

Monty & Eltham

The Catholic Parishes of
St Francis Xavier & Our Lady Help of Christians



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging of the Kulin Nation.

Churches CLOSED - Hearts OPEN

As we move into the 'Easter School Break', I just wanted to confirm my commitment to you - over these weeks and months ahead - that I will be around to help in any way I can to support your family life and faith commitment, in our wonderful communities at Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency.

It is shocking to think just how much our world has changed in such a short space of time. The things that we have taken for granted and our easy way of life are now under serious threat by this invisible enemy we name as the Coronavirus. To win this fight, we need simply to be 'still' - personal isolation and family quarantine, will help our country to defeat this pandemic and slow the rate of infections within our community. Avoid spreading this contagion by limiting the number of people that we come in contact with each day! So, stay at home and enjoy simple tasks, games and movies, food and fun. Naturally, this will not be easy - but necessary if we are to get through this difficult time for our society and the World.

As a leadership team, we are acutely concerned about the physical & mental health of parishioners and families at this time. We stand ready to support and practically care for anyone who might need our assistance to get through these weeks & months ahead. So, if we can help - please don't hesitate to be in contact with us.

It is my intention to ask Terry and Barry to isolate themselves from active duty over the next few weeks and months as we are all concerned for them and their personal health issues - and they have agreed to this request.

For the first time in history, our Churches at Eltham and Montmorency will be 'closed' but our Hearts are 'open' to you, and the Divine Presence that exists in the Risen Christ.

Public Church Services - like daily & Weekend Masses and Baptisms, are no longer available until further notice. Funerals and Weddings become small private occasions over this time. Naturally, I am deeply saddened by these restrictions imposed upon us by Health professionals, but our personal health is their number one concern, and for that reason I am very grateful indeed.

Next week, it is my intention to outline some suggestions for Holy Week.

If you have any ideas - fun stories on how to survive these 'quiet' days, please let us know!

On behalf of: Terry, Barry and myself, we wish you lots of love and prayerful support over these sacred weeks.

We move spiritually from Lent to Easter - from Darkness to Light - how appropriate!

Please open your hearts and concern for people that will find this time very difficult to live through. We are all in this experience together, and together we can find a new way to love in a deeper way. Thus, don't be afraid to say a prayer for yourself and others too.

Keep Safe - Do the right thing,

Warmest Love,

Yours in Jesus Christ

Michael F. Sierakowski - Moderator



This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.

For more information visit www.sfxmonty.org

We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.



PARISH TEAM & INFORMATION

OUR PEOPLE & OUR CONTACT DETAILS



Parish Priests

Terry Kean - Pastor in Solidum
terry.kean@cam.org.au

Michael Sierakowski - Moderator
michael.sierakowski@cam.org.au

Barry Caldwell

Parish Office

86 Mayona Road

9435 2178

Mon - Fri 9am-3pm

montmorency@cam.org.au

Gina Ang: Pastoral Worker & Caring Group Co-Ord
gina.ang@cam.org.au

Beth Krolkowski: Parish Manager & Pastoral Worker
montmorency@cam.org.au

Kate Kogler: Parish Secretary & Finance
eltham@cam.org.au

Peter Williams: Child Safety Officer
montmorency.childsafety@cam.org.au

Website: www.sfxmonty.org
www.olhc.info

Facebook:

St Francis Xavier Parish Montmorency

Monty & Eltham Newsletter & Facebook items:
eltham@cam.org.au

Schools

St Francis Xavier Primary School

Principal: Mr Philip Cachia: 9435 8474

principal@sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

www.sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

Holy Trinity Primary School

Principal: Mr Vince Bumpstead: 9431 0888

principal@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

www.htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School

Principal: Mr Chris Ray: 9439 7824

school@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

www.olhceltham.catholic.edu.au



*Let us pray for all those who have gone
before us marked with the sign of faith ...*

Montmorency

For the recently deceased:

Carol Said

For those whose anniversaries are at this time:

Eugene Collins, John Hedigan, Teresa Pfeil

For those in need of healing, remembering especially:

