



Ascension, by Martin Erspamer, OSB (2013).

Martin Erspamer is a monk of St. Meinrad Archabbey in southern Indiana, USA, and a well-known liturgical artist and liturgical consultant. Martin works in a wide range of media, including pottery, stained glass, and wood, and is internationally known for his illustration of sacred themes.

This piece was commissioned by Liturgical Press for its version of *The Roman Missal, Third Edition*. Few publishers in English-speaking countries commissioned original artwork for the RM.

*"I will be with you!" That is my promise.
"I will be with you for evermore."
Trust in my love.
Bring me all your cares, for I will be with you for evermore.*

... refrain from *I Will Be with You* (Ritual Song hymnal, 1996)
James E. Moore, Jr., 1983

Easter greetings to all members of the Boonah Catholic community and beyond on this Sunday of Easter, the Solemnity of the Ascension.

On Monday this past week, Maureen Hancock, Sue Webber and myself conducted a deep clean of the 'work sacristy' and the 'priest's sacristy' of our Boonah church.

Thanks to both women for the many hours of work put in. Some surprising discoveries included every annual Easter candle going back to 1999, many dozens of synthetic and plastic flowers plus containers, as well as almost every shape and style of candle sticks and vases. I wonder what may be in your cupboards at home? work? the shed/s?

The next step is to gather a second group of parishioners who attend to the liturgical environment and the music ministry and work out 'what we need' to celebrate in the future. *Thanks again Maureen and Sue.* Then we will have the church cleaned for future gatherings.

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. **REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNDAY WORD.** We again share several reflections on the Sunday scriptures our church chooses for the celebration of the Ascension of Christ Jesus.

I believe it important and necessary that we are able to hear the Word being reflected upon from female and male faith perspectives.

a. One reflection is offered by Cathe Shoulberg, RSM, is a Sister of Mercy who has had decades of teaching experience in parish schools as well as leadership as a school principal. The link offers a video of the reflection, the text and some background of the preacher:

<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/05242020>

b. A further reflection for Ascension is offered by Julian McDonald, a Christian Brother of the Australian province who ministers in Rome:

You Galileans, why are you just standing here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from among you into heaven will return as certainly and mysteriously as he left.

Acts 1:1-11

Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations...And know that I am with you at all times; even to the end of time.

Matthew 28:16-20

Even a cursory look at the Gospels reveals that their authors wrote with purpose and a sense of order, each intent on supporting the communities to which they belonged as they tried to deal with opposition and persecution as they went about living and proclaiming the “kingdom of God” in a world that was reluctant to accept them and their message. So, it was by design, rather than by coincidence, that Matthew, in his very first chapter, identifies Jesus, as the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy and names him as *Emmanuel...God-is-with-us* (Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14), and then, in his concluding chapter, records Jesus’ parting words as *And know that I am with you at all times; yes, to the end of time* (Matthew 28:29). Matthew is in no doubt that God, in the person of Jesus, has made his home among us and still dwells within us. The challenge, of course, for all of us is to live our lives as disciples of Jesus, ever-conscious of the fact that God is always in and among us.

In this context, I share with you some insights of two contemporary American poets, Christian Wiman and Mary Oliver. In his book, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer*, Wiman makes several comments that are very apposite to today’s gospel-reading and echo what we heard in the gospel-reading of the Third Sunday of Easter:

If every Bible is lost, if every church crumbles to dust, if the last believer in the last prayer opens her eyes and lets it all finally go, Christ will appear on this earth as calmly and casually as he appeared to

the disciples walking to Emmaus after his death, who did not recognize this man to whom they had pledged their very lives; this man whom they had seen beaten, crucified, abandoned by God; this man who, after walking the dusty road with them, after sharing an ordinary meal and discussing the scriptures, had to banish once more in order to make them see. (Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss*, Macmillan, NY 2013)

Earlier, in the same book, Wiman observes: *...the very act of attention troubles the tyranny of the ordinary.* This is a wake-up call for us to look for God in the ordinary, in the mundane events of life, in the people we meet, in nature, in art, in everything and everyone we encounter. Isn’t it interesting that, in today’s first reading from Acts, the two men in white who appeared to the disciples after Jesus had disappeared from their sight, brought their attention back to the ordinary: *Why are you men from Galilee standing here looking into the sky?*

