



Welcome to
the Parish of
St Michael
Thirroul

25 DECEMBER 2020
CHRISTMAS EVE AND DAY
Peace and Joy from the Franciscan Friars

Welcome · especially to visitors attending our Christmas Liturgies.

CHRISTMAS IN 2021 ... Insights from Saint Francis of Assisi

St Francis, on that Christmas Day in 1223, indulged his restless impulse to go into the rocks and woods around the village of Greccio, not alone, but accompanied by his brothers and by an unassuming and poor humanity, made up of simple folk and humble people.

Francis said, “We should celebrate this year’s Christmas together at Greccio: go quickly and prepare what I tell you; for I want to enact the memory of the Infant who was born at Bethlehem and how he was bedded in the manger on hay between a donkey and an ox. I want to see all of this with my own eyes.”



What drove Friar Francis to experience that Christmas was the irresistible desire to see with his own eyes the poverty in which the Lord Jesus wanted to be born. And this to believe that Christ – crucified and risen – is present, alive and glorified in the Holy Spirit, hidden under the tiny appearance of bread until the day of his return.

Clare [St Clare of Assisi] will live by this same gaze, astonished and loving, that nourishes her faith and focuses it on the poverty of Jesus, from his birth, throughout his life, up to the Cross. Clare’s life is transformed and made similar in every way to the poor Crucified, together with her sisters.

Seeing and believing are two verbs central to St Francis.

Seeing reminds us of the physicality of Francis’ faith: it is not enough for him to think, but he wants to see with his eyes, touch with his hands, smell with his nostrils, hear with his ears, taste with his tongue. In short, his whole person, his senses, are set in motion by desire, by what moves him most deeply. So, faith is simply life for him.

Do we have a fervent desire to see and touch the Lord? *Perhaps something else moves us.* Then like Francis, we need to get out of our comfort zone and set out towards a different and possibly hostile place, to which the wood and the rocks of Greccio allude. It is here that we can listen again to that desire within us, in the very groaning of creation, our common home: to see the Lord Jesus in the mystery of his poverty and weakness, to open ourselves again to a renewed encounter with him in the Spirit.

Francis experienced this encounter in a “physical” way: he touched the body of the Lord in the Gospel, read and listened to every day; he *saw* him in the leper, in his brothers, in the poor priests, in sinners; he saw the poverty of Jesus in the paradox of the human condition, magnificent and at the same time destined for death. He looked into the eyes of this fragility, finally freed from bitterness and fear.



✠✠ From the encounter with Jesus, the joy of faith blossomed for Francis, the fresh look of the risen man who saw the presence of God in all creatures and, for this reason, praised God and returned all good to God.

Believing: faith is kindled by that encounter that touched Francis and touches each one of us. Believing left its mark in the flesh of Francis' and can in our life. Our individual belief is born and safeguarded by the great "yes" of the faith of the Church. This is the act that accomplishes that seeing, that touching and letting oneself be reached. Let us look for the echo of this "yes" in the mysterious journey that, in countless ways, so many people make towards the Mystery.

Seeing without believing could leave our faith at the mercy of the emotion of the moment.

Believing without seeing could reduce faith to an idea that simply no longer has anything to do with our life and falls away, even when we continue to perform religious acts outwardly.

Joy is the sign that our faith is still alive; sadness and lament are like an anaesthetic of faith, which slowly becomes stupefied, loses contact with the "physicality" of our flesh, of life, and becomes merely intellectual or moralistic. Or it disappears.

Let us be vigilant, because this can also happen to us. This does happen when: we take faith for granted and do not creatively cultivate a life of prayer in silence and contemplation; we lose contact with the word of God; we allow the Eucharist to become a routine; we do not joyfully avail of the Sacrament of Reconciliation; we separate faith from life; we do not forgive and do not spend our life for others; we distance ourselves from the poor and adapt to a comfortable and guaranteed life.

Seeing and believing are Francis' steps, disarming in their simplicity and depth.

In the midst of fear of the pandemic, the solidarity with others facing this pandemic, the openness to others, the suffering of Mother Earth, the resistance to caring for the future of our common home, the hotbeds of war, terror, bigotry and repression, and the silent work of those working for peace with justice – in the midst of all these, the reality of our world, God is present.

We are called to celebrate Christmas with eyes that can see this reality in and around us. Let each of us, starting with ourselves, take a step towards that Greccio woods among the rocks, to see a Child born in this poor reality.

This Christmas, we are called to see and believe in a new way.

WEEKEND MASS TIMES

Church of St Michael • Thirroul

↘ Saturday 5:30pm and Sunday 8:00am

Bulli Sunday 8:30am and 5:30pm

Corrimal Saturday 6pm and Sunday 9:30am

USUAL WEEKDAY LITURGIES

Thirroul [Mass] Tuesday 5:30pm

Wednesday 9:00am

Thursday 9:00am

Friday 9:30am

Patrick Vaughan, *Parish Priest* Andrew Granc ofm, Ken Cafe ofm, *Assisting*

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Parish Office Hours – Tuesdays and Wednesdays – 9:00am to 12:30pm and 1:00pm to 3:30pm

Fridays – 9:30am to 2:30pm

🌐 www.thirroulcatholic.org.au

Parish School ☎ 4267 2560