

Sunday 15 February 2026

**6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Project Compassion Sunday**

Dear Parish Family,

This weekend Fr Niel will travel back to the Philippines to be with his family. His father is seriously ill in hospital there and, at 93 years old, there are grave concerns for his recovery. His illness has taken everyone by surprise. His dad, Loreto, could use your prayers - so too Fr Niel and his family at this time.

Fr Niel will be gone for the next four weekends, and with Fr Anthony away as well till the middle of March, we are slightly short handed. It calls for greater patience and flexibility as together we navigate the next days and weeks. With that in mind, if you are a weekday Mass goer, there will be sheets at all churches through the week where you can provide your contact details. Or you could contact the office (newcparish@mn.catholic.org.au) and let them know the Mass you attend. It will make my life easier in contacting you, should there be an emergency or last-minute Mass change or cancellation. **A Text or Email** in good time is better than arriving at the church to a note pinned to the door.

I hope as you read this that you have been at the Parishes' Regional Assembly. I am praying that it is a huge success with amazing conversations and listening in the spirit moments from a huge crowd of people. We are a very fortunate community to have these opportunities to come together and to engage as a synodal church where every voice is heard. Whilst I know that we have challenges, I also know that we have an immensity of opportunities to grow, to outreach and to be church together.

I love the symbol of the boat that is part of our church and in our understanding of faith. When you go into our more traditional churches and look up you will notice the lovely wooden ribbing of the ceiling supports. This ribbing mimics the inside of an upturned boat. You will remember that Jesus invites his disciples to leave their boats to be 'fishers of men'. The upturned boat image is reflective of them pulling their boats on shore and like fishermen overturning them on the shore till they need them again. You will also be aware that, throughout the journey with Jesus, there are moments where they row together in storms and across the lake, Jesus meets them in their boat as he walks toward them, asks them to fish again after His resurrection and then entrusts them with His mission to step again from their boats.

I am hopeful that as we continue our Assembly process in a synodal way that you will accept again, and again, the invitation to leave everything and follow Him. That you will accept the invitation to be 'fishers of men (and women)' and feel empowered to help our parish take its next steps to a wonderfully bright and enlivened future. I am hopeful that, as the disciples together rowed across the Sea of Galilee, we will join to build our community together. The future is full of opportunity and whilst I don't always know what God has planned for me or our parish, I am also invited to place my trust in Him. That means often stepping into the unknown with faith, friendship, parish family and courage!

Greg, Parish Priest

Parish Priest

Fr Greg Barker

Assisting Clergy

Fr Niel Olano

Fr Anthony Coloma

Deacon Kevin Gadd

Parish Administration

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Newcastle West, 2302

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After hours emergency phone:

0494 390 653

Anne Warren (*Business Manager*)

Jenny Pascua (*Parish Secretary*)

Daloras Howes (*Administration*)

Peter Davies (*Administration*)

Mary-Anne de Luca (*Sacraments*)

Dr Anne Millard (*Music & Liturgy*)

The Parish Diary...(for the week ahead)

6th week in Ordinary Time, Year A/2

Mon 16 Feb

8:15am Mass @ The Cathedral

Tues 17 Feb

8:15am Mass @ The Cathedral

9:15am Mass @ Stockton - Opening School Mass

11:00am Funeral Mass at The Cathedral for Leslie Albert Tobin

Wed 18 Feb *Ash Wednesday*

8.15am The Cathedral

9.00am Stockton

10.00am The Junction

Noon The Cathedral

Noon St Columban's Primary School

5.00pm The Cathedral (Polish)

6.00pm Tighes Hill

7.00pm The Cathedral



Thurs 19 Feb

8:15am Mass @ The Cathedral

[9:00am No Mass @ Stockton]

Fri 20 Feb

10:15am Mass @ The Junction

11:00am Exposition, Adoration and Reconciliation @ The Cathedral

12:05pm Mass @ The Cathedral

Sat 21 Feb

9:15am Mass @ The Cathedral, followed by the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, followed by Reconciliation