*Baby Kylie, Sriyani Algama, Nikki Attwood, Justine Best,
Kristina Brazaitis, Daniel Brewis, Desmond Deehan,
Renee Eastwood, Debbie Edgley, Marilyn Fairbank,
Julian Forrester, Gennie Hannon, Samuel Hauser (Kyabram),
Colleen Hussin, Jim Hussin, Tina Inserra, Adrian Jones,
Patsy Leed, Pat Longton, Erin McLindon, Hasti Momeni,
Therese Moore, Patricia Mulholland, Montagna Mustica,
Graham Neal, Geoffrey Nyssen, Mercy Ocon, Ron Pfeil,
Susan Phelan, Andrew Pighin, Terry Said, Anthony Salvatore,
Mary Salvatore, Maria Schroeders, Jeanette Steward,
John Tobin, Aldo Viapiana, Sheryn Zurzolo.*

Eltham

For the recently deceased;

Joyce Devine

For those whose anniversaries are at this time;

For those in need of healing, remembering especially:

*Baby Harriet Banks, Jon D'Cruz, Ruth Decker, Fay Dobson,
Jeanette Jenkins, Baby Finley McPartlin,
Simone Owen, Jo Porter, Paul Rushbrook.*

To include an anniversary please contact Parish House
9435 2178 or eltham@cam.org.au.

RECENTLY DECEASED

*Our Lady Help of Christians and
St Francis Xavier Communities offer their sincere condolences
to the family and friends of:*

Joyce Devine

and

Carol Said

sister-in-law of Mike Said

our thoughts & prayers are with you at this time.

RECONCILIATION

Saturday, 10:30am Monty ~ Terry
1/2 hr prior to any mass said by Michael

Collections last weekend: 21 & 22 Mar 2020

Community	Thanksgiving	Presbytery
Eltham		
Montmorency		

Please note the above figures are monies banked &
do not include visa/mastercard or direct debits.
Thank you so much for your contributions.

REFLECTION ON SUNDAY GOSPEL FOR TODAY

How are you coping? If you are like me, life seems so surreal, so weird, so unsettled. Everyone is talking about the coronavirus. The TV news and the newspapers are full of coronavirus. Many of us can only handle so much information and we have to turn off the news to try and think about other things.

Here in our own country the virus has come to us and will almost certainly increase its presence among us. Many of us are anxious, not only for ourselves but for those we love.

Many of us are self-isolating or close to it, and so many people in their care for me as an older member of the community have encouraged me to do this. We may all have to do this.

Can we find some hope and learn some lessons in this time of crisis? Let me quote Bill Gates. He asks what is the coronavirus teaching us? He has fourteen messages and here is one of them.

“It is reminding us that we are all connected and something that affects one person has an effect on another. It is reminding us that the false borders that we have put up have little value and this virus does not need a passport. It is reminding us, by oppressing us for a short time, of those in this world whose whole life is spent in oppression.”

We turn to our faith story to see where we can find some hope. Our Churches are closed and everything is shut down. We have so much time for reflection, for prayer, for finding inner space and we may be able to make this time a precious time for prayer and meditation.

We look to the Word of God to find some meaning, even inspiration, to help us through these times. Our Gospel for today tells the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. A puzzling story in many ways but such a wonderful story as well.

In the story we see the various reactions of people to the death of Lazarus. His two sisters, Martha and Mary, were grieving. Martha had to talk it out and she said to Jesus, “where have you been? If you had been here my brother wouldn’t have died.” Mary stayed home. She held her grief to herself but when she saw Jesus she too expressed her disappointment and said, “Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died”.

What about the crowd, the people who were sympathising and supporting Martha and Mary. Some of them were critical, remarking that Jesus could have healed Lazarus if he had been around.

What did Jesus do? In great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, he asked where Lazarus was and when the sisters said, “come and see”, Jesus wept.

It’s not too hard for us to set this story to our own story of today. We are in such unprecedented times. We wonder where God is in all this mess. We too may be angry with God. Why does God let this happen and couldn’t God have stopped all this terrible suffering. And how does God respond? The God we know in Jesus weeps with us in our pain. God weeps with us.

And the Gospel story doesn’t end there. For once again the God we know in Jesus went to the tomb and called Lazarus from death into life. “Lazarus, here come out”. The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff. And Jesus said to those around him, “Unbind him, let him go free.”

However we understand the raising of Lazarus, is the Gospel an invitation to ask who is Lazarus today? Perhaps it’s you, perhaps it’s me. In all the unknown, the fear, the anxiety, the questions, the losses, we are all facing a kind of death. We don’t know how and when this will end, but we come in faith believing that we too will hear the Risen Jesus calling us to life.

