

Sunday 8 February 2026

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parish Family,

As we near the Parish Assembly's phase 2, I thought it was timely to touch base re our finances and the touchstone of our finances which is our parish planned giving. Some people choose to give via 'money in the baskets' as they are passed on Sundays, some use the Eftpos machines strategically placed at the doors, some use our envelope system printed with a number and logo, and many are using direct debit or credit card with a set monthly, or weekly amount. Either way our parish stays afloat due to your kindness and generosity. If you have been giving the same amount for years, could you consider a small increase? And if you haven't started giving yet, could you? At the Assembly I will talk briefly about our challenges financially so that you have a clear picture of our reality. We will also provide financial statements to help paint a picture of our financial reality in readiness for the assembly's second phase. The money is not something I often talk about. However, it is good for me to think sometimes about how we budget and your generosity is a big part of that. Thank you.

Our Extraordinary ministers of communion (lay helpers) and our Ordinary ministers (priests and deacons) have asked me to talk about communion and the reception of the Eucharist. In the dioceses of Australia, standing is the most common posture to receive Communion, though individual members may choose to receive Communion while kneeling (GIRM 160). When approaching to receive Communion, bow in reverence of the Sacrament you are to receive (GIRM 160). *A common posture and gesture help to symbolise the assembly's unity in Christ and also helps the communion procession to flow smoothly.* In Australia we are asked not to genuflect as it breaks the symbol of unity in Christ. Those that genuflect without warning become a potential trip hazard for those coming behind who are not expecting that action.

When receiving Communion in the hand, the communicant might be guided by the words of St Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386AD): *"When you approach, take care not to do so with your hand stretched out and your fingers open or apart, but rather place your left hand as a throne beneath your right, as befits one who is about to receive the King.* " (Cat. Myst V. 21-22). **Those who are left-handed are free to receive Communion on whichever hand they feel most comfortable.** When the minister says "The Body of Christ", reply "Amen" (GIRM 161).

When receiving in the hand, consume the whole of the host at once. When receiving on the tongue, communicants should open their mouths sufficiently and position their tongue to help easy reception of the host. The tongue should extend slightly past the bottom lip, and the mouth needs to be sufficiently open to help the minister to place the host respectfully. On the hand or on the tongue has the same level of reverence and respect, regardless of personal opinion.

If desired, move to the minister with the chalice. When the minister says "The Blood of Christ", reply "Amen," receive the chalice, drink a little from it, and return the chalice to the minister. In keeping with Christ's command to take and drink and consistent with the Church's tradition that the sacraments be ministered, *it is not allowed for communicants to self-intinct (or dip) the host in the chalice.* Our ministers are instructed to place their hand over the chalice and to politely say 'we are unable to allow intinction here.'

Kind regards,

Greg, Parish Priest



Parish Priest

Fr Greg Barker

Assisting Clergy

Fr Niel Olano

Fr Anthony Coloma
Deacon Kevin Gadd

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Daloras Howes (Administration)

Peter Davies (Administration)

Mary-Anne de Luca (Sacraments)

Dr Anne Millard (Music & Liturgy)

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

5th week in Ordinary Time, Year A/2

Mon 9 Feb

8:15am Mass @ The Cathedral
10:00am Funeral liturgy at The Cathedral for Catherine Walmsley

Tues 10 Feb *St Scholastica, virgin*

8:15am Mass @ The Cathedral
9:00am Mass @ Stockton
11:00am Mass @ The Cathedral, celebrating Women's Consecrated Life

Wed 11 Feb

8:15am Mass @ The Cathedral
9:00am Mass @ Mayfield West (anointing)
11:00am Mass @ The Cathedral - perpetual profession of Shari Maria Brewster as a Diocesan Hermit

Thurs 12 Feb

8:15am Mass @ The Cathedral
9:00am Mass @ Stockton
9:30am Diocesan Staff Mass @ The Cathedral
10:15am St Joseph's The Junction Opening School
9:15am Mass
1:30pm Mass at Charles O'Neill, Mayfield West

Fri 13 Feb

9:15am Holy Family Opening School Mass
10:15am St Columban's Opening School Mass
10:15am **No Mass @ The Junction**
11:00am **No Exposition/Adoration @ The Cathedral**
12:05pm Mass @ The Cathedral

