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ST ALBANS VICTORIA 3021

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PARISH UPDATE 9

Ascension greetings to everyone!

Many people who have visited Rome would have stopped by the Castel Sant'Angelo (from which you get a wonderful view along the street leading to St Peter's). On the top of that ancient building there is a bronze statue of the Archangel Michael putting his sword back in its scabbard as a signal of the end of the plague of 590.

Ah, yes: 'this too will pass', this experience of ours experience of living in altered ways because of this virus pandemic. And some signs of that may be there in the tentative easing of some of the restrictions.

Sorting our lives as bearers of the life of Christ is where this weekend's gospel story of the Ascension of Jesus draws us. We are moving from the Season of Easter towards the celebration of the new age of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, which we will celebrate next weekend. In that change of focus, the emphasis turns to the continuing presence of 'new life Jesus' in our own lives, and how we shape them according to our basic faith of God's love for all people, renewing us again and again unto eternal life.

This constant reflection has an extra layer of anxiety for us this year – "How long, O Lord, how long?" as Psalm 13 calls out. How much longer must those in frontline works keep on with the draining hours, risking exposure themselves as they protect us and serve us? How long must those working in supermarkets, in transport, in garbage collection and other essential services? How long can parents and children in lockdown stay patient and loving for one another? We used to structure our lives with routines: now "the time is out of joint", as Shakespeare's troubled Hamlet observed.

There are risks in this situation that we may find it even harder to shape our lives according to 'new life Jesus'.

There's that dramatic story of Peter pulling a knife on one of the temple guards when they approached Jesus in the Garden, and then shortly afterwards denying Jesus three times. Peter is drained, frightened, blustering, confused. He doesn't mean to betray Jesus, surely, but he does.

Peter is like all of us, falling into unintentional sin, unintentionally causing pain to others. Any of us could be Peter. In this increasingly disconnected world (working from home, stood down, unemployed, social life all but cut out), we are also more connected with some people at very close quarters. We can hurt without meaning to, and it's easy to feel hurt without knowing where to lay the blame.

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Ascension-Pentecost is a great opportunity to name again for ourselves that the Way of Jesus is our Way. In good times and in bad, we belong to the Lord, we are sharers in the life of His Spirit!

There has been some slight easing in the regulations for some church gatherings – for funerals and weddings, for example. But we have to stay at home on Saturday nights and Sundays. Here's an important teaching from St Augustine from long ago (354-430):

We are praising God at this moment when we are gathered together in this church building. When anyone leaves to go home, in a sense we cease to praise God – but not really. Provided we do not cease living a good life, we praise God continually. We stop praising God only when we turn aside from righteousness and all that pleases God. For if we never turn aside from a holy life, though our tongues are silent our lives speak aloud; God has ears for what our hearts are saying.

For some, Schools reopen next week! Those young Parishioners – and their parents dropping them off – will be 'out there', working another series of moves into their day. My admiration continues to grow for our Principals, teachers and other staff for their constant commitment to provide opportunities for our young people to continue to learn and grow! They, too, have their own personal lives to manage – we thank you!

In this 'change of seasons' time for our Church here are some prayers:

- from Ascension Day Mass:

Jesus Christ ascended not to distance himself from us but so that we, his people, might be confident of following where he, our Head and Founder, has gone before us.

- looking forward to Pentecost:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and we shall be re-created.

And You shall renew the face of the earth.

Have a good week! Take care! Stay warm! Blessings!

Maurie Cooney
Parish Priest