

Welcome to the Parish of Saint Michael Thirroul



PARISH BULLETIN
13 / 14 SEPTEMBER 2025
THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS
SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Suffering and Salvation

Isn't it amazing that we base our religion on an instrument of execution intended to bring the cruellest suffering and most humiliating death to the lowest of human beings, the dregs of society. We take images of that horrible instrument and we hang them as decorations in our houses, we make jewellery in its image, and we trace its image over our bodies whenever we pray.

We are a religion of the Cross and of all that it stood for. We do not run away from suffering and death, but rather we transform them into salvation and resurrection. We do not run away from humiliation, but rather we joyfully accept humiliation for the sake of the glory of God. We do not run away from the lowest of human beings, but rather we embrace them as other Christs.

"When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself, says the Lord." The powers of this world are nothing compared to the power of the Cross of Christ.

"Christ in his boundless love freely underwent his passion and death because of the sins of all, so that all might attain salvation. It is, therefore, the duty of the Church's preaching to proclaim the Cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows."

– Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (1965) 4

The Cross has always been central to Christian faith. Today's celebration is very ancient; its origins are associated with St Helena, the mother of Constantine, the Roman Emperor (306-337) who embraced Christianity as the religion of the empire. Helena journeyed to the Holy Land where she established churches in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Legend has it that she brought back to Rome some of the wood of the cross of Christ. The title of today's celebration echoes the attitude of Christian faith in Helena's 4th century. It is a very different attitude from the one we have taken for granted for many centuries. In the 4th century, the Cross was Christ's glorious trophy, carried by the Risen Lord as a symbol of his Paschal Mystery, his victory over all evil, even death itself. In the Middle Ages, however, as appreciation of the Paschal Mystery faded, the Cross became associated with the human sufferings of the Saviour. The familiar crucifix was seen as an invitation – as it certainly is – to repentance and conversion. Today's liturgy teaches us that the truths that inspired these two different views can be brought together.

In the gospel reading from John, Jesus tells Nicodemus that 'the Son of Man must be lifted up', to open the way for humanity to eternal life with God. John's gospel following describes the Cross with overtones of the coming triumph – 'When I am lifted up', Jesus declares at the Supper, 'I shall draw all people to myself' (John 12:32); Pilate's notice attached to the Cross proclaims Jesus as 'King'; the 'blood and water', so solemnly described flowing from his open side, are a life-giving flood for the human family. (The old story of the bronze serpent, remembered in the first reading, reminds us how close the origins of old Israel's remarkable faith were to the pagan practices around them. In fact this image was destroyed by the upright king Hezekiah [2 Kings 18:4].)

The reading from Paul to the Philippians provides a perfect complement to the gospel reading. Paul's words are in the form of a hymn that comes to a glorious climax in the Paschal Mystery. In a few brief words, this hymn outlines the drama of Christ's life among us: an abasement that is transformed – through 'the glory of God the Father' – into an exaltation as Christ is recognised as 'Lord', sharing all things with the Father. In his abasement, Jesus 'emptied himself' – putting aside the expression of the divine greatness that was his by right. He shared our life and became the Servant of all. In the end, he humbled himself even more, dying the death of a condemned criminal slave or non-citizen. Suddenly the dramatic movement of the hymn is reversed, God the Father 'raises him high' to receive adoration and acclaim from the whole of creation.

The liturgy has struck the balance. Emphasis upon the Paschal Mystery as a triumph must never forget that the horror of the Cross was the pathway to glory. Emphasis upon the human sufferings of the Crucified One must not eclipse the glorious light of the Resurrection. And our gospel reading assures us that the Cross is not something demanded by an angry God (as many are tempted to think) but the expression of God's love – 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son', to be our 'way' from the darkened world we have made to the glory we are to share with him.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading Numbers 21:4-9

- ✚ In the story of the poisonous serpents and the bronze serpent, how do we see God's justice and mercy balanced?
- ✚ How can the Israelites' grumbling and dissatisfaction apply to our lives today? In what ways do we grumble against God's providing for us?
- ✚ How does God's command to Moses to create the bronze serpent show his understanding of human needs?



