

St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church
Moore Street, Adelaide



**An open, welcoming and inclusive community
in the heart of the City of Adelaide**

**Keeping Community
Spiritual Resources & Reflections**

Thursday 15 December 2022

Dear friends,

The relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions will make it possible to again open the church for private prayer and public worship.

Sunday Mass is offered weekly at 10 am, and the church will also be open on Thursday between 11.30 am and 1 pm, with the Angelus at noon and Mass at 12.10 pm. During Advent, there is also a reflection each Wednesday at 8 am.

The decision to return to worship in community, whether for private prayer, or the public celebration of the Word and Sacraments, is not a straightforward matter.

These newsletters are intended to keep our entire community informed on events in the life of the Parish, so we will continue to produce these news bulletins for now.



1. From Fr Steven - In the Whirlwind

This is a hectic time of year. Yes, we are busy, too busy. There are also moments of joy. Surprisingly, painful memories can also surface at Christmas time. We may have to face difficult situations with family members. In the complexities of life, then, we have to talk about prayer. The story of Job tackles the big issues and forms a good back drop for exploring prayer.

The figure of Job is a remarkable creation. His story is crafted to show how a faithful person deals with unwarranted suffering. In the story, then, Job demands his day in court with God. He wants to sort it out with God, clearing his name, setting the record straight. God, however, does not work by our standards. In the end, Job encounters God in the whirlwind. His questions are not answered, but Job is different. In the whirlwind, Job is taken into the heart of God and transformed.

It is important to talk about the experience of unanswered prayer. Do we give up on prayer? Do we give up on God? These very human questions bring the nature of faith into bold relief. With this in mind, let me make some suggestions about prayer. These suggestions are premised on the belief that prayer requires the courage to be vulnerable. In other words, we have to be honest with God. Such honesty places us in a position of openness, enabling us to be drawn into the whirlwind.

First, prayer is not an incantation. It is an invocation from the depths of the heart. This is the key to understanding the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

Second, we need to consider prayer in the context of our understanding of spirituality. The concept and practice of spirituality is complex. There are many spiritualities. In this case, I am talking about Christian spiritualities. As we get older, we re-discover prayer in tandem with a revitalized spirituality.

Third, spirituality is a way of seeing and living, where we see life as sacred and live accordingly.

Fourth, we do not need the Church in order to be spiritual. But there are times when being with kindred spirits, yes, being with the congregation of the faithful, is both reassuring and empowering. In communion with others, we grow, we love, we share, and we pray.

Fifth, I am advocating a sacramental view of prayer, that is, life is underwritten by the incomprehensible mystery of God. Remember, Job's questions were not answered, but he had a life-transforming encounter in the whirlwind. Indeed, the whirlwind was a sacramental experience.

Let me finish with a poem I wrote some years ago, which captures this view of prayer,

*I tried praying (I tried hard)
Faithfully, truly, deeply
As the order of the day was "pray".
So I prayed hoping my aunty would be healed
For the poor, world peace and a new me
But something was wrong.
One day, sitting on the beach by the ocean
I gave up on prayer. It was as simple and as hard as that.
And yet, when I had nothing to left to give God began to pray in me
And from the depths of my soul, God whispered love.* (Steven G Ogden, 2016)

Fr Steven

2. COVID-19 Update

With the significant increase in COVID-19 infections being reported, the Parish Council has again considered the precautions we have put in place within our worshipping community. Parish Council, noting that we (like many church communities) have a number of older folk and others who might be regarded as vulnerable among our number, has agreed that we will continue to take a conservative approach for the time being, and to encourage precautions including Distancing, Ventilation and Facemasks: **DVM** for short. Distancing means maintaining a sensible distance of 1.5 metres between individuals or family groups; Ventilation means leaving some doors and/or windows open to allow a flow of air—and we have air conditioning, so we will neither freeze nor boil!—and Facemasks are obvious.

3. Daily Prayer

Most Christian denominations have forms for prayer in the morning and the evening, and at other times of the day. Morning and Evening Prayer in *A Prayer Book for Australia*, are available in either a fixed form (pp 3-33) or a form for each day of the week (pp 383-424).

Online Resources

There is an online version of Daily Prayer from *A Prayer Book for Australia* for each day available at Australian Daily Prayer <https://dailyprayer.ampers.x10.mx/>. There is also a free app for mobile devices from the App Store or Google Play.

