



Welcome to the Parish of Saint Michael Thirroul



PARISH BULLETIN
10 / 11 FEBRUARY 2024
 6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME + YEAR B
CHINESE NEW YEAR – 10 FEBRUARY

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Be Made Clean

The liturgical year and the spiritual life coincide.

This is a certainty. But how to explain it?

(1) The goal of spiritual life is to let oneself be increasingly open to the God of all creation. Doesn't liturgy help in this?

(2) All of us are constructed so that we become ourselves completely when (and only when) we do #1 explicitly or implicitly.

(3) We love and are loved insofar as this takes place, whether we know it or not.

(4) Jesus lived among us as a human being in time and space. Liturgy gradually exposes us to that.

All the above is the "spiritual life," at least in this way of looking at it. Maybe we can think here about number (1) and this week's Gospel.

The gospel stories this year are being told by Mark, just as they were told last year by Matthew. The most vivid of the gospels is Mark's. He is direct and uses fewer words, but he has more concrete details. Last week Jesus did not just "cure" Peter's mother-in-law, a bland way of putting it. He "grasped her hand and helped her up." When Jesus stills the storm at sea, he is not just "in the boat," he is "at the stern" of it according to Mark, and he is not just asleep, but asleep "on a cushion."



Mark's approach helps us to get the texture of the story, to listen with our imaginations, to let the life of Jesus enter in. As we receive Jesus, the Word of God, we open to the God of all creation. We share his life spiritually, partaking of it in ritual: we recall it in the readings, and we receive it as sacrament. Whether we realize it explicitly or not, our goal is to "know him more clearly, love him more dearly, follow him more nearly."

So, as hearers, we begin by quieting down, perhaps admitting how little each of us is, and we let the life of Jesus speak to us in the readings.

We might notice several things in this Sunday's Gospel: the man who walks up to Jesus covered with scales and scabs is breaking the law. As long as the sores are on him, he should "dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp," according to the explicit instructions of the first reading. He should be ringing a bell and crying out "Unclean, unclean!"

But Jesus does not mind. In Mark's words, Jesus is "moved with pity." Just three words, but they tell us so much. There follows a wonderful statement from the leper. "If you choose, you can make me clean." He has to believe in Jesus' power in order to say such a thing. It is a confession of faith.

Jesus answers, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Direct, honest, so revelatory of God. The whole life of Jesus seems to consist of this desire to help those who are in trouble, to give to those who have a seed of faith, who are sharing in "spirituality."

Finally, in an extraordinary move, Jesus stretches out his hand and touches the man. The ancient belief was that this sickness was communicable, and at the very least it was disgusting. Yet Jesus reaches out to him with care and says, "Be made clean."

Let's pray and ponder in our hearts this wonderful story from Mark. It tells us about God.

Doesn't it help us open to the God of all creation?

Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom, by preaching and by the healings that signalled the Kingdom's mysterious coming in his own person.

Critical studies of the miracle narratives of the four gospels have produced important conclusions. They concern a relatively small number of events – about 30 in all. These narratives offer a distinct contrast to the characteristics of typical 'wonder stories'. Though part of the Christian message from the beginning, they are constantly associated with a concern that they not give rise to a superficial popular enthusiasm, but be understood as signs of the coming of the Kingdom. We have already recognised the importance of this concern of Mark. His account of the healing of the leper, as Jesus begins his Galilean ministry presses home the point.

What a magnificent encounter with which to introduce the missionary journeys of Jesus. It would be hard to find a more telling symbol of the human miseries that Jesus was sent to overcome, than the plight of the leper who ↗ ↘

✚✚ threw himself at the feet of Jesus – ‘If you choose, you can make me clean. It was a situation produced in large part by human ignorance and fear, accentuated by traditions of ritual cleanness. Our first reading from Leviticus describes this pathetic condition in graphic detail – obliged to wear torn clothes, with hair dishevelled, and sounding the warning cry, ‘Unclean!’, that ostracised the leper from normal society. What the biblical writings called ‘leprosy’ included not only the dreaded Hansen’s disease, but many other skin disorders, many of which modern medicine recognises not to be contagious.