Terry Kean



Lower Plenty Garden Views Aged Care

It was lovely we could meet and thank Pam Mitchell at 8.30am and 10.30am Masses a couple of weekends ago. Indeed a gracious, gentle, caring woman with a heart full of love and compassion. She was delighted to be with us.



Thank you too to those who have given me their names indicating they would like to be part of a visitation team. Though it may be a little while before we are required, it would be wonderful to have just a couple more volunteers. If you could find one and a half hours a month for this life-giving work it would be grand, so please do give it a second thought. It is sad that those in aged care and most in need of a visit are left isolated and alone at this time. We hold them and all who are sick in our prayers. Keep well.

Patsy

**PROJECT
COMPASSION**
GO FURTHER TOGETHER

Fifth Sunday of Lent
29th March 2020

Tawonga is a 10-year-old girl, living with a disability. She lives in a village in northern Malawi in a region plagued by food insecurity and poverty. For most of her life, her parents have struggled to put meals on the table. Tawonga often had to miss school because she was too sick from hunger. The family also faced discrimination in their community due to her disability. Since participating in a Caritas Australia supported program, Tawonga's life has transformed. Her family now grows enough food to provide three meals a day, ending the struggle of malnutrition, and helping her thrive at school.



Please donate to Project Compassion 2020 so this transformational program can continue to empower vulnerable women, men and children, and strengthen the communities around them.

Let's Go Further, Together.

You can donate through Parish boxes and envelopes, by visiting www.caritas.org.au/projectcompassion or phoning 1800 024 413.



KNOW YOUR POPE TO KNOW YOUR CHURCH

If you missed the Academy nominated movie: "The Two POPES" by Anthony McCarten, you might like to read this extraordinary book.

Top shelf in Gathering Area, Eltham.

If you're not inclined to read the whole book, do read the Epilogue. It's a reason for hope... from my perspective.

Trish



Hi Everyone,

Just to keep everyone informed click [here](#) for the latest letter from Fr Taylor whose mission is ending in Malawi and who has handed over effective control to a group of parishioners in your sister parish.

The good news is Saint Kizito (Chigoneka) Parish in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe at the end of last year were able to purchase an office complex for additional rental income generation, to support needy educational scholarships in the outlying parishes. This marks yet another milestone for your sister parish as she moves towards becoming more self-sufficient. St Kizito now acts as the hub in order to support the needy in the outlying 5 very poor parishes.

In his letter Fr Taylor has mentioned his retirement and suggested we also bring to a close the Support Group as we both move on. If you would like to read the extract from our last meeting on what was resolved click [here](#).

In a nutshell we are moving towards closing the charity by the end of the June financial year. Parishioners can be justifiably pleased we are concluding on a high note, having provided \$127,000 over the past 24 years, which in no small way has transformed the facilities in the respective outlying poorer parishes. I plan to provide a final update in June to thank everybody, when we celebrate the feast day of Saint Kizito, if that is possible. However, in any event, at our website we have a history and information stretching back to the early days should that be of interest, which you can read by clicking [here](#).

Kindly note Fr Taylor did not mention any successor, suggesting we move on, so the group resolved it was not viable to continue.

Lindsay Byrnes



Prison Fellowship Australia
WE GET THROUGH.

Thank you for your patience, support and understanding while we have been assessing the upcoming Easter Biscuit program.

In light of the current Coronavirus situation, we have made the decision to postpone this event until September 2020. This date is special as it will be coinciding with our Week of Prayer for prisons. We will have an amazing platform to share the Good News of Jesus to the Victorian prisoners and highlight the prisoners and prisons in the PF Week of Prayer. Information will be sent out with new flyers and dates when they have been confirmed. Can I ask that you spread this news to others that you know are baking. I don't want to miss anyone...

This has been a difficult decision to make. I assure you that it has been made prayerfully and with much thought for the men and women who receive your Easter biscuits. We want to make sure that Prison Fellowship and all our volunteers are doing their part to be safe and also follow the advice and instructions of our government. The Department of Corrections is in agreement of our decision.

If you have any questions or concerns, please ring myself, Richard Feeney or Richard Boonstra at the office to have a chat and we will do our best to answer them.

Thank you for supporting the Easter Biscuit Bake! PLEASE save your flour and sugar for September (if you were lucky enough to find some on the supermarket shelf!).

