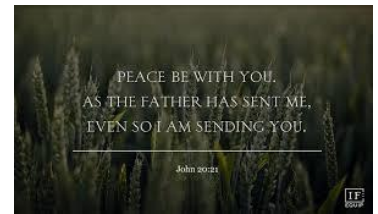


St Thomas More's Parish

St Thomas More's Catholic Parish, a welcoming people of faith, lives out God's Mission, embracing love, justice and peace.

We acknowledge the Wakka Wakka, Giabal and Jarowair people, the Traditional Owners who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.



71 A Ramsay Street Toowoomba Qld 4350 Ph: 4635 9555 Fax: 4635 5742

Parish Leader: a/h phone: 0407 804 461. Email: parishleader@stthomasmores.org.au

Parish Email: parishoffice@stthomasmores.org.au Parish Council Email: parishcouncil@stthomasmores.org.au

Parish Website: www.stthomasmores.org.au Parish Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/stmparishtwmba/>

Second Sunday of Easter Year A: 18 - 19 April, 2020

Readings: Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Not so long ago we used to speak of the Sundays "after" Easter. The terminology has changed and we now speak of the Sundays "of" Easter. In other words, we now recognise that the liturgical readings and prayers for each Sunday between Easter and Pentecost invite us into different movements of the one great symphony of resurrection faith. Today's gospel tells of fear and joy and blessing. We bring our present experience of pandemic into dialogue with all of this.

The first scene in today's gospel has the disciples hiding behind closed doors "for fear" of those who had handed Jesus over to be executed by the Roman authorities. As supporters of someone executed on a political charge, they had reason to be fearful. Jesus appears among them, offers a greeting of peace, and tells them that he has been sent by God, his "Father". They receive from him the gift of the Holy Spirit. He sends them in turn to bring peace and to mediate the forgiveness of God through the power of the Spirit. The story invites us as believers to place ourselves in the shoes of the earliest disciples. It invites us to be open to receive the gift of the Spirit, to emerge from behind the doors that close us in on ourselves and that prevent us from rising above the fear of reprisals in the pursuit of justice and peace.

The second and third scenes in today's gospel focus on Thomas who was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared in their midst. Thomas seems to trust only his own experience. We all know people like Thomas. They test our patience because they seem to lack imagination. Then they make big statements when they come around to understanding what everyone else has known for a while. If we think, however, that those who hear in the first place are any better than Thomas, we need to note that the doors are still closed eight days later! The simple fact of knowing has not dispelled the fears. Even those who do believe and trust often need time to take the gospel message on board.

All three readings this Sunday affirm those who believe without "seeing". In the reading from Acts, many who had not seen the risen Jesus are drawn to the community of faith-filled believers. The community addressed in 1 Peter have "never seen him [the Christ]" and yet they love him and are filled with inexpressible joy. In the gospel, we too are declared blessed: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe".

As we continue to celebrate Easter, we join with the global community in celebrating the 50th annual Earth Day on Wednesday of this week. The theme for 2020 is climate action. We have dispelled our fears, listened to the science on Coronavirus and taken courageous action. We might pray for the same courageous action to save our planetary home.

Reflection by Sister of Mercy, Sr Veronica Lawson RSM, Theologian and Biblical Scholar

Parish Leader:.....Michael Bermingham
Priest Director:..... Michael O'Brien
Pastoral Council:..... Terry Carter
Finance Committee:..... Tim Davis
Secretary:..... Donna Pugh
Secretary:.....Jenny Bartkus
School Principal:Michael Cash
APRE:Kristin Byrne
School Board:.....Karen Tobin

Parish Safeguards Contact:
Sarah Holcombe – 0408 193 636

Next Sunday
25 and 26 April 2020

3rd Sunday of Easter:

No Mass

Readings: Acts of the Apostles 2:14, 22-33
1 Peter 1:17-21
Luke 24:13-35

Thought for the Week

"Our civilization - so competitive, so individualistic, with its frenetic rhythms of production and consumption, its extravagant luxuries, its disproportionate profits for just a few - needs to downshift, take stock and renew itself,"
Pope Francis – Easter Sunday 2020

April 2020 HAPPENINGS IN OUR PARISH

Parish Newsletter:

Paper copies are available outside the front door of the Church and near the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. Weekday Mass booklets for April are also available in paper copies – in the same spot as the Newsletters.

