

Mary at the cross a model for adults

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How can we preach more effectively to the youth?

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What Pope Benedict writes in his new book on Jesus

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'Lifetime allies' Cosatu and bishops give the poor hope

STAFF REPORTER

THERE is "hope for the poor but they will not be handed wealth on a silver platter", leading trade unionist Zwelinzima Vavi said in an address to the annual general meeting of the Justice and Peace (J&P) department of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), whom he described as "lifetime allies".

Mr Vavi said that no real, lasting improvement in the lives of the poor will be won without a struggle.

This was the first public AGM held by J&P. It was attended by more than 200 people from churches, government, civil society organisations and trade unions. The AGM ran under the theme, "Is there any hope at all for the poor".

J&P head Fr Mike Deeb OP said the AGM highlighted the need for all stakeholders to come together to fight poverty in South Africa.

Speaking at the event, Professor Tinyiko Maluleke, a theologian with the University of South Africa (UNISA), blamed politicians for often creating hope where there is no hope. He said people are so desperate that they think they can buy hope from a plastic bottle; he urged the Church to fight against politicians who give false hope.

Prof Maluleke said South Africa "is a country that is stuck in transition with people suffering from poverty. If we remove government grants most people will die of starvation". In his theological analysis, Prof Maluleke equated Lazarus to the poor population in South Africa who, he stressed, are not merely statistics but are human beings.

He highlighted the need for government to listen to the people because they do have solutions to most of the problems. "Poor people need to be recognised and to be given true hope before they die," he said, referring to Abraham who hoped against hope to have a child.

"There is still hope for the poor in South Africa, if only government improves on service delivery, education and job creation," Prof Maluleke said.

In his address, Mr Vavi called the Con-



Pupils at St Joseph's School in Linton Grange, Port Elizabeth, celebrated the launching of the "Pillars of Character" campaign. The day consisted of a prayer, presentations of slogans, a fun walk, games, sport and food stalls.

gress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), of which he is the secretary-general, and the SACBC "lifetime allies".

"We were side-by-side and shoulder-to-shoulder in the trenches in the fight against apartheid and for justice. We have remained close to the SACBC for the past 17 years," Mr Vavi said.

He reminded the meeting that in 1994, South Africa won political emancipation and 17 years later there is a need to revive the same traditions of selflessness in the struggle for economic emancipation, justice and peace.

Mr Vavi summed up the poverty crisis in South Africa quoting from the Declaration of the Civil Society Conference held in

October 2010 which stated that "South African citizens have a constitution and laws which give better guarantees of social justice, human rights and equality than almost anywhere else in the world. Yet in practice millions are denied these rights, especially socio-economic rights, in what has become the most unequal nation in the world."

The trade union leader said the rich elite earn millions by exploiting the labour of the working class.

"A minority, including some of our own former comrades in public office, make their millions by corruptly manipulating opportunities to win tenders, bribing offi-

cials or using political connections."

He referred to the lack of an official poverty line for South Africa, with 50% of the population living on 8% of national income. "On the other hand the number of billionaires in South Africa nearly doubled from 16 in 2009 to 31 in 2010 and the country's 20 richest men enjoyed a 45% increase in wealth." Mr Vavi added that the poorest 10% of earners get R1 275 a month, which is 0.57% of the total earnings, while the top 10% get R111 733, which is 49,2% of the total.

Fr Deeb said it was clear that South Africa remains the most unequal society in the world where poverty lives in such close proximity to ostentatious wealth. "Families living in shacks in Diepsloot, with no running water or electricity, no jobs and pathetic service delivery, live just a few miles from the families in Sandton in mansions with big gardens and swimming pools, and well funded private schools."

According to Fr Deeb, Mr Vavi contended that there is hope for the poor, since an unequal society cannot survive indefinitely. Mr Vavi gave examples of the current uprising in Tunisia and Egypt, saying if such people power can bring down dictators such as former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, asking how much more should we, living in a democracy, be able to transform the lives of the poor of South Africa.

Mr Vavi insisted that the key to overcoming poverty is job creation adding that employment does not only bring an income but self-respect, self-confidence and personal dignity. Fr Deeb explained that unemployment in South Africa is estimated to be at 36% which includes people who have given up looking for jobs.

Mr Vavi blamed the current poverty and unemployment on the economic structure which he said was inherited from the days of colonialism and apartheid.

He urged a move towards an economy based primarily on the manufacturing industry. This, he said, is the only basis for a modern, developed economy which can create jobs at the rate at which the government wants to achieve, 5 million jobs by 2020.

Now everybody can walk like a pope

BY SARA ANGLE

AUDREY Hepburn had Hubert Givenchy, Rita Hayworth had Jean Louis, Michelle Obama has Jason Wu, and the pope has the Gammarelli.

From their little shop in Rome, the Gammarelli family has been outfitting popes, as well as cardinals, bishops and priests since 1798.

Now Mes Chaussettes Rouges (My Red Socks), a Paris-based online retailer, is offering a tiny piece of Gammarelli style to the general public.

"I first saw the red socks in the early '90s on the French prime minister, Edouard Balladur, and thought it was very amusing, but I found out that the Gammarelli socks were only available in Rome," said Vincent Metzger, the proprietor of Mes Chaussettes Rouges.

Mr Metzger and a friend created the

business initially by purchasing a bulk quantity of socks from Gammarelli and selling them to friends in the northern summer of 2009.

They saw a business opportunity, Mr Metzger recalled: "We went to Rome again and stayed there for three nights for negotiations, and we made a contract."

Other than the Gammarelli shop behind the Pantheon in Rome, Mes Chaussettes Rouges is the only licensed retailer of Gammarelli products.

Mr Metzger claimed the Gammarelli socks are now worn by French Prime Minister Francois Fillon, "which I think is very funny. He buys them on our website," Mr Metzger said.

Gammarelli socks are "the best quality, because they are made with long fibred cotton, making them more solid". And because the seam is done by hand on the sides of the foot rather than machine sewn

at the toe, Mr Metzger thinks they are much more comfortable.

Gammarelli socks are designed as religious clothing, so they are available only in cardinal red, bishop purple and priest black.

The pope wears white socks, but Mes Chaussettes Rouges offers papal white only upon special request.

Mes Chaussettes Rouges targets a particular kind of customer—what they call "The Gammarelli Man", who, according to the website, is someone who possesses true virtue in all things and appreciates the little things in life.

The Mes Chaussettes Rouges website even works in a pun, calling Gammarelli socks "an infallible means by which to stand out".—CNS



Red socks made by Rome's Gammarelli family are now being sold online with the launch of Paris-based retailer Mes Chaussettes Rouges (My Red Socks). Since 1798, the Gammarelli store in Rome has been outfitting popes, cardinals, bishops and priests from across the globe. (CNS photo courtesy of Mes Chaussettes Rouges)



A roundtable discussion on the theme "Does South Africa have an activist Parliament?" was hosted by the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office (CPLO). Pictured are Mike Pothier of the CPLO; Pregs Govender, deputy-chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission; and Henri Nkuepo of the Human Rights Commission.

Warm welcome for new archbishop

BY PATRICK MAKAMURE,
ARCHIBALD MASHAU &
MARTIN WAMBA

CATHOLICS in Pretoria greeted their recently installed ordinary, Archbishop William Slattery, with enthusiasm when he celebrated his first Mass in the city's Sacred Heart cathedral.

Welcoming Archbishop Slattery on behalf of the cathedral parish community, Dennis Setshedi said: "Your installation as archbishop of Pretoria has been met with great excitement, joy and happiness. So many of us have been waiting anxiously to meet you, and indeed, to welcome you."

"We thank God for sending you to us. We look forward to your leadership and guidance. Your Grace, I am glad to inform you that we are a vibrant multicultural and multilingual community which is committed to giving you the necessary support in the discharge of your responsibility."

Archbishop Slattery, a Franciscan who previously headed the diocese of Kokstad, was formally installed in Pretoria East's church of the Beatitudes in late January.

The day was filled with celebration and song with the



Archbishop William Slattery

cathedral's choir filling the air with music.

The West African community participated in procession of the Word and the whole congregation participated through the service with enthusiasm as the archbishop delivered an insightful homily.

Various communities and sodalities presented the archbishop with gifts.

The Zimbabwean communi-

ty also led a procession, followed by the Sodality of the Sacred Heart, the West African community and the choir.

The Mass was followed by a lunch with the archbishop.

Vuyi Phehane who spoke on behalf of the cathedral community added: "There is no doubt that our community and our society as a whole, with your leadership, will be able to follow Christ and his values. We look forward to being enriched by your presence, and by your teachings; helping us to build the Catholic spirit in this archdiocese and encouraging collaboration at all levels of Church life."

Meanwhile, the archdiocese of Pretoria is organising a pilgrimage to Italy and France to witness Archbishop Slattery and other new archbishops from around the world receive the pallium from Pope Benedict at a Mass in St Peter's basilica in the Vatican.

The pallium is a band made of lamb's wool given to a metropolitan archbishop as a mark of his jurisdiction.

■ The pilgrimage, from June 23 to July 7, will be led by Archbishop Slattery and will visit Rome, Assisi and Milan in Italy, and Paris and Lourdes in France. For details contact Michelle on 012 342 0179.

Call to Christians to give up meat, become vegetarian

BY CLAIRE MATHIESON

A JESUIT priest has suggested that vegetarianism is a Christian option.

In a blog on the website of the Jesuit Institute of South Africa (www.jesuitinstitute.org.za), Fr Peter Knox said a call by Pope Benedict for Christians to cut down on their meat consumption had been an idea circulated by many in the Church.

"I had recently received an invitation to a lecture on the moral obligation to be vegetarian, from a religious and secular perspective. This invitation I dutifully passed on to a friend, a confirmed carnivore, who had been disturbed at the sight of feedlots beside the road in Gauteng. 'If this is the way our meat is raised,' he had asked, 'isn't it better to be vegetarian?'"

Fr Knox said he had become increasingly aware of the meat production business in the country. "For kilometre after kilometre, in pens of a few hundred square metres, thousands of young cattle are fattened on grain to prepare them for

the table."

In South Africa some 75% (or 1,35 million head) of beef is raised this way.

"Apparently their diet makes them produce 66% less methane than free-range cattle. It produces tender and lean meat when the cattle are slaughtered," Fr Knox said. "The less stress and excitement they have, the better they eat."

However, Fr Knox said, while the environment may be stress-free for the cattle, they do not have access to grass—the diet for which they are created.