Blessings and stay healthy and safe,
Laura & the PF team



As the COVID-19 situation continues to intensify here in Victoria, the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies Victoria) has been closely monitoring the situation by tracking advice from the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Commonwealth and State Governments.

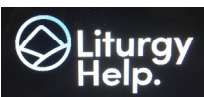
As it has since its inception in Australia in 1854, Vinnies remains committed to its mission of assisting the most vulnerable within our communities during this challenging time. It is through the generous donation of goods and finances from our parishioners and supporters that we are able to provide our services. We do not receive any government financial assistance. Our aim is to continue to keep our services going as much as possible. SVdP will respond practically and compassionately to social injustices, natural disasters and international health crises today, tomorrow and well into the future.

Changes to our current works are:

HOME VISITS: Our members and volunteers are adapting the provision of this essential service and will no longer be entering homes. However, phone interviews will be conducted and subsequently arrangements made as to how best assist, for example, leaving a food parcel/food vouchers outside the premises (in an agreed secure location). We will endeavour to keep our services going to people in need during this critical time.

VINNIES SHOPS: The majority of our shops remain open, however this is subject to any local circumstances changing. The Briar Hill shop is open and will be receiving donated goods while it remains open. However home collection of goods is temporarily stopped.

Mike Said



Free individual and family prayer resources for Catholics in social isolation:
<https://www.liturgyhelp.com/aus/pray>

Register for LiturgyHelp Personal and Family Prayer

In this time of crisis, we are providing Catholics with access to a range of prayer resources for personal and family prayer. In particular, we hope that Catholics in social isolation around the world can gain a sense of prayerful solidarity with their local faith community and the whole Body of Christ.

Catholic Diocese of Wollongong

Due to the new social distancing regulations aimed at minimising the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), many Lenten groups around the world are no longer able to physically meet, so we have decided to make Weeks 3 to 6 available as a [free MP3 Digital Download](#) so that everyone can follow along with the Sunday Gospels, psalms and reflections from their own homes.

The digital download resource also includes audio narrations of the readings by Bishop Brian Mascord and Jude Hennessy, and audio narrations of the Sunday Gospel reflections narrated by Fr Christopher Sarkis and spiritual direction by Sr Anastasia Reeves OP. (paraphrased)



Lockdown

by Fr Richard Hendrick, OFM

Yes there is fear·

Yes there is isolation·

Yes there is panic buying·

Yes there is sickness·

Yes there is even death·

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again·

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear·

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them·

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound·

Today a young woman I know

is busy spreading fliers with her number

through the neighbourhood

So that the elders may have someone to call on·

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples

are preparing to welcome

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality

To how big we really are·

To how little control we really have·

To what really matters·

To Love·

So we pray and we remember that

Yes there is fear·

But there does not have to be hate·

Yes there is isolation·

But there does not have to be loneliness·

Yes there is panic buying·

But there does not have to be meanness·

Yes there is sickness·

But there does not have to be disease of the soul

Yes there is even death·

But there can always be a rebirth of love·

Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now·

Today, breathe·

Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic

The birds are singing again

The sky is clearing,

Spring is coming,

And we are always encompassed by Love·

Open the windows of your soul

And though you may not be able

to touch across the empty square,

Sing

Prayers of the Faithful for 28th & 29th March 2020 Fifth Sunday of Lent

Priest: Brothers and sisters, in the hope of the resurrection, let us bring our prayers before the Lord.

That the Holy Church will be safeguarded from critics, sceptics and denouncers. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

That Christians all over the world will be rewarded with eternal life for their sacrifices and sufferings. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

That all people mourning a loved one will find consolation in the words of Christ, the resurrection and the life. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

That our parish communities may be renewed in faith with the promise of the resurrection. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

That those affected by disease may be strengthened by God's love and comfort. We especially remember communities affected by the spread of the coronavirus. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

That those in the medical profession working in difficult and uncertain circumstances will be granted courage and endurance. We pray especially for those assisting in the coronavirus outbreak. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

That the sick and housebound will find comfort in the word of God, especially those on our sick list. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

That those who have died will dwell with God forever, especially Carol Said. We also remember those whose anniversaries are at this time, including John Hedigan, Teresa Pfeil and Eugene Collins. In your mercy:
Lord, hear our prayer.

