

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 21

Greetings to all as we complete the first 1½ weeks of this Stage 4 lockdown!

It seems longer than that already, are you finding?

It's certainly making a difference – there is so little traffic on the roads as I head out to the shops or my one-hour exercise. Please may this make a difference to the spread and impact of the Virus, and rein it right in!!

And then what direction will we be taking? There's talk about the AFL Grand Final being in Perth or Brisbane; the organisers of the Boxing Day Sydney to Hobart boat race are looking at changes to their rules; and the MCG cricket is scheduled for that day, too; the Tennis Open at the end of January have described four alternatives to its usual routine, just in case. Our churches won't be opened for some time yet, I think.

This weekend's Gospel reading has Jesus 'changing direction'. Do you remember that in last Sunday's Gospel he crossed the lake from the Jewish side to the non-Jewish side. His first loyalty may have been to his Jewish patterns, religion and culture. In this Gospel he is pushed by a woman 'on the other side' to expand that. He responds to her, "How great is your faith!"

In several critical stages of Jesus' ministry it is women who keep driving the growth of faith. Think again of Mary Magdalene being the first to announce Jesus' resurrection. Of course there are men, too – think of the Roman centurion who draws from Jesus his admiration "I have not seen faith like this even amongst my own people!"

Who are the women and men in your life who have brought you to faith, sustained you in faith, pushed you further in faith? An attachment with this letter names a small number of women from across our Tradition who have shown faith-in-action.

Of course there is the presence and pattern for our lives of Mary, mother of Jesus, too. And what a strength of faith Joseph was for that new family!

One of Mary's major feasts occurs this Saturday, her Assumption into heaven, eternity life. So many titles and descriptions have been given to Mary over the years. An attachment offers a fresh Litany of Mary, taking the gospels as its starting point.

As well as in our own Tradition, Mary is one of the highly honored figures in the Muslim religion, with the majority of Muslims viewing her as one of the most righteous women to have lived, and some viewing her as a prophet.

One of the initiatives of Pope Francis has been to renew the relationships of our Church with other religious traditions. Several times he has met with Muslim leaders, desiring to share with one another those elements of faith that we share. Muslims and Jews and Christians all refer to Abraham as 'our father in faith'.

This urging that the religions reach out to one another was given a new lease of life in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. That Council is the most significant teaching body of our Church in our lifetimes. Pope John Paul II called it 'the sure

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compass' to guide our Church forward. Pope Francis has that Council as the key reference point for his leadership of our Church.

Amongst that Council's teaching documents, four are named as 'constitutions' – that is, they name what constitutes being part of the Church. They are about God, Liturgy, the Church itself, and The Church in the Modern World.

Look at that last title: ***IN*** the world.

Its opening words state that *"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts."*

This is why our Church has established bodies like Catholic Care (they phoned during the week in great appreciation of our contribution last week) and Caritas (where our contributions to Project Compassion go). The Church doesn't have a life separate from the 'comings-and-goings', the 'pains-and-joys', the successes-and-failures' of life. It's in the reality of life that the love of God, that we know in Jesus, has to have an impact. As well as our own individual good works, it's the Church as a community who has to 'lift up the life of the world'. That same document says that *"the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served."*

During the past week devastation struck Beirut in Lebanon. An attachment indicates Caritas' response to that.

You may remember that around this time of year each year – the end of August – our Australian Bishops publish a 'Social Justice Statement'. That wants us to look at and respond to life of our country with the eyes and action of Jesus. This year's Statement will name Mental Health as a factor in Australian life that requires attention. I'll tell you about that when the Statement is released.

On 'Songs of Praise' last Sunday (11.30 on ABC2), they were back in Scotland during the season of the 'pink-footed goose' which come in thousands during summer to feed. Rather than a dove, some of the ancient Celts apparently had the pink-footed goose as a symbol of the Holy Spirit! The description was: persistent, insistent, going where it wants to; always flies and feeds with others (the V shape), all supporting one another in the slipstream as they fly.

May we let ourselves be impacted on by the life of that Holy Spirit!

To finish this week on a light note: try the 'brainteasers' on an attachment with this letter and share them around!

May the power of the 'pink-footed goose' be with you! May the blessings of God's Holy Spirit be leading you on!

Maurie Cooney
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