

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.

Easter Liturgy Timetable

Holy Thursday, 6th April

Mass of the Lord's Supper 7pm @ SFX, Montmorency

Good Friday, 7th April

The Way of the Cross 11am @ OLHC, Eltham
The Passion of Our Lord 3pm @ OLHC, Eltham

Holy Saturday, 8th April

Blessing of the Food 5pm @ SFX, Montmorency
Vigil of the Resurrection 7pm @ SFX, Montmorency

Easter Sunday, 17th April

Dawn Vigil of the Resurrection 6am @ OLHC, Eltham
Easter Mass 8:30am @ SFX, Montmorency
Easter Mass 10am @ OLHC Eltham



We welcome into the Parish Office Kerry Mash, in a voluntary capacity to support Kate. Here's a little introduction from Kerry:

My mum's family (Romeril) moved here in the 1920s and she was one of the students the year the St Francis Xavier school opened in 1932. The Mash family has been involved with the Parish in one way or another since then with the fourth generation (Tyrrell) currently enrolled in the school. I was away experiencing life as a Public Servant in Canberra for over 30 years but am now settling back into life in the area. I have been offered the opportunity to volunteer in the Parish office a couple of days a week and will hopefully take on the pleasant task of organising Baptisms across the Parishes. I'm really looking forward to getting back into the Parish life and the contact I will have across our communities.

Kerry

Naturally we all wish Kerry well, as we get to know her and thank her for her service to the community.



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

For more information visit pol.org.au/eltham or pol.org.au/montmorency.

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 Priest

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

Parish Office

all correspondence to:

86 Mayona Road,
 Montmorency Vic 3094
 9435 4742

eltham@cam.org.au
montmorency@cam.org.au

Kate Kogler:

Parish Secretary
 Tue-Fri 9am-3pm

Peter Williams:

Child Safety Officer
SFX&OLHC.ChildSafety@cam.org.au

Websites:

www.pol.org.au/montmorency
www.pol.org.au/eltham

Facebook:

[St Francis Xavier Parish Montmorency](https://www.facebook.com/StFrancisXavierParishMontmorency)

Monty & Eltham Newsletter & Facebook items:

eltham@cam.org.au

Schools

St Francis Xavier Primary School

Principal: Philip Cachia: 9435 8474
principal@sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au
www.sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

Holy Trinity Primary School

Principal: Vince Bumpstead: 9431 0888
principal@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au
www.htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School

Acting Principal: Mark Pinkerton: 9439 7824
school@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au
www.olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

RECONCILIATION

available half an hour before
 any weekday or weekend Parish Mass.

Collections: 12 & 19 Mar 2023

	OLHC	SFX
Thanksgiving	\$857.00	\$801.00
Presbytery	\$977.35	\$570.90

Stewardship Offering

Month	OLHC	SFX	Total
December	\$6,257.77	\$11,796.00	\$18,053.77
January	\$7,248.10	\$8,760.60	\$16,008.70
February	\$5,345.56	\$8,405.00	\$13,750.56

Monty & Eltham Calendar of Events

Saturday 25

12:00pm Baptism: Elsie Montmorency
 6:00pm Mass Montmorency

Sunday 26

8:30am Mass Montmorency
 10:00am Mass Eltham

Monday 27

7:00pm Easter Liturgy Music Rehearsal Montmorency

Tuesday 28

9:30am Mass & SFX Grade 6 Montmorency
 11:00am Funeral: Anna Maria (Ans) Scholten Montmorency
 7:30pm Small Church Community Montmorency

Wednesday 29

6:30am Meditation Montmorency
 9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Eltham
 10:30am ASRC Food Collection Montmorency

Thursday 30

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Montmorency
 11:00am Funeral: Margaret Lumb Montmorency

Friday 31

9:10am SFX School Lenten Liturgy Montmorency
 9:30am Mass Eltham

Saturday 1 April

12:00pm Baptism: Isabelle, Harvey, Adeline, & Grace Montmorency
 6:00pm Mass Montmorency

Sunday 2 - Palm Sunday

8:30am Mass Montmorency
 10:00am Mass Eltham
 12:00pm Baptism: Toby, Willa Eltham

Monday 3

7:00pm Easter Liturgy Music Rehearsal Montmorency

Tuesday 4

9:30am Mass & SFX Grade 3 Montmorency
 10:00am Craft Group Montmorency
 11:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry Eltham
 7:00pm Easter Liturgy Music Rehearsal Montmorency

