

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 23 February 2023

Dear friends,

The relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions will make it possible to 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.

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 provide some resources for prayer and reflection: enjoy!



1. From Fr Steven - Mystery before dogma

The experience of the mystery of God is an indefinable experience. Certainly, we cannot translate this experience easily into words, nevertheless, it touches our lives in deep and lasting ways. It can take place as we receive the Blessed Sacrament on Sunday morning or walk along a windswept beach. It can occur as we share a meal with friends or say a prayer with a dying loved one.

The experience of mystery is holy. The word "holy" is evocative, surcharged with a multitude of religious associations. Theologically, it is a "both/and" term, that is, God as holy is near and far, that is, immanent and transcendent. On that basis, I want to explore the idea of the holy and its theological implications. This is because the Lenten experience is a journey into the heart of God.

The idea of "holiness" evokes something of the otherness of the divine. At one level, this makes sense. It makes sense of those times when we experience the absence or distance of God. It reminds us too that God is not a commodity, that is, God cannot be harnessed or homogenized. Like Moses' encounter with the burning bush, God is present, but the presence cannot be named. Ultimately, our God is an incomprehensible mystery. So, our faith begins with mystery.

In contrast, dogma is about belief. In particular, it is the formalized beliefs recognized and promulgated in and by a Christian tradition. Comparatively, Anglicanism has focused on mystery in its prayers, rituals, and symbols. Its dogma has been minimalist (see the "Fundamental Declarations" from the Constitution, reproduced below). I am not saying we are wishy washy, but rather, we focus on divine mystery.

The temptation to treat God as commodity is ever present. Note the repeated warnings in the Bible about idolatry. Also note the teachings of Jesus about the reign of God, which embodies the present and future impact of divine presence. Significantly, this presence is vital, life-giving, healing, and holy. It is the fulfilment of the best of life, which God desires for the whole creation. Certainly, this God cannot be made captive, and this is why Jesus describes the reign of God in parables.

The use of a parable has rhetorical effect, but with Jesus, it is more than just a literary device. A parable, a metaphor, or a symbol is the only way we can talk about the divine. And often the best response to the sheer wonder of the divine is silence.

Let me say a few things that puts the concept of dogma in context. First, there is the question of truth statements. In the Christian tradition, Jesus is the touchstone of truth. In fact, Jesus is the wisdom of God. In and through Jesus, we receive new wisdom. This means that Jesus is the ground of truth, but we do not own the truth. The truth cannot be reduced to bold black and white statements or abstract truths that apply regardless of circumstances. There are greys.

Second, in the worst-case scenario, religious dogmatism interprets God's holiness exactly in terms of a moral purity. The purpose of truth statements here is to protect the moral purity of God. However, God understood strictly in terms of moral purity can lead to violent speech and actions. God as God, however, is not dependent on human actions. We respect God, but we cannot protect God. In fact, God does not need our protection. The word *God* itself is not always necessary. And for some people, it gets in the way. Once again, silence can be our best response and finest tribute.

Our sacramental tradition has intuitively recognized divine mystery in the life and story of Jesus. In fact, "No dogmatic statement can ever exhaustively express the mystery of God's self-communication in Christ" (Gerald O'Collins). Ultimately, the experience of divine mystery is a gift, a gratuitous and unconditional gift received by us with joy. In this light, the season of Lent is a journey into the heart of divine mystery.

Enjoy the mystery,

Fr Steven

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

FUNDAMENTAL DECLARATIONS

1. *The Anglican Church of Australia, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church of Christ from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.*
2. *This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.*
3. *This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.*

2. COVID-19 - Where are we now?

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 in the community has been considered by the Parish Council, which 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, in case of extreme weather!—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://stmarymagdalenesadelade.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. Fasting and Abstinence

During Lent we are invited to participate in the discipline of "fasting and abstinence", a tangible expression of the call to turn away from sin and to be faithful to the gospel.

Fasting is understood, these days, to consist of one substantial meal a day, or for small meals to be taken in the morning and evening. Abstinence includes not consuming meat, and avoiding luxurious foods generally.