Caring for Each Other:

As a community of faith, we are called to be aware of those around us in the community. Please keep in touch with each other and be particularly mindful of people who may be on their own. If you need assistance or know of someone who requires assistance from the Parish, please contact the Office and we will follow up.

Caring for Our Staff:

We have now placed signs outside the Parish Office asking people who come to the door to stop and phone the office to talk to staff. Staff coming to the door may talk to you through the screen door rather than opening it. Please don't be offended by this as it is being done to abide by distancing requirements and in the interests of staff health and safety. If you phone and it goes to messages, please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as we are able.

Planned Giving and Parish Contributions:

Many thanks to those who are dropping their Planned Giving Envelopes with their weekly offering into the mailbox near the door to the Parish Office. You are also welcome to contribute online through internet banking. Details as follows:

Account Name: St Thomas More's

BSB Number: 064786

Account Number: 514001500

Please note: Account No has been updated.

Reference: Your Envelope Number (if part of Planned Giving) or Loose Collection (if not part of Planned Giving)

Phone us if you need to ask further about this option.

AROUND THE DIOCESE

Toowoomba Diocese Current Information:

Current information and resources in our diocese can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.twb.catholic.org.au/coronavirus-response-resources/>

Access to Mass online:

1. Available from the Archdiocese of Brisbane

A live web cast of the 10am Sunday Mass, as well as other special events from the Cathedral of St Stephen Brisbane. Access live broadcasts at specific times or replays of a Mass on-demand:

<https://brisbanecatholic.org.au/multimedia/web-cast/>

2. Available from the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Daily Mass is streamed live at 1pm (Mon - Fri) from St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne and is then available as a recording on demand until one hour prior to the next 1.00pm Mass:

<https://melbournecatholic.org.au/Mass>

3. Available from the Archdiocese of Sydney

Daily Mass from Our Lady of the Way Parish North Sydney is recorded and available to view anytime on YouTube:

<https://www.northsydneycatholics.com/>

Pray at Home Resources:

The following links will open a couple of sites that have been set up by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to help us with resources and prayers at home:

- <https://www.catholic.org.au/coronavirus>
- <https://www.catholic.org.au/prayathome>

Project Compassion:

Thanks for your continued support of Project Compassion. In these challenging times, your kindness and solidarity can make a world of difference to the lives of the most vulnerable. Cash donations (envelopes and boxes) can be dropped at the Parish Office or a. Parishioners may also donate via:

- Phone 1800 024 413
- Visit <https://www.caritas.org.au> and clicking the donate now option
- Send a cheque to GPO Box 9830 Sydney NSW 2000
- Or mail or fax this [Donation Form](#)

Devotional Sites and Apps:

• Bread 4 Today:

<https://www.ccsr.org.au/bread4today/>

This daily reflection app is produced by the Redemptorists, Australia, New Zealand and Samoa.

• Three-Minute Retreat:

<https://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer/about-3minute-retreats>

These brief but thoughtful virtual 'retreats' are based on the lectionary and are produced by Loyola Press, a ministry of the Jesuits in the United States. They are available online or as an app on your phone.

• Sacred Space:

<https://www.sacredspace.ie/>

The Irish Jesuits have been producing the popular Sacred Space daily prayers and reflections for more than twenty years, and they are now available as a convenient phone app.

• A 14-Day Retreat:

For those in isolation the following link is to a 14-day retreat entitled: [With Jesus in the Desert: A retreat for a time of isolation](#) This provides a structured prayer guide with a different theme for each of the 14 days.