Priest: Loving God, your Son is the way through our darkness and despair. Hear our prayers and help us to trust in your promises as the time of Christ's suffering draws near. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Our Lady Help of Christians & St Francis Xavier Rosters

Due to Masses being suspended at this time, rosters had been cancelled. However, we have realized we are still in need of certain invaluable contributions from those cleaning our churches, maintaining the gardens and composing of Prayers of the Faithful. It is Michael's intention that the prayers will be printed in the Bulletin each week during this testing time.

Please email the Parish office if you have any concerns: eltham@cam.org.au or montmorency@cam.org.au.

Roster for Weekend 28/29 March 2020		
Rough, Annette	Altar Society	OLHC
Rough Family	PRStatue	OLHC
Roster for Weekend 04/05 April 2020		
Andreatta, Brenda	CLNR	SFX
Dunell, Linda	Altar Society	OLHC
Rigg Family	PRStatue	OLHC
Saltamacchia, Carmel	Altar Society	OLHC

Please bear with us as we make adjustments based on the needs, restrictions and requirements of our two communities. Thank you.

Open new doors to prayer

by Thomas O'Loughlin

"All Masses Cancelled." That sign went up today outside my local church. Who could have imagined it just a couple of weeks ago? Most Catholics recognize it's a sensible decision: large gatherings are just what we do not want at the moment. The loving thing right now is to keep our distance, lest we transmit the virus.

There are those who do not like the idea of "missing Mass". Could they "get Mass", they ask anxiously, even if they are not able to be physically present at a service? I have heard priests saying that they will not have "the state" - imagined as somehow the enemy of the Church - ordering them to close, and talking of "defending the freedom of religion" by "providing Mass", even though it would be endangering the very people they are claiming to serve.

But the fact that many regular Massgoers will not be in a church this weekend - and most likely not even over Easter - might actually help us to broaden our understanding of the Eucharist and deepen our spirituality. For too long - some historians would say since the seventh century - Latin Christians have tended to think about the Eucharist as an object (something that happens due to the activity of the priest, which the lay faithful observe rather like the audience at a play of a concert) or as a commodity (with those present behaving as religious consumers). The language we use is the giveaway. We talk about "getting Mass" and "attending a Mass", of "getting Communion" and "taking Communion". The image in our minds is that the Eucharist is something "out there", which we watch or somehow obtain and make our own, as if we were theatregoers or consumers.

But the word "Eucharist" relates to a verb: it is something we, the whole People of God *do*. It is the *activity* of thanking God the Father as a gathered community - and we offer this praise and thanks through Christ our Lord. The focus is on thanking the Father. The access to the Father is provided to us in the Spirit through Jesus Christ - and the prayers are led by the priest. It is our basic activity as Christians, not some "thing" that the priest does for us or makes for us.

So if we cannot gather because of the coronavirus, can we still offer thanks to the Father through Christ? Let's relearn some basics.

First, Jesus is present with us. Many Catholics treat church buildings as if they were pagan temples: as if God is only "in there". But God's presence is everywhere and the risen Christ is not limited by space. This presence of the risen Jesus among the community is captured in this saying preserved in Matthew's Gospel: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (18:20). Even the smallest gathering - just two people standing two metres apart so as not to spread the virus - has the risen Lord among them. It might be two people in a house together; it might even be two people talking together on their mobile phones or on Skype. This is expressed in another ancient Christian saying - preserved in the

Didache (a first-century new disciples' guide): "Wherever the things of the Lord are spoken about, there the Lord is present" (4:1).

Second, your room is a basic place of prayer. We sometimes think that we are only commanded to pray in a church building - we have grown up with the idea of attendance at Mass on Sunday as a regulation - but it is sobering to recall this instruction by Jesus: "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the gatherings and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:5-6). We are now being advised not to go to work or use public transport, not to attend church services and to keep our distance from people. It's a moment for us to rediscover the art of closing the door and praying alone - knowing that the Father will listen to our prayers.

Third, we describe the Eucharist as "the centre and summit of our Christian lives", which is true, but we often make the mistake of regarding it as the whole of our religious life. This crisis calls on us to build up the surrounding foothills, by caring for one another and thanking God at home and in our place of study or work as well as in church. If we are not thankful for the meals and the friendship we share at home, we are hardly ready to be thankful at the Great Thanksgiving that we call "the Eucharist".

And finally, every table is a sacred place. Jesus encountered people and taught at their tables: every table is a place where we can encounter the Lord in those with us. We will not be eating together as sisters and brothers in a church for the next few months, so let's start recalling that *whenever* we eat, we should be thankful: "You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you" (Deuteronomy 8:10). We should always be thankful for the food we eat (saying grace before meals) and for the pleasure of eating and being together (grace after meals).