Archbishop Geoff invites the people of the diocese to join him, this year, in fasting and prayer on the Wednesdays during Lent. His prayers will focus on two aspects of the "Calls" that arose from the recent Lambeth Conference of Bishops. The Archbishop's prayer, which he invites us to join, is that we as a Diocesan community, and as individual members of it, might discern **how to bear faithful witness to Christ** and **authentically proclaim the gospel** in our Adelaide context.

Archbishop Geoff reminds us, “The point of fasting with prayer is not to change God’s mind about something (or to lose weight) but to sharpen our awareness of God and our openness to God and to prompt us to pray.”

6. Worship During Lent

During Lent we have for some years made additional opportunities for worship available as part of our Lenten discipline. This year, the regular weekly pattern will include

Sunday	10 am, Sung Mass
Wednesday	8 am, Reflection and Prayer
Thursday	12 noon Angelus, 12.10 pm Mass
Friday	6.15 pm, Stations of the Cross

The **Reflection on Wednesday mornings** will be based on Fr Philip Carter's series called “Thin Places” that will also be the blog content for Lent. You can see these reflections on the blog at stmarymagdalenesadelaide.org.

The **Stations of the Cross on Friday** is a 14-step devotion that commemorates Jesus's last day on earth, beginning with the condemnation before Pontius Pilate. The stations are commonly used as a pilgrimage as the individual moves from station to station. At each station, we recall and meditate on a specific event from Christ's last day. Specific prayers are recited, then we move to the next station until all 14 are complete.

The Stations of the Cross are commonly found in churches as a series of 14 small icons or images. The stations are most commonly prayed during Lent on Wednesdays and Fridays.

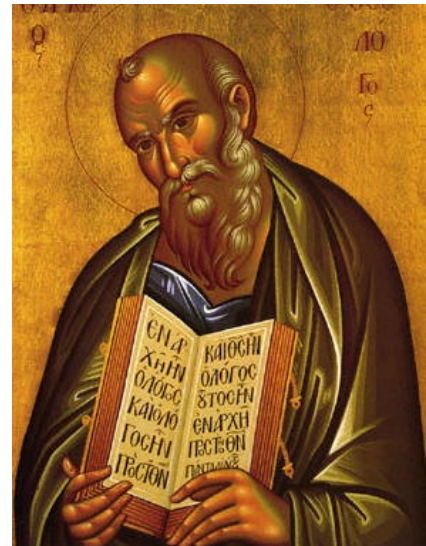
7. This Week in the Calendar

This week in the church’s calendar we celebrate the early church bishop St Polycarp, the Apostle St Matthias, and the priest and poet George Herbert.

St Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, disciple of Saint John the Apostle and friend of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, was a revered Christian leader during the first half of the second century.

Saint Ignatius, on his way to Rome to be martyred, visited Polycarp at Smyrna, and later at Troas wrote him a personal letter. The Asia Minor Churches recognized Polycarp’s leadership by choosing him as a representative to discuss with the Pope the date of the Easter celebration in Rome—a major controversy in the early Church.

Only one of the many letters written by Polycarp has been preserved, the one he wrote to the Church of Philippi in Macedonia.



At 86, Polycarp was led into the crowded Smyrna stadium to be burned alive. Tradition tells us that the flames did not harm him and he was finally killed by a dagger. The “Acts” of Polycarp’s martyrdom are the earliest preserved, fully reliable account of a Christian martyr’s death. He died in 155.