First Sunday of Lent

Sat 21 Feb

5:30pm Vigil Mass @ The Cathedral

5:30pm Vigil Mass @ The Junction

5:30pm Vigil Mass @ Mayfield West

Sun 22 Feb

7:30am Mass @ St Mary's

8:00am Mass @ Tighes Hill

9:00am Mass @ Stockton

9:30am Mass @ The Cathedral *

11:00am Italian Mass @ The Junction

12noon Polish Mass @ The Cathedral

1.30pm Rite of Election @ The Cathedral

5:00pm Mass @ The Cathedral

* Livestreamed on the Cathedral's YouTube channel - search Sacred Heart Cathedral Hamilton

The Polish Community

We will be having our weekly stations of the cross every Friday, starting 20 February onwards at 5pm. Hope to see you there.

Bulletin Survey - with a prize!

We'd welcome your feedback about the parish bulletin - what you like, what could be done better, what new content could be included.

Submitting a response to the survey puts you into a draw to win a \$100 gift voucher.

Here is the link:

<https://tinyurl.com/Newcparishbulletinsurvey>

Or use the QR code:



Prayer Requests

RECENTLY DECEASED: Sr Rae Brooker rsm, Leslie Albert Tobin, Slavko Sepic

ANNIVERSARIES: Edilberto Dacutanan, Elna Dacutanan, Corazon Guerrero, Ethel Casey, Irena Ivanovic, Judith Fleming, Kevin & Zoe Lawler, Michael Lennan, Reg O'Brien, Piero Barile. William (Bill) Warren

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK: John Hayes, Gary Valaire, Jeremy Eden, Braxton Rayner, Patricia Gillett, Tui Innes, Raymond Morley, Louise Hall, Phil Riordan, Twon Nguyen, Eileen Jennings, Gwen Haggerty, Nick Fazzini, Rose Gathercole, Alexander Klein, Patty Keegan, Kathryn Kennedy, Leonetta Papichio, John Woods, Rae Booc, Hoagy VanEwyk, Pat Fitzpatrick, Loreto Olano



Please send prayer requests and items for the Bulletin to the Parish Office by 5pm on Wednesdays.

Parish Teams

Promoters of Safeguarding: Louise Outram, Cynthia Tamonan, Alex Tamonan, Sr Kath Williams rsm, Annie Evans.

Bereavement Team: Margaret Cox, Gail Lovell, Christopher Gregory, Margaret Beard, Margaret Newton, Anne Millard (02) 4979 1252.

St Joseph's Pastoral Team: Contact the Parish Office.

RCIA: Contact Mary-Anne at the parish office. Our website has a form which can be used to express interest in becoming a Catholic.

Sacramental Program: Contact Mary-Anne at the Parish Office.

Baptism team: Meets on the first Tuesday of the month, with parents who are preparing for their children's baptism.

Project Compassion Sunday

Many people were astonished last year when one of the richest people in the world proclaimed that 'the fundamental weakness in Western civilisation is empathy.' The gentleman was clearly not familiar with the New Testament. Compassion is the calling card of Christians. We announce our presence by acts of love. That is what Jesus did and taught.

If you look at the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37), we get an idea of just how empathy and compassion are signs of strength, not weakness. The story says that the Samaritan came across somebody who'd been assaulted and robbed. The stranger 'looked at him with compassion'. He doesn't just look. In the next few lines, he takes ten separate actions: he goes over, he bandages the man, he pours oil on his wounds, he lifts him onto his donkey, he takes him to an inn, he looks after him, he pays the innkeeper, he asks the innkeeper to help, he promises to return, he commits to meeting the bill. Compassion is an action not just a feeling.

CARITAS AUSTRALIA This week, we begin our annual **PROJECT COMPASSION** journey of Lent and with it our annual commitment to Project Compassion, organised by Caritas Australia. For generations, Project Compassion has helped us express our Lenten commitment to prayer, personal sacrifice and almsgiving. Our focus this year is a call to 'Unite Against Poverty'. It is a powerful call.

Every day, the news brings us distressing stories about how the divisions in the world bring disastrous consequences for the most vulnerable people. Our work for Project Compassion is a significant way to bring healing to God's family.