Sat 14 Feb *Sts Cyril, monk, and Methodius, bishop*
9:15am Mass @ The Cathedral, followed by the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, followed by Reconciliation

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sat 14 Feb

5:30pm Vigil Mass @ The Cathedral
5:30pm Vigil Mass @ The Junction
5:30pm Vigil Mass @ Mayfield West

Sun 15 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
5:00pm Mass @ The Cathedral

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

Prayer Requests

RECENTLY DECEASED: Jude Booc, Nora Eyre, Nina Di Claudio, Catherine Walmsley, Leslie Albert Tobin



ANNIVERSARIES: William (Bill) Warren, John Woodward, Maureen Kauter, Reg O'Brien, Carmel Kelly (Bartlett), Margaret Dixon, Margaret Watt

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

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

Parish Teams

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.

Promoters of Safeguarding: Louise Outram, Adele Rubino, Cynthia Tamonan, Sr Kath Williams rsm.

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.

Bulletin Survey - and a possible 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/
Newparishbulletinsurvey](https://tinyurl.com/Newparishbulletinsurvey)

Or use the QR code:



The Chuckle

Police were called to a child care centre this week because a three-year-old was resisting a rest...



Mission

Why We Exist - Where We Are Going

Mission is the Church's purpose. A synodal Church is a Church that listens in order to serve.



Mission asks: • Who is God calling us to be? • What is needed in our region today? • How do we reach young people and families? • How do we rebuild community? • How do we witness to Christ in the heart of the city?

From Session 1, people named the need for:

- Outreach
- Service
- Accompaniment
- Reaching the next generation
- Evangelisation through welcome and hospitality

Our Regional Assembly Goal

To develop new pastoral goals rooted in the voices of our people and guided by the Holy Spirit.

MISSION: POSSIBLE Mission sends us outward, toward the world God loves. Mission energises our parishes. Mission keeps us focused on what matters most.

Regional Parish Assembly-Session Two: Discerning what we Heard - Saturday 14 February

You are warmly invited to join us for a Regional Parish Assembly on Saturday 14 February at the Sacred Heart Cathedral precinct. 9.30am arrival, 10.00am commencement, 3.00pm finish. This gathering will be a time to discern and dream together. Your voice matters, and together we can help shape the future of our mission and ministry.

RSVP: We need numbers in order to cater for lunch!

Please let us know by Monday 9 February if you will be attending by completing this online form:

<https://tinyurl.com/ParishAssembly2>

OR contact the parish office:

⇒ on 4979 1101

⇒ or newcparish@mn.catholic.org.au



OR add your name to the sign up sheets that are available at all churches this weekend.

Please feel welcome to take home a copy of the booklet which contains the agenda and information that will guide our discussion. It can be found at the main entrance of each church.

For morning tea next Saturday, please bring a plate to share!

Lent

Ash Wednesday is coming up on 18 February.

► If you still have your **palm** from Palm Sunday last year, could you bring it next weekend? Boxes are available at all church entrances. The palms will be used to make ashes for Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday Mass times:

8.15am	The Cathedral
9.00am	Stockton
10.00am	The Junction
Noon	The Cathedral
5.00pm	The Cathedral (Polish)
6.00pm	Tighes Hill
7.00pm	The Cathedral



The launch of Project Compassion will take place during the Diocesan Staff Mass this week on Thursday at 9.30am, and boxes will be available next weekend.

Resources for Lent Reflection and Prayer

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/JISAreregisterLent>

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 beginning prayer, a short scripture text, a reflection upon it, 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 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 will begin a new series, *Parousia: The Bible and the Mass*, beginning Wednesday 11 February. Join us 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 then! To participate, please email the parish office:

newcparish@mn.catholic.org.au

Tighes Hill Church community are having a **pancake breakfast** after 8am Mass on 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 The Cathedral, Adelaine Bashford, Catalina and Massimo Modonese, Isla and Aria Mood, Gabriel Thompson and Theodore Adenix; at Stockton, Evie Griffiths.



Farewell Fr Sabu

Our thanks, prayers and best wishes go with Fr Sabu as he begins his journey this weekend as administrator of Muswellbrook parish.



Saint Josephine Bakhita

On 1 October 2000 Josephine Bakhita was declared a saint by the Catholic Church. In 2001 February 8 was established as an Optional Memorial in the Australian liturgical calendar.