The Church of England provides an online version of its orders for Daily Prayer at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>. This is also available as a free app. The Divine Office of the Catholic Church is available online at www.ibreviary.com and is also available as a free app (App Store or Google Play).

Times of Prayer

Many people find it helpful to make a particular time daily for prayer and reflection. One option might be to join your prayer with those of the wider world at some special times during the day, especially in praying the Angelus at 9 am, 12 noon and 6 pm.

4. Reflections and Meditations

In addition to Fr Steven's regular reflection in this newsletter, which is uploaded to the web page for wider accessibility, Fr Philip Carter's meditations and spiritual reflections are presented on our blog, <https://stmarymagdalenesadelaide.org/>.

To access these meditations, simply go to the blog and select the "Spirit matters" tab on the top. If you would like to receive an email update when there is a new posting on the blog, whether for a Sunday or weekday service, or for meditations and other supports for prayer, please subscribe to the blog using the box on the right-hand side of the page.

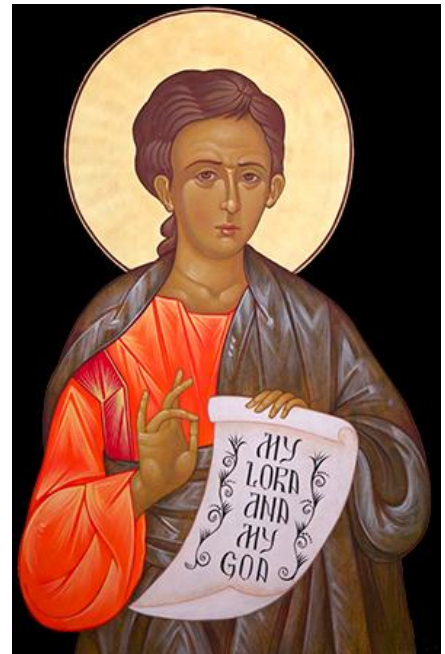
Service booklets as PDF files are still available for Sunday and weekday services on the web site and on the Parish's Facebook page.

5. This Week in the Calendar

In the coming week we celebrate St Thomas the Apostle. Also, as we move into the final days of Advent, we begin the annual recitation of the "O" Antiphons.

St Thomas has long been known mainly for a single remark that caused him to be named "Doubting Thomas." But if he doubted, he also believed. He made what is certainly the most explicit statement of faith in the New Testament: "My Lord and My God!" and, in so expressing his faith, gave Christians a prayer that will be said till the end of time.

Thomas should be equally well-known for his courage. Perhaps what he said was impetuous—and along with the other disciples, he ran away from danger—but he can scarcely have been insincere when he expressed his willingness to die with Jesus. The occasion was when Jesus proposed to go to Bethany after Lazarus had died. Since Bethany was near Jerusalem, this meant walking into the very midst of his enemies and to almost certain death. Realizing this, Thomas said to the other apostles, "Let us also go to die with him" (John 11:16b).



The example of St Thomas is one which we later Christians can all take to heart. Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." (John 20:29). A salutary lesson to us all, two thousand years on.

Thomas shares the lot of Peter the impetuous, James and John, the "sons of thunder," Philip and his foolish request to see the Father—indeed all the apostles in their weakness and lack of understanding. We must not exaggerate these facts, however, for Christ did not pick worthless men. But their human weakness again points up the fact that holiness is a gift of God, not a

human creation; it is given to ordinary men and women with weaknesses; it is God who gradually transforms the weaknesses into the image of Christ, the courageous, trusting, and loving one.

St Thomas's Day was long a popular day for ordinations, so that the newly ordained clergy could officiate for the first time at Christmas.

6. The Church Fathers on St Thomas

From a homily on the Gospels by Saint Gregory the Great

Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. He was the only disciple absent; on his return he heard what had happened but refused to believe it. The Lord came a second time; he offered his side for the disbelieving disciple to touch, held out his hands, and showing the scars of his wounds, healed the wound of his disbelief.

Dearly beloved, what do you see in these events? Do you really believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not by chance but in God's providence. In a marvellous way God's mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his master's body, should heal our wounds of disbelief. The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened. So the disciple who doubted, then felt Christ's wounds, becomes a witness to the reality of the resurrection.