Moreover, raising cattle diminishes food resources for people.

"They [cattle] consume tons of grain (mostly mealies) which would otherwise be destined for human consumption. Their water usage is much higher than that of free-ranging cattle. They are in such close quarters that disease can spread rapidly among a whole herd of cattle before it is noticed or treated. Respiratory diseases are rife, reducing growth rates and

increasing costs."

Fr Knox said the current meat industry caters entirely for humans and takes a utilitarian approach to animals. He said that animal rights activists are also seen as being "whacky". Animals, just like the planet as a whole, are proper objects of our moral concern, he said.

"If we take God's point of view, we realise that God created the universe and all that is in it not solely to sustain human life. However God does care for the welfare of what is most important for our own survival and this includes the animals and plants that feed us."

The Jesuit priest said that Lent is an opportunity to rethink our relationship to God, our neighbour and our world. "We examine our way of life and what we use and consume. We look deeper than the convenient packaging of our daily life."

Fr Knox added that humans might discover that there are compelling arguments for reducing or even eliminating our consumption of meat.

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Wet-weather companion inspiration for new novel

BY CLAIRE MATHIESON

INSPIRED by stories told during his childhood, Catholic businessman Kevin Butler has written a historical novel, titled *Parley with the Devil*.

Mr Butler, a parishioner of St Paul's in Somerset West, near Cape Town, said the stories were inspired by great-grandfather, James Philip Butler.

"These [the stories] first got me thinking about a book. He arrived in South Africa around 1840 and got up to some colourful adventures, but I had insufficient information on him to fund a biography so I had to become imaginative and the idea of a novel dawned," Mr Butler said.

The father of one said it was while living on a farm in the north of New Zealand during a very wet winter that he first started writing down ideas for the book about the escapades of the young Irishman in Victorian South Africa.

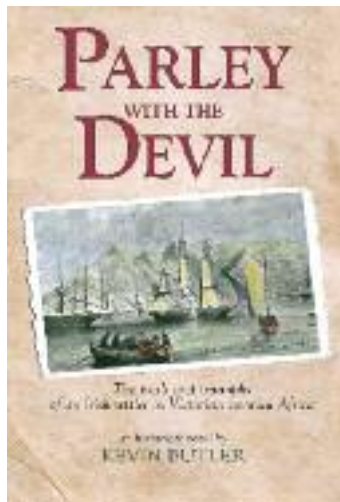
"James Bradley became my wet-weather companion and so a story of adventure and intrigue emerged. While I dreamed of Africa, I wrote and escaped the miserable New Zealand weather," he said.

Mr Butler said he "spent much time in the local library reading about the Victorian Cape, becoming progressively more fascinated".

It was only after returning to Cape Town that the story was



Author Kevin Butler



Kevin Butler's first novel, inspired by the stories of his grandfather, is now available.

reconstructed to its published form, he added.

The book follows James Bradley, a young Irishman who arrives in the colonial Cape of 1840 as a new cavalry recruit in defence of the eastern border. The story is interwoven with real events and includes conversations on the slave trade, infamous battles and skirmishes with local tribes, as well as a touch of romance.

The son of a dentist, born in Beaufort West, Mr Butler said he spent much of his early youth on his grandparents' sheep farms in the Karoo district of Loxton. "As a youngster I rode horses and hunted vermin for my pocket money."

Mr Butler attended St Patrick's Christian Brothers' School in Kimberly before going

on to complete science and arts degrees in Cape Town.

"Many years of my young life were spent in the advertising industry in Johannesburg, London and eventually in Cape Town where I started as a copywriter and finally ended up as managing director".

Mr Butler also started successful cosmetics businesses but is today focusing on his writing.

Parley with the Devil was launched in Cape Town this month at a well-attended function. It is available at secular bookstores.

A group of past pupils of St Henry's Marist Brothers' College in Durban, travelled to the Sundays River Valley near Addo, in the Eastern Cape, to help with the week-long summer camp the Marist Brothers and Sisters of Mercy run for local children in informal settlements in the area. The group made a donation and helped distribute food in the area to the many deprived families. Pictured is Jason Grieve, one of the past pupils, interacting with a local child.



School celebrates 140 years

BY CLAIRE MATHIESON

CELEBRATING its 140th anniversary, a convent school recalled the six Irish Dominican sisters who founded one of today's top performing schools in Cape Town.

According to Springfield Convent School's public relations officer, Sue Anderson, it took faith, dedication, a great sense of courage and 800 pounds to fulfill the need for a school in the "countryside" of what now is suburban Wynberg.

In honour of the jubilee celebration a gala concert was held in Cape Town City Hall with the Springfield choirs and orchestra performing to a packed audience. According to Ms Anderson the celebrations also saw "a 140th birthday Mass, celebrated with Archbishop Stephen Brislin and Archbishop Henry, with well over a thousand Springfield pupils, families, past pupils and special invited guests in The Avenue at Springfield, and followed by tea in the beautiful convent gardens".

Ms Anderson said Archbishop Brislin identified the strengths of the school and underlined the importance of holding on to what was most



Springfield celebrated its 140 years with hundreds of cup cakes.

precious at the heart of Springfield: the "essence of faith and courage", which she said holds true for all who pass through the gates of Springfield, as it did for the founding sisters those years ago.

Western Cape premier Helen Zille said in a letter to the school that the anniversary was a "testament to your school's commitment to excellence in education. The educators, learners and parents of Springfield have much to be proud of, par-

ticularly the contribution it has made towards increasing access to opportunities for girls."

Springfield was the first school in Cape Town to offer matric to young women and to open its doors to all female learners irrespective of their race.

Ms Anderson said inter-house galas, a Mass for deceased sisters and staff, a formal dinner and a giant decorative tier of birthday cup cakes also formed part of the week-long celebrations.

Call to properly label GM foods

STAFF REPORTER

THE Diakonia Council of Churches, of which the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference is a member, has called for the clear labelling of food contents to become part of the Department of Trade and Industry's Consumer Protection Act which is currently being revised.

Diakonia communications coordinator Kudzai Taruona said the council is calling for support to label food in South Africa. Referring to the draft legislation, Mr Taruona said the section

dealing with the labelling of genetically modified (GM) food is "so weak and ineffective that it still leaves consumers in the dark about GM food".

The department received comments on the proposed legislation and has been asked to make it law that food producers provide further information on the labels of all foods that contain GM ingredients. The department has also been asked to "remove all loopholes that allow companies to avoid meaningful labelling", Mr Taruona said.

Clarity on the GM content

threshold has also been encouraged. Countries differ on the amount of GM presence that determines whether an item of food can be considered modified. Diakonia has requested that it be set at 1%.

Currently the act requires only foods containing GM maize, soya bean and imported canola oil to be labelled, exempting foods with up to 5% GM content from labelling.

Mr Taruona said the council felt it was the consumers' right to know exactly what was contained in their food.

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St Kizito Children's Programme Cape Town

St. Kizito Children's Programme (SKCP) is seeking to employ a Parish Group Mentor from 1 June 2011. SKCP is a parish-based movement responding to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children in the Archdiocese of Cape Town. SKCP is currently working in sixteen parishes serving largely disadvantaged communities, where local Parish Groups of volunteers work directly with the children, caregivers and families who are in need of their services. The Parish Groups are led and guided by Parish Group Mentor responsible for a cluster of participating Parishes.

The key performance areas of the Parish Group Mentor are to:

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Liberia fears civil war spillover

BY BRONWEN DACHS

LIBERIANS fear a spillover of violence from Ivory Coast as tens of thousands of Ivorians fleeing political tensions at home seek refuge in neighbouring countries, said a Church worker in Liberia's Gbarnga diocese.

As more refugees cross the border into Liberia, "there is concern that among them are supporters of either side who want to consolidate their position from here", said Manuel Bangalie, who works for the diocesan justice and peace commission. "We don't know their intentions."

Mr Bangalie said that a team of five people from the diocese, Caritas and Catholic Relief Services visited the border areas in Liberia's Nimba County to assess the needs of the refugees.

They found a vast increase in

the number of refugees since visiting the area in January, "because the tension has intensified" in Ivory Coast, he said, noting that an estimated 3 000 refugees are in the county.

The United Nations fears Ivory Coast's increasingly bloody post-electoral crisis, resulting from presidential incumbent Laurent Gbagbo refusing to leave office after Alassane Ouattara was declared the winner of the November 28, 2010 elections, could become a full-blown civil war. More than 1 000 civilians have been killed since the beginning of December.

Mr Bangalie said the Church backs the Liberian government's plan to expand refugee camps at the border and is involved in plans to "provide more accommodation, food and maternal health facilities". He said the assessment team

found that most refugees at the border are women and children.

Many refugees have made their way to the city of Gbarnga and "residents are finding it difficult to provide the necessary accommodation and food for the influx of people", Mr Bangalie said.

Locals are "trying to manage and make the refugees feel at home", he said, noting that during Liberia's civil war its refugees were accommodated in Ivory Coast "and now is our chance to reciprocate".

About 250 000 people were killed in Liberia's civil war, which ended in 2003.

"People here know how civil war feels," Mr Bangalie added.

African Church leaders have urged a strong role for religious officials, including the Ivorian bishops' conference, in mediating the impasse in Ivory Coast.—CNS



A Muslim girl chants slogans and holds up a Quran and a cross during a rally to demonstrate unity between Muslims and Christians in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt. The rally took place after recent sectarian clashes left 13 people dead. (Photo: Mohamed Abd El-Ghany, Reuters/CNS)

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Pope: Despite troubles, Church is gift from God

BY CINDY WOODEN

EVEN if the Catholic Church is beset by problems, it is still a gift of God, Pope Benedict told several hundred pastors of Rome parishes.

Too often, "perhaps because of a fear of triumphalism", priests and other Catholics do not rejoice enough over the gift of being part of the Church, the pope said during his annual Lenten meeting with the Rome pastors.

"Certainly, there always are difficult, negative aspects" of the Church's life on earth, "but it is a beautiful gift that we can live in the Church" and receive the sacraments of God's love and mercy, the pope said.

"The fact that the Church is not only a gift of God and divine, but also very human" means there always will be problems and a need for penance.

"The Church is always threatened. There is always a danger, the opposition of the devil", who does not want there to be

believers on earth.

Christians, however, can be confident that "truth is always stronger than lies, love is stronger than hatred and God is stronger than all the opposing forces", the pope said.

