



*On the way to Emmaus, by Janet Brooks-Gerloff (1992), oil on canvas,
Kornelimünster Abbey, Aachen, Germany.*

*Throw your fear
in the air*

...

*Be what you are
Give what you have*

. . . lines from *You're here, still*
Rose Ausländer (1901-1988)

Easter greetings to all members of the Boonah Catholic community and beyond on this Sixth Sunday of Easter!

Auxiliary bishop of Brisbane, Ken Howell, updated the clergy of Brisbane on Friday afternoon about the state of play as regards the celebration of Mass.

It is very clear: *The opportunity for increasing daily or weekend Masses for up to 10 people in the near future is being considered and further directives will be communicated with you very soon. At this stage, the celebration of Mass remains suspended.*

In the next week and following I will look at where we are at here in Boonah, the requirements that must be complied with - the pros and cons of it all, and above all, discerning the practicalities on the ground. I will reach out to our parish pastoral council executive to do this.

In the meantime, let's focus on reading the scriptures in our homes . . . if there are two or more at home, then it may be possible to do together. We pray for our needs and especially the needs of

people across the world. We might not only pray for all health people responding to people and populations but also those entrusted with leadership in the community and across continents.

1. **LITURGY BRISBANE**, from our own archdiocese, provides the Sunday Readings for home reflection. Click on the link below for today's texts.

We all know the drill: the first document contains the Sunday readings with associated commentaries and prayers. It is suggested that families gather to read the Scriptures aloud together:

<https://litedliturgybrisbane.weebly.com/sunday-readings-at-home.html/>

The second resource is designed for families with young children. An extract from the Sunday gospel is provided, along with several reflection questions, a family activity and a worksheet for children:

<https://litedliturgybrisbane.weebly.com/family-prayer-week-by-week.html/>



2. **A REFLECTION ON THE SUNDAY WORD.** Last Sunday, we carried a Sunday reflection shared from the Catholic Women Preach website.

Today's reflection is offered by Mary Ann Hinsdale, a members of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, MI, USA, and a teacher of theology at Boston College. The link offers a video of the reflection, the text and some background of the preacher:

<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/05172020>

3. We extend our condolences to Mario and Anne Artesi and family upon the death of Pio Artesi. Pio was Mario's younger brother, lived in Italy, and been very unwell for the last year. We had been asked to pray for Pio in our weekly 'roll-call' of people who are sick and unwell. May Pio rest in peace!

4. We pray with and for those who are sick in our parish and beyond: all across the globe infected with COVID-19; former pastor of Boonah parish Fr. Ellis Clifford, Chris Healy, Bill Castley, Paul White, Thyrlene Devin, Bridget Muller, Liliana Toohill, Libby Shields, Jonathon Hancock, Marko Babic, Dermot Peters, Max Gardiner, Nicole Wimmer, Bernice Lippiatt, Pat Toohill, Trish Merlehan, Kath Pascoe, Suzy Collyer, Pat Shannon, and Paul Maschio.

*Loving God, rock of strength and comforter,
hear the cry of those who suffer from sickness at this time
and embrace them in your loving arms.*

5. Here is a second reflection on the Sunday readings from Laurie Woods, an Aussie scripture scholar. Thanks Laurie!

Today's first reading continues the Christian story in Acts and features Philip, who was one of the seven we read about last week appointed to take care of the finances and material needs, particularly of the Greek speaking members of the Jesus community in Jerusalem. Philip's Greek name indicates he is one of the Hellenist Jews of this community. It is important to remember that the infant church at this stage was Jewish and the Jesus people were becoming branded as heretics for their belief in Jesus as Israel's messiah. One significant figure who vigorously opposed the Jesus people at this time was Saul of Tarsus, who, known later as Paul, became one of the most outstanding Apostles of Christianity.

Philip, commissioned by the Jerusalem community, travels north to take the gospel message to the people of Samaria. Luke makes the point repeatedly in his volume of Acts that those sent on mission make a significant impression by healing people of various physical and mental complaints. These 'signs and wonders' as Luke calls them drew listeners to the missionaries and were instrumental in bringing people to Jesus Christ. Luke is also noted for attributing the success of missionary work to the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit emerges as a kind heroic character in Luke's writings.