The Divine is present in the ordinary experiences of life. The Divine is all around us. Mary Oliver, in her poem, *My Work Is Loving the World* echoes the same sentiments:

*My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the
hummingbird – equal seekers of sweetness.
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue
plums. Here the clam deep in the speckled
sand.
Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young, and still not half-
perfect? Let me keep my mind on what
matters,
which is my work,
which is mostly standing still and learning to
be astonished.*

(September 2013)

What does all this have to do with the liturgy that puts the focus on the ascension of Jesus

into heaven? Most cars, these days, are fitted with devices for guiding drivers to destinations with which they are not familiar. These instruments are called Sat Navs or TomToms or Garmins, or have some other commercial name. When we take a wrong turn, the little voice comes to our rescue and announces a need to alter course with the word “recalibrating”. Today’s first reading gives us a glimpse of the disciples engaged in the process of recalibrating after the departure of Jesus has forced them to take measures for plotting new directions in their lives.

The disciples had settled into a level of comfortability. Jesus had been their guide and companion for three whole years. They were used to having him around. One moment he was with them and, then, suddenly he was dead. Then followed his resurrection and his startling reappearances among them. Finally, with next to no notice, he was taken from them. To make things even worse, two strangers appear and reprimand them, telling them that they have no reason to be surprised at what has just happened. After all, God, the Divine Being is not someone we can hold on to, or someone we can treat as a possession or a security blanket. That’s the attitude or mind-set that the two mysterious men are intent on shaking out of the disciples. And that’s something that’s worthy of our reflection. We can easily slip into thinking that we deserve to feel that God is near us because we have done our level best to live good, moral lives, to support the needy and to be faithful to prayer. Yet, there are times when we feel as low as

ditch water or as dry as dust when it comes to feeling God’s presence.

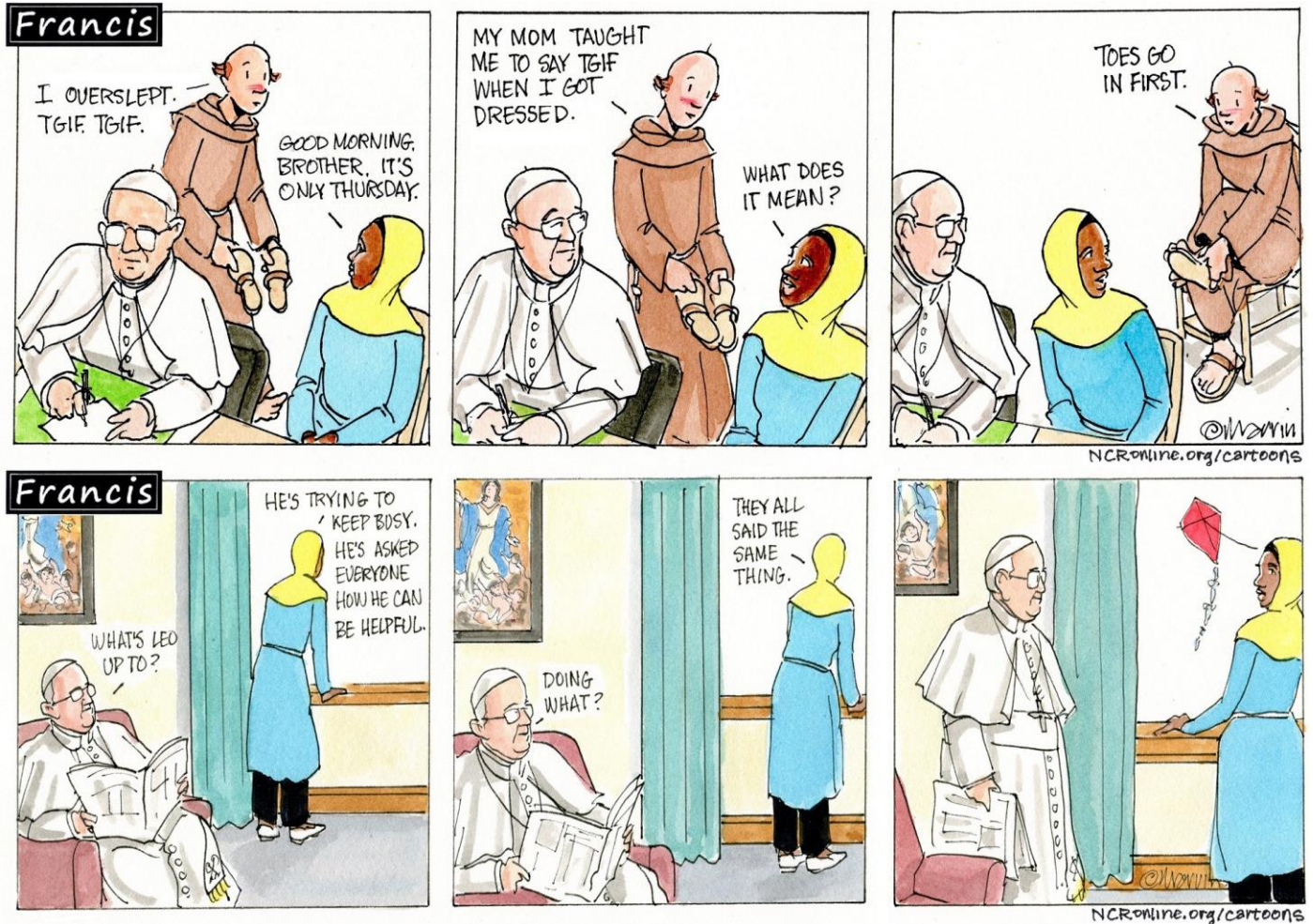
But Jesus’ parting words could not be clearer. He says nothing about looking after ourselves or assuring us that we will feel him or God or the Holy Spirit close to us. Instead, he urges the disciples, and us, their successors, to get out there and be good news to everyone we encounter.