Touching Christ, he cried out: My Lord and my God. Jesus said to him: Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed. Paul said: Faith is the guarantee of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. It is clear, then, that faith is the proof of what can not be seen. What is seen gives knowledge, not faith. When Thomas saw and touched, why was he told: You have believed because you have seen me? Because what he saw and what he believed were different things. God cannot be seen by mortals. Thomas saw a human being, whom he acknowledged to be God, and said: My Lord and my God. Seeing, he believed; looking at one who was truly human, he cried out that this was God, the God he could not see.

What follows is reason for great joy: Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed. There is here a particular reference to ourselves; we hold in our hearts one we have not seen in the flesh. We are included in these words, but only if we follow up our faith with good works. The true believer practises what he believes. But of those who pay only lip service to faith, Paul has this to say: They profess to know God, but they deny him in their works. Therefore James says: Faith without works is dead.

7. The last days of Advent - The "O" Antiphons

Every day, the church celebrates "The Divine Office", the daily round of prayer at morning, throughout the day, and at night.

In the last days of Advent, from 17 December, a custom arose as early as the 8th century whereby the daily singing of the Magnificat (Mary's song "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord") was preceded by a special sentence that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament. These compositions came to be called **antiphons** (from the Greek *antiphōna* meaning 'harmonies' and *antiphōnos* meaning 'responsive' (*anti* 'in return' + *phōnē* 'sound')) as they were recited before and sometimes after a psalm or canticle.

These ancient poems were written in the early centuries of the Church for reading in this time of preparation. Each begins with an exclamation of a title for the Messiah drawn from the Old

Testament, a deliberate way of connecting the coming of Christ with the prophetic writings of the Hebrews scriptures, and to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfilment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well.

- *O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love:
come to teach us the path of knowledge!*
- *O Leader (Lord) of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
come to rescue us with your mighty power!*
- *O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people:
come to save us without delay!*
- *O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
come and free the prisoners of darkness!*
- *O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice:
come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.*
- *O King of all nations and keystone of the Church:
come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!*
- *O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
come to save us, Lord our God!*

Along with these exclamations, the repeated use of the imperative "Come!" embodies the longing of all for the Divine Messiah. The popular hymn "O come, O come, Emmanuel" draws on the O Antiphons and the repeated cry, "Come," for its inspiration.

A Meditation on the O Antiphons

O Wisdom,
Sophia's child,
and Mary's too,
bring us back to you.

O Adonai,
set us free
of fear, despair,
misogyny.

O Justice Flower,
of Jesse tree,
uproot our hatreds.
Wash us clean
in just-reign waters,
plant us deep in Thee.

O Key of David,
open heaven's gate
unlock, unblock,
a captive people
too long enthralled
by hate.

O Radiant Dawn,
*light the way
of all who long
to preach, to teach,
to consecrate
heavenly hosts
of God's indwelling.*

O Emmanuel,
*strengthen weary arms,
steady trembling knees
bring surcease of sorrow.*

O Advent Light,
*dispel death's dark shadow.
Awaken a waiting world
to life's fresh-blessed tomorrow.*

Sr Christine Shenk CSJ

9. Intentions for Your Daily Prayers

We pray throughout the week for the world and the church. These intentions may be helpful in your private or family prayers.

For the world. The leaders of the world as they seek to respond to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. For refugees and asylum seekers, that they may find places of safety and welcome.

For the church. In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, pray for the Diocese of Southern Ohio (USA). In our national church, pray for the Diocese of Melbourne; and within the Diocese of Adelaide, for St Peters Woodlands Grammar School.

For our local community. For the Collective and its ministry in the local community. For the Magdalene Centre, as it deals with the need to change the way it delivers services in order to safeguard the health of customers, staff and volunteers.

For those in need. Pray for all those who are troubled in body, mind or spirit, especially Paull, Sim, Jasmin, Henry, John Edwards (priest), Peter Garland (priest), Robert Whalley (priest), John Parkes (bishop), Stephan Clark (priest), Mark, Olivia, Nance, Neil, Elaine and Edward.

For those who have died. Those who have worked and worshipped in this place before us; those who have died as a result of COVID-19 and in other tragic circumstances; those who have died recently, and those whose anniversaries of death occur at this time. ✠ *Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.*

For the saints. For the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph, St Mary Magdalene, St Thomas, and holy women and men of every time and place.

This newsletter will normally be distributed weekly on Thursday. Any appropriate items should be emailed to the Parish Office, StMMAdelaide.Parish@outlook.com, by Tuesday evening at 5 pm.