Most Catholics today can barely remember the time when few of those present at Mass actually ate or drank. This was partly because of fear of condemnation for "unworthy reception" - based on a misreading of 1 Corinthians 11:27 - or for

an imagined breach of the fasting regulations. An idea had also taken root that one could gain grace by attending additional Masses (or at least consecrations) - a work of "supererogation" at which one could never "receive" - which led to the development of the notion that one could obtain the spiritual blessings through a mental act of intentional volition without any physical contact. These ideas can be traced, not surprisingly, back to Cartesian world of seventeenth-century France, and the rarified and cerebral spirituality that flourished in the Jansenist community at Port Royal near Paris. They belong to a world that saw faith as an action of the intellect, and which placed minimal value upon the liturgy as a holistic encounter of the actual body of the Church. (Since we will all be staying in for the next few months, you might want to read the two brilliant and surprisingly entertaining chapters on Jansenism in Ronald Knox's *Enthusiasm*.)

Some have been tempted to reach for the idea of "spiritual communion" as a sort of "fix" in this emergency. Better to simply acknowledge that this is a weird time: we cannot meet up, we cannot shake hands, and we are temporarily - for very good reasons - unable to behave in the normal human way. So we cannot behave in a liturgically normal way, gathered as a people, as sisters and brothers, to be together, to sing together, to listen together while sitting in a group, to shake hands with our neighbours as friends (John 15:15) and then to share a loaf and a common cup. Until we can get back to normal, let's just note its loss, concentrate on what we can do while we are living in isolation from one another, and then, when the restrictions are lifted, rejoice that our fellowship is restored.

We will not be gathered as large groups for the next few months - let's use this experience to rediscover that *we* are the Church (it is not a building, or the preserve of the clergy), that we must be *Eucharistic* every day (it is an act of attitude of thankfulness for all the good things of creation, particularly meals, not a performance we "attend" or an object we "get", "take" or "receive"), and that *the risen one is with us*, interceding for us with the Father, in these worrying times.

Thomas O'Loughlin is professor of historical theology at the University of Nottingham, and a former president of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain. His latest book is *Eating Together, Becoming One* (Liturgical Press).



A woman lights a candle on her balcony in Rome last Thursday as the faithful across Italy say a prayer for those suffering from Covid-19

Gospel: John 11:1-45

There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with the two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. – It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, ‘Lord, the man you love is ill.’ On receiving the message, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will end not in death but in God’s glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.’

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judaea.’ The disciples said, ‘Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews wanted to stone you; are you going back again?’ Jesus replied:

‘Are there not twelve hours in the day? A man can walk in the daytime without stumbling because he has the light of this world to see by; but if he walks at night he stumbles, because there is no light to guide him.’

He said that and then added, ‘Our friend Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he is able to rest he is sure to get better.’ The phrase Jesus used referred to the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by ‘rest’ he meant ‘sleep’, so Jesus put it plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.’ Then Thomas – known as the Twin – said to the other disciples, ‘Let us go too, and die with him.’

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.’ ‘Your brother’ said Jesus to her ‘will rise again.’ Martha said, ‘I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said:

‘I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’

‘Yes, Lord,’ she said ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.’

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, ‘The Master is here and wants to see you.’ Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house sympathising with Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, ‘Where have you put him?’ They said, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept; and the Jews said, ‘See how much he loved him!’ But there were some who remarked, ‘He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man’s death?’ Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, ‘Take the stone away.’ Martha said to him, ‘Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.’ Jesus replied, ‘Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

‘Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.’

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, here! Come out!’ The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, let him go free.’

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.



Reflection

We come to the third and last of the dramatic stories selected from the gospel of John for the Sundays of Year A. We have already encountered Jesus as living water and as light of the world; now we meet him as resurrection and life. As with the previous stories John weaves together an appealing human story and profound theological teaching. He does this so well that we are moved to admiration of his extraordinary skill.

There appear to be two climaxes in the story. One is the exchange between Martha and Jesus. He identifies himself as “the resurrection and the life”, prompting Martha to confess, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who is coming into the world”. The second is Jesus summoning Lazarus out of the tomb and bidding the onlookers, “Unbind him, let him go free”. What wonderful words with which to conclude this splendid story!

Break Open the Word 2020