Second Reading Philippians 2:6-11

- ✚ “Agape” love (pronounced *ah-gah-pay*) is selfless and free from self-concern and self-preoccupation. It includes conversion, vulnerability, search for justice, and suffering. Explain Jesus’ love for us in terms of *agape*. What would the world be like if everyone had some of this kind of love?
- ✚ “The will of God is the divinization of every creature; and it was to bring about this divinization that the One who was in God and who was God, emptied himself in order to participate in our human condition and transform it from within.” Can you agree with such a statement?

Gospel John 3:13-17

- ✚ “For God so love the world that he sent his only Son ...” So, what is your job? Who is going to tell the world about this love? Name some ways (other than preaching) that you can do such a thing. Might you run into difficulties at times? When this happens can you remember that you are not alone and that you will always receive the grace you need?
- ✚ How does Pope Francis “help us see the true face of God”? Does he emphasize Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, “God so loved” and God “gave”?

Nicodemus was a Jewish elder who wanted to know the Master. Do Jesus’ words to him, God so loved, help us to see the true face of God? He has always looked at us with love, and for the sake of love he came among us in the flesh of his Son. He went in search of us when we were lost. In Jesus, he came to raise us up when we fell. In Jesus, he wept with us and healed our wounds. In Jesus, he blessed our life forever. The Gospel tells us that whoever believes in him will not perish. In Jesus, God spoke the definitive word about our life: you are not lost, you are loved. Loved forever.

– Pope Francis, *Homily 4th Sunday of Lent, Year B*, 14 March 2021

**PLEASE BRING IN ... ONE NON-PERISHABLE ITEM PER FAMILY EACH WEEK
TO HELP THE NEEDY IN THE LOCAL ILLAWARRA AREA – WINTER ITEMS ARE STILL NEEDED
Thank you for your great generosity!**

SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY

The Catholic Church in Australia marks Safeguarding Sunday (formerly Child Protection Sunday) on the second Sunday of September – at the conclusion of National Child Protection Week. Safeguarding Sunday seeks to acknowledge the immense damage caused by the sexual abuse of children and adults at risk, including by priests, religious and lay people within Catholic contexts. It makes a commitment to practices and protocols that create and maintain safe environments for all people. It invites people to pray for those harmed by abuse directly and indirectly. Today we are gathered on Safeguarding Sunday, a day when we pause to focus on our responsibility to protect and care for those who are vulnerable. In the Scriptures, we find a clear and strong message about justice, compassion, and speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves. We are called to be a safe, welcoming and hope-filled Church. In our everyday lives, let’s be mindful of those around us who are vulnerable or marginalised. Who are the “silent” ones in our society, the ones without a voice? Today, God may be calling you to stand up for them. Whether it’s through prayer, support, or direct action, we are invited to participate in God’s work of justice.



BISHOP’S ANNUAL APPEAL – CARING FOR THOSE WHO CARED FOR US

Next weekend there will be a special collection at both Masses. Our faith calls us to help one another through prayer and action. Your tax-deductible donation to this appeal will help Bishop Brian ensure a dignified retirement for our diocesan clergy through suitable accommodation, transport assistance and holistic health care. Currently, there are 10 clergy in retirement. It is likely that we will have an additional 10 diocesan clergy retiring over the next 5 years. As a matter of priority, we need to ensure that we have the resources to continue to care for our ageing clergy.

THE CROSS – THE CRUCIFIX

During the first two centuries of Christianity, the cross may have been rare in Christian iconography, as it depicts a purposely painful and gruesome method of public execution and Christians were reluctant to use it. A symbol similar to the cross was used to abbreviate the Greek word for cross in very early New Testament manuscripts. The extensive adoption of the cross as Christian iconographic symbol arose from the 4th century.

However, the cross symbol was already associated with Christians in the 2nd century. By the early 3rd century, the cross had become closely associated with Christ. In 204, Tertullian tells how it was already a tradition for Christians to trace repeatedly on their foreheads the sign of the cross. During the first three centuries of the Christian era the cross was “a symbol of minor importance” when compared to the prominence given to it later. It is important to note that the **crucifix**, that is a cross upon which an image of Christ is present, is not known to have been used until the 6th century.