Wednesday 5

6:30am Meditation Montmorency
 9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Eltham
 10:30am ASRC Food Collection Montmorency
 1:00pm Small Church Community Montmorency
 7:30pm Small Church Community Montmorency

Thursday 6 - Holy Thursday

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Montmorency
 11:30am SFX School Stations of the Cross Montmorency
 7:00pm Mass of the Lord's Supper Montmorency

Friday 7 - Good Friday

11:00am The Way of the Cross Eltham
 3:00pm The Passion of Our Lord (Mass) Eltham

Saturday 8 - Holy Saturday

5:00pm Blessing of the Food (Easter Blessing) Montmorency
 7:00pm Vigil of the Resurrection (Mass) Montmorency

Support Montmorency Parish by giving with CDFpay

Simply scan the QR code with your mobile phone and in a few easy steps you can quickly and securely give to your parish.



Support Eltham Parish by giving with CDFpay

Simply scan the QR code with your mobile phone and in a few easy steps you can quickly and securely give to your parish.





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

Montmorency

For the recently deceased:

Margaret Lumb, Anna Maria "Ans" Scholten

For those whose anniversaries are at this time:

Martha Fernandes, John Hedigan, Doug Matthews, Adrian McConnell, Maria Muscat, Carol Said, Paul Said, Stella Skehill, Remi Vulich, Michael Wellington

For those in need of healing, remembering especially:

Gay, Gayle, Helen, Maurice, Arturo Bacani, Rita Bevanda, Kim Brisbane, Pat Collins, Debbie Edgley (nee Vanderwert), Alana Foulds, Bob Fraser, Melanie Lam, Lita Lee, Yvonne Mee, Cindy Morrissey, Andrew Pighin, Aquatha Spina

Eltham

For those whose anniversaries are at this time:

Frank Hermans

For those in need of healing, remembering especially:

Violetta, Shannon Donahoo, Jade McAlear, Fiona Rogers, Rosemary Scully, Ian Sturman, James Sutton, Sarah Thompson

To include an anniversary please contact Parish Office 9435 4742 or eltham@cam.org.au.



Congratulations to all who celebrated their sacraments during January:

Saturday 25 March

St Francis Xavier, 12:00pm

Elsie May Elliott

Baptism

Please Note:

all correspondence to the Parish Office : 86 Mayona Road, Montmorency Vic 3094

eltham@cam.org.au

ph: 9435 4742

montmorency@cam.org.au

Kate is in the office

Tuesdays to Fridays from 9am to 3pm.



Rehearsals for Easter Liturgy Music

Are you going to be around over Easter? Do you fancy yourself as one with musical talent? If so, would you like to add your voice or instrument to others, enhancing the celebrations of our Easter Liturgies of Holy Thursday, the Saturday Vigil and Easter Sunday morning at 8.30am Mass? Vocal or instrumental music ability would be very welcome.

Music rehearsals for these Liturgies will be held in the SFX Church from 7-9pm on **Mon 27th March, Mon 3rd & Tues 4th April.**

Complying with current policy, all participants are required to have a Working with Children Check and a current Code of Conduct. If this is a challenge for you, please be in touch with Peter Williams at Parish Office ph: 9435 4642. Caring for our children and the vulnerable is the responsibility of all of us. Many thanks. It would be nice to see some new faces and fresh voices!

Good Friday Service

3pm 7 April

and

Easter Dawn Service

6am 9 April 9

at Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham

In the gathering area at OLHC there are sign-up sheets for the specific roles in our services.

Please include a contact number.

Please note that you must have completed **all the requirements for Child-Safety** in order to take on a role. Kathleen Nolan.

Prayers of the Faithful for 26 March 2023 - Fifth Sunday of Lent

Leader: Through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, God our Father has shown his immense love for us, and so with confidence we turn to the Lord in prayer.