The meeting at the Vatican began with a strong round of applause for the pope, who will turn 84 on April 16 and will celebrate the 60th anniversary of his priestly ordination in June.

Rather than responding to the priests' questions, as he has done in the past, Pope Benedict reflected with them on a reading from one of St Paul's letters. Only occasionally referring to his notes, he spoke for almost 40 minutes.

A priest is a servant and that means "doing not what would please me most", but what is necessary to serve others.

As priests, "sometimes we have to do things that don't immediately appear spiritual and wouldn't be our choice; from the pope to the lowliest assistant pastor, we all have to

do administrative and temporal work", he said.

Pope Benedict said that everything a priest says and does—whether or not he's formally ministering to someone at the moment—reflects on his priesthood, because the idea of someone being a "part-time priest" is impossible.

Priesthood is not an occupation a man chooses as a career. "Only God can make a priest, and if there's a choice involved, it's God's," the pope said.

Priests must preach the truth, the whole truth, taught by the Church, even the truth that is uncomfortable, even on themes that personally I don't like very much," the pope said.

He told the priests that it's natural that young priests are full of enthusiasm and that a priest's physical energy wanes as he ages, but "it's important that even in old age, even as the years pass, we do not lose our zeal and the joy of being called by the Lord".—CNS

Too much greed, Vatican rep tells UN



Church bells rang, horns blasted and firecrackers echoed throughout Lebanon as it was announced that Bishop Bechara Rai of Jbeil, Lebanon, had been elected the 77th patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church, Doreen Abi Raad reports. Patriarch Rai, 71, known for his courage to speak the truth, is seen as someone who can unite Maronite Catholics, who have been divided among political party lines. He replaces Cardinal Nasrallah P Sfeir, 90, who retired because of age. Patriarch Rai will officially be installed on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25. He said his motto will be "Communion and Charity". (Photo: Paul Haring, CNS)

DURING a United Nations conference on the "green economy" and sustainable development, a professor speaking on behalf of the Vatican urged that humans remain at the centre of all such development.

"Promoting economic development should not be at the expense of the poor and marginalised or of future generations, which is often qualified as 'inter-generational engagement and justice'," economics professor Charles Clark of St John's University, which has campuses in the United States and in Rome, said in his remarks to the UN General Assembly.

"The well-being of all, and especially those who live with the pains of hunger and who are excluded from contributing to and benefiting from the economic, social and political life of their communities, requires that both markets and government policies be directed towards the higher goal of integral human development, grounded in the principle of the fundamental human dignity of each person," he said.

Prof Clark made his remarks during the UN's Second Preparatory Committee for the Commission on Sus-

tainable Development. He was a member of the Vatican delegation to the committee; the Holy See has permanent observer status at the UN.

"Most of the development strategies and policies that have failed to promote integral human development in the past have done so because they reduced humans to a shadow of their humanity."

"On the one hand, we are told that self-interest and greed are the sole drivers of human behaviour, and that 'free markets' are all that is needed to turn 'private vice into public virtue'."

On the other hand, we are told that human nature is what society makes it, giving us a development strategy that centres on structures and institutions, with the hope that the right institutions will be enough to promote development."

However one views the issue, Prof Clark said, "humanity cannot be reduced to either selfish egos or social constructs. A full understanding of what it means to be human must also include the basic solidarity that is a necessary part of our humanity, that comports to the fundamental dignity of each person and that demands justice."—CNS

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Church: We'll aid Japan after secular agencies are gone

BY SARA ANGLE

FOLLOWING the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, the Catholic Church "wants to be there not only in the short term but especially in the long term", after "many of the secular agencies have gone and there's no one to help", according to Mgr Anthony Figueiredo of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the Vatican's charity promotion and coordinating office.

Cor Unum said Pope Benedict had donated \$100 000 to the relief efforts of the Japanese bishops' conference. "The bishops are the first responsible for charity in the diocese and they know the needs of the people," Mgr Figueiredo said.

Bishop Marcellino Dajji Tani of Saitama, one of the dioceses hit hardest by the disaster, told the Catholic missionary news agency Fides that the catastrophe is a reminder that "life is in the hands of God and that life is a gift from God", and he described the tragedy as a challenge for Christians during Lent "to practise and witness to the commandment of love and brotherly love".

The director of Caritas Japan, Fr Daisuke Narui, told Fides: "This painful event may be an opportunity to spread the values of the Gospel, that is, the frater-

nity of all men and women, the building of common good, the recognition that every person has the dignity of a child of God and is important in the eyes of God.

"If with our work and our witness, we can communicate that, then from this evil will come good."



A stamp showing Pope John Paul II, Jesus of Divine Mercy and St Peter's basilica is being jointly issued by the Vatican and Poland to celebrate the May 1 beatification of the Polish pope. The stamp will become available on April 12. (Photo courtesy of the Vatican Philatelic and Numismatic Office)

Pope Benedict offered his prayers for the people of Japan: "I want to renew my spiritual closeness to that country's dear people, who with dignity and courage are dealing with the consequences of the calamity. I pray for the victims and their families and for all who are suffering because of these terrible events. I encourage all those who, with laudable speed, are working to bring help. Let us remain united in prayer."

In a message to members of the Orthodox Church, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople said the Japanese tragedy demonstrates the threat posed by nuclear power plants and it calls for serious reflection.

"With all due respect to the science and technology of nuclear energy and for the sake of the survival of the human race, we counter-propose the safer green forms of energy," the patriarch said.

The Orthodox patriarch, who is a leading proponent of a Christian environmental theology, said in his message: "Our Creator granted us the gifts of the sun, wind, water and ocean, all of which may safely and sufficiently provide energy. Therefore we ask: Why do we persist in adopting such dangerous sources of energy?"—CNS

Violence threat to S Sudan freedom

BY PAUL JEFFREY

VIOLENCE in the contested Abyei region of Sudan has displaced thousands of families and threatens to derail talks leading to the birth of Africa's newest country in July.

Satellite images show troops from the North and South digging in around Abyei, a contested region where at least 149 people were killed in fighting that began in late February. Aid groups estimate some 45 000 people have fled the region.

"Because of the fighting, most people have fled to the South. The few people still in Abyei are gathering their property and preparing to leave as well," said Fr Peter Suleiman, pastor of Our Lady of the Annunciation parish in Abyei.

The violence stems from a conflict between the nomadic Misseriya, a Khartoum-backed tribe that takes its cattle to Abyei during several months of the dry season, and the permanent residents of Abyei, mostly members of the Dinka Ngok tribe who support the Southern Sudan government in Juba.

A referendum on Abyei's

political future was scheduled for January, but it never took place because the two sides could not agree on who was eligible to vote.

Fr Suleiman said the Misseriya initiated the current fighting.

"They were allowed to come to Abyei to graze and water their cows, but they were not to be armed. This time they came with their cows but they also brought their guns and militias. And they started fighting," Fr Suleiman said.

"They destroyed four villages and caused many casualties. They burned houses and burned a school and a clinic. The four villages they attacked were reduced to ashes. Nobody is left there," the priest said.

According to the priest and other reports from the region, some of the displaced have moved in with relatives in villages to the south of Abyei, yet hundreds of families are living in the open, constructing makeshift shelters. A report from a Save the Children Sweden assessment team said area wells were unable to provide adequate water for the increased

population and that fights had broken out at some water points.

In response to the attacks around Abyei, the government in Juba broke off talks with Khartoum over details of the July independence of the South.

John Ashworth of the Denis Hurley Institute in Pretoria, an adviser to the Sudan Ecumenical Forum, called this "quite normal brinkmanship" that was characteristic of the way negotiations are conducted in Sudan.

"I don't think this will affect the independence of the South. July 9 is as sacrosanct as January 9 was," he said, comparing the date of Southern Sudan's expected independence with the date of its referendum on secession.

Fr Suleiman said he still hoped that negotiations would make it possible for the displaced to return home—at least those families whose homes were not destroyed.

"We believe in dialogue, so we're asking God to intervene in the talks, hoping something good will come from them."—CNS

British foreign policy is 'anti-Christian'

BY SIMON CALDWELL

CARDINAL Keith O'Brien of St Andrews and Edinburgh has accused the British government of operating an "anti-Christian foreign policy".

He criticised foreign secretary William Hague, a Catholic, for increasing overseas aid to countries such as Pakistan without demanding greater protection for religious minorities persecuted there.

"I urge William Hague to obtain guarantees from foreign governments before they are given aid," the cardinal said at the launch in Glasgow, Scotland, of "Persecuted and Forgotten", a 2011 report on persecuted Christians around the

world by Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic charity.

In a reference to the January 4 assassination of Salman Taseer, the Pakistani governor of Punjab, and the March 2 killing of minorities minister Shahbaz Bhatti, both of whom had opposed the country's controversial blasphemy laws, the cardinal said that "to increase aid to the Pakistan government when religious freedom is not upheld and those who speak up for religious freedom are gunned down is tantamount to an anti-Christian foreign policy".

"Pressure should now be put on the government of Pakistan—and the governments of the Arab world as well—to ensure that religious freedom is

upheld, [and] the provision of aid must require a commitment to human rights," the cardinal said in his comments.

He added that the Aid to the Church in Need report highlighted a "huge surge in Christians fleeing persecution" and that it revealed about 75% of all religious persecution today was anti-Christian.

"In countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, Christians face violence, intolerance and even death because of their beliefs. This is intolerable and unacceptable."

His comments followed an announcement by the British government to double overseas aid to Pakistan without requiring a commitment to religious freedom for Christians.—CNS



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The Southern Cross

Editor: Günther Simmermacher

Reverence at Mass

THE recent correspondence in this newspaper on the subject of music in the liturgy and the ongoing debate about the new translations in the English missal have been vigorous and occasionally perhaps even polarising. Even so, these discussions show that for many the Mass and its liturgy still matters a great deal.

This is how it should be. The Mass, Christ's sacrifice and his real presence in it, is at the centre of our faith. It is right that people should have strong opinions on the liturgy, provided these are expressed with such charity and respect as to prevent the Eucharist becoming a battleground.

One may contrast the passion for the liturgy that has been evident on our letters pages and other forums with the casual attitudes some Catholics exhibit at Mass. There is merit in the complaint that too often reverence for the Eucharist and respect for God's house are lacking.

It cannot be right that a sacristan has to pick up empty fast-food packages after a Mass, or that a priest has to collect used tissues from the benches, never mind that congregants discard consecrated hosts in the pew. There certainly is a lack of regard for the Eucharist when congregants present themselves for the reception of the Body of Christ while chewing gum, or treat the Mass itself as a social club rather than a time for prayer and worship.

