



St Anthony's Parish



St Bernard's Parish

67-75 EXFORD ROAD, MELTON SOUTH, 3338.
P.O BOX 2152 MELTON SOUTH 3338
TEL: 9747 9692

61 LERDERBERG STREET, BACCHUS MARSH 3340
TEL: 5367 2069
OUR LADY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, KOROBET
309 MYRNIONG-KOROBET ROAD 3341

2nd Sunday of Lent-Year B

28th February 2021

PARISH PRIEST: Fr Fabian Smith
ASSISTANT PRIESTS: Fr Lucas Kyaw Myint /Father Marcus Goulding

ST ANTHONY'S PARISH

Parish Secretary: Lesley Morffew
Admin Assistant: Judy Johnson
Parish Office Hours:
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9.00am-4.00pm
Tuesday 9.00am-1.00pm Thursday 9.00am-5.30pm
Email: meltonsouth@cam.org.au
Website: www.stanthonyofpadua.com.au
St Anthony's School Principal: Damien Schuster
Wilson Road, Melton South 3338
Phone: 8099 7800
Email: principal@sameltonsth.catholic.edu.au
Website: www.sameltonsth.catholic.edu.au

ST BERNARD'S PARISH

Parish Secretary: Dolores Turcan
Admin Assistant: Judy Johnson
Sacramental Coordinator/ Bookkeeper: Naim Chdid
Parish Office Hours:
Tuesday-Friday 9.00am-1.00pm
Email: bacchusmarsh@cam.org.au
Website: www.stbernardsbacchusmarsh.com.au
St Bernard's School Principal: Emilio Scalzo
19a Gisborne Rd, Bacchus Marsh VIC 3340
Phone: (03) 5366 5800
Email: principal@sbbacchusmarsh.catholic.edu.au
Website: www.sbbacchusmarsh.catholic.edu.au

Catholic Regional College - Melton (Years 7-12)
Principal: Marlene Jorgensen **Phone:** 8099 6000
Website: www.crcmelton.com.au

ST ANTHONY'S PASTORAL COUNCIL

Sue Alexander	0400 171 843
Naim Chdid	0437 004 790
Lillian Christian - Vice Chair	0400 441 257
Stephen Fernandes	0439 743 533
Amy Honrade	03 9747 0078
Natalie Howard - Chair	0492 947 201
Rose Ma'ae	0431 386 473
Sally Markulin	0405 814 490

EX-OFFICIO:
Fr Fabian Smith PP, Fr Lucas Kyaw Myint, Fr Marcus Goulding
and Damien Schuster Council Secretary: Judy Johnson

ST BERNARD'S PASTORAL COUNCIL

Shane Cook -School Advisory Board	0419 999 052
Peter Farren	0418 594 501
Maira Ross	0400 675 056
Aaron Russell - Chair	0401 927 502

EX-OFFICIO:
Fr Fabian Smith PP, Fr Lucas Kyaw Myint, Fr Marcus Goulding
and Emilio Scalzo

CHILD SAFETY OFFICERS

Coordinator: Godwin Barton (0425 734 449)

Officers: Karina Dunne & Lorraine Tellis

PARISHIONER'S FIRST COLLECTION/SECOND COLLECTION

Parishioners who normally give cash each weekend for the collections, if they wish to donate, are now able to go to the link below and make their payments online.

The link to the St Anthony's Parish is: <https://bit.ly/CDFpayMeltonSouth>

The link to the St Bernard's Parish is: <https://bit.ly/CDFpayBacchusMarsh>

Please put your name and thanksgiving number if you know it as a reference.

If you need a Priest in the case of an emergency please call 0403 435 471

MASS AND DEVOTIONS

ST ANTHONY'S 1/3-7/3 MELTON SOUTH

MASS TIMES:

Monday 1st March:	6.30pm
Tuesday 2nd March:	9.15am & 6.30pm
Wednesday 3rd March:	7.30am & 9.15am
Thursday 4th March:	9.15am
Friday 5th March:	7.30am & 9.15am
Holy hour and Confession 6.00pm Stations of the Cross 7.00pm	
First Friday:	After Stations of the Cross
	Midnight
First Saturday:	8.30am
Saturday Vigil 6th March:	5.00pm
Sunday 7th March:	8.30am
	10.30am
	5.00pm