May this Lenten time, marked by prayer and reflection, serve to bring us closer to Christ so that we come to know and serve him more deeply. *Let us pray to the Lord.* **Lord, hear our prayer.**

May this time of preparation for Easter guide our reflection and strengthen our hope in the resurrection. Ezekiel in the first reading reminds us that our homeland is elsewhere. *Let us pray to the Lord.* **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for people caught up in war through circumstances beyond their control. May both parties seek paths to peace that are productive, enduring and in the long term, fruitful. *Let us pray to the Lord.* **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for Pope Francis who chose the name of Francis in imitation of the poor man of Assisi. May we restrain our desires as Saint Francis did and concentrate on serving the poor. *Let us pray to the Lord.* **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray in particular for the people of Ukraine and Russia at war with one another. May our prayers help them to realise that violent conflict prolongs, rather than promotes, a resolution. *Let us pray to the Lord.* **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for people in our society suffering from loneliness. Our materialistic and affluent society often hides people's pain, fearing others' reaction. Let us be sensitive to the suffering of others. *Let us pray to the Lord.* **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have died, especially *Margaret Lumb & Anna Maria Scholten*, and those whose anniversaries occur at this time, including *Martha Fernandes, John Hedigan, Frank Hermans, Doug Matthews, Adrian McConnell, Maria Muscat, Carol Said, Paul Said, Stella Skehill, Remi Vulich & Michael Wellington*. May they rest in the light of God's face. *Let us pray to the Lord.* **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Leader: Gracious and welcoming God, source of all life, we are confident you hear our prayers, as we make them in the name of Jesus.

All: Amen

ST VINCENT'S CARE SERVICES - AN EMERGING HOUSING CRISIS

THE CRISIS

St Vincent's Care Services, (SVCS) 43 Diamond Street, Eltham, has announced the imminent decommissioning of all its independent living units, necessitating current residents to seek alternative housing. This, at a time when Australia is experiencing one of its worst rental housing shortages in decades.

SVCS Eltham offers a range of Aged Care/Retirement living options. Two storey **Herring House** was built in the 1960's. It sits along the Diamond Creek border of the property. The units provide a comfortable kitchen/living/dining area and a separate bedroom/bathroom configuration. These units house Australians who are in need, vulnerable and/or financially challenged. Some of these residents have resided there for over 20 years.

Two storey **Rundle House** was built in the 1980's. There are two blocks of units that sit along the railway-line border of the property. The units are one-room bed-sits with a small bathroom portioned off in one corner by a wall and sliding door. Initially these only housed vulnerable Aussies, however, many of the Rundle House units had sat empty for several years. The property has a history of flood damage and sits on a flood plain (concerns that have been partially addressed over the years by Council). In 2016, when displaced refugees from war-torn Syria/Iraq/Iran required emergency housing, SVCS and the Government made a deal - refugees would be housed in Rundle House for 2 years. Church and community groups were invited to "adopt" a unit and were responsible for appointing the unit and offering ongoing support (i.e. assistance with doctors, schools, Centrelink, shopping, English lessons etc). Despite the dire circumstances throwing this displaced community together, it was a joyous time. The new arrivals quickly became part of the broader community – AND – built a new Multicultural Community on site.

At the end of the two years families with children, and any individual under the age of 55 years were required to move. Fortunately at that time, there was not the rental crisis we face today. Refugees who were 55 years and over had the option of remaining in their units, since this age complied with SVCS regulations, and almost ALL the refugees in that category remained in the "Eltham Village".

SVCS have told residents that the time has come to upgrade Herring and Rundle Houses, but this would require bringing the buildings up to 2023 standards. They say this is cost prohibitive, and quote an approximate price of \$20 million. Because of this, they say a refurbishment project is untenable.

One cannot fault an organisation for making the decision that the housing they provide is "sub-standard". What defies belief is that SVCS appears to have NO VISION for replacing this housing. *"We will knock the buildings down."* *"We will not rebuild."* *"We would like you to move by 31 December 2023 if possible."* *"We will help you find affordable housing."*

It is time to pose these questions:

- 1. Why doesn't SVCS have a Vision for replacing their current affordable independent-living housing after demolition?***
- 2. Who has made the decision to move vulnerable, needy, at-risk residents in a climate of absolute housing crisis?***

SO WHO RUNS ST VINCENT'S CARE SERVICES?

SVCS is the aged care division of St Vincent Health Australia, which is a ministry of Mary Aikenhead Ministries. Mary Aikenhead Ministries was established by the Congregation of Religious Sisters of Charity of Australia, to continue to build on the charism and traditions of the Sisters of Charity through aged care, health, research, education and social services ministries. Over the years the Sisters of Charity expanded their aged care services to include Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, paving the way for what is now one of Australia's leading Catholic aged care providers – St Vincent's Care.

