

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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ST ALBANS VICTORIA 3021

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PARISH UPDATE 39

Greetings all!

Within the season of Advent there is a special 'novena' of nine days from 17th up to Christmas. The Readings of the Mass on each of those days take in a broad sweep of the story of God referring to creation and to Abraham from so long ago through to the announcement of Mary's and Elizabeth's pregnancies and the forthcoming births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Along the way there are great stories of some of the ancestors of Jesus, through whom God is always pushing forward so that one day life will be fulfilled and complete for all.

As well as the prominent figures, such as David and Moses, there is an array of not-so-well-known characters. This mixture of all and everyone includes an unorthodox prophet, who doesn't come from the religious establishment and who attracts crowds in the desert; the homeowner; a Roman centurion; fishermen; a shepherd; a paralytic; a son who rethinks his original 'no' to his father; an unwed mother; her puzzled fiancé; her older pregnant cousin; and the two babies. Ordinary people ... just like us! Look how ordinary people just like us have a role in the unfolding story of God's being amongst the people. In case we might think that they are somehow 'specially chosen and set apart', think of the preaching of Jesus as he repeatedly surrounds himself with 'ordinary' people. And he entrusts the mission of his kingdom to them.

Remember those words of St Francis of Assisi: 'you are to be preaching the presence of Christ always: if necessary you might occasionally have to use words'. Yes: by the way we live our lives we can be like that great Advent figure, John the Baptist, being a sort of light, shining in the lives of others by the way we are with them – hopeful, positive, supporting, compassionate, enjoyable.

Mary MacKillop had John the Baptist as one of her favourites. What are the ways you can be this sort of pointer – showing that the coming of Christ and his Way are really in our world? Whatever it means to you in your circumstances, Advent asks us all to consider what in our lives assists the presence of Christ to be real.

It is precisely this 'showing-forth-the-life-of-Christ' that our young Parishioners have been called to, challenged with, and blessed for in the Sacrament of Confirmation. We gathered in ten ceremonies for the Sacrament in the past three weeks, part of which had them naming figures from the story of the Church who have lived by the 'fruits of the Spirit'. It is now their turn to take to that mission, supported always, we hope, by the community of the Church.

Our 'church re-opening team' has met again during this week, and planned our way forward. See attachments for the times of Masses, including Christmas Eve/Day, the weekend of 26/27 December, New Year's Day, and a new schedule commencing on the weekend of 3/4 January 2021. All Masses at Christmas and on weekends require bookings in advance – this is essential to make sure that we comply with the regulations for possible 'contact tracing' if required, and that we contain the numbers in our churches

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to 160 – the number we are permitted by the ‘2 square metre’ restriction. See attachments with this letter for details.

To celebrate the Season of Advent and Christmas, the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne is hosting a TV carols special entitled “Jesus is Christmas” on Sunday 20 December at 7pm. Presented in partnership with Australian Catholic University, Mercy Health and Villa Maria Catholic Homes, the one-hour program features a line up of local and international artists including singer and performer Silvie Paladino, ARIA Award winning artist and X-Factor Australia Vocal Director Gary Pinto, international opera singer Michael Petruccelli, The SAGA, and other local artists and Parish choirs. The carols special will be broadcast on free-to-air TV via C31 (channel 44 on digital TV) and streamed online at the Archdiocesan YouTube channel.

Reflections on this time of year come in a couple of attachments with this letter – taking the image of ‘light’ as we continue to light another Advent candle each week, and the underlying dynamic of ‘blessing’ which Mary was so aware of: she features in this Sunday’s Gospel Reading, hearing the message the ‘With God, nothing is impossible!’

Much activity this week as end-of-year gatherings take place. Enjoy that, enjoy the anticipation of being together at Christmas; blessings for ‘good Advent-ing’!

Maurie Cooney
Parish Priest