Confession available 30 minutes prior to each Mass

Holy Hour will be held each Tuesday evening at 5.30pm

ST BERNARD'S 1/3-7/3 BACCHUSMARSH

MASS TIMES:

Monday 1st March:	No Mass
Tuesday 2nd March:	7.30am
Wednesday 3rd March:	9.30am
Thursday 4th March:	7.30am
Friday 5th March:	9.30am
Stations of the Cross	7.00pm
Saturday 6th March: (EF Latin 1962)	9.00am
Saturday Vigil 6th March:	5.00pm
Sunday 7th March:	8.30am
	10.00am

Confession available 30 minutes prior to each Mass

Holy Hour will be held each Tuesday evening at 7.30pm.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK Anointing of the sick can be organised with the Priests directly, please call them.

Father Fabian 0403 435 471

Fr Lucas 0478 768 141 /Fr Marcus 0468 367 893

OUR LADY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

KOROBEIT

MASS TIME

Saturday Vigil: 6.30pm



Second Sunday of Lent 28th February 2021



Margret is a teacher at a vocational school for deaf students in the Solomon Islands that suffered long-term water shortages and damage from Tropical Cyclone Harold. With Caritas Australia's support, Margret's school installed water tanks, repaired cyclone damage and implemented COVID-19 prevention measures, and is now planning to boost food security.

Please donate to Project Compassion 2021 and help people living with disabilities in the Solomon Islands gain access to education and clean water, empowering them with skills to protect our common home.

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



PARISH & EVENTS NOTICES

NEWS FROM THE PARISH OFFICES

ST ANTHONY'S

ST BERNARD'S

WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK

Volunteers could you please check if your WWCC is still current, If you need any assistance please contact Lesley 9747 9692 (St Anthony's) or Dolores 5367 2069 (St Bernard's).

THE STRENGTH OF VIRTUE – RETREAT DAY – SATURDAY 27th MARCH

What does it mean to be a virtuous woman? How do we acquire the virtues in a stable way, to live out our vocation as one made in the Image and Likeness of God? How does the practice of virtue rehabilitate us to our true selves and free us to act in accord with the teachings of Christ?

Join Father Paul Rowse, O.P., Anna Krohn, and the Dominican Sisters for a day of reflection on what it means to be a woman of strength, a woman of virtue. 9:30am– 4.00pm, St Bernard Parish Hall. Lunch is provided. Babies are welcome.

PROJECT COMPASSION BOXES AND ENVELOPES

The Project Compassion boxes and envelopes are located in the Church Foyer.

ST. ANTHONY'S MARRIED COUPLES

The married couples group get together on the 1st Sunday of each month (except April) so couples who have been married for approx. 10 years or less can spend time in friendship, prayer, formation, and social activities. Time: after the 10:30am mass and parish BBQ lunch babysitters / Sunday school will be available for children - please see display posters in the Church.

Contacts: Fergus Prien 0432 730 910 Renee Prien 0403 080 632

PARISH DAY

Date: 7th March 2021 Time: After 10.30am Mass Lunch: Provided Activities and Workshops: It will run for 2 hours to showcase the different groups/communities we have at St Anthony's Parish so parishioners are aware and can join.

LENTEN WEEKLY FAITH FORMATION

This Lent St Anthony's is hosting a weekly faith formation series looking at St Joseph: Model of the Spiritual Life. The series will be run by *Sapientia*, a group of theologians from Melbourne. Each night will consist of a talk, a period of discussion, and hospitality. Come along to hear about and discuss the litany of St Joseph and his titles of Promotor of Social Justice, Model of Virtue, Protector of Christ, and Son of David. Mondays 1, 15, 22 Mar, 7pm in the Meeting Room ALL WELCOME Register at <https://tinyurl.com/meltonsouth>. Flyers available in Church foyer.

BINGO

St Anthony's Bingo has recommenced. Start time: 7.00pm Finish time 9.45pm. We have 3 sessions per evening with a cost of \$9.00 a set (45 games). Come and have a great social evening with your fellow parishioners and friends. Coffee and tea provided and canteen services available.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2021

The WDP host country for 2021 is Vanuatu. This year the service will take place at St Catherine of Siena Church, Bulman's Rd on **Friday 5th March, at 11am**. All welcome especially women and children. Our parish will be having a leaving collection, at all Masses on the weekend 27-28th Feb, to raise money for the needs of the Women and Children at risk. *I trust you will give generously as you have in previous years in support of our brothers and sisters in Vanuatu. God Bless.* Any queries, contact Marian 0400007286.