While some instances of irreverence are readily observable, other gestures and signs are more difficult to measure.

Dress codes for Mass, for example, are subject to prevailing culture standards. In 1928 *The Southern Cross* could still object to women exposing their ankles in church; today this would seem absurd. It is entirely possible that a Catholic woman wearing a short dress has intense reverence for the Eucharist and that the woman in her Sunday best merely goes through the

motions at Mass. Dress is no reliable indicator of reverence.

Reverence cannot be measured by external gestures. Indeed, it would seem sinful to pass judgment in the first place.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus warns us to "beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them" (6:1). He is dismissive of those who are ostentatious in their exhibition of piety: "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others" (Mt 6:5).

Whatever external signs of reverence we demonstrate must above all be sincere. So it is salutary to bow before receiving Communion, but this should be because one seeks to show reverence for the present Christ in that manner. The gesture is meaningless if it is merely an automated response to an instruction. An ostentatious bow may be less reverent than no bow at all. God knows our hearts.

Of course, shows of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament can set an excellent example. More importantly, however, we must deepen our internal reverence for the Eucharist.

We do so alone in prayer and reflection, and in ensuring that we are in a state of grace as we receive Holy Communion. We do so in our parishes in on-going catechesis about the meaning of the Eucharist and proper preparation for it. And we do so in our families and communities by helping others understand the incredible gift of the sacrament, even and especially if we give witness by example, when we show our reverence not only towards the Eucharist but also to others.

As we prepare to present ourselves to receive the body and blood of Christ, we must remind ourselves of what we are about to receive, be conscious of the awesome reality of his presence, and act accordingly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor reserves the right to shorten or edit published letters. Letters below 300 words receive preference. Pseudonyms are acceptable only under special circumstances and at the Editor's discretion. Name and address of the writer must be supplied. No anonymous letter will be considered.

Your personal saviour and mine

A HAPPY, recent development in our priests' homilies (and in Pope Benedict's talks) is the frequency with which reference is made to the urgency for a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prior to Vatican II, the faith was often taught as a sort of philosophy, a system of do's and forbidding don'ts. This "personal relationship" terminology was seen as "Protestant" by many Catholics.

If materialism, hoarding money, power and prestige, watching television, rugby, football, cricket, gambling and playing the lotto, pornography and violent and sexually explicit movies take first place in our lives, we are breaking the first commandment and are guilty of idolatry by worshipping today's false gods and by dethroning God as the Lord and Saviour of our lives.

In this era of mercy, Christ has urgent need of victim souls to help enliven and apply the fruits of the victory won through his cross and

resurrection.

This is something the Blessed Mother is calling for frequently in her apparitions. What a privilege we have as co-redeemers to be ambassadors for Christ, the redeemer, actualising and bringing about what St Paul writes of in Col 1:24: "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the Church."

As victim souls, empowered by frequent Confession and Communion, daily prayer of the Rosary, the chaplet of Divine Mercy, Scripture reading, and surrendering our wills for God's intentions, we can help bring about the salvation of our lukewarm, non-believing and estranged relatives, loved-ones, enemies and even those unknown to us. We can actually be partakers and co-redeemers in applying Christ's work of redemption.

Consecration to the alliance of the hearts of Jesus and Mary could be a first step. Next, one way to

accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour in a special way is by praying the following 'miracle' prayer (propagated by the Servite Fathers)—preferably after Holy Communion, often and intensely, from the heart:

Lord Jesus, I come before you just as I am. I am sorry for my sins. I repent of my sins. Please forgive me. In your name, I forgive all others for what they have done against me.

I renounce Satan, the evil spirits and their works, I give you my entire life, Jesus, now and forever. I invite you into my life Jesus. I accept you as my personal Lord, God and Saviour. Heal me, change me, and strengthen me in body, soul and spirit.

Come, Lord Jesus, cover me, wash me with your precious blood, and fill me with your Holy Spirit. I love you Lord Jesus. I shall follow you every day of my life. Amen

The call of the 5th century Pope, St Leo the Great, Doctor of the Church, is as urgent as ever: "Unless a man accepts Jesus Christ as his own personal saviour, the victory won by Jesus on the cross will avail him nothing."

John Lee, Johannesburg

One-track solution?

YOUR report "New initiative helps the person and the family" (February 23) makes interesting reading: it shows what a narrowed-minded Church we are becoming.

Many of the ills that befall the human person in South Africa go way beyond the sexual realm, so why are the hierarchy so hung up on sex? Poverty, unemployment, corruption, crime, drugs, the exploitation of the environment, education, and health care are all major problems in South African society and yet we, as a Church, seem to think that all that degrades the human person is always linked to sexuality.

I am not sure how any of the problems Bishop Hugh Slatery lists will solve the above-mentioned issues which, like a cancer, will destroy South Africa if not addressed seriously. Should we ban gay partnerships so that poverty will be alleviated or health care improved?

A few weeks ago you reported on the remarks made by the president of the SACBC at their recent plenary session. Archbishop Buti Tlhagale frequently asks why the Church is no longer involved in public discourse, why it has been sidelined. Perhaps it is because we are alienating ourselves by having a one-track approach—sex—to problems facing people today?

Bishop Slatery also claims that "class-war feminism" is promoted in modern culture. Has he ever stopped to think that maybe feminism has become an aggressive feature of our society precisely because

people—women—have not been treated with dignity and respect?

The "Theology of the Body" seems to be the answer to everything at the moment, and the more I read about it, the more I think it is a form of Catholic fundamentalism. Should we not have a broader and better-informed approach to the multi-faceted problems that face the human person in South Africa and therefore help people in all the dimensions of their humanity?

Lynette Paterson, Johannesburg

What the Church wants?

YOUR correspondent Cate Bompas (February 2) seems to be concerned with the phenomenon of priests offering the Tridentine Mass—officially known as the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite—and in particular that this, in her view, is done with insufficient consultation and altogether too frequently, constituting what she views as an abuse.

Ms Bompas, and others of like mind, should refer to the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* as well as the Pope's accompanying explanatory letter, wherein the rights of priests and laity are outlined. Any priest of the Roman Rite is free to celebrate the Tridentine Mass according to the texts of the 1962 Roman missal without any special permission—and importantly the laity who wish, may be present at such Masses.

Public Masses can also be included in a parish's Mass schedule, where the need is judged by the parish priest to exist. If a "stable group" requests such a Mass, every effort should be made to accommodate such a request, and if all else fails, the matter should be referred to the pontifical commission ecclesia dei so that a solution may be found.

There is much uncertainty and lack of clarity as to what constitutes a "stable group"—probably because circumstances vary so widely around the world, as does the availability of priests, that to define this too narrowly would be unhelpful. It has been suggested that even just three people in a parish might be a stable group! Whether that, in practice, is realistic, is another matter entirely.

Significantly, the Ecclesia Dei in Rome declared in Letter 13/2007, dated January 20, 2010, that a priest may use his own initiative in scheduling public Tridentine Masses, so as to expose his parishioners to this form of the liturgy and introduce a broader spectrum of people to this part of their heritage.

As for the habitual use of this form being an abuse, does your correspondent know that there are growing communities of priests, such as the Priestly Fraternity of

Peter, and the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, which, with the full blessing of the Holy See, and in full communion with the pope, have had the charism of habitual—and, indeed, exclusive—use of the Tridentine Mass and associated liturgical rites, for many years, well before the 2007 motu proprio?

Clearly, the frequent, even habitual use of the Tridentine Mass, is in accordance with the mind of the Church today. Those priests who are exercising their rights under *Summorum Pontificum*, are to be commended in implementing the express wishes of our Holy Father.

If Ms Bompas does not wish to attend such a Mass, she is not compelled to do so. Be that as it may, I would encourage her to attend a Tridentine Mass at the cathedral in Johannesburg, where I know that it is available—it may well be for her an encouraging and uplifting experience.

May all priests and people open their hearts to all the Church has to offer and make widely available this form of the Roman rite, as the Church herself clearly wishes.

Nicholas Mitchell, Johannesburg

What Interdiocesan consultation?

YOUR report of the handover of the results of phase one of the Interdiocesan report to Archbishops Buti Tlhagale and William Slatery (March 9) refers to questionnaires given to parish pastoral councils and small Christian communities, "and individual Church members".

This is only the second time that I have heard of this Interdiocesan consultation. What is it about and what does it hope to achieve?

There certainly has been no mention of this "consultation" in any parish newsletters or weekly news bulletins in my parish, and no mention of it has been made from the pulpit. Were it not for the reports in *The Southern Cross*, I would have no knowledge of it. This could mean that many Catholics who may be able to contribute will not do so.

This once again raises the question as to how seriously the views of the laity are really considered by our bishops.

Mervyn Pollitt, Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal

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Tooth-mugs and justice

I RECENTLY spent some time at two very different locations: one a retreat centre (lovely setting but pretty basic), the other a beautiful four-star holiday resort with pretty much all the mod-cons one could wish for.

Neither of them provided a tooth-mug in the bathroom. No big deal, really. All you have to do is ask. That is the point: if you want something, or want it done right, or want it done according to how you think is right, then you have to take some action.

There are ways and means to take action. You can go to the management and make a request, fill in an evaluation form, complain, demonstrate or toyi-toyi, or just leave it and say: "Such is life."

With local elections on May 18 there is a need to look at how things are, how they should be, and how this can be achieved. In a sense that is what our region's March family theme—"If you want peace, work for justice"—is about. March is Human Rights month, so it focuses us on the way things ought to be for justice resulting in a peaceful environ-

ment, such as that which I experienced in the Drakensberg, away from demonstrations and all the hustle and bustle of city life.

What I believe is relevant for family life is how peace is experienced and justice achieved. What motivates us human beings? The principles of Catholic Social Teaching are helpful, particularly that of the dignity of the human being and the common good. However, is knowing that motivation enough?

Every family inherently knows these principles, but how well do we put them into practice and on what basis? And if we have difficulty at the level of the most basic structure of society, what will motivate us to do so at other levels? Is it, in fact, a more selfish, individualistic sense of "I want", even more so than "I need"?

It appears to me that the underlying Christian virtue of love is an essential ingredient in doing good and in acting for the common good; love of God, a desire to please God, love of neighbour (starting with those in our most intimate relationships).

Is love a feeling built around a sense of

Toni Rowland

Family Friendly



belonging? Is it a decision to love one and all, just because they are all God's children?