Starting in the 4th century, crucifixion imagery began to appear in art. Early depictions showed a **living Christ**, and tended to minimize the appearance of suffering, so as to draw attention to the positive message of resurrection and faith, rather than to the physical realities of execution. It was not until the Middle Ages that Jesus was more often seen as a human being, capable of suffering. The first depictions of crucifixion displaying suffering are believed to have arisen in Byzantine art, where the “S”-shaped slumped body type was developed. *Who else besides Christians wear a symbol of public execution on themselves?*

SAN DAMIANO CROSS

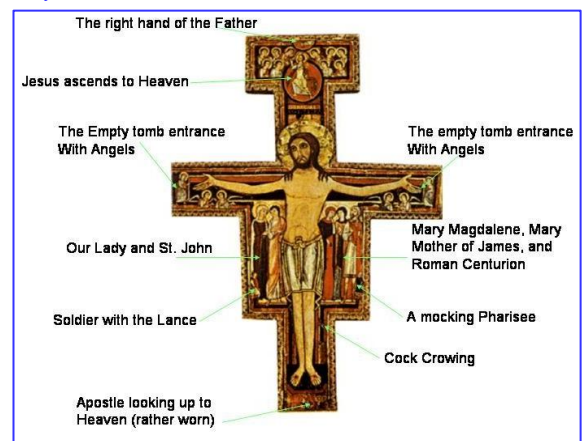
The San Damiano Cross is the large Romanesque rood cross which was in the little church of San Damiano, Assisi, before which St Francis of Assisi was praying when he is said to have received the commission from the Lord to rebuild the Church. It now hangs in the Basilica of Saint Clare in Assisi, Italy. Franciscans cherish this cross as the symbol of their mission from God. The cross is a crucifix of a type sometimes called an icon cross because in addition to the main figure of the Christ, it contains images of other saints and people related to the incident of Christ's crucifixion. The tradition of such painted crucifixes began in the Eastern Churches.

The central image of the crucified Jesus varies significantly from the traditional medieval depictions of the crucifixion. The crown of thorns is replaced by the halo focusing the reader on the joy of the resurrection rather than the cruelty of crucifixion. Jesus' hands, open and turned upwards, channel blood across the figures below, a sign of blessing. Jesus' eyes are sad, in contrast with his arms raised in triumph and the overall aliveness of the image. Jesus stares straight at the viewer not with his head down as in traditional crucifixion imagery.

The middle section of the cross is quite crowded with figures who are significant in Jesus' life and eyewitnesses to the crucifixion. Mary, Jesus' mother and the disciple John stand to one side, while Mary of Magdala, Mary the wife of Clopas and a Centurion stand on Jesus' other side. The hand gestures are significant here also. Both Mary and Mary Magdala have their hand on their chin, said to represent the struggle to comprehend what is happening – the struggle between faith and reason. The centurion has three fingers raised – reinforcing his assertion that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. Interestingly, all of the faces are benign – not traumatised suggesting that the key figures understand the importance of this moment in salvation history. The two smaller figures represent the soldier who pieced Jesus' side with a lance, Longinus, and Stephaton, the soldier who gave Jesus a sponge soaked in wine when he was thirsty. The images suggest that Jesus died in communion with those who loved and believed in him and also those who were caught up in the event due to their day jobs. Nevertheless, all of the characters are protected by Jesus' outstretched arms and redeemed by the blood which drips downward. The tiny face which can be seen over the shoulder of the centurion is thought to be the face of the artist – it was a common practice in medieval art to autograph your work in this way. The angels who appear beneath Christ's outstretched arms are depicted as animated witnesses to the unfolding events.

The feet of Jesus rest in a black panel, perhaps indicating his descent into hell. The figures at the base of the cross are no longer clear. Franciscan scholars suggest they could be either the patriarchs or saints of the Umbrian region namely, Damian, Rufinus, Michael, Peter, Paul and John the Baptist. They are in conversation or so it seems. Others have asserted that the figures are those of the disciples at the Last Supper. The presence of the rooster in this part of the cross is a reminder of Peter's betrayal – drawn small to suggest that the crucifixion consigns all sin to history and even the biggest regrets of our lives are minute events in the whole human story.

