

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

ABN 56 751 544 850

Telephone: 9366 2146 Fax: 9366 9876

Email: stalbans@cam.org.au

Website <http://pol.org.au/stalbanssydenham>

4 Winifred Street
ST ALBANS VICTORIA 3021

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PARISH UPDATE 70

Greetings everyone!

“The extension of the COVID lockdown means that **our churches will remain closed until next Wednesday morning (28th July)**. There will be no activity in our churches over that time.”

Alongside that announcement there was a pick-me-up moment as I headed off on a walk up Alfrieda St. Blossoms have come out on two trees (between William and Henry Sts)! It seems all out of ‘whack’ – and it also shouts out as a great sign of hope that “this too will end”!

Various feelings and emotions are being experienced during the continuing lockdown aren’t there – within ourselves and around us? One might be a grim determination to do the right thing and try to stay in charge of as much of life as we can. That was expressed with strong resolve in a section of today’s Office of Readings in the ‘Daily Prayer of the Church’: it is from St Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians (4:8-9) -

*We are often troubled, but not crushed;
sometimes in doubt, but never in despair;
there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend;
and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed.*

That’s like the blossoms breaking through the bare winter branches of those Alfrieda St trees – not giving in, finding a way to come through.

Another expression of what some may be experiencing is in the attachment with this letter – words of a ‘prayer-song’ whose refrain is –

*O shelter me, O shelter me:
The way ahead is dark and difficult to see.
O shelter me, O shelter me:
All will be well if only you will shelter me!*

At Masses this weekend we would have been listening to the beginning of a five-week series of Readings on the Eucharist, that primary Gift and gathering point that we are missing so much. Although this year’s Reading cycle is mostly shaped by the Gospel of Mark, these Eucharist readings come from the Gospel of John.

As you know, we have Sunday readings in a 3-year cycle - this year we are reading from Mark’s gospel, last year it was Matthew’s, and next year it will be Luke’s. In a 3-year cycle, where does the gospel of John come in? Well, Mark’s gospel is quite short, and so there’s ‘space’ in that year of the cycle to include some of John - which is this year.

Usually this series on the Eucharist continues for five weeks in which John takes us on an exploration through stories, sayings, teachings. That starts this weekend with the story of the miracle of the feeding of the crowds. This year, however, is different because the feasts of Mary MacKillop and of the Assumption of Mary fall on Sundays. They take precedence, and so we will have just 3 weeks of readings from John on Eucharist. .

We know much about Eucharist, of course. It’s good to recall that, and to be open to appreciating this Gift in more ways. For example, we start with bread and wine. Bread is essential for life. It shows our dependence on something outside ourselves to keep us alive. We have to take something from outside ourselves if we are to remain alive. Jesus is to us what bread is to us. As he said, “I am the Bread of Life”, real, fulfilled, completed Life. And we have wine, which is festive, which can enlarge our lives, which draws us together as we ‘share a drink’ and ‘wait until everyone is gathered to make a toast’. Eucharist nudges us forward towards the ‘feast of the Kingdom of Heaven’ when all are gathered in New Life.

Another experience we are missing is the gathering of family, isn't it? And amidst these restrictions, the coming week gives us the first 'World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly'!! Our Church has honoured grandparents over the ages through the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus, occurring this week on Monday, 26th July. Let us pray:

*I thank You, Lord, for the comfort of Your presence:
even in times of loneliness, You are my hope and my confidence,
You have been my rock and my fortress since my youth!
I thank You for having given me a family and for having blessed me with a long life.
I thank You for moments of joy and difficulty,
for the dreams that have already come true in my life
and for those that are still ahead of me.
I thank You for this time of renewed fruitfulness to which You call me.
Increase, O Lord, my faith; make me a channel of your peace;
teach me to embrace those who suffer more than me, to never stop dreaming,
and to tell of your wonders to new generations.
Send Your Spirit, O Lord, to renew the world, that the storm of the pandemic might be
calmed,
the poor consoled and wars ended.
Sustain me in weakness and help me to live life to the full in each moment that You give
me,
in the certainty that you are with me every day, even until the end of the age.
Amen.*

From various sources:

"Nobody can do for little children what grandparents do. Grandparents sort of sprinkle stardust over the lives of little children."

"Young people need something stable to hang on to — a culture connection, a sense of their own past, a hope for their own future. They need what grandparents can give them."

"If nothing is going well, call your grandmother."

"What children need most are the essentials that grandparents provide in abundance. They give unconditional love, kindness, patience, humour, comfort, lessons in life. And, most importantly, cookies."

"Grandma always made you feel she had been waiting to see just you all day and now the day was complete."

"When grandparents enter the door, discipline flies out the window."

"Sometimes our grandmas and grandpas are like grand-angels."

"Becoming a grandmother is wonderful. One moment you're just a mother. The next you are all-wise and prehistoric."

Blessings for staying well and being hopeful even as we miss the great Gift of gathering for Eucharist and of greeting one another face-to-face!

Maurie Cooney
(Parish Priest)