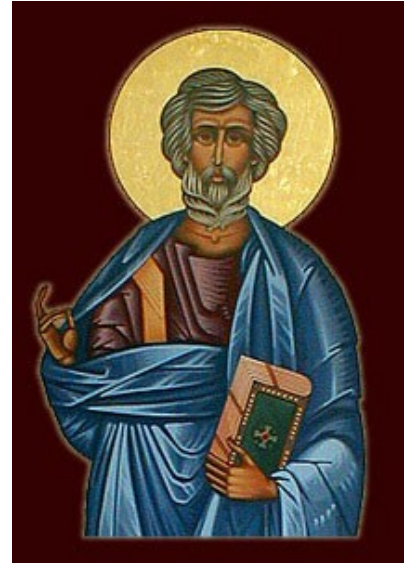
Polycarp was recognized as a Christian leader by all Asia Minor Christians—a strong fortress of faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ. His own strength emerged from his trust in God, even when events contradicted this trust. Living among pagans and under a government opposed

to the new religion, he led and fed his flock. Like the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life for his sheep and kept them from more persecution in Smyrna. He summarized his trust in God just before he died: "Father... I bless you, for having made me worthy of the day and the hour..." (*Acts of Martyrdom*, Chapter 14).

St Matthias is mentioned just once by name in the New Testament.

According to Acts 1:15-26, during the days after the Ascension Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers—about 120 of Jesus' followers.

Now that Judas had betrayed his ministry, it was necessary, Peter said, to fulfill the scriptural recommendation that another should take his office. "Therefore, it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22).

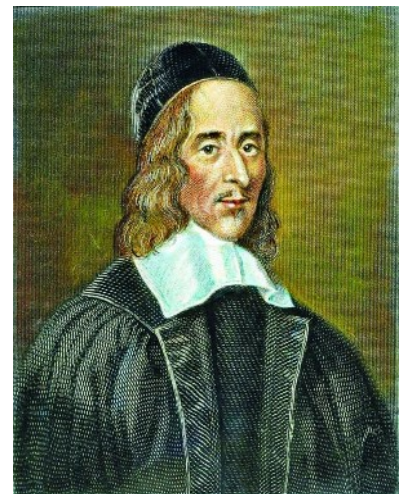


They nominated two: Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. They prayed and drew lots. The choice fell upon Matthias.

What was the holiness of Matthias? Obviously, he was suited for apostleship by the experience of being with Jesus from his baptism to his ascension. He must also have been suited personally, or he would not have been nominated for so great a responsibility. Must we not remind ourselves that the fundamental holiness of Matthias was his receiving gladly the relationship with the Father offered him by Jesus and completed by the Holy Spirit? If the apostles are the foundations of our faith by their witness, they must also be reminders, if only implicitly, that holiness is entirely a matter of God's giving, and it is offered to all, in the everyday circumstances of life. We receive, and even for this God supplies the power of freedom.

George Herbert (1593-1633) was born to a noble Welsh family. He was a brilliant student at school and university, and in 1620 became the "public orator" at Cambridge. One of the main duties of the office was to express the sentiments of the university, and it was considered a launching point to high office.

Herbert's career continued to climb, as did his prestige—Sir Francis Bacon dedicated his *Translation of Certain Psalms* to him, and he was elected to Parliament—but then came a series of tragedies: King James died, as did many of Herbert's sponsors; Bacon died; his mother died (Donne delivered the funeral sermon); the plague broke out.



In 1629 he gave up his secular ambitions and prepared to take holy orders. He was ordained and moved to the rural countryside at Bremerton near Salisbury. He rebuilt the church with his own money, visited the poor, consoled the sick and dying, reconciled neighbours. He became known as "Holy Mr. Herbert." He served for only three years, however, dying of tuberculosis in 1633.

On his deathbed, Herbert sent a "little book of poems" to his friend Nicholas Ferrar, founder of the religious community nearby at Little Gidding. "If he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul," he wrote in his instructions, "let it be made public; if not, let him burn it, for I and it are the least of God's mercies." The book, published later that year with the title *The Temple*, contains some of the most memorable poetry in the English language. Several poems contained in the book are now used as hymns, such as "The God of Love my Shepherd Is," "Teach Me, My God and King," and "Let All the World in Every Corner Sing."

8. From a letter on the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp by the Church of Smyrna

A rich and pleasing sacrifice

When the pyre was ready, Polycarp took off all his clothes and loosened his under-garment. He made an effort also to remove his shoes, though he had been unaccustomed to this, for the faithful always vied with each other in their haste to touch his body. Even before his martyrdom he had received every mark of honour in tribute to his holiness of life.