Almost another lifetime ago, when I presided at Australian Catholic University graduation ceremonies, I often reminded the graduates that they might well be the only gospel that some people would ever hear, see or encounter. That was a reminder for myself as much as for the hundreds of graduates in front of me. There is nothing particularly unclear, confusing or wishy-washy about the wording Matthew gives to Jesus’s parting message to his disciples. Moreover, he took the calculated risk that his disciples would be able to measure up to the task, of course, with the help and guidance of God’s Spirit. Jesus envisaged a community made up of all nations, with no peoples excluded. Describing himself as the one with all legitimate authority on earth and in heaven, he sends his followers to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to follow all that he has commanded, never forgetting that he is with them at all times. There’s a universal ring about that. Yet, even though we live in countries made up of people from all nations. I wonder sometimes if we really make them all welcome in our church and social groups. Perhaps it’s more comfortable to exclude those who live life differently.

3. 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, Thyrleene 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.

*O Jesus, you are Mercy in the lives of all who are sick.
Give them your strength and love,
And help them to carry this cross with grace and faith.*

4. FRANCIS, THE COMIC STRIP by Pat Marrin.



19th and 21st May 2020

5. This month of May is the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si* – Pope Francis' letter to all people of good-will concerning human care for creation. It was ground-breaking and remains so.

Over the next five Sundays, we will promote the anniversary of *Laudato Si*.

The Columbans (of the St. Columbans Mission Society founded in 1918) have released an electronic version of their own 'Vocation for Justice' and this is the link:

<https://columbans.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Newsletter-May-2020.pdf>

The front cover caught my eye. It depicts a community planting a tree in the Sindh, Pakistan. And with the people stands a mate of mine from study days in Chicago, Columban Father Liam O'Callaghan. Liam has ministered in Pakistan for more than two decades and hails from Ireland. Liam also penned a short one-page inside called 'Renewing our Understanding of Security' – see page five.

6. Last Sunday I raised the question of our communal financial support of the parish. Thanks to those amongst us who rang in or emailed, and for your positive feedback. A special thanks to those who were able to catch-up on their commitment to parish giving.

7. The **PARISH GIVING APP** is now working! I trialled it myself on Thursday and it works. Be sure to choose BOONAH PARISH! All gifts are gratefully received . . .

<https://parishgiving.brisbanecatholic.org.au/slides/>

8. A few weeks ago saw the annual marking of *International Nurses Day*. I was touched by Francis' message to all nurses across the world:

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate International Nurses Day, in the context of the International Year of Nurses and Midwives officially declared by the World Health Organization. At this same time, we observe the bicentennial of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the pioneer of modern nursing.