The St Vincent Care Mission statement is:

***"We express God's love through the healing ministry of Jesus.
We are especially committed to people who are poor or vulnerable."***

The St Vincent Care Values are:

***"Compassion, Excellence, Integrity, Justice,
We are committed to serve those who are facing poverty and vulnerability"***

It is hard to see how moving people out of an affordable housing setting at this time in our social history, meets any of the Mission or Values goals of Vincent Care.

SNAPSHOT ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING – Vic 2023

The National Rental Affordability Scheme, implemented in 2008 and concluding in 2026, is part of the Australian Government's long-term commitment to improve housing affordability. Sadly, the scheme is failing. Australia is already experiencing a massive shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable houses/units, with a predicted 36,000 affordable rentals exiting the scheme by 2026. This housing crisis comes at a time when basic utility costs are skyrocketing, interest rates on mortgages are pushing homeowners into the rental market, unemployment is high, and the cost of renting is becoming prohibitive.

The rental picture is grim, and it is hard to believe that SVCS will really be able to re-house these residents in either affordable housing, or a location in which they wish to live. The message we are hearing from ALL RESIDENTS (refugee or Aussie battler) is that they want to remain with their SVCS Community, and they want to be in or near Eltham (because of family, church or friendship connections).

MOST IMPORTANTLY – THE VOICE OF POPE FRANCIS

SVCS is a catholic facility, and OLHC is a Catholic parish. Therefore we are bound by catholic teaching.

“The Church has a positive view of private property, but it has affirmed in numerous Papal and other official documents that private property is not an absolute right and that property is to be used for the common good with a consistent recognition that all goods come from God and are intended for the benefit of all and not just a few. This means it is an injustice for some to have more than enough while others lack bare necessities.” - Justice and Peace Office.

In the Pope's encyclical 'Laudato si' he writes: **“I want to be very clear. We can't find any social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever for lack of housing.”** If SVCS move vulnerable and poor residents out of their comfort zone, out of their community, with no option of re-housing them together, in Eltham, they have failed the Pope's directive.

WHAT WE CAN DO

As a parish, I am sure we want to support organisations in our area that are providing for the aged, the needy, the homeless, refugees, asylum seekers, and those who are either medically or mentally frail. SVCS is one such organisation. If SVCS had a **VISION** to rebuild affordable housing, there is every indication that both State and Federal Governments could share funding.

Writing to the people running this organisation, with your ideas and concerns, is a practical step. Some email addresses are provided for you below, but you may have other people you wish to contact, and we encourage you to do so.

Don't ponder. Don't pontificate. Act now. It is the Socially Just and Moral thing to do.

Ben Ramcharan: ben.ramcharan@nillumbik.vic.gov.au

Mayor of Eltham

Colin Brooks: colin.brooks@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Victorian Housing minister to help create community housing in Eltham

Lincoln Hopper: lincoln.hopper@svha.org.au

CEO St Vincent's Care Services

Bernadette Murphy: bernadette.murphy@svha.org.au

Victorian Manager St Vincent's Care Services

Vicki Ward: vicki.ward@parliament.vic.gov.au

MP for Eltham



Roster for THIS WEEKEND: 25/26 March 2023

Armstrong, Miranda	C10:00
Azzopardi, Michael	E10:00
Bowyer, Darrell	ASRC
Bowyer, Rosemary	ASRC
Capuana, Marisa	PRYR
Dunell, Linda	ASE
French, Jossie	W8:30
Leahy, Michelle	R10:00
Love, Philip	W8:30
Northrop, Greg	E10:00
Reardon, Kathy	E10:00
Reardon, Peter	E10:00
Scully, Greg	E10:00
Turnbull, Mark	H10:00
Turnbull, Pauline	H10:00
Wallace, Kathryn	W6:00
Williams, Peter	W6:00
Zavadil Family	PRSE

Roster for NEXT WEEKEND: 01/02 April 2023 PALM SUNDAY

Bacani, Brian	W6:00
Capuana, Marisa	W6:00
Dhanasen Family	PRSE
Haines, Geoff	E10:00
Haines, Jan-Marie	E10:00
Hall, Vali	ASE
Illiffe, Yvonne	E10:00
McEwen, Christopher	R10:00
McKinley, Michael	W8:30
Nolan, Mike	PRYR
Ramsdale, John	W8:30
Reardon, Peter	E10:00
Scully, Greg	C10:00
Smith, Neil	E10:00
Taylor, Colin	H10:00
Taylor, Trish	H10:00
Taylor, Trish	R10:00

ASE = Altar Society @ Eltham; C = Commentator; E = Euch. Minister;
H = Hospitality; PRSE = Pilgrim Rosary Statue @ Eltham;
W = Minister of the Word; R = Reader

Thanksgiving Envelopes 2023 are available now in the foyers of both churches

Please collect your envelopes.