TIME AND TALENT SHEETS-VOLUNTEERS

Thank you to all our Parishioners who filled in the volunteer sheets. We have had a fantastic response. Group leaders will be in touch soon.

ST BERNARD'S AGM & BBQ NEW DATE

6.00pm, Saturday 20th March 2021

All St Bernard's parishioners are invited to attend our rescheduled parish AGM and BBQ dinner following the Vigil Mass on Saturday, 20th March in the Parish Hall. The AGM is an opportunity to learn more about the life of our parish and plan for the year ahead. Opportunities for respectful questions will be provided. Families and children particularly welcome. BYO drinks. The meeting is the excuse for the meal!

AGM Agenda: (1) Prayer; (2) Attendance; (3) Minutes of AGM 2020; (4) Sacramental Statistics; (5) School governance update; (6) Finance update; (7) Property development opportunities; (8) 12-month forward plan; (9) General Business; (10) Expressions of Thanks; (11) Set date of AGM 2022; (12) Prayer.

SOUP AND STATIONS

Fridays in Lent

Two parish families are very kindly providing a soup dinner before Stations of the Cross on Fridays during Lent. Soup will be served in the Parish Hall at 6pm with Stations to follow in the Church at 7pm. Come along and feed both body and soul!

HOLY HOUR WITH CONFESSIONS & NIGHT PRAYER

7.30pm Tuesdays

A Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration is held at St Bernard's Church each Tuesday at 7.30pm. Confessions are available throughout and the Holy Hour concludes with Night Prayer (Compline) and Benediction. Build some time with our Eucharistic Lord into your week this Lent.

LENTEN WEEKLY FAITH FORMATION

This Lent St Bernard's is hosting a weekly faith formation series looking at St Joseph: Model of the Spiritual Life. The series will be run by *Sapientia*, a group of theologians from Melbourne. Each night will consist of a talk, a period of discussion, and hospitality. Come along to hear about and discuss the litany of St Joseph and his titles of Promotor of Social Justice, Model of Virtue, Protector of Christ, and Son of David. Wednesdays 3, 10, 17 Mar, 7pm in the Parish Centre. ALL WELCOME!

Register at <https://tinyurl.com/sapientiabacchusmarsh>.

Flyers are available in the Church foyer.

CHOIR FOR ST BERNARD'S SUNDAY 10.00AM MASS

Rehearsals for the choir are as follows:

7.00pm Wednesday 3rd March (Church)

9.00am Sunday 7th March (Parish Centre)

7.00pm Wednesday 10th March (Church)

New members welcome.

WORSHIP NEWS

ALL VOLUNTEERS IN OUR PARISH MUST HAVE A CURRENT WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK

ST ANTHONY'S MINISTRIES

NEXT WEEKEND ROSTER: 6th & 7th March MINISTERS OF THE WORD

5.00pm Vigil: Cristina Anyayahan
8.30am: Geoff Sutton
10.30am: Elaine Lacey
5.00pm: Dolores Turcsan

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS

5.00pm Vigil: Dolores Turcsan & Philip Anyayahan
8.30am: Michael Higgins
10.30am: George Bonello & Doris Bonello
5.00pm

If you are unavailable for these dates please contact the emergency minister on the roster. Thank you

MASS COORDINATORS

5.00pm Vigil: Annonika & Carmen
8.30am: Lina & Julie
10.30am: Lillian & Godwin
5.00pm: Leonia & Godwin

ST ANTHONY'S PASTORAL CARE

We pray for the recently deceased:

Sabina (Ina) Faux,

We pray for those whose death anniversaries occur at this time:

Leo Cachia, William Joy, Leslie Levett, Lavina Mascarenhas, Carmelo Micallef, Francis Xavier Micallef, Faaleleiga Pennacio, Anthony Savian & Pennacia Sio

Please pray for the Sick:

Martha Baice, Nickolia & Klara Butkovic, Maria Caruana, Mary Caruana, Chinnamma Joseph, Judy Layton, Peter Manicaro, Reg Marslen, Damien Michael, Kevin Michael, Tony Michael, Veronica Michael, Caleb O'Brien, John Osborne, Peter Poole, Irene Rahilly, Catherine Roberts, Peter Roberts, Pat Roberts, Charlie Spiteri, Janko Stojanovic, Clint Abela Wadge, & John Xuereb and all those who have requested our prayers.