At this critical moment, marked by the global health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we have rediscovered the fundamental importance of the role being played by nurses and midwives. Every day we witness the testimony of courage and sacrifice of healthcare workers, and nurses in particular, who, with professionalism, self-sacrifice, and a sense of responsibility and love for neighbour, assist people affected by the virus, even to the point of putting their own health at risk. Sadly, this can be seen in the high number of healthcare workers who have died as a result of their faithful service. I pray for them – the Lord knows each of them by name – and for all the victims of this epidemic. May the Risen Lord grant to each of them the light of heaven and to their families the consolation of faith.

Nurses have historically played a central role in health care. Every day, in their contact with the sick, they experience the trauma caused by suffering in people's lives. They are men and women who have chosen to say "yes" to a very special vocation: that of being good Samaritans who are concerned for the life and suffering of others. They are guardians and preservers of life, who, even as they administer necessary treatments, offer courage, hope and trust.

Dear nurses, moral responsibility is the hallmark of your professional service, which cannot be reduced to scientific-technical knowledge alone, but must be constantly inspired by your human and humanizing relationship with the sick. "Taking care of women and men, of children and elderly, in every phase of their life, from birth to death, you are tasked with continuous listening, aimed at

understanding what the needs of that patient are, in the phase that he or she is experiencing. Before the uniqueness of each situation, indeed, it is never enough to follow a protocol, but a constant – and tiresome! – effort of discernment and attention to the individual person is required".

You – and here I think too of midwives – are close to people at crucial moments in their existence – birth and death, disease and healing – helping them deal with traumatic situations. Sometimes you find yourself at their side as they are dying, giving comfort and relief in their last moments. Because of your dedication, you are among the "saints next door".[3] You are an image of the Church as a "field hospital" that continues to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ, who drew near to and healed people with all kinds of sickness and who stooped down to wash the feet of his disciples. Thank you for your service to humanity!

In many countries, the pandemic has also brought to light a number of deficiencies in the provision of health care. For this reason, I would ask leaders of nations throughout the world to invest in health care as the primary common good, by strengthening its systems and employing greater numbers of nurses, so as to ensure adequate care to everyone, with respect for the dignity of each person. It is important to recognize in an effective way the essential role your profession plays in patient care, local emergency activity, disease prevention, health promotion, and assistance in family, community and school settings.

Nurses, as well as midwives, deservedly have the right to be better and more fully valued and involved in processes concerning the health of individuals and communities. It has been shown that investing in them improves overall care and health. Their professionalism should thus be enhanced by providing suitable scientific, human, psychological and spiritual tools for their training, by improving their working conditions and by guaranteeing their rights, so that they can carry out their service in full dignity.

In this regard, associations of healthcare workers play an important role. In addition to offering comprehensive training, they support their individual members, making them feel part of a larger body, never dismayed and alone as they face the ethical, economic and human challenges that their profession entails.

I would like to say a special word to midwives who assist women in their pregnancies and help them give birth to their children. Your work is among the most noble of professions, for it is directly dedicated to the service of life and of motherhood. In the Bible, the names of two heroic

midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, are immortalized in the Book of Exodus (cf. 1:15-21). Today, too, the heavenly Father looks to you with gratitude.

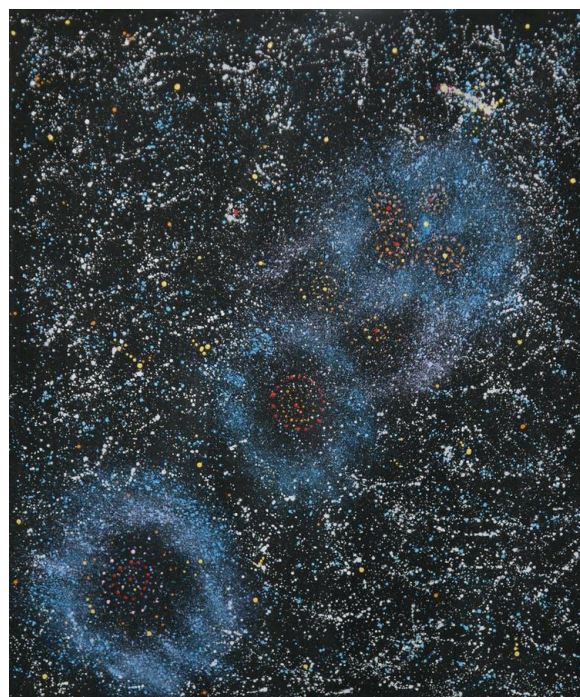
Dear nurses, dear midwives, may this annual celebration highlight the dignity of your work for the benefit of the health of society as a whole. With the assurance of my prayers for you, your families and those for whom you care, I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 12th May 2020