Church decisions were made by the communities themselves

The elders of the Jerusalem community, struck by Philip's success, sent Peter and John to Samaria, not to preach or make converts but to endorse the baptizing work of Philip with the laying on of hands that bestowed the gifts of the Spirit. As a cultural aside, it is worth noting that the Jerusalem church was governed by a committee of elders (in Greek: *presbyteroi*). Respect for wisdom and age has always been an outstanding feature of Jewish culture. This is before the rise of a centralised Christian hierarchy or priesthood as we know them. Throughout his writing, Luke informs us that church decisions were made by the communities themselves in collaboration with their elders. This is the kind of synodality that Pope Francis is attempting to restore in today's church.

The poet of the responsorial psalm is bursting with joy and gratitude and calls on all the earth to praise

the creator of the unfathomable beauty that makes up our world. When writers of the ancient Hebrew text mention the 'name' of God the reference is to Moses' experience at the burning bush. The name of God was revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14) as describing a spirit reality that is infinitely mysterious, compassionate, far above human comprehension, powerful and sacred beyond all imagining. It was never meant to portray an old person in the sky made in the likeness of limited human imagination. For the psalmist, God is a reality that has given him help and reassurance in his life.

By the time we get to the period when the second reading from 1 Peter was written we notice that church conditions had changed. Communities were growing in numbers and more organised methods of administration had to be employed. We also note that the Greek of this letter is of such high quality that it is fairly certain it was not written by the Galilean fisherman himself. We can say, however, that the two letters, 1 and 2 Peter, were very probably written by a disciple of Peter who was faithfully reflecting the teachings and spirituality of Peter. Today's extract was written at a time after the first generations of Christians when hope in the imminent coming of Christ was fading and when Rome was referred to with the codename 'Babylon' – years after Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome in 70 AD. Peter was martyred around 64 AD. The writer is encouraging his people to endure suffering, ridicule and accusations of disloyalty to the Empire for their commitment to Christ. He urges them to keep a clear conscience and never cease striving to do good.

A good conscience is not guided by popular opinion

The Second Vatican Council promoted the importance of conscience and was careful to state that conscience needs to be informed so that it can make decisions according to proven wisdom and the values of goodness and justice. A good conscience is not guided by popular opinion nor does it follow the line of least resistance but seeks to be honest in its genuine search for truth. The writer of the first letter of John encourages his community to test points of view, human action groups, lobbies, movements, trends so that they do

not fall prey to ideas and behaviour that are merely fashionable or popular.

He writes: *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1).

A conscience that is a reed shaken by the wind of fashion, trendy ideas and what seems OK without careful examination by the yardstick of truth, justice and proven wisdom is an unreliable conscience. It is dishonest and fake.

The gospel reading is taken from John 14 which forms part of the farewell discourse of Jesus given to those disciples who were present at the Last Supper. Today's extract begins 'If you love me you will keep my commandments.' Virtually every English version of the Bible has a rendering almost identical to this. What is missed is the subtlety of the original Aramaic that Jesus would have used. The Aramaic *poukdáni* is rightly translated as 'my commandment' but it also contains the idea of a trust or something guarded for safekeeping. Jesus is not saying, 'Do as I command!' he is saying 'Keep everything I have said and taught to you as a sacred trust, this is how you will show your love for me.' The verb for 'love' here in Aramaic is *rakhem* which also means to have compassion, empathy and friendship towards another. In fact, *rakhem* is based on the verbal root *rakhmah* which means innards and womb. It describes love coming from the depths of one's being as well as the love, nourishment and tenderness provided by the womb.

In his last will and testament Jesus leaves everything to his closest friends

This fits into place when we appreciate that John is presenting in this farewell discourse the last will and testament of Jesus. In Jewish tradition, a husband longs to have a son who can inherit his name and possessions. This is an important cultural aspect of Jewish social heritage. But Jesus has no house or goods to pass on and no son to carry on his name and his work, so he leaves everything, his teachings, his attitudes and values, and his very self, to his closest friends.

The promise of Jesus is that he will not abandon his friends but will send the Spirit who will be