(PLEASE LET US KNOW WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE IS NO LONGER REQUIRED ON THIS LIST)

PRAYER FOR THE SICK

Father we lift up all those who are facing illness. We ask that You bring healing, comfort and peace to their bodies. Calm their fears and let them experience the healing power of your love.

Amen



ST BERNARD'S MINISTRIES

NEXT WEEKEND ROSTER: 6th & 7th March MINISTERS OF THE WORD

5.00pm: Kratochvil Family
8.30am: Moira Ross
10.00am: Carmel Shea

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS

5.00pm: Colin Remedios
8.30am: Carol Jones
10.00am: Anne Daly

ST BERNARD'S PASTORAL CARE

We pray for those whose death anniversaries occur at this time:

Mary Delahey, Peter Gavin, Reginald Kirwan, Edward Kula, Andrew Monteith, Kaylene Preston & Kevin Punshon.

Please pray for the Sick:

Noah Barlow, Chaiel Balcombe, Michael Barrett, Peter Bennett, Steven Braszel, Tina Bower, John Canty, Fred Capuano, Gary Ching, Josephine Cilia, Robyn Cola, Ted Cooling, Marianne Cuskelly, Lindsay & Kathleen Dally, Judy Delahey, Jack DeLuca, Theresa Dockter, Allison Evans, Helen Evans, Justin Fernandez, Pasquale Gagliarbi, Mario Galea, Cynthia Goodyear, Gwen Green, Joe Gristi, Adam Hillier, Leonie Kervin, Elle Hillman, Kiahni Holamotutama, Alicia Holborn, Chaiel Jackson, Matthew Jansen, David Kasprzak, Michael Larkin, Marie Maloney, Patricia Marechal, Brian Marshall, Debbie Marshall, Jordanis Mary Pauline McDonald, Ian McKechnie, Marcus Meno, Paul Mullin, Arthur Pape, Michael Paterson, Georgia Peacock, Mitchell Prendergast, Peter Roberts, Ken Shaw, Terry Sims, Marian Smith, Elizabeth Stehmann, Catherine Time, Susan Trist, Stephen Van Eede, John Van Orsouw, Angela Vicum, Louis Vogels, Barry Walsh, Cath Wheelahan, Jayne Wilkins, Patricia Yazbek, & Betty Young.

(PLEASE LET US KNOW WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE IS NO LONGER REQUIRED ON THIS LIST)

SERVICE / COMMUNITY

ST ANTHONY'S

WEEKEND VOLUNTEERS: 6th & 7th March

PIETY STALL VOLUNTEERS

5.00pm Vigil:

8.30am:

10.30am: Roster Pending

5.00pm:

CUPPA VOLUNTEERS

5.00pm Vigil:

8.30am:

10.30am: Roster Pending

CHURCH FLOWERS

February: No Flowers during Lent



CLEANING ROSTER: Thursday

Lorelle Porter

Volunteers would be appreciated as well.

Please contact the Parish Office if you are able to help 9747 9692. Thank you.

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

Welfare Number: 1800 305 330

The Melton South Conference meet every 3rd Tuesday morning in the Meeting Room 10.30am.

New members most welcome, training provided.

Non perishable items within the use by date can be left in the 'drop box' in the Church foyer.

Thank you.

COMBINED CHURCHES CARING MELTON INC

We're here to support City of Melton residents get ahead through access to our foodbank and other community programs. It's never just about the food or the budget help, it's about recognising the beauty that is in the person and bringing it out so they can be their best.

Address: 100 Coburn Road Melton South 9747 6811

God, strengthen and sustain all those who volunteer in our Churches; that with patience and understanding they may love and care for your people; and grant that together they may follow with Jesus Christ offering to you their gifts and talents.

Amen



ST BERNARD'S

WEEKEND VOLUNTEERS : 6th & 7th March

PIETY STALL VOLUNTEERS

Sunday: Marj Tung

CHURCH FLOWERS

February: No Flowers during Lent



PRESBYTERY & CHURCH GROUNDS-

Front Garden:

Back/Side Garden:

Parish Centre: Roster Pending

Carpark/Pines:

Back Paddock:

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY:

Welfare Number is 1800 305 330.