This week, the readings ask us to travel to deeper places in our lives. The Gospel warns us against shallow virtue which 'goes no deeper to that of the scribes and Pharisees'. St Paul speaks about mature wisdom, a view of the world that is at odds with those who have power. 'The masters of this age' seldom understand compassion and the way in which 'the Spirit reaches the depths of everything.' Those depths will take us to the margins and stir in us a longing to 'Unite Against Poverty'.

Films

Watch/download the Introduction to Project Compassion film and the inspiring stories of Sisilia, Monoranjon, Manaini and the emergency response in Gaza:

<https://tinyurl.com/ProjectCompassion2026>



Congratulations

Dominican Sister Lynette Eastmure celebrated 60 years of profession last weekend!



Easter Raffle



To help us prepare for a giant Easter raffle, we're asking each family to donate an egg, bunny or bilby. White baskets are available at the main entrance of each church.

Weekday Mass Goers

If you come to weekday Mass, even occasionally, please add your contact details to the sheets which will be available at all churches from this weekend. Sometimes priest availability may impact the Mass schedule at short notice, and we'd like to be able to let you know when this happens.

Resources for Lent

Lent 2026: I am light

Jesuit and Ignatian Spirituality Australia (JISA) is offering a daily prayer resource for Lent, focussed on being children of light. You can see a **sample** here:

<https://tinyurl.com/JISAsampleLent>

Each day a 2:30 minute video will arrive in your email, with reflective images, music, the word of God and a simple prayer written by Michael Hansen SJ.

You can register here:

<https://tinyurl.com/JISAregerLent>



Lent 2026 - The Journey Home

This is a daily reflection resource for Lent, written by the former Archbishop of Brisbane, Mark Coleridge.

Here is a **sample**:

<https://tinyurl.com/TheJourneyHome2026sample>



It is designed with both individuals and groups in mind, offering simple, easy-to-follow prompts for small group leaders to use each Sunday during Lent. Each weekday includes a prayer, a scripture text, some thoughts to provoke reflection and/or discussion and a closing prayer.

To order, use this link:

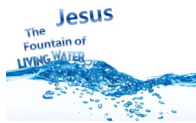
<https://tinyurl.com/Lent2026TheJourneyHome>



Regular Opportunities for Prayer and Meditation

• Tighes Hill Christian Meditation

(non-denominational) - each Monday
3.30pm at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church Tighes Hill



• Living Waters Meditation Centre

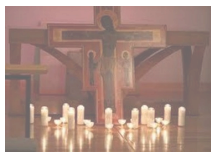
- each Wednesday 7.30am and Friday
11.00am at 34 Kenrick St The Junction

- **The Rosary** - each Wednesday after 8.15am Mass at The Cathedral, First Saturday of the month after Mass and Novena at The Cathedral



- **Divine Mercy Devotion** - first Sunday of the month 3.00pm at Christ the King, Mayfield West

- **Taize Service** - first Sunday of the month 5.00 - 6.00pm at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Tighes Hill, followed by a shared supper.



Our Columbaria

Those in our Columbaria whose anniversaries occur in February:

At Sacred Heart Cathedral:

Robert Charles	Xuyen An Le
Bartholomew	Patricia (Trish) Leishman
Jean Rosario Belcher	Alan James Long
Gwenneth Bennett	Fiore (Frank) Monaco
Anthony Bookallil	Stan O'Brien
Beryl Jean Clarke	Kathleen O'Neill
Marie Forrest	Roger Saunders
Joanne Franks	Robert Smith
Giuseppe Grach	Gregory Smith
Edna Jean Hancock	Toni Van Schyndel
Peter William Heggart	William (Bill) Warren
Michael Henessy	Clare Alice Withers
Ronald Joseph Jarrett	Joan Woodcock
Czeslaw (Cec) Kizeweter	

At St Joseph's:

Nicholas Evans	Gerald Meighan
Robyn Field	Bob Smyth
Marie James	Kath Walsh
Marie Maddrell	Alan Watt
William McNeil	Johanna Schmuck
Margaret McVie	Rodney Wright

Eternal rest grant unto them and may perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace, Amen.