There and then he was surrounded by the material for the pyre. When they tried to fasten him also with nails, he said: "Leave me as I am. The one who gives me strength to endure the fire will also give me strength to stay quite still on the pyre, even without the precaution of your nails". So they did not fix him to the pyre with nails but only fastened him instead. Bound as he was, with hands behind his back, he stood like a mighty ram, chosen out for sacrifice from a great flock, a worthy victim made ready to be offered to God.

Looking up to heaven, he said: "Lord, almighty God, Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have come to the knowledge of yourself, God of angels, of powers, of all creation, of all the race of saints who live in your sight, I bless you for judging me worthy of this day, this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ, your anointed one, and so rise again to eternal life in soul and body, immortal through the power of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among the martyrs in your presence today as a rich and pleasing sacrifice. God of truth, stranger to falsehood, you have prepared this and revealed it to me and now you have fulfilled your promise.

"I praise you for all things, I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal priest of heaven, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. Through him be glory to you, together with him and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen".

When he had said "Amen" and finished the prayer, the officials at the pyre lit it. But, when a great flame burst out, those of us privileged to see it witnessed a strange and wonderful thing. Indeed, we have been spared in order to tell the story to others. Like a ship's sail swelling in the wind, the flame became as it were a dome encircling the martyr's body. Surrounded by the fire, his body was like bread that is baked, or gold and silver white-hot in a furnace, not like flesh that has been burnt. So sweet a fragrance came to us that it was like that of burning incense or some other costly and sweet-smelling gum.

9. From a sermon of St John Chrysostom on St Matthias

'In those days, Peter, stood up in the midst of the disciples and said" As the fiery spirit to whom the flock was entrusted by Christ and as the leader in the band of the apostles, Peter always took the initiative in speaking: "My brothers, we must choose from among our number." He left the decision to the whole body, at once augmenting the honour of those elected and avoiding any suspicion of partiality. For such great occasions can easily lead to trouble.

Did not Peter then have the right to make the choice himself? Certainly he had the right, but he did not want to give the appearance of showing special favour to anyone. Besides he was not yet endowed with the Spirit. "And they nominated two," we read, "Joseph, who was called Barsabbas and surnamed Justus, and Matthias." He himself did not nominate them; all present did. But it was he who brought the issue forward, pointing out that it was not his own idea but had been suggested to him by a scriptural prophecy. So he was speaking not as a teacher but as an interpreter.

"So," he goes on, "we must choose from those men who lived in our company." Notice how insistent he is that they should be eyewitnesses. Even though the Spirit would come to ratify the choice, Peter regards this prior qualification as most important.

"Those who lived in our company," he continued, "all through the time when the Lord Jesus came and went among us." He refers to those who had dwelt with Jesus, not just those who had been his disciples. For of course from the very beginning many had followed him. Notice how it is written that Peter himself was "one of the two who had listened to John, and followed Jesus."

"All through the time when the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning with the baptism of John" – rightly so, because no one knew what had happened before that time, although they were to know of it later through the Spirit.

"Up to the day," Peter added, "on which he was taken up from us – one of these must be made a witness along with us of his resurrection." He did not say "a witness of the rest of his actions" but only "a witness of the resurrection." That witness would be more believable who could declare that he who ate and drank and was crucified also rose from the dead. He needed to be a witness not of the times before or after that event, and not of the signs and wonders, but only of the resurrection itself. For the rest happened by general admission, openly; but the resurrection took place secretly, and was known to these men only.