We deeply value your support and financial contribution throughout the years.

We would also love your help in taking other envelopes to people you know to help us.



Lent and Easter Pamphlets

We have seen the shops stocking their shelves with Easter Eggs and Hot Cross Buns and last week Ash Wednesday signalling the start of our Lenten and Easter journey.

The Montmorency conference of SVDP have some booklets that may be of interest to parishioners that will assist us in celebrating and preparing for Easter and Pentecost. Pamphlets are in the front foyer near the entrance doors. Some of the pamphlets include:

- Family Prayer Traditions for Lent
- Lent and Me
- Lenten Family Graces
- 10 Creative Things Kids can do for Lent
- Family Meal Prayers for Lent

We hope that you enjoy the selection. Please feel free to browse all the pamphlets. A gold coin donation in the poor boxes located at the front and side entrances will help defray costs.

Easter Liturgy Volunteers

If you would like to be involved in the Easter Liturgies at **St Francis Xavier Church**, we invite you to add your name and a contact phone number on the volunteer sheets in the Gathering Space.

We very much appreciate your assistance, keeping in mind you will need to be up-to-date with Child Safety requirements.

In **St Francis Xavier Church**, we will be celebrating the Liturgies of **Holy Thursday 7.00pm**, **Easter Vigil Saturday 7.00pm** and **Easter Sunday morning 8.30am**.

As we determine our required number of ministers we will be in touch with you. Thank you.

Fifth Sunday of Lent - 25 & 26 March



Project Compassion brings together Australian schools, parishes and supporters to raise funds for people in vulnerable communities across the world. This year, we introduced you to the story of four inspiring people whose lives have been transformed with your generous support: Laxmi, Tereesa, Priscilla and Thu

Today, they are creating a better world for their families, their communities and for all future generations.

Project Compassion is a demonstration of the faith, empathy and generosity of our supporters. It is the lifeblood of Caritas Australia - without it, we could not do the vital work we do. Thank you for helping transform lives today and for all future generations.

Please donate to Project Compassion 2023.

Together, we can help vulnerable communities face their challenges today and build a better tomorrow **For All Future Generations**.

You can donate through Project Compassion donation boxes/envelopes available from your parish, by visiting caritas.org.au/project-compassion, or by calling 1800 024 413.



Photo: Phan Tan Lam/Caritas Australia

Listening to Julian of Norwich

A fourteenth-century visionary and anchorite helps to keep our gaze fixed on the Cross / **By Claire Gilbert**

Although we were christened as babies, church only really featured in our family at Christmas and on Easter Sunday, and my awareness of Lent came late to me. Its meaning has grown in recent years, not least through the deep companionship of Julian of Norwich. She was the bright star in the dry-as-dust universe of an Oxford theology degree in the 1980s - the subject of my doctoral thesis - and then, when I was diagnosed with myeloma, a cancer of the blood, my spiritual companion through two and a half years of grueling treatment. As I emerged from the treatment, I felt a call to tell her story in her own words. I am steeped in her.

Julian's astonishing *Revelations of Divine Love* does not mention Lent. What it does do is to invite its reader - who comes best to her text as its disciple - to walk towards an encounter with Christ as directly and transformatively as Julian herself did in her 1373 revelations. In that encounter, the experience of the pain of Christ's Passion is received by the reader as it was by Julian: viscerally, immediately, undeniably. She faces the pain with her eyes wide open, asking to receive it in her own body as a mother, desperate with love, asks to receive and relieve the pain of her child:

"Methought it passed bodily death, my pains. But of all pains that leadeth to salvation, this is the most pain: to see thy love suffer. How might any pain be more to me than to see him that is all my life, all my bliss and all my joy suffering?"