Josephine was born around the year 1869 at Dafur, in modern-day Western Sudan. She belonged to the Daju People. In 1877, when she was around 7 years old, Josephine was kidnapped by Arab slave traders. She was forced to walk about 970 kilometres, barefoot, to El-Obeid and was bought and sold twice before she arrived. Once again, during 1877 to 1889, she was sold again three more times between Africa and Europe. Josephine was finally given freedom when she was in Italy.

Josephine Bakhita entered the novitiate of Canossian Sisters, at the Institute of St Magdalene of Canossa in Italy on 7 December 1893. Three years later she took her vows and was welcomed by Cardinal Sarto. In 1902 she was sent to the Canossian convent in Schio and during her 42 long years of stay there, she was employed as the cook, sacristan and portress, otherwise known as the doorkeeper. While doing these types of minor works she was frequently able to have contact with the local community.

During World War II she shared the fears and hopes of the town people, who considered her already a saint as they felt protected by her presence. Bombs, however, did not spare Schio, and yet the devastation did not result in any casualties. Josephine spent her last days suffering with pain and sickness, but she was always cheerful. If someone asked how she was going she would reply 'as the master desires'. She died on 8 February 1947. Saint Josephine Bakhita is the patron of Sudan and more recently the patron of victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking is also held annually on 8 February. It focuses on St Josephine Bakhita, highlighting the circumstances of violence and injustice affecting millions of voiceless people. It has become a day of prayer and learning.

Anti-Slavery International: Founded in 1839, it is the oldest international human rights organisation in the world. It partners with many organisations from around the world, including Caritas and Catholic Mission.

For more information, follow this link:

<https://www.antislavery.org>



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 aboard. 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>

Profession

The Perpetual Profession of Shari Maria Brewster as a Diocesan Hermit will take place during Mass in The Cathedral on Wednesday 11 February at 11am. Light refreshments will be served after Mass in the Victor Peters Suite. All welcome.

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.

2026 Sisters of Faith Dinner

Wednesday 11 February, 6.00pm

Victor Peters Suite, 841 Hunter Street, Newcastle West

Last chance to secure your tickets to hear from this year's guest speaker Sr Helen-Anne Johnson from Mum's Cottage, Holmesville. Tickets are \$35 and on sale through this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/SistersofFaith>



Lent 2026 with the Catholic Guy

Lent is a time when we can grow closer to God and prepare our hearts for the true meaning of Easter. For 40 days you will receive a short, practical and inspiring video in your inbox every morning to help you make this Lenten journey more powerful and prayerful. This program is FREE and you can sign up here: <https://tinyurl.com/LentCatholicGuy>. Go to BruceDownes.org for more information.

Helping Others

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.

Community Kitchens

The Community Kitchens run by CatholicCare can be accessed by anyone who needs a warm meal or support. Local locations are:

Adamstown: Every Wednesday, 11am to 1pm at 486 Glebe Road, Adamstown

Newcastle: Every Saturday, 5.30pm to 6.30pm (6.30pm to 7.30pm during Daylight Savings) at Civic Park, King Street, Newcastle.

Phone: 4979 1120

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 prepare 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**