FRANCIS



Molly Tasman Napurrurla, Warlpiri, 2003, Marrkirdi Jukurrpa, ('Wild Bush Plum Dreaming'), on Magnani Pescia paper, image size 490x320 mm. Warnayaka Arts Centre Lajamanu, and Aboriginal Art Prints Network, Oxford Street, Sydney



Alma Nungarrayi Granites, Yanjirlpirri or Napaljarri-warnu Jukurrpa (Star or Seven Sisters Dreaming), 2011, acrylic on canvas, 91x76 cm. Warlukurlangu – Artists of Yuendumu <http://warlu.com>

9. *Who would you choose, Jesus or the Spirit?* by Jesuit Father Thomas Reese:
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/signs-times/who-would-you-choose-jesus-or-spirit>

10. Informed Catholics help promote the transformation of local communities as missionary members of the church. The globe's premier independent Catholic daily is *LaCroix International*. The editors carry well-written reporting and news, analysis, and opinion that is largely ignored by much of the Australian media, especially News Corp.

I have noticed there are some free e-books available for new subscribers. A 13-month subscription is now US\$39.95 – that is about one cent per day. Check it out:
<https://international.la-croix.com/one-month-subscription>

11. This story will touch your heart:

'Duck! Rabbit!' author, Amy Rosenthal, died of ovarian cancer in 2017 – 10 days after writing a 'dating ad' for her husband to find new love

by Celia Walden 8 May 2020 •

"I have been married to the most extraordinary man for 26 years," Amy Krouse Rosenthal wrote in an open love letter to her husband, published in the New York Times's *Modern Love* column in 2017. "He is an easy man to fall in love with. I did it in one day," the American author and filmmaker went on, before listing every one of Jason Rosenthal's attributes, from his parenting skills – "He is an absolutely wonderful father" – to his pancake-flipping abilities and overall mastery in the kitchen. "Wait," she adds breathlessly: "Did I mention that he is incredibly handsome? I'm going to miss looking at that face of his."

Because ten days after the piece was published, 51-year-old Amy died of ovarian cancer. It hadn't just been a love letter she'd secretly been writing – in between the fits of terminal agitation that still haunt her family – but a personal ad for her husband's second wife. The letter's title? *You May Want To Marry My Husband*. If that sounds familiar, it's because over five million people read it.

You may have been one of them; I was. And the man I pictured through a haze of tears, three years ago, is eerily similar to the one being beamed into my study now: solid and faintly Clooney-esque with his salt 'n' pepper hair and all-American smile.

Only, in that time, the 55-year-old has gone from being an anonymous Chicago lawyer you "couldn't find on Google" to an author, TED-talker, and board chair of the Amy Krouse Rosenthal Foundation, supporting ovarian cancer research and children's literacy.

Amy died 10 days after her open love letter to her husband was published in the New York Times

He has watched his wife's legacy grow stronger – he was touched, he says, to see the Duchess of Sussex reading his late wife's book, *Duck! Rabbit!* to little Archie in a video celebrating his first birthday earlier this week. "There he was squirming around, smiling and just being a regular little boy. What a testament to Amy that her book has such meaning to so many families," – and he has sold Amy's *Modern Love* letter to Universal Pictures. He is, today, probably the most famous widower in America; an ambassador for grief. But most of all he is "that husband."

These are not titles many of us would yearn for, he concedes. "People in my own family will still ask me, 'are you really sure you want to be doing this all the time?'" But "this" – the writing and public speaking on loss, grief and resilience – has become Rosenthal's mission in life. And although he never expected his forthcoming memoir, *My Wife Said You May Want To Marry Me*, to be published at the peak of a global pandemic, the lessons Rosenthal learned, both during his late wife's battle with ovarian cancer and after her death, when he and his three children – Paris, 23, Miles, 25 and Justin, 27 – were forced to find a way to heal, are more resonant than ever.

"Let's be clear: what we're all living through now are a series of losses," he explains from the Chicago home in which he's currently locked down. "Suddenly we're in the strange position where everyone has a story of loss. Those losses may range from not being able to go outside, take your daily walk or go to the gym, to having someone close to you be really sick or die – but they are all losses. So what we're experiencing isn't just like grief: it is grief."