In the midst of this powerful, porous exchange, her gaze locked upon Christ, Julian hears a friendly voice inviting her to look away from the Cross, up to Heaven, where there is no pain. With all her might she refuses to break her gaze. "This is my heaven," she insists. The shared pain is where she stays, love and faith making her steadfast. And after what seems like a "sennight" of suffering, as she and all of Christ's

lovers and Creation itself move through the climax of pain of the Crucifixion, her constant gaze still fastened on the Cross, she sees that the pain has passed and Jesus' face is full of blissful cheer, and she feels the same blissful cheer in herself. The vision is unexpected: she does not see Christ die, and his face is still the broken, bloody, ugly face that passed through the Passion. But he is resurrected, and Julian and all of Creation rejoice with him.

Shortly after her visions (we think) Julian entered an anchorhold, bricked up into a small room attached to a church, remaining there for the rest of her long life. Why did she do this? The action makes no sense at all if I do not understand what prayer was to her, and what her revelations were to her. To the contemplative, being left alone to pray is a rare and precious gift. To one who has received strange and compelling visions full of as yet dimly understood meaning, pregnant with the possibility of heresy, that could lead to excommunication - being cancelled, in today's pitiless secular puritanism - the chance to be able to draw her curtain across the window to a prying world and be left in peace to mull on what she has seen, and, more dangerous still, to write it down, the anchorhold pulls her soul towards it, and her soul welcomes it.

She would not have known if her words would ever be read, but she wrote them.

All of this teaches me how to approach Lent. Kneeling in Westminster Abbey for the powerful service of Communion with aching, sung plainly and exquisitely by the choir, enacted in solemn sorrow by the clergy, our foreheads marked, our penitence in plain sight, I am moved to my core as my eyes fix themselves upon the Cross. From that depth of sorrow made porous

through my penitence, my faith evoked, I begin the slow-paced journey towards Good Friday.

For now, I cannot see beyond the Cross. For now, I am as a child who does not know that her pain will come to an end, or rather, knows only that this time of patient pacing will end with the Cross, that this must come to pass. Like Julian, I will not look away from the Cross to some other, happier place. As a matter of discipline, I do not let my mind dwell on what falls after Good Friday. That would be cheating.

It's good to fast in Lent, not to drink, to perform acts of charity. But my besetting sin is pride in achievement and I'm far too prone to turn those acts into my own little triumphs of the will.

Julian fastened her gaze upon the Cross with no thought of turning away. She entered her cell with no thought of leaving it. She wrote her *Revelations* with no thought that they would be read. Ongoing journeys all, with no prospect of an outcome, no goal secured, no "job done". She challenges my addiction to achievement. And so my Lenten prayer is to try, to really try, to stay with the task in hand, whatever it may be, not seeking reward, not

listening to the tempting voice that calls me to triumph in what I have done. To keep pacing, my eyes fixed on the Cross, letting nothing draw my gaze from it, all the way to Good Friday. And simply trusting that what lies beyond will come to pass in God's good time.



Claire Gilbert writes and speaks about ethics and spirituality in politics and public life, medicine and ecology. She is director of Westminster Abbey Institute. I, Julian, her fictional autobiography of Julian of Norwich, is published by Hodder & Stoughton on 13 April.

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 sympathizing 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:

Apart from the intimacy of Jesus' farewell discourse with his disciples, the story of the raising of Lazarus is the most deeply personal in John's gospel. We are told that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. He calls Lazarus his friend, and when he sees the tears of Mary and others, he feels great distress, sighs deeply, and weeps.

Yet for all this, John is not aiming to arouse our sympathy with a human-interest story. He has a much more serious purpose, that of shedding light on Jesus' true identity and summoning his readers to the fullness of faith. John gives an early clue to this in Jesus' decision not to go immediately to Bethany; what is at the forefront of Jesus' mind is the glory of God, not human consolation. John goes on, in verses we do not hear today, to report that the raising of Lazarus provoked the plot to kill Jesus. Ultimately, as the gospel as a whole testifies, the glory of God is made manifest in the death of Jesus.

The length of this story (the longest single narrative in John apart from the passion) presents one challenge, but another is the interweaving of its emotional and theological threads. Ministers of the gospel have to hold in balance its profound poignancy and its Christological testimony. As has been spelt out in the commentaries on the gospel stories of the past two Sundays, a choice has to be made between the full or the shortened version, as well as about the manner of proclamation. The guiding principle is what will be of most benefit for the assembly. **Break Open the Word 2023**