When I mention that there is a Charter of Rights of the Family dating from the 1980s people are usually surprised. Family rights include the right to life, to shelter, to marry, to have children, to education, to freedom of religion, to freedom to make responsible decisions about the family's way of life.

There is a unique innate sense of love, belonging and commitment that is natural to a family. When we think of and take on board the image of "Church as Family", we should be learning to treat others as family and generalise the qualities of commitment to others. It is a tall order, no doubt, but a necessary one for the good of society.

Pope Paul VI taught us that if you want peace, work for justice. And if you want justice, learn to love. Learn to take the appropriate action, whether it is requesting a tooth-mug or demonstrating for the right to life.

Chris Chatteris SJ

Pray with the Pope



Preaching to youth

General Intention: *That through its compelling preaching of the Gospel, the Church may give young people new reasons for life and hope.*

'COMPELLING' is a strong word, and its synonyms—"convincing", "forceful", "undeniable" and "gripping"—are equally strong. These terms describe the pope's ideal homily for young people. No doubt he would be hoping and praying for something equally compelling for older people as well!

Preachers certainly need the support of prayer to be convincing. I am reminded of the story of the preacher who wasn't doing too well one Sunday. On noticing this, his congregation started storming heaven at the tops of their voices with the words: "Help him Lord! Help him!" We could speculate that perhaps the preacher lacked his usual force because he himself had that morning neglected or cut short his prayers.

When it comes to communicating the Gospel to youth, the assumption is often made that we must focus on the latest communication techniques and become like those motivational speakers who earn their crust by giving rousing talks to schoolchildren on the secrets of worldly success. Or we might feel that we should get up to date with the teen soapsies, or get onto Facebook.

No doubt these things are all very good and helpful, but I have a memory of, as a young person, being completely captivated by a man who simply spoke—and spoke simply. He would sit down, take a scripture text, normally from the Gospel, and expound it for a whole hour while his young audience hung on to his every word. They were certainly given "new reasons for life and hope". He was a layman. His name was Jean Vanier.

Jean Vanier has a great natural gift for communication, but he is a compelling preacher because what he says comes from a deep well of prayer and a gentle wisdom that has been enriched by his Gospel-inspired way of life. Help us Lord! Help us!

Introducing Jesus

Missionary Intention: *That by proclamation of the Gospel and the witness of their lives, missionaries may bring Christ to those who do not yet know him.*

ONCE asked a Jesuit priest, a missionary in India, what he did as an apostolate. "I preach the Gospel," he replied rather disarmingly. He went on to explain that he was involved in the primary evangelisation of the so-called "tribal" communities. Primary evangelisation: I have often imagined myself to be there and wondered how I would cope. Where would I start? What would I say?

The "first contact" of primary evangelisation is beautifully depicted in the 1986 film *The Mission*. This first meeting between the European missionaries and the Guarani indigenous people is made possible by the universal human language of music when the leading missionary plays his flute.

Such indigenous people would have had no knowledge at all of Jesus Christ. Today there cannot be many people left in the world for whom the name of Jesus Christ is completely new. Perhaps the problem today is that people *think* they know who Jesus is or is not, and dismiss him out of ignorance.

For example, some will tell you that he never actually existed and was the invention of a historical conspiracy*. If this ignorance is wilful, it can be more difficult to deal with than that found in primary evangelisation where missionaries often came across a fundamental openness to faith and an interest in Jesus.

Of course, after the first contact, comes the harder, longer part, which is about witnessing with one's life. A missionary who worked in east Africa says that he is convinced that most of the successful communication of the Gospel in Africa in the last century was due to "the personal witness of goodness, dedication and love of many missionaries". Who can doubt him?

The pope's request is that we pray that today's missionaries may be and do likewise.

* For an excellent debunking of the Jesus-myth genre go to www.bede.org.uk/jesusmyth.htm

The sacrament of unity

ONE of the most important things to come out of the Second Vatican Council was the Church's understanding of herself.

According to *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is the "sacrament of the unity of mankind".

This is a far cry from the Church's understanding of herself as the perfect society separated from the world with its dedication to spiritual values as distinct from earthly values, or as a supernatural society as distinct from a natural society.

Obviously the Church is a society, but as long as we saw it exclusively in this way, we had to link the action of Christ to the visible structure of the Church either in terms of the Catholic Church alone or to all the Christian communions which have some recognisable church structure.

The Church as "the perfect society" is very different from the Church as "the sacrament of the unity of mankind". In the latter case the Church is not seen as something different from humankind. It

is a leaven in the mass, something that influences the whole of humankind and spiritualises it.

We see only one community, the community of the human race, or the family of people, and now the Church is the sacrament of that people. Here the word "sacrament" is being used in its broadest sense as the saving action of God in the human situation.

The human situation is the visible sign, and the saving action of God is the invisible grace. God is working through the sacrament of the Church to unite humankind to himself.

The Church as a leaven in the mass also means that the action of the Church in the world cannot be limited to the visible structure of the Church, whether in terms of the Catholic Church or any other communion with a visible structure.

The Church is the leaven in the mass spiritualising and Christianising it. The Church is the human community as influenced by the unifying, consecrating action of Christ. In this sense the

Mgr Paul Nadal

Priesthood and Ministry



Church is co-extensive with the human community, and is not a society or community apart.

In its most complete expression the Church has its visible structure which is the outward sign of the sacrament of the Church, the sign of Christ's influence on the human race.

The Church can and should persuade people to belong to its visible structure, but it cannot and should not try to control all things human.

It serves the human community by bringing them the light of the Gospel and a fuller measure of the grace of Christ. In this way it unites people to God and to one another.

In this sense to use the theme of the Southern African pastoral plan, the Church is the "Community Serving Humanity".

■ This is the fourth instalment in Mgr Nadal's six-part series on the priesthood.

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Pilgrimage to Italy & France, led by Archbishop William Slattery



The Archdiocese of Pretoria and Micasa Tours invite you to join a spiritual Pilgrimage to accompany our new Archbishop, William Slattery, to Rome in June as he receives his Pallium.

We will be visiting Rome, Assisi, Milan in Italy and Paray Le Monial and Lourdes in France.

23 June - 7 July 2011

Includes Pallium Mass with the Pope and our Archbishop, William Slattery

- Tour of St Peter's Basilica. Mass at St Peter's, Angelus, Vatican Museums.
- 2 nights at Paray Le Monial in Paris to visit the Shrine of St Margaret Mary Alacoque, to honour the Sacred Heart - Patron of our Archdiocese.
- Supper with Archbishop William Slattery.
- Tour of Rome
- 2 Nights in Lourdes.
- Lunch at the Franciscan House.

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MERCY SUNDAY - THE DAY OF ATONEMENT!

"Look, I come to make the whole of creation new!" Rev 21:5



WHY DO WE NEED TO CELEBRATE THE SUNDAY of DIVINE MERCY?

Divine Mercy Sunday is an annual celebration and like the Day of Atonement all sins and punishment are washed away in God's infinite mercy!

Jesus words to St. Faustina: "... I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and all punishment.* On that day all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. Diary # 699

WHY does OUR LORD need to re-emphasize the infinite value of CONFESSION and HOLY COMMUNION?

If we no longer recognize that we ARE SINNERS we cannot even begin to receive the Mercy of God. Our Lord is calling us ALL to be washed clean in HIS LOVE (confession), to be united in HIS LOVE (Holy Communion) and to begin our lives again! - HEALED! RESTORED! RENEWED!

An extraordinary GIFT of GRACE that is comparable to a:

SECOND BAPTISM!

HOW ARE WE TO CELEBRATE JESUS' FEAST OF MERCY?

- Make a good confession. (Church made a provision -20 days before or after Mercy Sunday)
- Receive Holy Communion on the day of the Feast. (in a state of grace)
- Venerate* the Image of the Divine Mercy (can be done during or at end of Mass)
- Be merciful to others, through our actions, words and prayers.
- Novena - Chaplet of Divine Mercy. (to begin on Good Friday)
- The homily by the priest should be on Divine Mercy.
- The Image of Divine Mercy is to be solemnly blessed by the priest.
- Place all our trust in Jesus.

*To venerate a sacred image or statue simply means to perform some act or make a gesture of deep religious respect toward it because of the person whom it represents - in this case, our Most Merciful Saviour.

"..Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be acts of mercy, and I demand the worship of My Mercy through the Solemn Celebration of the Feast." Diary # 742

ARE YOU CELEBRATING THE FEAST OF DIVINE MERCY? - 1 MAY, 2011

OUR LORD has provided us on this 2nd SUNDAY of EASTER with a 're-newed' UNDERSTANDING of HIS MERCIFUL LOVE poured out for us in the HOLY SACRIFICE of THE MASS:

This special celebration of God's mercy on the Sunday after Easter is not a new or radical idea stemming simply from private revelation. Our Lord, through Saint Faustina, is re-emphasizing what was strongly urged from the very beginning by Saint Thomas the Apostle! (see "Apostolic Constitutions.") There we read: "After eight days (following the Great Feast of Easter) let there be another feast observed with honour, the eighth day itself (Octave) on which He gave me, Thomas, who was hard of belief, full assurance, by showing me the print of the nails, and the wound made in His side by the spear." (AND Thomas no longer doubted but believed!)

Reconciliation - Tribunal of Jesus' Mercy:

Jesus words: "Let no soul fear to come to Me, even if its sins be as scarlet.... When you approach the confessional, know this, that I Myself am waiting there for you!... Oh, how miserable are those who do not take advantage of the miracle of God's mercy! You will call out in vain, but it will be too late. (Diary # 699; 1448)

Jesus' Image of Mercy: The Image, presents the Eucharistic Lord Jesus, whose Heart has been pierced and now pours forth blood and water as a fountain of mercy for us. It is the Image of God's sacrificial gift of mercy made present at every Mass!

Jesus: "I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the Fountain of Mercy...that vessel is this image with the signature "JESUS I TRUST IN YOU"...let every soul have access to it" (Diary # 742; 570).



The Eucharist - Greatest Gift of Divine Mercy!