Resources from Liturgy Brisbane:

Liturgy Brisbane continue to provide online prayer resources for each Sunday as well as resources for families with children. The resources can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.liturgybrisbane.net.au/prepare/sunday-readings-and-family-prayer/>

LIVE STREAMED MASS:

Mass will be live streamed from St Patrick's Cathedral Toowoomba each Sunday at 9:00am. There are a number of options available to access it. You can use any of the following links:

[Facebook](#)
[YouTube](#)
[Website](#)

PLEASE REMEMBER IN OUR PRAYERS:

Those who are ill: Bryan Flemming, Terry Tyers, Ned Sparksman, Pauline Dixon, Allan Wills, Damian Wyvill, Sara Mehari, Scott Murphy, Michelle Halpin, Christine Prescott, Toni Fitzgibbon, Camille Taylor, Patrick McNamee, Janice Lockhart, Dodie McGrane, Val Sharpe, Paul Turner, Mary Buttin, Rev Fr Brian Sparksman, James Babineau, Mort Edmiston, Arleen Hansen, Peter Webster, Monica Gleeson, Georgie Rose Allen, Pat Chapman, Alvina Denison, Bevan Devine, Mick Ahern, Brian Swords, Jean Denison, Terry McNamara, Pauline Anderson, All who are ill with the Corona Virus.

Recently Deceased: Irene Long, Tony Bermingham, All victims of the Corona Virus.



Easter as an enduring story of loss and hope

Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ

Over the centuries Easter has changed its appearance to accommodate different societies. In the early centuries its celebration was workaday. The weekly Eucharist was a celebration, often in homes, to prepare for the return of Christ at the end of time.

When the persecutions stopped Easter took on a more elaborate appearance — large churches in the cities, a month of fasting to prepare for Easter and a week to celebrate the events leading up to Jesus' death and Resurrection.

In a Christian society, too, the events, games, vegetation and meals at Easter were marked by Jesus' story. Hot cross buns, Easter eggs, brodetto pasquale, passion plays, Easter lilies and passion fruit owe their names to Easter. Their names remain, even as secular events have also come to mark the season: from the football played on Easter Monday and then Good Friday, the Stawell Gift and country tennis tournaments.

In Christian churches the celebration of Easter this year will look more like Lent or Passion week. All Australians, too, will be without football, concerts, interstate and international travel and family gatherings. The atmosphere, too, will be one of constraint, not freedom. Instead of celebrating the present, we may be weighed down by fear and anxiety about the future. We are all captive to COVID-19.

These restrictions are hurtful. But they also open out to the original depths of the Easter story. In the Gospel stories Easter Sunday dawned as emptily as it threatens to this year. There was nothing to celebrate. Jesus' world had been shut down; his disciples had shut themselves away in locked rooms in fear that they would be the next to suffer; the only people in the streets apart from the soldiers were a couple of Jesus' friends, mostly women, whose love overcame their fear and drew them out to visit his tomb.

As the sun rose on Easter Sunday his followers had not simply lost a friend and a leader. They had also lost the hope and meaning they had found in him. They followed him because they believed that God would act through him to free his people. His crucifixion had proved that belief to be absurd and had taken away any grounds for hope. The leaders of his own people had disowned him. The Romans had done what they were experts at doing: they had killed him slowly outside the city, leaving him nailed naked and writhing to a timber pole, stripping him both of his humanity and of the credibility of his claim. Easter dawned in a desert.

The Gospel stories of Easter are stories of more than celebration. They evoke in various ways the disciples' transition from despair at the death of their friend and leader and the loss of their own hope, to joy and the understanding that God has freed them through his death. Disciples cowering behind locked doors find Jesus in the room with them. Disciples leaving Jerusalem in grief find him walking with them. Mary Magdalene, grieving as she goes to the tomb to anoint his corpse, finds him waiting unrecognised for her outside the tomb. These stories all point to the mystery of God's presence and victory in what seemed to be a crushing defeat.

In a stirring passage, St Paul begins with the words 'Nothing can separate us from the love of God'. He goes on to list the human catastrophes that might be expected to do so. He was confident because he believed so strongly that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

Today Paul might have added to his list of things overcome all the experiences of the COVID-19 — the sickness, death, isolation, impoverishment and loneliness that it has brought with itself. For him the raising of Jesus meant that beyond these things lay a hope and love that were stronger than death.

This year, as we contemplate all the things that could separate us from hope, Easter invites all of us, whether or not we share Paul's faith, to reflect on what matters to us deeply enough to sustain us in the face of loss and death. If the celebrations of Easter are muted, its challenge to reflect on our lives and world is sharpened.