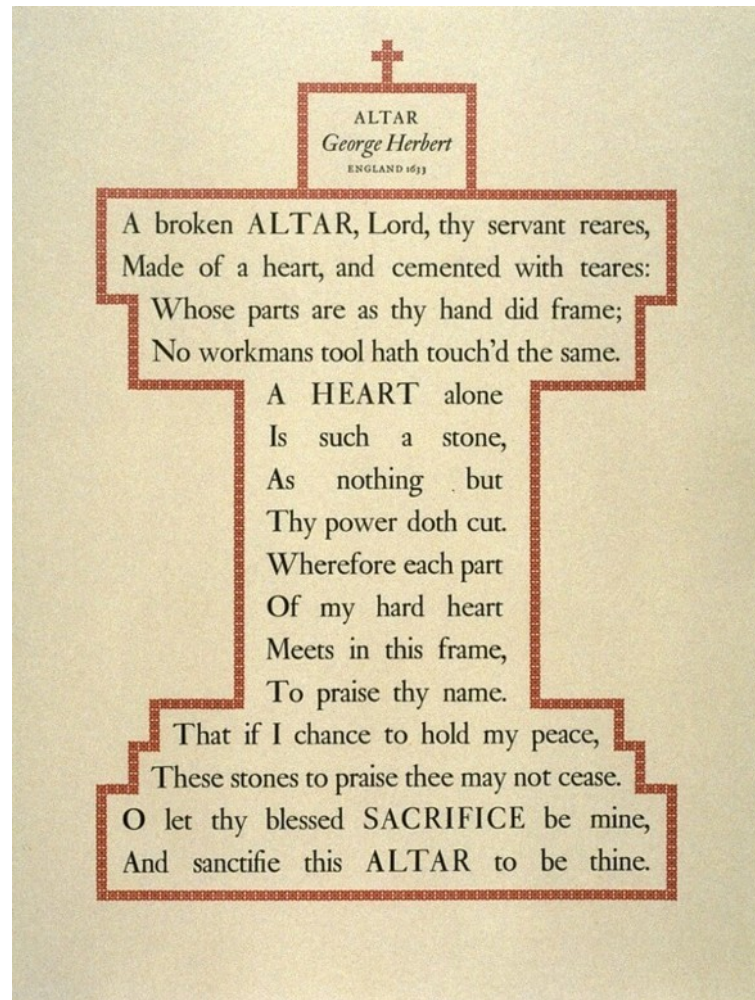
And they all prayed together, saying: "You, Lord, know the hearts of men; make your choice known to us." "You", not "we". Appropriately they said that he knew the hearts of men, because the choice was to be made by him, not by others.

They spoke with such confidence, because someone had to be appointed. They did not say "choose" but "make known to us" the chosen one; "the one you choose," they said, fully aware that everything was pre-ordained by God. "They then drew lots." For they did not think themselves worthy to make the choice of their own accord, and therefore they wanted some sign for their instruction.

10. George Herbert's Poetry – Visual Variety

Visually, George Herbert's poems are varied in such a way as to enhance their meaning, with intricate rhyme schemes, stanzas combining different line lengths and other ingenious formal devices.

The most obvious examples are pattern poems like *The Altar* (below) in which the shorter and longer lines are arranged on the page in the shape of an altar. The visual appeal is reinforced by the conceit of its construction from a broken, stony heart, representing the personal offering of himself as a sacrifice upon it. Built into this is an allusion to Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart."



In the case of "Easter Wings" (illustrated below), the words were printed sideways on two facing pages so that the lines there suggest outspread wings. The words of the poem are paralleled between stanzas and mimic the opening and closing of the wings. In Herbert's poems formal ingenuity is not an end in itself but is employed only as an auxiliary to its meaning.

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and flore,
 Though foolishly he lost the fame,
 Decaying more and more,
 Till he became
 Most poore:
 With thee
 O let me rife
 As larks, harmoniously,
 And sing this day thy victories:
 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.
 My tender age in sorrow did begonne
 And fill with sicknesses and flame
 Thou didst so punish sinne,
 That I became
 Most thine.
 With thee
 Let me combine,
 And feel this day thy victorie:
 For, if I imp my wing on thine,
 Affliction shall advance the flight in mee.

11. 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 Puerto Rico (USA). In our national church, pray for the Diocese of Tasmania; and within the Diocese of Adelaide, for the Parish of Salisbury.

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, Edward and Neil.

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 Polycarp, St Matthias, 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, StMMAdeelaide.Parish@outlook.com, by Tuesday evening at 5 pm.