Before the "loss is loss is loss" epiphany Rosenthal experiences two thirds of the way through his memoir, he admits to believing in a barometer of grief. "People would come to me saying: 'I know how you feel – I lost a dog.' And you couldn't help thinking: 'How can you compare that to what I went through? I'm the one who suffered more!'"

"Did I mention that he is incredibly handsome?" wrote Amy of Jason. "I'm going to miss looking at that face of his."

The 'silver lining' brigade were also hard to bear at first. One person who made contact with Rosenthal early on, when Amy's essay went viral, was Sheryl Sandberg: the Facebook COO who lost her own husband to a heart attack five years ago. "I remember her saying to me: 'Jason, you will find joy again,' and thinking 'yeah, right.' But then she was one person who had been through a similar experience, and ultimately it was very helpful. Then when I did my TED talk [in 2018] and so many people descended on me afterwards with their own tales of loss, I could see how surprised and grateful they were to hear grief being spoken about openly."

I'm curious to know whether, having experienced the extreme grief he details in his memoir – from the shock of Amy's diagnosis and the realisation

that theirs would be "a cancer family forever", to carrying his wife's lifeless body "through our living room to a gurney that was waiting to take her away" – Rosenthal somehow feels better equipped to deal with the mass human tragedy of Covid-19.

"Actually, I do think that those of us who have been to the depths of intense grieving have a perspective here," he nods. "Firstly, because we realise that like everything else this will at some point be over. Over. But also because we know it's OK to experience moments of major anxiety."

"There's a pattern we'll all be familiar with by now: you feel alright for a little while, and then suddenly desperately anxious or sad again. And that's going to keep happening for a while." Accepting that pattern will be a part of our lives for some time is helpful. "But it's also important to share our stories. Because it's in recognising those shared feelings that we become more resilient and start to heal."

12. 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.

13. Many parish communities treasure the singing of *You are mine* by David Haas. Enjoy: <https://youtu.be/Sgm9lkTNQmc>.

14. *We can now have Mass with ten people!*

When will eucharist be celebrated again in our parish?

These two remarks were made to me in the last few weeks including the immediate week just gone.

Emails from Brisbane Archdiocesan HQ have been sent to parishes about *what we can* and *what we can't do*. These instructions address the state of play now and into the future . . . whatever the future might look like. Of course, all bets are off if there is an increase in COVID-19 infections.

It is not simply a matter of opening the church doors now and celebrating eucharist. If it were, every parish would be open for Sunday liturgy this Sunday.

Each parish is working through the many steps that must be undertaken legally (think State government law) and complied with *if* we are to celebrate the eucharist for groups of nine plus the presiding priest. Again, the Archbishop has left this decision in the hands of local parish leadership.

More than a few parishes who have *paid staff* have asked them to do behind-the-scenes work. I spoke with six priest colleagues during the week about what each parish must do if eucharist is celebrated.

My considered response is that there is so much we must do for nine (9) people before, during and after eucharist that it just isn't feasible. And I don't see it changing very much when in a few weeks we can have a gathering of twenty people. I am very concerned: what if we get it wrong? Also, who decides who and who can't celebrate the eucharist? These are serious human and pastoral concerns. I also add, that if you are over 70 years of age, you are still asked to think about whether or not it is safe to be part of public gatherings such as eucharist.

However, there was a creative suggestion about having open-air Masses. Thirty people can gather with the distancing rules in place etc. Today is 8C here in Boonah – I didn't see that coming!

So for the coming week, we will continue to engage in the faith practices that have sustained us over these several months: praying at home, reflecting upon the scriptures, sitting in quiet to hear the Spirit, reaching out to those in need and watching spiritual recordings on TV.

15. A parishioner from one of the four parishes I served in Mackay sent me this clip. Enjoy:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWcJZ210AaM>

16. Dan Schutte, the composer of the hymn *Be Not Afraid* (and numerous other compositions) has pre-recorded song and prayer for personal reflection during the nine days between the Ascension and Pentecost Sunday. Dan calls it *Novena for Pentecost*. Each day's clip is short: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZrXiYyPjteTcE9mMH-vlSPSN5z1Zx8pE>
You may find this resource a help to prepare for Pentecost Sunday: the fiftieth day of Easter.

John
pastor
Boonah Catholic community