Parish Group Meetings

St Joseph's Prayer/Discussion Group will

commence our 2026 program with the Wollongong Lenten Program. We start **this Thursday** 19 February at 9.30am in the meeting room at The Junction and will continue weekly until Easter. All welcome. Contact Janet Tully on 0435 518 671.



Book Club meets on Sunday, 1 March, to discuss *Always Home, Always Homesick* by Hannah Kent. For April it will be *Legacy* by Chris Hammer.

If you would like to participate in book club meetings, please email:

newcparish@mn.catholic.org.au

View, Chew, and Chat has started a new series, *Parousia: The Bible and the Mass*. Join us on Wednesdays as we explore how Scripture comes alive in the Mass and deepens our understanding of what we celebrate each week. Watch the first episode:

[Parousia: The Bible and the Mass - St. Paul Center.](#)

All welcome to join us! To participate, please email the parish office:

newcparish@mn.catholic.org.au



Tighes Hill Church community are having a **pancake breakfast** after 8am Mass this Sunday 15 February 2026.



Faith Sharing on the Sunday Gospel at

Tighes Hill Church after 8am Mass on 1st, 8th, 22nd and 29th March 2026.

Parish Luncheon at Souths Leagues Club, Llewellyn

St, Merewether @ 12.30pm on Monday 16th February. All welcome. Inquiries to Maureen (Tighes Hill) on 0412 673 151.



Welcome to Our Newly Baptised!

We joyfully welcome those receiving the Sacrament of Baptism this weekend: At St Mary's, Louis Craven; At the Cathedral, Anthony Cook, Maisie Lavis, Gabriel Thompson and Reuben van Rugge.



The Chuckle

And the Lord said unto John "Come forth and you will receive eternal life"

But John came fifth and won a toaster.





EPIC Young Adults – Vision and Mission



EPIC is inviting all young people aged 18-35 to have their say in shaping the future of our Young Adults ministry! Join us for a **Vision and Mission Writing Day** --a chance

to reflect, dream, and contribute your voice to what this community is becoming. Whether you're deeply involved or newly curious, your perspective matters. Come connect with other like-minded young adults, share ideas, and help articulate a vision grounded in faith.

Date: Saturday 28th February

Time: 10am to 3:00pm

Location: Diocesan Resource Centre

RSVP at <https://tinyurl.com/EPICVandM>



From the Promoters of Safeguarding

Safeguarding includes protecting an older person's human rights while respecting their autonomy; however, elder abuse in Australia is a growing social issue that affects seniors across all communities. It refers to any act or failure to act that causes harm or distress to an older person, often occurring in relationships where trust is expected. Abuse can take many forms, including financial exploitation, psychological or emotional abuse, physical harm, sexual abuse, and neglect.

Financial abuse is the most commonly reported type in Australia, frequently involving misuse of money, coercion, or pressure to change wills or access assets. Many cases are carried out by family members or caregivers, which makes abuse difficult to detect and report. Older people may feel ashamed, fear retaliation, or worry about damaging family relationships, leading to significant under-reporting.

Australia has responded through initiatives such as the **National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians** (<https://eaaa.org.au/>), elder abuse helplines, and advocacy services; however, challenges remain due to an ageing population and increased dependence on others for care.

Preventing elder abuse requires community awareness, legal protections, and support services that empower older people. Respect, dignity, and safety are essential to ensure older Australians can age free from abuse.

Global Volunteering Information Session



February 19 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm AEDT

Discover the Impact of Volunteering Abroad with Palms International Volunteering!

Palms has over 60 years experience preparing and supporting people to mentor abroad. Your life experience could sustain a self-reliant future for those with least opportunity. And the experience of volunteering abroad could change your life, forever.

Join us for an ONLINE session to discover how you can help develop community self-reliance and create lasting change.