Eucharist - Presence of Jesus' Mercy:

Jesus words: "Oh, how painful it is to Me that souls so seldom unite themselves to Me in Holy Communion. I wait for souls, and they are indifferent toward Me. I want to lavish My graces on them, and they do not want to accept them. They treat Me as a dead object, whereas My Heart is full of love and mercy." (Diary # 1447)

Jesus' Prayers for Mercy: The Chaplet of Divine Mercy; 3 O' Clock Prayer for conversion; Novena prayers etc; to implore God's mercy for ourselves and for the whole world. A spiritual work of mercy, interceding and praying for the salvation of souls. (Free resources available. See below)

Jesus words: "I defend as My own glory every soul that will say this chaplet; or, when others say it for a dying person, the pardon is the same. The prayer most pleasing to me is the prayer for the conversion of sinners." (Diary # 811; 1074)

"Today I am sending you with My mercy to the people of the whole world. I do not want to punish aching mankind, but I desire to heal it, pressing it to My Merciful Heart...(...) Before the Day of Justice I am sending the Day of Mercy." Diary # 1588

WILL YOU HELP ME?

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The pope looks at Jesus' final week

In his second volume on the life of Christ, Pope Benedict presents Jesus as a reconciler, not a political revolutionary.

JOHN THAVIS looks at Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week—From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection.

IN his new volume on Jesus of Nazareth, Pope Benedict presents the passion and resurrection of Christ as history-changing events that answer humanity's unceasing need to be reconciled with God.

The 384-page book, titled *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week—From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, was published this month. The pope had worked for several years on the text, the second in his series exploring the main events of Jesus' public ministry.

In a foreword, the pope said he did not set out to write another chronological "Life of Jesus", but instead to present the figure and message of "the real Jesus"—not a political revolutionary and not a mere moralist, but the son of God who inaugurated a new path of salvation based on the power of love.

Through his sacrifice on the cross and his institution of the Church, Jesus carried out a universal mission: "Leading the world away from the condition of man's alienation from God and from himself." It's a mission that continues today, the pope wrote.

"Is it not the case that our need to be reconciled with God—the silent, mysterious, seemingly absent and yet omnipresent God—is the real problem of the whole of world history?" he asked.

The book analyses the key events of Jesus' final days, including the cleansing of the temple, the Last Supper, his betrayal, his interrogations before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, his crucifixion and his appearances to the disciples after his resurrection.

Throughout the text, Pope Benedict examines the scriptural interpretation of early Church fathers and contemporary scholars, rejecting some arguments and affirming or elaborating on others. Prominently cited is Rudolf Bultmann, the late 20th-century German Protestant scholar of the New Testament.

The pope said it was important to understand that the events recounted in the Scriptures are historically grounded and actually occurred and are not simply stories or ideas. For example, he said, if Jesus did not actually give his disciples bread and wine as his body and blood at the Last Supper, then "the Church's Eucharistic celebration is empty—a pious fiction".

Likewise, he said, Christ's actual resurrection from the dead is foundational for the Church. Without it, "Christian faith itself would be dead".

At the same time, he acknowledged that the historical record about Jesus is not always complete and said that: "If the certainty of faith were dependent upon scientific-historical verification alone, it would always remain open to revision." He took issue with the "historical Jesus" movement in scriptural scholarship, saying it has "focused too much on the past for it to make possible a personal relationship with Jesus".

The pope took critical aim at scholars who have interpreted Christ's passion in political terms and sought to portray Jesus as a "political agitator". On the contrary, the pope wrote, Jesus inaugurated a "non-political Messianic kingdom" in a world where the political and the religious had been inseparable.

"This separation—essential to Jesus' message—of politics from faith, of God's people from politics, was ultimately possible only through the cross. Only through the total loss of all external power, through the radical stripping away that led to the cross, could this new world come into being."

The condemnation of Christ, the pope said, had complex political and religious causes and cannot be blamed on the Jewish people as a whole.

The pope said it was a mistake to interpret the words reported in the Gospel: "His blood be on us and on our children," as a blood curse against the Jews.

Those words, spoken by the mob that demanded Jesus' death, need to be read in the light of faith, the pope wrote. They do not cry out for vengeance, but for reconciliation. "It means that we all stand in need of the purifying power of love which is his blood. These words are not a curse, but rather redemption,



Copies of Pope Benedict's new book, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week—From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, are seen at the Libreria Editrice Vaticana bookstore in Rome. In his book, the pope says the condemnation of Christ had complex political and religious causes and cannot be blamed on the Jewish people as a whole. (Photo: Paul Haring, CNS)

salvation."

The pope said Pontius Pilate is presented realistically in the Gospels as a man who knew that Jesus posed no real threat to the Roman order, but who had to deal with political realities—including pressure from Jesus' accusers.

"Now we must ask: Who exactly were Jesus' accusers? Who insisted that he be condemned to death?", the pope wrote. He noted that John's gospel says simply it was "the Jews".

"But John's use of this expression does not in any way indicate—as the modern reader might suppose—the people of Israel in general. After all, John himself was ethnically a Jew, as were Jesus and all his followers," he said.



Pope Benedict prays in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, at the spot that marks the place Jesus was crucified, in Jerusalem. In his new book, the pope analyses the central characters and key events of Jesus' final days. (Photo: L'Osservatore Romano, Reuters/CNS)

What St John was referring to with the term "the Jews" was the "temple aristocracy," the dominant priestly circle that had instigated Jesus' death, the pope said.

In St Mark's gospel, this circle of accusers is broadened to include the masses or mob of people. But the pope said it also would be a mistake to see this as referring to the Jewish people as a whole; more specifically, they were the followers of the imprisoned rebel, Barabbas, who were mobilised when Pilate asked the crowd to choose amnesty for one of the accused: Jesus or Barabbas.

The pope said the trial and condemnation of Jesus was a classic conflict of truth versus power, posing questions that still reverberate in modern politics. When Jesus said that his kingship consisted of bearing witness to the truth, Pilate—the representative of worldly power—did not know how to react, and asked pragmatically: "What is truth?"

"It is the question that is also asked by modern political theory: Can politics accept truth as a structural category? Or must truth, as something unattainable, be relegated to the subjective sphere?" the pope asked.

In the end, the pope wrote, Pilate may have convinced himself that he had defended Roman law and civil peace. But at a later date, he said, it would become clear that "peace, in the final analysis, cannot be established at the expense of truth".

Examining the figure of Barabbas, Gospel accounts depict him as a "terrorist or freedom fighter" against Roman rule. In effect, the pope said, Pilate was looking at two criminals accused of rebelling against the Roman empire.

It is clear, the pope said, that Pilate prefers the non-violent "fanatic" that he saw in Jesus. But the crowd supports the rebel Barabbas because "they would like to see a different solution to the problem".

"Again and again, humanity will be faced with this same choice: to say yes to God who works only through the power of truth and love, or to build on something tangible and concrete—on violence," he said.

The pope said the Barabbas scene and its many recurrences throughout history represent a challenge to Christians and should "tear open our hearts and change our lives".

The pope said that "violent revolution, killing others in God's name", was not Jesus' way. "He does not come bearing the sword of the revolutionary. He comes with the gift of healing."

The book generally steered clear of commentary on contemporary issues, but on the issue of non-violence, the pope added that "the cruel consequences of religiously motivated violence are only too evident to us all".

"Vengeance does not build up the kingdom of God, the kingdom of humanity. On the contrary, it is a favourite instrument of the Antichrist, however idealistic its religious motivation may be. It serves not humanity but inhumanity."

In the book's third chapter, Pope Benedict looks at the figure of Judas. He noted that the other disciples believed that in betraying Christ, Judas had come under the grip of Satan.

Judas did take a step towards conversion when he later acknowledged his sin and gave back the money he was paid for his betrayal, the pope said. But Judas' "second tragedy" was that he could no longer believe in forgiveness.

"He shows us the wrong type of remorse: the type that is unable to hope, that only sees its own darkness, the type that is destructive and in no way authentic," the pope said. "Genuine remorse is marked by the certainty of hope born of faith."

He went on to describe the physical cruelty of the Passion, including the "barbaric" practice of scourging, which left Jesus near death, and the crowning with thorns, which aimed to humiliate Jesus and his claims to be a king.

The pope said the soldiers involved in these acts of brutality were scapegoating Jesus. "Whatever may be afflicting the people is offloaded onto him: in this way it is to be driven out of the world."

When the beaten Jesus is presented to the crowd with his crown of thorns and reed sceptre, he manifests his fully human nature. "In him is displayed the suffering of all who are subjected to violence, all the downtrodden. His suffering mirrors the inhumanity of worldly power, which so ruthlessly crushes the powerless," he said.

The book's final chapter examines the resurrection from the dead as "the crucial point" of Jesus' life. Without the resurrection, the pope said, Jesus would be merely "a failed religious leader".

The pope said some of the strongest evidence for the authenticity of the resurrection was to be found in the Scripture accounts of the disciples' encounters with the risen Christ. Jesus is presented as being present physically, yet not bound by spiritual laws, and is not immediately recognised. All of this is presented "clumsily" in the Gospel narratives, which make them all the more credible, reflecting the disciples' genuine amazement.

"It is important that the encounters with the risen Lord are not just interior events or mystical experiences—they are real encounters with the living one who is now embodied in a new way," he said.

After his resurrection, Jesus was not a "ghost" or a mere "resuscitated corpse", but one who has entered a new life in the power of God. This comes through clearly in the Gospel accounts, he said.

The pope then asks whether modern men and women can put their faith in such testimony. "Enlightened" thinking would say no. "Science would seem to rule it out—but, the pope said, science has its limits.

In fact, he said, the resurrection does not contradict science but speaks of something outside our world of experience, a further dimension. He then posed a series of questions to underline that a "new dimension of reality" should not be rejected out of hand by modern thinking.

"Is not creation actually waiting for this last and highest 'evolutionary leap', for the union of the finite with the infinite, for the union of man and God, for the conquest of death?"

In essence, he said, Jesus' resurrection made that leap, "creating for all of us a new space of life, a new space of being in union with God". As such, the Resurrection was an event that broke out of history yet "left a footprint within history", he said.

In a brief epilogue, the pope looked at the ascension of Christ into heaven, a concept that may be difficult for people to understand, he said. With the ascension, Jesus' presence with God is not "spatial" but divine.

"The departing Jesus does not make his way to some distant star," he wrote. "Ascension does not mean departure into a remote region of the cosmos." In joining God his father, Jesus "has not gone away but remains close to us", accessible throughout history and in every place.

Christians believe that Christ will return and restore justice in a final triumph of love, he said. In the meantime, what is required of Christians is vigilance—which means, first of all, "openness to the good, to the truth, to God, in the midst of an often meaningless world and in the midst of the power of evil".—CNS

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Growth towards mature adulthood

Being an adult produces responsibilities that are difficult to meet. RAYMOND M MWANGALA OMI suggests that Mary at the cross provides a good role model for adulthood.