The Vinnies Store is located at 8 Grant Street, Bacchus Marsh. The store is open 7 days a week. If you are able to volunteer and would like some more information, please contact the Store Manager on 8199 4205.

THE NEIGHBOURS PLACE

The Neighbours' Place is a Christian not-for-profit organisation whose aim is to serve people of the **Moorabool Shire**, west of Melbourne Australia, who are disadvantaged, at risk or temporarily unable to feed themselves or their family and who are in need of emergency food relief.

NILS is a **No Interest Loans Scheme** for assistance of up \$1500 for things like white goods, furniture and minor car repairs to keep life going.

We are located at [77 Main Street, Bacchus Marsh](#)

Phone: 03 5367 6222

Email: neighbourspl@iinet.net.au

Hours of Operation: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9.30am-12.30pm. Closed on public holidays.

SOUL FOOD

Soul Food provides a free community meal each Wednesday (excluding school holidays), in the Uniting Church Hall, Gisborne Rd, Bacchus Marsh. Meals are served up at 12noon. All are welcome and this is a free event. No need to book, just come along.

PARISH CENTRE BOOKING

Tel: 5367 3427 Mon—Fri 9.00am to 6.00pm

Hall Managers: Marie & Terry Casey

FAITH FORMATION

ST ANTHONY'S AND ST BERNARD'S

BAPTISM PREPARATION PROGRAM– ST ANTHONY'S AND ST BERNARD'S

The Baptism Preparation Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month.

Time: **6.30pm-7.45pm.**

Next preparation meeting : **Thursday 25th March**

Location: **St Anthony's Church– Meeting Room**

Baptisms are held on the 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month.

Both parents are required to attend these meetings. We kindly request adults only and a copy of the birth certificate.

Please be advised that Baptism applications must be submitted 2 months in advance.

Please contact the Parish Office if you have any queries.

BAPTISM TEAM: Roster Pending



ADULT PREPARATION

Adult preparation for the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist or Confirmation are through the R.C.I.A Program. Please see Fr Fabian, Fr Marcus or Fr Lucas .

FATIMA STATUE—ST ANTHONY'S

These families are praying together for the mission of the Parish:



Group 1: **Shane & Dolly Barrow** **0439 386 130**

Group 2: **Frank & Cia Carreon** **0431 206 357**

Group 3: **Kratochvil Family** **0439 837 252**

DIVINE MERCY NOVENA

1st Sunday of the Month-3.00pm

PRAYER TO ST MICHAEL

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle,
be our protection against the wickedness
and snares of the Devil; may God rebuke him,
we humbly pray, and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly host,
by the power of God, cast into hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits, who prowl
through the world seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.



NEO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

[bow during the next line]

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen

LITURGY OF THE WORD

ENTRANCE PROCESSION

Of you my heart has spoken: Seek his face.
It is your face, O Lord, that I seek;
hide not your face from me.

FIRST READING Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

God put Abraham to the test. 'Abraham, Abraham' he called. 'Here I am' he replied. 'Take your son,' God said 'your only child Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering, on a mountain I will point out to you.'

When they arrived at the place God had pointed out to him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood. Then he stretched out his hand and seized the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham' he said.

'I am here' he replied. 'Do not raise your hand against the boy' the angel said. 'Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your son, your only son.' Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt-offering in place of his son.

The angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven.

'I swear by my own self - it is the Lord who speaks - because you have done this, because you have not refused me your son, your only son, I will shower blessings on you, I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants shall gain possession of the gates of their enemies. All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, as a reward for your obedience.'

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: 115

Commentator: I will walk in the presence of the Lord,
in the land of the living.

All: I will walk in the presence of the Lord,
in the land of the living.

I trusted, even when I said:

'I am sorely afflicted.'

O precious in the eyes of the Lord
is the death of his faithful.

Your servant, Lord, your servant am I;
you have loosened my bonds.

A thanksgiving sacrifice I make:

I will call on the Lord's name.

My vows to the Lord I will fulfil
before all his people,
in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.

I will walk in the presence of the Lord,
in the land of the living.

SECOND READING Romans 8:31-34

With God on our side who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give. Could anyone accuse those that God has chosen? When God acquits, could anyone condemn? Could Christ Jesus? No! He not only died for us - he rose from the dead, and there at God's right hand he stands and pleads for us.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

From the shining cloud, the Father's voice is heard:
this is my beloved Son, hear him.

Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

GOSPEL Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves.

There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Rabbi,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus.

As they came down the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;
listen to him.

NEXT WEEK'S READING

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT-YEAR B

First Reading: Ex 20:1-17;

Second Reading: 1 Cor 1:22-25;

Gospel: Jn 2:13-25



The Psalms X

Psalm 23

From Pope Benedict XVI's Wednesday catechesis, October 5, 2011 (Part One of two parts)

Turning to the Lord in prayer implies a radical act of trust, in the awareness that one is entrusting oneself to the God who is good, “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6-7). For this reason I wish to reflect on a Psalm that is totally imbued with trust, in which the Psalmist expresses his serene certainty that he is guided and protected, safe from every danger, because the Lord is his Shepherd. It is Psalm 23, a text familiar to all and loved by all.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”: the beautiful prayer begins with these words, evoking the nomadic environment of sheep-farming and the experience of familiarity between the shepherd and the sheep that make up his little flock. The image calls to mind an atmosphere of trust, intimacy and tenderness: the shepherd knows each one of his sheep and calls each by name; and they follow him because they recognise him and trust in him.

He tends them, looks after them as precious possessions, ready to defend them, to guarantee their wellbeing and enable them to live a peaceful life. They can lack nothing as long as the shepherd is with them. The Psalmist refers to this experience by calling God his shepherd and letting God lead him to safe pastures: “He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

The vision that unfolds before our eyes is that of green pastures and springs of clear water, oases of peace to which the shepherd leads his flock, symbols of the places of life towards which the Lord leads the Psalmist, who feels like the sheep lying on the grass beside a stream, resting rather than in a state of tension or alarm, peaceful and trusting, because it is a safe place, the water is fresh and the shepherd is watching over them.

And let us not forget here that the scene elicited by the Psalm is set in a land that is largely desert, on which the scorching sun beats down, where the Middle-Eastern semi-nomad shepherd lives with his flock in the parched steppes that surround the villages. Nevertheless the shepherd knows where to find grass and fresh water, essential to life, he can lead the way to oases in which the soul is “restored” and where it is possible to recover strength and new energy to start out afresh on the journey.

As the Psalmist says, God guides him to “green pastures” and “still waters”, where everything is

superabundant, everything is given in plenty. If the Lord is the Shepherd, even in the desert, a desolate place of death, the certainty of a radical presence of life is not absent, so that he is able to say, “I shall not want”. Indeed, the shepherd has at heart the good of his flock, he adapts his own pace and needs to those of his sheep, he walks and lives with them, leading them on paths “of righteousness”, that is, suitable for them, paying attention to their needs and not to his own. The safety of his sheep is a priority for him.

If we follow the “Good Shepherd” — no matter how difficult, tortuous or long the pathways of our life may seem, even through spiritual deserts without water and under the scorching sun of rationalism — with the guidance of Christ the Good Shepherd, we too, like the Psalmist, may be sure that we are walking on “paths of righteousness” and that the Lord is leading us, is ever close to us and that we “shall lack nothing”. For this reason the Psalmist can declare his calm assurance without doubt or fear: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.”

Those who walk with the Lord even in the dark valleys of suffering, doubt and all the human problems, feel safe. You are with me: this is our certainty, this is what supports us. The darkness of the night frightens us with its shifting shadows, with the difficulty of distinguishing dangers, with its silence taut with strange sounds. If the flock moves after sunset when visibility fades, it is normal for the sheep to be restless, there is the risk of stumbling or even of straying and getting lost, and there is also the fear of possible assailants lurking in the darkness.

To speak of the “dark” valley, the Psalmist uses a Hebrew phrase that calls to mind the shadows of death, which is why the valley to be passed through is a place of anguish, terrible threats, the danger of death. Yet the person praying walks on in safety undaunted since he knows that the Lord is with him. “You are with me” is a proclamation of steadfast faith and sums up the radical experience of faith. God’s closeness transforms the reality, the dark valley loses all danger, it is emptied of every threat. Now the flock can walk in tranquillity, accompanied by the familiar rhythmical beat of the staff on the ground, marking the shepherd’s reassuring presence.

This comforting image ends the first part of the Psalm, and gives way to a different scene.

To be continued