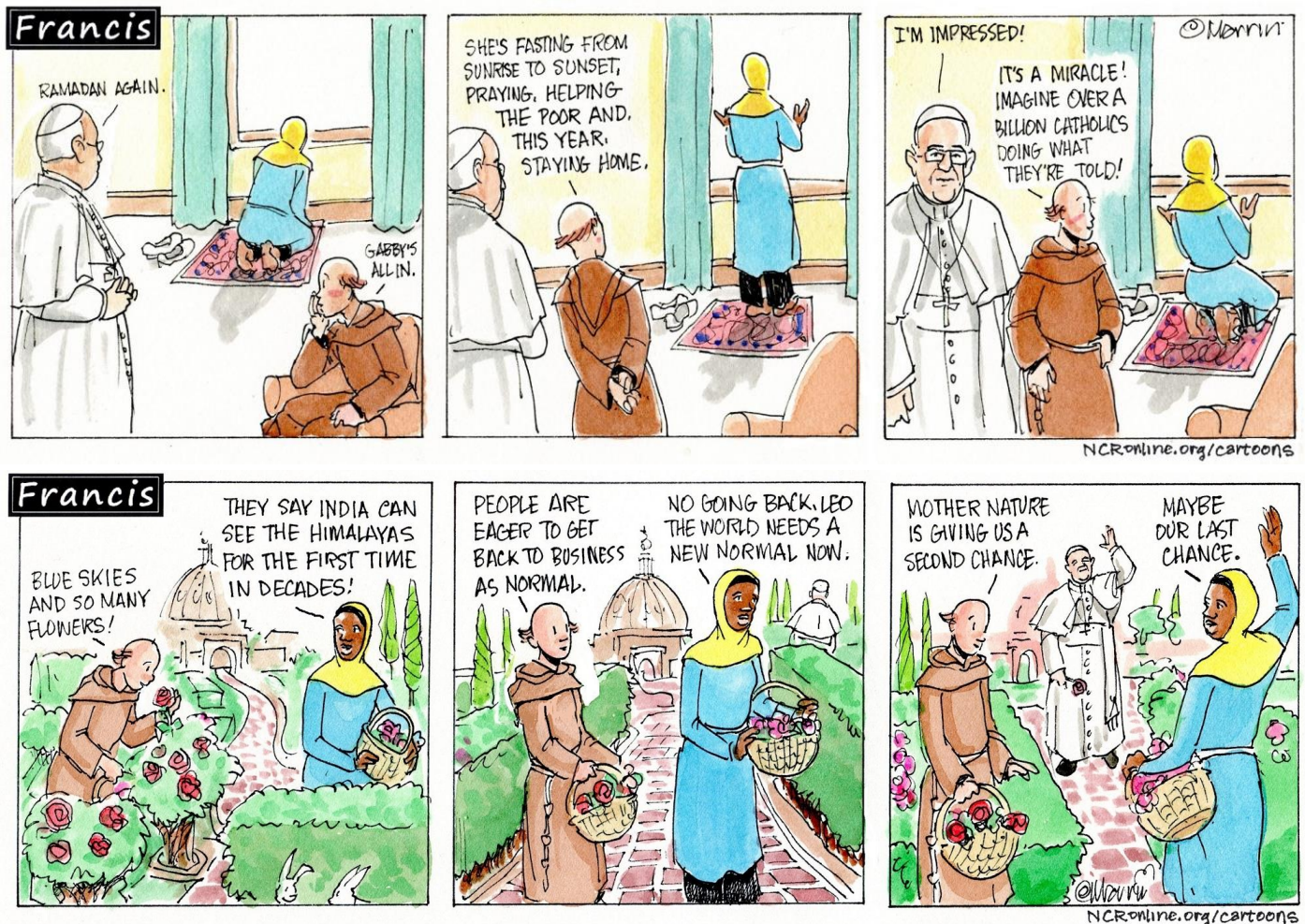
their support. The Greek word used here is *paraklētos* and there are some fancy theological words for this term such as Paraclete, Advocate, which don't actually mean a lot to the average reader, and other variations like Helper and Comforter.

However, the Greek word describes one who goes into bat for someone, acting as a support, negotiator and go-between. Jesus did exactly this in the flesh and will continue to do it in spirit through the Holy Spirit. John gives voice to the conviction of Jesus that his values and those of his followers will be rejected by people who live selfish and materialistic lives. We could almost hear Jesus warn us to beware of those who are driven by consumerism and whose aim in life is to acquire more, waste the planet and be obsessively taken in by whatever is on their Smartphone.

At this point, Jesus is quite mystical in his words to his closest friends when he tells them he will be with them in spirit and when he says, 'On that day you will realise that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.' He is talking about a oneness that exists between himself and the Father (this stands as an often repeated motif in John's gospel) and a further relationship of union between Jesus and the disciple. The climax of this discourse is Jesus' articulation of the ideal that we become one with him as he is one with the Father. Here, we are reading a literary expression of a cycle of intimate relationship involving God, Jesus and us.

