind some very familiar parts of life that have shaped me, and being sad about that.*

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*And really looking forward to the new place and coming to be 'at home' there.*

Perhaps in that context it is helpful to remember some of our Church's teaching about the stage before death: a terminally ill patient can choose not to pursue "treatments that provide only a precarious or painful extension of life." And from the Catechism of the Catholic Church on not being obliged to take extraordinary measures for those terminally ill:

*2278 Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of "over-zealous" treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted.*

*2279 Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.*

Customarily we are very generous supporters of Mercy Palliative Care each year.

Last Sunday was the feast of St Francis of Assisi. It's a pity, I think, when his life is reduced to that of a simple man who loved the world of nature. As well as that, Francis crossed many borders and built many bridges in his time. He transgressed the social, civil and Church borders of his community to embrace and then live with lepers who had been ostracised from the ordinary life of Assisi. He crossed the border of the Fifth Crusade's battle to engage in a peaceful encounter and exchange of ideas with the Muslim Sultan, despite the vilification of Muslims by the majority of Christian Europe at the time. And of course he moved across the border of species when he referred to nonhuman creatures as his "sisters" and "brothers," recognizing that lines of demarcation between the human and nonhuman are in some ways artificial constructs, given our interdependence on one another and universal reliance on our common source, God.

On the feast, Pope Francis released his new Encyclical '*Brothers and Sisters All*'.

"Once this health crisis passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation," Francis writes in the opening chapter, which addresses the "dark clouds" the Pope says he sees hanging over the world.

Among things the Pope puts up for discussion: trickle-down economics, the world's unfair distribution of wealth, continued use of the just war theory and the death penalty, and populist leaders who appeal to people's "basest and most selfish inclinations."

"Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all." "God willing, after all this, we will think no longer in terms of 'them' and 'those', but only of 'us'."

There are two attachments with this letter – an introduction, and an overview of the Encyclical.

As I round off this Letter, very dark clouds are gathering to bring the heavy rain that has been forecast. They will pass.

'Bless us, O GOD, with the resilience and purpose to come to new days, with minds and spirits renewed!'

Maurie Cooney

Parish Priest