GROWTH and adulthood are not automatic processes. Adulthood depends on the fulfillment of certain expectations. It is an ideal which differs from one society to another.

There are, however, certain characteristics that are common to all cultures. Adulthood is generally associated with the ability to assume certain responsibilities which represent the values held by society. It is to reach perfection, defined by the particular society. Few, if any, achieve the goal.

Life's journey is a perennial attempt to reach what is considered the goal. Sometimes forward strides are made. At other times the movement is backwards or even sideways. Thus a gap is created between the actual self, the self as it exists in the present, and the ideal self, the self towards which one is moving.

The gap—the difference between the actual self and the ideal self—provides the motivation for change and growth. If no difference existed between the ideal self and the actual self there would be no motivation for change and growth. One should not be surprised if some of our public officials are unwilling

(or maybe even unable) to change.

To avoid frustration in the process of growth, the ideal must be realistic, achievable. To strive for an ideal that is too high is to set up oneself for failure and frustration.

It is no accident that many cultures and societies see fatherhood and motherhood as the ideal of adulthood. Leaders and role models also assume many of the characteristics of fathers and mothers. In a simple, yet profound sense, the ideal adult for the male is the father while the ideal adult for the female is the mother.

Whether or not one had a positive experience of father and mother, one cannot avoid being influenced by them. To live a liberated and mature life one would have to make peace with one's own father and mother.

There are two basic characteristics associated with adulthood which not only distinguish adults from non-adults, but also present the basic challenge of adulthood: the ability to bear tension and the capacity to bless.

The image of Mary standing beneath the cross of Jesus (Jn 19:25-27) is a helpful image in reflecting on these two characteristics.

In the gospel scene from John, Jesus hangs on the cross crucified as a criminal. And *standing* near the cross are some women, including his mother, and at least one of his disciples.

Is this a realistic portrayal of a death scene? How often have we seen a mother or wife standing upright at a funeral? Shouldn't we expect to find Mary crawling on the ground, covered in ashes? Or maybe



A Pietà by Michelangelo in Rome's Lateran basilica. The writer believes Mary is a good role model for adults to follow. (Photo: Günther Simmermacher)

a graphic description of Mary's grief and mourning? None of this is given us.

What would be a realistic picture of Mary? She could have reacted (and maybe did react) to the execution of her son in one of the following ways:

- Mary could have implored them to forgive him. As a mother, she

could have pleaded with them to forgive him. "He is only a boy. He didn't mean what he said," we want to hear Mary say.

- Mary could have threatened them with divine retribution. After all, this was God's only-begotten son being treated like the scum of the earth.

- Mary could even be justified in trying to negotiate his release. All a mother wants is the survival of her child.

- She could even have thrown herself at their mercy, crying the loudest and making all kinds of noises.

She does none of that. Mary's presence at the cross is a silent presence. She is there, fully present, saying nothing, yet *standing* and taking it all in.

This picture stands out as the most appropriate image of an adult, of one who has learnt how to deal with pain and suffering. Children seek immediate release from tension; adults bear tension.

No life is without tension. Because of age and social standing the adult is usually burdened with the problems of others which they are expected to bear.

Like Mary, adults must learn how to bear the necessary tensions of life and to let go of it in appropriate ways. The first step is to learn the art of pondering. Like Mary, adults need to store up all the tension in the heart (Lk 2:51). In other words, the experience of tension should not be avoided, but experienced to the full.

Unfortunately, many people do not allow themselves to experience the pains and frustrations of life. We are too quick to react. We want

to fight for justice, to correct situations and have our rights protected. Speaking up and protecting the rights of the innocent is important, but we need to do it from that place in our lives where we are most at peace.

Many times we fail to be agents of transformation because we simply react to situations. We are mere transmitters, giving out negative energy that we have consumed. Rather, we should become transformers. Transmitters simply give out what they have received. Transformers change what has been received, maintaining some of it and giving out a different product.

That the world is in a mess today is largely due to the infantile attitudes which exist even on the international level. One just has to look at the accusations and counter-accusations in times of war—the blame game. It ends only when someone decides to end it.

And so, instead of giving hurt in return for hurt, adults know that it is possible and necessary to give back love.

What the image of Mary at the foot of the cross brings out, if only implicitly, is the fact that it is possible to transform negative and bitter experiences into ones which are life-giving, that the ideal of transforming society is possible.

However, to do this, we must be willing to stand beneath the cross and suffer its humiliation. Only adults are capable of doing this. This is the type of Christian the world needs today.

■ Fr Mwangala teaches at St Joseph's Theological Institute in Cedara, KwaZulu-Natal.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Meaning of the Mass

YOUR editorial of February 16, well written by Michael Shackleton, reminds us that the Holy Mass really does matter. Indeed, to those who truly, humbly and knowingly live that holy hour—priest and people as one—it more than matters.

It is surely the most awesome, most thrilling, most precious hour of the day. For in

this highest form of sacred worship, Jesus Christ is present as both priest and victim.

It cannot be denied that our teaching of the holy sacrifice of the Mass is terribly inadequate.

How many members of our congregations really know and feel what is taking place on the altar before them? I note the growing irreverence in many areas towards the Blessed Eucharist at Commu-

nion time. "The body which will be given up for you" and the "chalice of my blood which will be shed for you". Now, this is what is truly present; not just a memory and not just a symbolic gesture.

But truth re-lived, and love expressed in so simple a manner—using bread and wine—seems unbelievable; but then God is marvelously simple and that confuses our complicated minds.

The editorial correctly states "that the way it is celebrated can have

a contrary effect on the faithful"—and it will have and does have! Thousands of people leave the Church because, for them, the obligatory Mass is meaningless.

I am further convinced that our young men will be far more influenced and touched by the reverent and joyful celebration of the Eucharist than by classified adverts in this regard.

It is the Holy Mass that really matters.

Fr Ralph de Hahn,
Cape Town

Word of the Week

Ecumenical, ecumenism: Promotes cooperation and better understanding among different religious denominations: aimed at universal Christian unity.

Application: "An ecumenical prayer service was held by the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist parishes of Randburg in support of victims of the recent tsunami in Japan."



Family Reflections

2011 FAMILY THEME:
PEACE ON EARTH BEGINS AT HOME"

MARCH—IF YOU WANT PEACE WORK FOR JUSTICE. — Pope Paul VI

March 25 Annunciation. Mary said "yes" to God when the angel Gabriel approached her. Her "yes" was given freely but was part of God's plan of salvation. It brought about a new order in the world. Thank her for this choice she made and pray for an increase in faith and trust in God.

March 27 3rd Sunday of Lent. *The Living Water.* The readings use the powerful symbol of water and the need to quench one's thirst in a physical as well as a spiritual way. The beatitudes readings a few weeks ago also speak of a hunger and thirst for justice. How strong is our thirst right now for a just society for all not only for ourselves? Are we doing enough to fight injustice and so achieve the peace we desire and need?

Community Calendar

To place your event, call Claire Allen at 021 465 5007 or e-mail c.allen@scross.co.za, (publication subject to space)

BETHLEHEM:

Shrine of Our Lady of Bethlehem at Tsheseng, Maluti mountains; Thursdays 09:30, Mass, then exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. 058 721 0532.

CAPE TOWN:

Holy Hour to pray for priests of the archdiocese, 2nd Saturday monthly at Villa Maria shrine Kloof Nek Rd, 16:00-17:00.

Good Shepherd, Bothasig. Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration in our chapel. All hours. All welcome.

Day of Prayer held at Springfield Convent starting at 10:00 ending 15:30 last Saturday of every month—all welcome. For more information contact Jane Hulley 021 790 1668 or 082 783 0331.

DURBAN:

St Anthony's, Durban

Central: Tuesday 09:00am Mass with novena to St Anthony. First Friday 17:30pm Mass—Divine Mercy novena prayers. Tel: 031 309 3496.

JOHANNESBURG:

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament: first Friday of the month at 09:20 followed by Holy Mass at 10:30. Holy Hour: first Saturday of each month at 15:00. At Our Lady of the Angels, Little Eden, Edenvale. Tel: 011 609 7246.

First Saturday of each month rosary prayed 10:30-12:00 outside Marie Stopes abortion clinic, Peter Place, Bryanston. Joan Beyrooti, 011 782 4331.

PRETORIA:

First Saturday: Devotion to Divine Mercy. St Martin de Porres, Sunnyside, 16:30. Tel Shirley-Anne 012 361 4545.

Liturgical Calendar

Year A, Week 1

Sunday, March 27, Third Sunday of Lent
Ex 17:3-7, Ps 95:1-2, 6-9, Ro 5:1-2, 5-8, Jn 4:5-42 or 4:5-15, 19-26, 39-42

Monday, March 28

2 Kings 5:1-5, Ps 42:2-3; 43:3-4, Lk 4:24-30

Tuesday, March 29

Dan 3:25, 34-43, Ps 25:4-9, Mt 18:21-35

Wednesday, March 30

Deut 4:1, 5-9, Ps 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20, Mt 5:17-19

Thursday, March 31

Jer 7:23-28, Ps 95:1-2, 6-9, Lk 11:14-23

Friday 01 April

1 Hos 14:2-10, Ps 81:6-8, 8-9, 10-11, 14, 17, Mk 12:28-34

Saturday 02 April, St Francis of Paola

1 Hos 6:1-6, Ps 51:3-4, 18-19, 20-21, Lk 18:9-14

Sunday 03 April, Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Sm 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a, Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6, Jn 9:1-41



St Francis of Paola

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IN MEMORIAM

ARENDSE—Martin. Passed away March 23, 1983. Deep in our hearts you will always stay, loved and remembered every day. Always in our thoughts. Jacoba and family.

OPPEL—Fr John Lawrence of Springbok, Keimoes. Passed away March 28, 1993. Always lovingly remembered by the Congregation of St Francis de Sales of Namaqualand and Koelenhof, families and friends. Rest on Fr Opel. You have done such a lot.

PILLAY—Mrs Johanna of Springbok, Namaqualand. In loving memory of our dear mother who passed away March 31, 2001. A loving mother gone to rest. Thank you for your love and concern. Rest on dear mother. Always remembered by your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, daughters-in-law, other families and friends, not forgetting the Legion of Mary, Matjeskloof.