Applying this to our own lives we may well ask, *How do I recognise the Spirit in my life?* Another way of putting this is, *Can I recognise the spirit of Jesus Christ in the persons and events of my life?* Remember, Jesus is not remote. He is as close as the person next to us, the ones we share our life with, the stranger in the street. *Do I express the kind of love (= friendship, courtesy, empathy, compassion, appreciation) that Jesus is talking about in today's gospel? Will I encourage someone today, this week? Will I make a phone call or send a text or email to be a support to someone? Will I tell someone I appreciate them for who they are, not just for what they do?*

6. FRANCIS, THE COMIC STRIP by Pat Marrin.



12th and 14th May 2020

7. Our Archdiocese of Brisbane has now launched the **PARISH GIVING APP**. It can be used as a one-off and accepts all forms of debit and credit cards including MasterCard and Visa. Our church bank, the Archdiocesan Development Fund, assure us that no card details are held as part of the application. The highest industry standard is applicable on this app.

I will be signing-up our parish on Monday. I invite you to give it a go:

<https://parishgiving.brisbanecatholic.org.au/slides/> All gifts are gratefully received . . .

8. **THE CATHOLIC LEADER** digital edition is currently delivered free to your inbox every Thursday morning. Sign up here <https://bit.ly/2ShdcSZ> A free subscription is available while Masses are suspended across the Archdiocese of Brisbane due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The editor and his team hopes this offer gives us all a sense of connection, inspiration and renewal in the faith, at a time when living the faith has changed.

‘The best poems in dark times can be funny ones’

■ BY RACHEL KELLY

WHEN I first read the email, my instinct was to go deeper. That was always my late mother's advice in times of crisis. In a new literary version of chain mail, the message asked me to share two poems or bits of writing that might help sustain us and pass them on to others. I thought initially of Cardinal Newman. As a young man, travelling in Italy, he was taken ill. He wrote “Lead, Kindly Light” while his ship became stranded in the straits between Corsica and Sardinia. “So long thy pow’r hath blest me, sure it still / Will lead me on.”

They were the same words that sustained a group of miners in 1909 trapped in the West Stanley Colliery. An explosion killed 166 men and boys.

Twenty-eight survivors found a pocket of air and were sitting in almost total darkness when one of them began to hum “Lead Kindly Light”, probably to the tune, “Sandon”, by C.H. Purday, popular with miners in the Durham coalfield. One boy died of his injuries; 14 hours later, the rest were rescued.

Then I realised I was barking up the wrong poetic tree. Actually, the best poems in dark times can be funny ones. I remembered this from a dying friend: we had enjoyed a happy exchange of light verse in the weeks before he passed away.

Laughing is important for our wellbeing and has plenty of benefits. As it says in Proverbs in the King James Version: “A merry heart doeth good like a

medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” A good chortle is the ultimate release into the moment. You can only laugh in the now. It is impossible to worry about the future or regret the past when we are chuckling in the present.

Enough theory. Here are two poems I like. First up, something snappy: “To a Friend in Search of Rural Seclusion” by Christopher Logue, with apologies to Welsh readers:

When all else fails,
Try Wales.



And second, “A Man who Boozes”, a poem of unknown Irish origin that may appeal to those of us, like me, originally from the Emerald Isle:

It was a year ago, September
a day I well remember
I was walking up and down
in drunken pride
when my knees began to
flutter
and I fell down in the gutter
and a pig came by and lay
down by my side.

As I lay there in the gutter
thinking thoughts I could
not utter
I thought I heard a passing
lady say,
“You can tell a man who
boozes
by the company he chooses.”
And with that, the pig got up
and walked away.

Rachel Kelly is a writer and mental health campaigner. Her latest book is *Singing in the Rain: 52 Practical Steps to Happiness*, Short Books, £12.99.

9. One of my clergy mates sent me this: *Waiting for God*. It is excellent!

Christianity is mostly about waiting around. This will not be news to anyone who's had to sit through a particularly onerous homily, of course, but as a central facet of Christian belief, it's often one lost on non-Christians. That the whole rich tapestry of Christian culture functions, theologically, as an extended prelude to Christ's return is not always appreciated even amongst believers.

The eschatological edge of Christianity – the belief that we really are living in the ‘latter days’ – has been blunted in a society that struggles to conceive of an end to the supply of rare-earth metals, let alone the end of all things. In a “throwaway society”, obsessed with instant gratification, it is easy to feel slightly silly to live your whole life in expectation of something you can't begin to comprehend. Nevertheless, “awaiting the blessed hope” is core to Christian spirituality.