Please register here:

<https://tinyurl.com/PalmsInformation>



Our Catholic Schools

St Joseph's Primary School: Karen McGinlay (*Principal*)

Union Street, The Junction NSW 2291

(02) 4961 2827

www.merewether.catholic.edu.au

Holy Family Primary School: Shannon McGregor (*Principal*)

Pell Street, Merewether NSW 2291

(02) 4963 3009

www.merewetherbeach.catholic.edu.au

St Columban's Primary School: Penny Banister (*Principal*)

Church Street, Mayfield NSW 2304

(02) 4968 3315

www.mayfieldsc.catholic.edu.au

St Peter's Primary School: Dennis Nolan (*Principal*)

Dunbar St, Stockton NSW 2295

(02) 4928 1861

www.stockton.catholic.edu.au

St Francis Xavier's College: Greg Ptolemy (*Principal*)

Parkway Avenue, Hamilton NSW 2303

(02) 4961 2863

www.hamilton.catholic.edu.au

San Clemente High School: Emma South (*Principal*)

78 Havelock St, Mayfield NSW 2304

(02) 4014 7300

www.mayfieldsanc.catholic.edu.au

St Dominic's Catholic College: Rachel Jones (*Principal*)

76 Havelock St, Mayfield NSW 2304

(02) 4968 1295

www.mayfieldsd.catholic.edu.au

Diocesan Events

<https://tinyurl.com/cdmnevents>

Rite of Election 2026

The Rite of Election on Sunday 22 February 2026 is an opportunity to welcome all catechumens who will be baptised in their parishes at the Easter Vigil. A catechumen is an unbaptised person whose search for meaning has brought them to the Catholic Church. Please join in witness and prayerful support of those who choose to be Catholic. 1.30pm Sacred Heart Cathedral Newcastle West, followed by afternoon tea. RSVP for catering to mission@mn.catholic.org.au.

Diocesan Resource Centre

Opening Hours: Mondays and Fridays, 10am to 4pm.
Open 1st & 3rd Saturday of each month, 10am to 2pm.
cnr Tudor and Parry Sts, Newcastle West.

All resources are available to borrow; and are searchable on the library catalogue, which can be accessed through this link:
<https://tinyurl.com/DOMNLibrary>
OR use the QR code.



Praying Scripture Group

Saturday 21 February, 2:30pm

*Diocesan Resource Centre - Cnr Parry & Tudor Streets,
Newcastle West*

The Praying Scripture group will start meeting at 2:30pm on Saturday 21 February at the Diocesan Resource Centre adjacent to Sacred Heart Cathedral Hamilton during Lent to pray and reflect on the Lenten Gospels. We will continue to meet after Easter with a particular focus on the Gospel of John this year. You can contact Wayne Caruana for more information on 0466 631394.

Formation Film

Saturday 7 March, 11am, cnr Parry & Tudor Streets, Newcastle West – beside Sacred Heart Cathedral. Join us as we watch and discuss the 2024 release film ***Small Things Like These***.

Lunch will be served after the film.

Reservations requested:

<https://tinyurl.com/CDMN-FormationFilm>

or call Mary on 0249230682



ACBC Social Justice Statement

This year, the Australian bishops have chosen to release two Social Justice Statements – one in February and another in August. The February statement is titled *The Cost of our Living: Economic and Social Justice for the Common Good*.

Link: <https://tinyurl.com/ACBCSocialJustice>

Become an SRE Teacher — Share Faith, Bring Hope

*Monday 16 February or Monday 2 March 1-3pm
Mullane Room, 841 Hunter St Newcastle West*

Our parishes are looking for generous hearts to join our team of Special Religious Education (SRE)



teachers. This beautiful ministry allows you to share the love of Jesus with children in our local public schools, offering them encouragement, connection, and a sense of belonging.

If you've ever felt a nudge to serve, this is a wonderful place to begin. All training, support, and resources are provided - you simply bring your witness and willingness. Come along, meet the team, and discover how your "yes" could make a real difference in a child's life. Contact Nicola Graham 0417 773 444
nicola.graham@mn.catholic.org.au

Mission to Seafarers



Volunteer Drivers Needed for our Afternoon/ Evening Roster. For the centre to run to capacity we need drivers willing to drive on weekends and in the evenings Monday to Fridays from 3pm – 10pm (closing early if no seafarers onsite).