As the Saviour is moved with compassion in the presence of this human misery, we are reminded that the Servant of God of the late Isaian writings, who embodied God’s saving designs, by ‘bearing the sorrows’ of the people, is described as assuming the condition of a leper – ‘Despised, familiar with suffering, one from whom we averted our gaze’ (Isaiah 53:3). In fact, Jesus made an astounding gesture of solidarity with the man in his misery. As he healed the leper with his word of prophetic authority, he ‘stretched out his hand and touched him’. In doing so, according to the Law, he had made himself ritually unclean.

Those who claimed the power of healing were not uncommon in the world in which Jesus lived. Being seen as one of their number could seriously compromise the evangelising mission that had been so tellingly expressed in the healing of the leper. Jesus urged the man, therefore, to go off quietly, fulfilling the Law’s prescription by having the priests verify his cure. But the man who had been cured could not contain himself. So important, however was it to Jesus – that the notoriety his healing had attracted be minimised – that he was forced to keep away from the towns. Nevertheless, the people were still drawn to him – Who is this man?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SUNDAY’S SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading Leviticus 13:1-2,44-46

- ✚ Compare and contrast the way lepers were treated in the Old Testament (First Reading) with the way Jesus treated them (Gospel).
- ✚ In those days ritual demanded that if you had the sore of leprosy you had to “tear your clothes, be excluded, made to live apart from those you love, and you were forced to announce your presence by shouting, ‘Unclean.’” Not to this extreme, but are some people treated in a similar way today? Give examples.

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

- ✚ Paul says, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” In which of your day’s activities is it easy for you to remember the presence of God? Which are difficult? Can you gradually remember the presence of God in all your actions?
- ✚ In Paul’s time, when Christians sat down to share meals, there were a lot of problems, caused by different religious backgrounds and practices. How does the statement “do everything for the glory of God” work for you as a solution when there is a decision about how to act?

Gospel Mark 1:40-45

- ✚ “Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’” Are you moved with pity in any of the “unclean” situations we are experiencing in our world: Pandemic? Climate crises? Racial injustice? Human trafficking? Treatment of refugees? Prejudice, bigotry? Is there anything you can do to aid Jesus with the cleansing?
- ✚ Lepers were excluded from everything. They had to remain outside inhabited centres. So, the first transgression here is that of the leper. What does he see in Jesus that makes him break all the rules? What is Jesus telling us with this story?

The second transgression is that of Jesus: even though the Law prohibited touching lepers, he is moved, extends his hand and touches him, to heal him. Someone would have said: he sinned. He did something the law prohibits. He is a transgressor. It is true: He is a transgressor. He does not limit himself to words, but touches him. To touch with love means to establish a relationship, to enter into communion, to become involved in the life of another person even to the point of sharing their wounds.

With that gesture, Jesus reveals that God, who is not indifferent, does not keep himself at a “safe distance.” Rather, he draws near out of compassion and touches our life to heal it with tenderness. It is God’s style: closeness, compassion and tenderness. God’s transgression. God is a great transgressor in this sense.

— Pope Francis, *Angelus* on the 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 14 February 2021

**PLEASE BRING IN ... ANY NON-PERISHABLE ITEMS EACH WEEK
TO HELP THE NEEDY IN THE LOCAL ILLAWARRA AREA:
drop items in the special plastic bins near the church entrances.**

CHINESE NEW YEAR — The first day of Chinese New Year begins on the new moon that appears between 21 January and 20 February. Celebrations last up to sixteen days, though only the first seven are considered public holidays (in 2024 this is 10 February to 16 February). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_New_Year This year is the year of the **dragon**, the fifth of the 12-year cycle of animals which appear in the Chinese zodiac.

LENTEN MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS – *Through the Desert God Leads us to Freedom*

Dear brothers and sisters!

When our God reveals himself, his message is always one of freedom: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). These are the first words of the Decalogue given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Those who heard them were quite familiar with the exodus of which God spoke: the experience of their bondage still weighed heavily upon them. In the desert, they received the “Ten Words” as a thoroughfare to freedom. We call them “commandments”, in order to emphasize the strength of the love by which God shapes his people. The call to freedom is a demanding one. It is not answered straightaway; it has to mature as part of a journey. Just as Israel in the desert still clung to Egypt – often longing for the past and grumbling against the Lord and Moses – today too, God’s people can cling to an oppressive bondage that it is called to leave behind. We realize how true this is at those moments when we feel hopeless, wandering through life like a desert and lacking a promised land as our destination. Lent is the season of grace in which the desert can become once more – in the words of the prophet Hosea – the place of our first love (cf. Hosea 2:16-17). God shapes his people, he enables us to leave our slavery behind and experience a Passover from death to life. Like a bridegroom, the Lord draws us once more to himself, whispering words of love to our hearts.