SMITH—Ted 21/10/1929—28/03/2006. My dear beloved husband, it is difficult to accept how quickly time flies, but your memory is always alive in my heart. I miss you so much and long for the day we can be together in God's house. Your loving wife Carmen.

SMITH—Michael. 7/10/1955—25/03/2007. A dear son and brother, so sad that we had to lose you, but know that you are safe in God's hands. We miss you, your loving mother Carmen and family.

VOGEL—Mervyn. Passed away on March 23, 1996. We shall always cherish your cheerful smile and exuberance. Sadly missed, always remembered. Mom, Dad, Tracey and Roedi.

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PRAYERS

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(mention favour). Intercede for my family that we may always be provided for in all our necessities. I ask thee St Martha to overcome the dragon which thou did cast at thy feet. Ilona.

THANKS

GRATEFUL thanks to the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Heart, Our Blessed Lady, St Anthony and St Jude for prayers answered. Publication promised. PVE.

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4th Sunday in Lent – April 3

Readings: 1 Samuel 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

Psalm 23:1-6, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

Towards clearing our blindness

Nicholas King SJ

Sunday Reflections



ONE of the things that happen to us during Lent, if the season goes well for us, is that we are shown something of the extent of our blindness. Next Sunday is mid-Lent Sunday, when traditionally we relax our austerities; but that does not exempt us from reflecting prayerfully upon the readings.

In the *first reading*, it is the prophet Samuel who is blind; he has to be told to stop grieving for Saul (whom he had anointed King, it must be said, under God's instructions), and to anoint someone else, one of the sons of King Jesse, in Bethlehem.

Naturally he supposed that it was the eldest and tallest, but had to be taught that this was his blindness, and that the one to anoint was the boy who (as in African households) is looking after the sheep—and we give in to mild astonishment as we hear that “the Spirit of God rushed upon David”.

If David was looking after sheep, that is how God appears in the *psalm* for next Sunday, the much-loved 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd”, with its glorious vision of the unfailing presence of God, even in “the Valley of the Shadow of Death”, even “as my enemies watch”.

The *second reading*, with its interplay of “light” and “darkness”, continues the theme; five times the idea of “light” is mentioned (more if you include ideas like “reveal” and

“illuminate” and even “resurrect”), but darkness only twice. That should give us hope for the coming week.

The *gospel* is one of those long and beautifully crafted stories that we find in the fourth Gospel. There is too much to say about it; but one way of looking at it is to see it as two journeys, one out of blindness into sight, and the other, out of apparent sightedness to unmistakable darkness.

To begin with the first (and more significant) journey, that of the man born blind: he is there, and Jesus sets the scene by proclaiming, what we already knew, that: “I am the light of the world.” He then uses saliva to create mud, and puts it on the blind man's eyes, and tells him to go and wash in the pool Siloam.

Quite undramatically, the evangelist reports: “He came back, seeing.” But the man has a way to go still, as he is interrogated by

various people, and simply responds each time with the truth. The religious authorities ask him for his verdict on Jesus, and he gives it: “He is a prophet.” This, of course, is not enough for them, so they interrogate his parents, who are not going to get involved. So they get the once blind man back again for another going-over. Sounding like the officials of any totalitarian regime, they exhort him: “Give glory to God—we know that this man is a sinner.” However the blind man now has his eyes wide open, and challenges them stoutly: “I have no idea whether he is a sinner—all I know is that I was blind, and now I have my sight.” They question him again as to how it happened, and he asks if they are contemplating becoming disciples of Jesus! When they announce: “We don't know where he's from,” the blind man is very clear-eyed indeed: “Now there is a remarkable thing—you don't know where he's from, and yet he opened my eyes!...If he were not from God, he couldn't do anything.”

His journey into sight still has a little further to go, however, for he has to sort out who Jesus is. Jesus catches up with him, and asks the all-important question: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He is now utterly switched-on, and says eagerly, “Who is that, Lord, that I may believe in him?”, and gets

the powerful answer, which finally removes all blindness: “You have seen him, and the one speaking to you—that's the one,” and we applaud as the once blind man responds: “I believe, Lord,” and the evangelist adds “and he worshipped him”.

Contrast that, now with the assorted blindness in the rest of the story. There is the blindness of the disciples—they asked whose fault it was that the man was blind. There is the blindness of the passers-by—unable to decide if it was really him, and there is the blindness of the parents, who out of fear refuse to give any comment at all.

Worst of all, however, is the blindness of the religious establishment, with their dreadful and, it has to be said, blasphemous, certainties about what could and could not be from God.

Their journey comes to a terrible climax at the end of the story, when they overhear Jesus describing his mission as: “So that those who do not see may see, and the sighted may become blind,” and ask: “We're not blind, are we?”, to which Jesus responds: “If you had been blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying: ‘We can see’, your sin is permanent.”

This week we are invited to look at that embarrassing question: how blind are we?

The terrorist. The Vatican. The sign.

IT was a cold and rainy day in Rome. Ominous black clouds raced over the Eternal City bringing joy only to the river Tiber in anticipation of a deluge that would swell it from a late summer trickle into a raging torrent. A wall of water that would sweep away the ugly algae clinging to piers and bridges and wash the detritus of mankind left on its banks by millions of tourists.

In the dreary murk, the Castel Sant'Angelo seemed to be squatting menacingly on the river bank, almost as a warning to those with evil intent who would pass by its walls on their way to the Vatican City.

A shambling figure, wrapped in a cloak against the biting cold wind, paused briefly to exchange a few pleasantries with a group of Somali pavement traders huddling under a broken café umbrella advertising Peroni beer. They were desperately hoping that somehow, some misguided oriental tourists would walk by and relieve them of their stock of fake designer sunglasses and plastic statues of Moses, mass produced in China by factories full of atheists.

The figure strode on up the Via della Conciliazione—that broad and elegant avenue hacked out of the ancient city by Mussolini in 1929 and which modern Romans dislike with a passion.

He stopped for a while and stared at the majesty of St Peter's basilica and

Chris Moerdyk

The Last Word



took in the awesome beauty of the façade and square surrounded by perfectly placed columns. A black limousine carrying two splendidly attired cardinals swept by, splashing water from a leaking drain over the man's sandaled feet.

On he trudged, past the palace of Cardinal Cesi and paused at the edge of Piazza San Pietro to gaze once again at the greatest edifice ever raised to the legacy of Catholicism. Two traffic policemen, sheltering from the cold in a nearby doorway, watched the silent bearded figure.

“Look at that guy, he could be Osama bin Laden's brother,” quipped one of them.

“You wonder”, said the other, “how these guys actually get into the country. He's probably a refugee from Libya who bribed his way across on a fishing boat.”

The man walked across the piazza and joined a queue of tourists, pilgrims and clergy who, in spite of the inclement weather, were determined to brave the cold for a chance to wander

around and perhaps even be fortunate enough to attend Mass in the world's most iconic church.

The bearded man eventually reached the door and shuffled along with the others in the queue towards a booth where each paid their entrance fee.

He was stopped and asked for three euros. The man looked bemused and turned his palms upward in that international recognised gesture meaning, “I have no money”.

He tried once again to enter but was firmly taken in hand by a black-suited security guard and politely sent on his way.

The guard walked over to the a Swiss Guard on duty nearby and whispered: “Watch that guy, he's up to no good. Looks like a damn terrorist and he'll probably try and sneak in again.”

The shambling figure started walking back the way he had come, looking saddened and dejected. And cold. And somewhere, judging by his body language, he just didn't want to be anywhere.

He looked up at the sky hoping for a tiny break in the overcast so that he could glimpse the sun for just a fraction of a second and remember the endless sun-filled days of his homeland.

He stepped off the pavement and was jerked out of his reverie by the blast of a klaxon as a tour bus swept by missing him by inches.

The same two traffic policemen, looked out from their shelter and one shouted: “Hey Osama, you won't be given any virgins in heaven if you are killed by a bus.”

Halfway down the Via della Conciliazione he turned and looked again at St Peter's. An American tourist and his wife were standing nearby taking photographs.

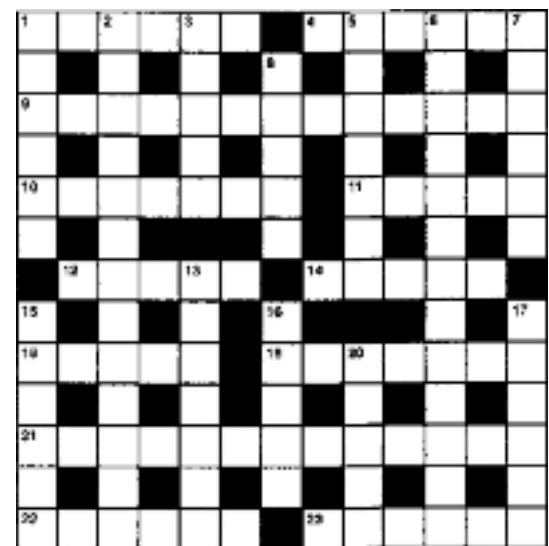
Suddenly there was what sounded like a crack of thunder and the dome of the basilica broke in two leaving a gaping void three metres wide.

The American grabbed his wife by the arm and said: “Jesus Christ! Did you see that?”

She was too dumbfounded to respond. But, the shambling figure nearby turned to him and said: “אני אכן.”

Which translated literally from Hebrew means: “I did indeed.”

Southern Crossword #437



ACROSS

1. Spoil the statue's visage (6)
4. Do Eskimo churches resemble these? (6)
9. Uncle leaving a person who is not fond of the Bible (13)
10. Diplomatic (7)
11. Repel one healed by Jesus (5)
12. Animals that disdain pearls? (5)
14. The wild one in the pack? (5)
18. He has property (5)
19. Excused yourself like a judge (7)
21. In the repository she may serve you (4,9)
22. Sid comes back before the month distress (6)
23. Not as much as the other amount (6)

DOWN

1. Even the faithful may have them (6)
2. Do they let light into Notre Dame cathedral? (6,7)
3. Tease on the threshing floor (5)
5. Leo and Gail join the astronomer (7)
6. You can't sit on them in church (8,5)
7. Hot and humid (6)
8. A leg I show moving nimbly (5)
13. Buddhism's perfectly happy state (7)
15. Given accommodation (6)
16. Cash for Salvation Army's wind instruments (5)
17. Journalist in charge (6)
20. Hindu class? (5)

Answers on page 11

Conrad



CHURCH CHUCKLE

ARABBI, a priest and a minister walk into a bar. The bartender looks up and says, “What is this, a joke?”