Enquiries to mark.spencer1@mn.catholic.org.au or 0408 895 951.

Food Baskets for the Needy

Items of dry goods or tin food can be placed in the blue bins located at our churches. When donating please check expiry dates. We request that you do not donate peanut butter. Any of the following non-perishable items are welcome: UHT milk, cereal, spreads, tinned goods, pasta, rice, pasta sauces, tea, coffee, biscuits, custard, jelly, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant.



Safeguarding

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle has an abiding commitment to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. If you have any concerns for a child or vulnerable adult please contact the Office of Safeguarding: 02 4979 1390, or email childprotection@mn.catholic.org.au or visit www.officeofsafeguarding.org.au

Sacraments of Initiation - Enrolments for 2026

Our parish wishes to support parents with their sacred duty of initiating children into the Christian life



through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. These sacraments form an inseparable whole: Baptism welcomes children into God's family, Confirmation seals them with the Holy Spirit for witness and strength; and the Eucharist unites them fully to Christ's Body, the source and summit of Christian life. These special sacraments help open their hearts to experience more of God's love and goodness in their lives, guiding them toward a deeper ability to love others selflessly and to follow the example of Jesus.

To support parents in preparing children for the Sacraments of Reconciliation (healing) Confirmation and First Eucharist, we are holding a parent information session at the Sacred Heart Cathedral on the following dates:

(please choose one to attend)

Option 1: Tuesday, February 17 6:00pm, -7:30pm

Option 2: Tuesday, February 24 6:00pm, -7:30pm

If you feel called to assist parents in preparing children for Sacraments of Initiation, or if you would like more information please contact our pastoral associate for Sacraments Mary-Anne de Luca on 0409 077 373 or email maryanne.deluca@mn.catholic.org.au

If you are interested in registering your child to be part of the sacramental journey this year, please fill out the following form:

<https://tinyurl.com/Initiation2026>

Donation Options

For anyone who wishes to make donations to the parish via direct deposit: Details are provided below for the individual parishes.

Account name: **CDF** BSB: **066739**

Account number: **see below***

Reference: **Donation [Surname]**

***Account numbers:**

Newcastle Parish – A/c no: **100008696**

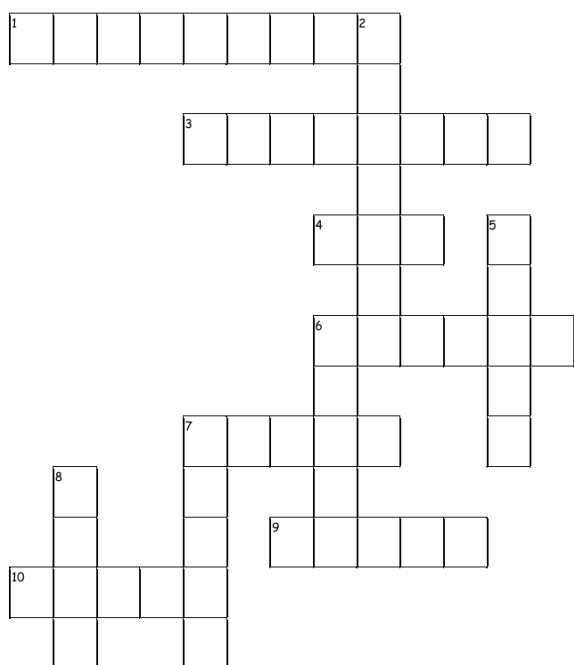
Mayfield Parish – A/c no: **100007169**

Stockton Parish – A/c no: **100003308**

CROSSWORD

Make peace before offering your gift to God

Mt 5:23-24



Across

- 1: followers of Jesus
- 3: to recall a memory
- 4: our Father in heaven
- 6: 'cats' is to 'cat' as 'people' is to '_____'
- 7: the priest breaks the bread at the _____
- 9: to go away from
- 10: to willingly give something

Down

- 2: a person we may or may not know
- 5: the opposite of back
- 6: when there is no more fighting or war
- 7: very mad
- 8: something we give, like a present

Today's Liturgy

Entrance Antiphon Cf Psalm 30:3-4

Be my protector, O God, a mighty stronghold to save me. For you are my rock, my stronghold! Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name.