The exodus from slavery to freedom is no abstract journey. If our celebration of Lent is to be concrete, the first step is to desire to open our eyes to reality. When the Lord calls out to Moses from the burning bush, he immediately shows that he is a God who sees and, above all, hears: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:7-8). Today too, the cry of so many of our oppressed brothers and sisters rises to heaven. Let us ask ourselves: Do we hear that cry? Does it trouble us? Does it move us? All too many things keep us apart from each other, denying the fraternity that, from the beginning, binds us to one another.

During my visit to Lampedusa, as a way of countering the globalization of indifference, I asked two questions, which have become more and more pressing: “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) and “Where is your brother?” (Genesis 4:9). Our Lenten journey will be concrete if, by listening once more to those two questions, we realize that even today we remain under the rule of Pharaoh. A rule that makes us weary and indifferent. A model of growth that divides and robs us of a future. Earth, air and water are polluted, but so are our souls. True, Baptism has begun our process of liberation, yet there remains in us an inexplicable longing for slavery. A kind of attraction to the security of familiar things, to the detriment of our freedom.

In the Exodus account, there is a significant detail: it is God who sees, is moved and brings freedom; Israel does not ask for this. Pharaoh stifles dreams, blocks the view of heaven, makes it appear that this world, in which human dignity is trampled upon and authentic bonds are denied, can never change. He put everything in bondage to himself. Let us ask: Do I want a new world? Am I ready to leave behind my compromises with the old? The witness of many of my brother bishops and a great number of those who work for peace and justice has increasingly convinced me that we need to combat a deficit of hope that stifles dreams and the silent cry that reaches to heaven and moves the heart of God. This “deficit of hope” is not unlike the nostalgia for slavery that paralysed Israel in the desert and prevented it from moving forward. An exodus can be interrupted: how else can we explain the fact that humanity has arrived at the threshold of universal fraternity and at levels of scientific, technical, cultural, and juridical development capable of guaranteeing dignity to all, yet gropes about in the darkness of inequality and conflict.

God has not grown weary of us. Let us welcome Lent as the great season in which he reminds us: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). Lent is a season of conversion, a time of freedom. Jesus himself, as we recall each year on the first Sunday of Lent, was driven into the desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted in freedom. For forty days, he will stand before us and with us: the incarnate Son. Unlike Pharaoh, God does not want subjects, but sons and daughters. The desert is the place where our freedom can mature in a personal decision not to fall back into slavery. In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken.

This, however, entails a struggle, as the book of Exodus and the temptations of Jesus in the desert make clear to us. The voice of God, who says, “You are my Son, the Beloved” (Mark 1:11), and “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3) is opposed by the enemy and his lies. Even more to be feared than Pharaoh are the idols that we set up for ourselves; we can consider them as his voice speaking within us. To be all-powerful, to be looked up to by all, to domineer over others: every human being is aware of how deeply seductive that lie can be. It is a road well-travelled. We can become attached to money, to certain projects, ideas or goals, to our position, to a tradition, even to certain individuals. Instead of making us move forward, they paralyse us. Instead of encounter, they create conflict. Yet there is also a new humanity, a people of the little ones and of the humble who have not yielded to the allure of the lie. Whereas those who serve idols become like them, mute, blind, deaf and immobile (cf. Psalm 114:4), the poor of spirit are open and ready: a silent force of good that heals and sustains the world.

It is time to act, and in Lent, to act also means to pause. To pause in prayer, in order to receive the word of God, to pause like the Samaritan in the presence of a wounded brother or sister. Love of God and love of neighbour are one love. Not to have other gods is to pause in the presence of God beside the flesh of our neighbour. For this reason, prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying, in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us. Then the atrophied and 

✠✠ isolated heart will revive. Slow down, then, and pause! The contemplative dimension of life that Lent helps us to rediscover will release new energies. In the presence of God, we become brothers and sisters, more sensitive to one another: in place of threats and enemies, we discover companions and fellow travellers. This is God's dream, the promised land to which we journey once we have left our slavery behind.