Early Christian liturgies concluded with a word that sounds strange to modern ears: *Maranatha*. It means, literally “Come, our Lord!” It's an affirmation of an article of faith, but at the same

time also a reminder of how we should live in light of the cross, and why we live in that way.

We live in this way because we love God. We wait because we love. Or at least, we ought to. During quarantine, I've been participating in a reading group on Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. One of Dostoyevsky's central concerns is the gap between loving as we ought to – perfectly, “as the father in heaven is perfect” – and loving as we actually love; conditionally or self-interestedly. Dostoyevsky could lay these conflicts out as acutely as he did in part because, in his fictional worlds, the sacraments rarely take centre stage.

Even Dostoyevsky's most admirable characters seem to live apart from the living symbols of God's love. But although the lack of visible, tangible grace in Dostoyevsky makes for great fiction, the same situation in our contemporary lives – cut off from the sacraments due to lockdown – is a spiritual trial.

This trial has led many Catholics to complain quite loudly about the lockdown. That's entirely

understandable. But it does miss something important about faithfulness. Being a faithful Catholic is about *regula fidei*, adherence to a set of truths, but that in turn is about being faithful to a living person, our Beloved, God. Faithfulness to a person can look like grand gestures and great passions, but much of the time – sometimes most of the time – it involves a great deal of waiting.

We wait for our loved ones when separated by work or distance; we wait for schedules to match up; for trains and buses and planes to arrive. And sometimes we wait for tempers to cool, or for difficult situations to pass. Not every human relationship is characterised by waiting, it's true: my own parents haven't spent more than two weeks apart since their marriage. But most relationships require us to wait at some point; to patiently live on someone else's time.

It's this kind of patient waiting, this intentional self-emptying, that Simone Weil felt was the indispensable basis for prayer:

"To give up our imaginary position as the centre, to renounce it, not only intellectually but in . . . our soul, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal, to see the true light and hear the true silence."

But – like much of Christianity – this is easier said than done. In practice we, as Elizabeth Jennings did, "wait restlessly" for God, our attention – and our affections – divided. Living "according to the flesh", we lack the capacity to love as we ought to. God's love is too great for us to bear.

I've found it helps to remember a remark of the French Dominican J-B Lacordaire (+1861): "There are not two loves". In waiting for God we *are* waiting for a loved one. And in waiting faithfully – "patiently bearing trials" – we begin to be capable of letting God in; Catherine of Siena thought patience and humility were like two wings – without which we would be unable to fly to God. It's only when we recognise our own lack, our own "littleness", that we begin to love.

We should bear in mind, however, that though love for God can be analogous to our earthly loves, it isn't *equivalent*. The problem with too roseate a view of "this perishing world" is illustrated in a

comment one wit made about the playwright Racine: he loved God as passionately as he loved his mistresses.

The problems with seeing our relationship as roughly similar to our earthly obligations can be seen in some of the responses to the suspension of Mass across the world. Understandably, lots of lay Catholics are confused and upset by this. Some question the wisdom of those decisions. But others are entirely explicit in their belief that the Eucharist is something we are entitled to, and that we can't receive as we ordinarily might reveal either incompetency or malevolence on the part of the bishops.

The Eucharist isn't something owed to us. God owes us nothing, least of all Himself. We receive it as part of God's astounding generosity, not through any merit of our own. But God's total self-gift to communicants in the Eucharist is reflected in the total self-gift that communicants make to God in receiving. We give ourselves to God just as God gives himself to us.

Self-sacrificial love is what motivates us to abstain from receiving when we cannot do so worthily; when we cannot give ourselves to God as totally as He gives himself to us. We don't just try to love God, but to love God as God loves us: wholly, entirely, and unconditionally.

Loving God as God loves us can be dramatic; suffering martyrdom or giving our lives wholly to God in religious life. But much of the time it's something we live out in ordinary ways. Bearing with people we find frustrating; sticking with tasks we find unpleasant; even sitting through onerous homilies. Faithfulness to God, like faithfulness to anyone, rests on small deeds as often as great ones.

It is hard to wait. And even harder to wait for someone we love. And it's as hard as it was two thousand years ago to wait for someone we cannot see or touch. But we have a god "who keeps His promises" (Deut 7:9). It is by waiting that we keep our promises to Him. *Maranatha*.

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/1444/waiting-for-god>

God did not make us to be eaten by anxiety, but to walk erect, free,
unafraid in a world where there is work to do, truth to seek, love to give and win.
Joseph Newton (20th century Baptist minister and inspirational author)



John
pastor
Boonah Catholic community