First Reading Sirach 15:15-20

He never commanded anyone to be godless.



Responsorial Psalm Ps 118:1-2. 4-5. 17-18. 33-34. R. v.1

(R.) Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord!

1. They are happy whose life is blameless, who follow God's law!
They are happy those who do his will, seeking him with all their hearts. (R.)
2. You have laid down your precepts to be obeyed with care.
May my footsteps be firm to obey your statutes. (R.)
3. Bless your servant and I shall live and obey your word.
Open my eyes that I may consider the wonders of your law. (R.)
4. Teach me the demands of your statutes and I will keep them to the end.
Train me to observe your law, to keep it with my heart. (R.)

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

God in his wisdom predestined our glory before the ages began.

Gospel Acclamation See Matthew 11:25

Alleluia, alleluia!
Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth; you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom. Alleluia!

Gospel Matthew 5:17-37

Such was said to your ancestors; but I am speaking to you.

Communion Antiphon Cf Psalm 77:29-30

They ate and had their fill, and what they craved the Lord gave them; they were not disappointed in what they craved.



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The English translation of the Psalm Responses, the Alleluia and Gospel Verses, and the Lenten Gospel Acclamations, and the Titles, Summaries, and Conclusion of the Readings, from the Lectionary for Mass © 1997, 1981, 1968, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. All rights reserved.



Next Week's Readings

1st Sunday of Lent, Year A

Gen 2:7-9, 3:1-7

Rom 5:12-19

Mt 4:1-11

Scripture Commentary

The **Book of Sirach** is a collection of proverbial teachings. This wisdom tradition presumes a fundamental order in creation and life. However, human beings are not predestined to conform to this order. On the contrary, its very nature presumes that humans are free. Women and men can decide to live in conformity with the way life unfolds –and this is wisdom, or they can choose to disregard this order – and that is foolishness. Although God desires that all live in conformity to this order, God has predestined no one to sin. All have been given freedom of choice. It is up to us to use it wisely. Today's reading addresses human freedom and human choice.

Composed of both instruction and prayer, the **responsorial psalm** focuses on adherence to the law (a word best translated 'instruction'). The language used throughout is typical of that found in the wisdom tradition, a tradition characterised by a clear delineation of two ways of living: the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked. In the instruction, a beatitude describes the rewards that attend righteous living. In the prayers that follow, one asks to remain obedient. The commitment of which the psalmist speaks means that one is acting out of devotion, not merely out of external observance.

Jewish apocalyptic, within which **Paul** develops his instruction on wisdom, maintained that the secrets of the future had been written down at the beginning of time and preserved somewhere safe from the eyes of humankind. At the fullness of time, they will be revealed. Time is thus divided into 'this age' of waiting and 'the age to come', when all things will be made known. Paul contrasts the wisdom of which he speaks with the wisdom of this age. Everything hinges on the essence of the revealed mystery which is the death and resurrection of Christ. Those who are mature have entered into this mystery by accepting the wisdom of the gospel.

Jesus' words today are based on the law and the prophets (the two major sections of the Bible). His teachings were so unprecedented that some accused him of rejecting his religious tradition. Jesus admits that his interpretations provide a new perspective, but they actually offer the fuller meaning of the tradition. The contrast he sets up is not between himself and the law, but between his interpretation and that of the scribes and Pharisees, the interpreters of the law for the people of that day. The formula he uses ('You have heard it said ... But I say to you ...') shows that he demands much more than mere external conformity. The four teachings he contrasts demonstrate how radical is his reinterpretation of the law.

© Dianne Bergant CSA

Dianne Bergant CSA was a Professor of Biblical Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where she taught from 1978 to 2014. She has taught and lectured in many places in the United States and abroad and has written numerous books, articles and chapters in books.