The Church's synodal form, which in these years we are rediscovering and cultivating, suggests that Lent is also a time of communitarian decisions, of decisions, small and large, that are counter current. Decisions capable of altering the daily lives of individuals and entire neighbourhoods, such as the ways we acquire goods, care for creation, and strive to include those who go unseen or are looked down upon. I invite every Christian community to do just this: to offer its members moments set aside to rethink their lifestyles, times to examine their presence in society and the contribution they make to its betterment. Woe to us if our Christian penance were to resemble the kind of penance that so dismayed Jesus. To us too, he says: "Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting" (Matthew 6:16). Instead, let others see joyful faces, catch the scent of freedom and experience the love that makes all things new, beginning with the smallest and those nearest to us. This can happen in every one of our Christian communities.

To the extent that this Lent becomes a time of conversion, an anxious humanity will notice a burst of creativity, a flash of new hope. Allow me to repeat what I told the young people whom I met in Lisbon last summer: "Keep seeking and be ready to take risks. At this moment in time, we face enormous risks; we hear the painful plea of so many people. Indeed, we are experiencing a third world war fought piecemeal. Yet let us find the courage to see our world, not as being in its death throes but in a process of giving birth, not at the end but at the beginning of a great new chapter of history. We need courage to think like this" (Address to University Students, 3 August 2023). Such is the courage of conversion, born of coming up from slavery. For faith and charity take hope, this small child, by the hand. They teach her to walk, and at the same time, she leads them forward.

I bless all of you and your Lenten journey. – Francis

SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

Sundays Year B • Weekdays Year II

Monday	12 Feb	Monday Ordinary Time Week 6	James 1:1-11	Mark 8:11-13
Tuesday ☞	13 Feb	Tuesday Ordinary Time Week 6	James 1:12-18	Mark 8:14-21
Wednesday	14 Feb	ASH WEDNESDAY	Joel 2:12-18	Matthew 6:1-6,16-18
Thursday	15 Feb	Thursday after Ash Wednesday	Deuteronomy 30:15-20	Luke 9:22-25
Friday	16 Feb	Friday after Ash Wednesday	Isaiah 58:1-9	Matthew 9:14-15
Saturday	17 Feb	Saturday after Ash Wednesday	Isaiah 58:9-14	Luke 5:27-32
Sunday	18 Feb	THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT • YEAR B – Scripture Readings are listed below.		

FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

- ✦ **Tuesday, 13 February** **17:30** **Mardi Gras – Fat Tuesday – Pancake Tuesday**
Usual weekday Mass ... followed by ... Pancakes ... and ...
burning of palms to make the ashes for Ash Wednesday
- ✦ **Wednesday, 14 February** **ASH WEDNESDAY**
09:15 **Mass** with the Blessing and Imposition of Ashes
11:00 **Catholic Women's League Meeting in the McCarthy Centre**
Valentine's Day – who was Saint Valentine?!
19:00 **Mass** with the Blessing and Imposition of Ashes
- ✦ **Friday, 23 February** **09:30** **Mass for Opening of School Year**
- ✦ **Thursday, 29 February** **19:15** **Baptism Preparation Meeting for Easter and April Baptisms**

THIS Sunday's Readings – on website

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR B
1st Reading Leviticus 13:1-2,44-46
2nd Reading 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1
Gospel Mark 1:40-45

NEXT Sunday's Readings – on website

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT • YEAR B
1st Reading Genesis 9:8-15
2nd Reading 1 Peter 3:18-22
Gospel Mark 1:12-15

SUNDAY

MASS TIMES

Saturday ☞ **17:30**
Sunday **08:00**
 ☞ Saturday Mass is recorded.

Parish of St Michael – Thirroul

One of the four Northern Illawarra Parishes
Moving forward as a Parish Family

Patrick Vaughan • *Parish Priest*

Andrew Granc ofm, Ken Cafe ofm • *Assisting*

Kerry Fabon • Parish Secretary

Tues, Wed 09:00–15:00; Fri 08:30–15:00

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Parish School of St Michael

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USUAL WEEKDAY MASSES

Monday _____
Tuesday ☞ **17:30**
Wednesday **09:00**
Thursday **09:00**
Friday **09:30**
Anointing of the Sick 1st Friday