(This article was published on 10 April in the online Jesuit Publication, *Eureka Street*.)

From darkness to light, from despair to hope

by Sr Karan Varker RSC

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us ...

With these prophetic words, Charles Dickens begins his famous 1859 novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, a story about a time of chaos, suffering and despair — but also about happiness and joy. It is a story of crucifixion but also of resurrection. Having just survived terrible bushfires and years of drought, here in Australia — as in so many countries — we now face an invisible enemy, the coronavirus. Our way of life has suddenly changed drastically. Our governments have had to take strict measures to try to stop its spread. Our state borders have been closed and are being policed. Families and friends are cut off from one another. People are instructed to go into isolation and practice social distancing.

Many businesses have closed. There are long queues of people out of work and now seeking government financial assistance. Only a handful of people can attend weddings or funerals. Places where groups of people meet must close, including places of worship. This means for us who are Catholics that now there is nowhere in Australia where we can physically attend the Eucharist.

Besides making many confused, angry and fearful, a real danger is that some people will fall into despair and perhaps take their own lives. No one knows when this pandemic will end. We live in painful uncertainty, in darkness.

As Catholics, we are accustomed to journeying through Lent and then rejoicing during our Easter celebrations. Though we may not be physically able to be present at the liturgies now, the readings of this time can strengthen us and give us hope.

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Lent was the story of the man born blind (John 9:1-41). Before curing the man's physical darkness, Jesus warns, "Night is coming when no one can work." In a sense, so many of us worldwide are presently stumbling in the darkness that this coronavirus has brought upon us. We are floundering, hoping to get through it. We need to see the light and have hope!

The very next words of Jesus in the reading give us this great hope, "I am the light of the World." Later he says, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The blind man not only gained physical sight, but he also grew in spiritual light. Unlike the Pharisees who failed to respond to the light of the world, he could see and believe in Jesus. A question here is: How will we respond? Though at this time we seem to be walking in darkness, can we, like the blind man, be open to Jesus' gaze and so live in hope, knowing that Jesus, our light, is with us?

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius asks us to consider how God looks at me, at us. How do I / we react to this? Can we believe too that God speaks to us through Isaiah? "You are precious in my eyes, and honoured, and I love you Fear not, for I am with you whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (43:4-7). Jesus is God with a human face. In a number of places, the Gospels tell us that Jesus gazed intently at people; for example, he looked at the rich young man who asked him how to gain eternal life (Mark 10:21). His gaze was never judgmental — only compassionate.

It is likely that Mary Magdalene saw this compassionate gaze of Jesus whenever he looked at her. Having witnessed his suffering and death, very early on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene and the women go out to anoint the body of Jesus, even though they are still in darkness. In this time of darkness, as we witness suffering and death, how are we being called to reach out in compassion to those around us?

The women are looking for the body. The body is gone. Has it been stolen? The tomb is empty. Mary runs to tell the others. There is so much running — out of fear, out of confusion, running because Jesus seems to have disappeared. Where is he? In our fear and confusion, we well may ask, "Where is Jesus in all this darkness?"

Mary stays in the garden, weeping and longing. Her tears of grief turn into great joy as she hears Jesus call her name and sees his loving gaze fixed on her. She is not to cling to him but to go out to tell his sisters and brothers that he is risen. The light of their life, their hope, is alive. His Father is now their Father, his God, their God (John 20:1-18). Jesus, our hope, is with us now. He will not leave us alone. He has promised to be with us through it all (Matthew 28:20).

On the feast of the Annunciation, I reflected on the confusion Mary must have experienced on being asked to do something she did not understand, something which would make great demands on her. Yet, in faith, she made herself totally available to God. Despite these difficult times, can we Christians still make ourselves available to others, to comfort and reach out to those distressed and lonely? We can trust that Mary, help of Christians, will intercede with her risen Son for us!

(This article by Australian Sister of Charity, Sr Karan Varker, was published in the American Publication, *Global Sisters Report*, a project of National Catholic Reporter, on 15 April 2020)