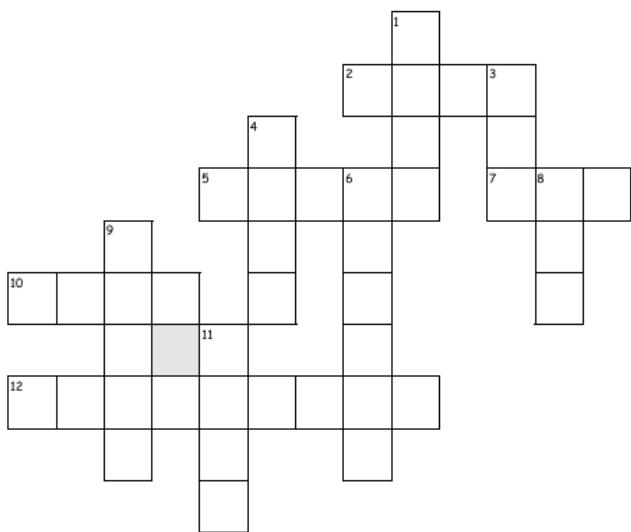
Mayfield Parish – A/c no: **100007169**

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

CROSSWORD

You are like light for the whole world

Mt 5:13-16



Across

2: a light you can carry around

5: not dark

7: the opposite of bottom

10: you eat this when you are hungry

12: Jesus' friends

Down

1: Jesus told the disciples they were like _____ for everyone on earth

3: an indoor plant grows in this

4: a very large town

6: kept out of sight

8: the number before two

9: a place where you live

11: a small mountain

Today's Liturgy

Entrance Antiphon: Ps 94:6-7

O come, let us worship God and bow low before the God who made us, for he is the Lord our God.



First Reading: Is 58:7-10

Your light will shine like the dawn.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 111:4-9. R. v.4

(R.) A light rises in the darkness for the upright.

1. He is a light in the darkness for the upright: he is generous, merciful and just.
The good man takes pity and lends, he conducts his affairs with honour. (R.)
2. The just man will never waver: he will be remembered for ever. He has no fear of evil news; with a firm heart he trusts in the Lord. (R.)
3. With a steadfast heart he will not fear; open-handed, he gives to the poor; his justice stands firm for ever. His head will be raised in glory. (R.)

Second Reading: 1 Cor 2:1-5

I came to you to proclaim Christ crucified.

Gospel Acclamation: Jn 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the light of the world, says the Lord; the man who follows me will have the light of life. Alleluia!

Gospel: Mt 5:13-16

You are the light of the world.

Communion Antiphon: Cf. Ps 106:8-9

Let them thank the Lord for his mercy, his wonders for the children of men, for he satisfies the thirsty soul, and the hungry he fills with good things.



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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.

Scripture Commentary

The theme that runs through the Scripture readings today and that has determined their choice is clearly that of 'light'. We can see it in the First Reading ('then will your light shine like the dawn'), in the opening verse of the Responsorial Psalm and (with reference to Christ) in the Alleluia verse ('I am the Light of the world'), all building up the climactic statement in the Gospel: 'You are the light of the world'.

The First Reading features one of the great appeals for social justice in the Old Testament. Israel has complained that much fasting on her part has met with no response from God. In reply God explains the kind of 'fast' Israel needs to undertake: not one involving penitential ritual but a 'fast' from injustice. Refraining from indifference and violence towards the weak, and a positive program of hospitality will cause Israel's 'light to shine like the dawn' and her 'wound' to be 'quickly healed over'. In a way that retains remarkable relevance for all human societies – local, national or, indeed, global – the prophetic text insists that if a community gets social justice right, then all else will fall into place.

It is at this point that the prophetic text becomes most relevant as a background for the brief extract from the Sermon on the Mount that forms the Gospel. Two images – salt and light – dominate the extract. The community of disciples, to whom Jesus has just addressed the Beatitudes, is not just to be something for itself. It has the vocation both to preserve ('salt') and to model ('light') something for the rest of the world.

Jesus does not simply apply the images 'salt and light' to the community. To each is added a few sentences of explanation and warning. To appreciate what he says about salt we have to recall the role salt played in food-preservation before refrigeration; salt was a vital domestic commodity. The explanation, however, is far from clear. Salt can hardly lose its taste but it may be so mixed with other elements as to become impure and so useless for either savour or preservation; it will be good only for salting the path outside the house, where people will trample it underfoot. Disciples who fall away from their vocation may face a similar fate.

The comment upon the image of light falls into two distinct parts. In biblical tradition Jerusalem was the archetypal 'city built on a hilltop'. When the Temple was illuminated – as during the Feast of Tabernacles – Jerusalem was indeed 'the light of the world'. The image then reverts to the more domestic scene: what one does with a lamp. The disciples' good works must function as a lamp giving light to a darkened world – not to draw attention to themselves but to lead outsiders to the knowledge and praise of the God who has set them to be salt and light for the world.

© Brendan Byrne SJ

Brendan Byrne has been Professor of New Testament at Jesuit Theological College in Melbourne, Australia, of which he was Principal (1992-97). He is the author of nine books, edits the theological journal *Pacifica* and regularly gives workshops on scripture to clergy and parish communities.

Next Week's Readings

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
Sirach 15:15-20
1 Cor 2:6-10
Mt 5:17-37