The scene at the top of the San Damiano Cross shows Jesus' ascension into heaven. Here Jesus is holding a cross, suggesting victory over death and raising a hand towards God. The scene shows the angels welcoming Jesus into heaven and reinforcing the communal nature of the whole Church. The inclusion of crucifixion, resurrection and ascension in the same image is typical of a new theology – emphasising the balance between the sorrow of the cross and the joy and hope of the resurrection.



SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

Sundays Year C • Weekdays Year I

Monday	15 Sep	Our Lady of Sorrows	Hebrews 5:7-9	John 19:25-17
Tuesday	16 Sep	Sts Cornelius and Cyprian, martyrs	1 Timothy 3:1-13	Luke 7:11-17
Wednesday	17 Sep	Wednesday of Ordinary Week 24	1 Timothy 3:14-16	Luke 7:31-35
Thursday	18 Sep	Thursday of Ordinary Week 24	1 Timothy 4:12-16	Luke 7:36-50
Friday	19 Sep	Friday of Ordinary Week 24	1 Timothy 6:2-12	Luke 8:1-3
Saturday	20 Sep	Sts Andrew Kim Tae-gon ++, martyrs	1 Timothy 6:13-16	Luke 8:4-15
Sunday	21 Sep	25 TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C — <i>Scripture Readings are listed below.</i>		

FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

- ✦ 1 September to 4 October The Season of Creation <https://seasonofcreation.org/resources/>
- ✦ Weekend, 13–14 September Blessing of those celebrating September Wedding Anniversaries and Birthdays
- ✦ Weekend, 20-21 September Bishop's Annual Appeal – special collection at both Masses
- ✦ Sunday-Wednesday, 21 to 24 September – Provincial Chapter of the Friars [Andrew and Ken in Sydney]
- ✦ Friday, 26 September Last day of School Term III
- ✦ Thursday, 2 October 19:15 Baptism Preparation Meeting for October Baptisms
- ✦ Friday, 3 October 09:30 Anointing of the Sick during Mass
- ✦ Saturday, 4 October 09:30 MASS FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI
- ✦ Monday, 6 October 09:30 BLESSING OF ANIMALS

RECIPE: JUICY CROCKPOT CORN ON THE COB

Cooking corn on the cob in a crockpot is one of the easiest and most flavourful ways to prepare it. It saves stovetop space and makes the corn incredibly juicy while allowing it to soak up all the seasonings you add. This method is perfect for family dinners, parties, or when you need to cook a large batch effortlessly. Start by cleaning and husking 6–8 fresh corn cobs. Arrange them in the crockpot, stacking neatly so they cook evenly. In a small bowl, melt ½ cup of butter and mix in your favourite spices — garlic powder, paprika, salt, pepper, and even a little chili powder for a kick. Pour the butter mixture evenly over the corn, then add ½ cup of water or broth to keep it moist while cooking. Cover the crockpot and cook on high for 2–3 hours or low for 4–5 hours. Halfway through, rotate the corn so every piece gets coated with the buttery seasoning. Avoid lifting the lid too often, as it slows down cooking and affects how well the flavours are absorbed. When done, carefully remove the corn with tongs and place it on a serving platter. Add extra melted butter or sprinkle fresh herbs like parsley or cilantro on top before serving. The result is tender, flavourful corn that everyone will love — a guaranteed hit at any meal!

BLESSING OF ANIMALS, MONDAY, 6 OCTOBER AT 09:30.

As usual, the Blessing of Animals will take place on the **Monday** of the long weekend, **6 October at 09:30**. The blessing takes place in the courtyard next to the church. All animals under 800kg and their carers/handlers are welcome, though please keep the larger pythons on a tight leash. The **feast of St Francis of Assisi** is on **Saturday, 4 October**, with a special **Mass at 09:30 on Saturday, 4 October** — animals are welcome at that Mass.

Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan; it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

THIS Sunday's Readings — on website	NEXT Sunday's Readings — on website	SUNDAY
THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS	25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ♦ YEAR C	MASS TIMES
1 st Reading Numbers 21:4-9	1 st Reading Amos 8:4-7	Saturday 17:30
2 nd Reading Philippians 2:6-11	2 nd Reading 1 Timothy 2:1-8	Sunday 08:00
Gospel John 3:13-17	Gospel Luke 16:1-13	Saturday Mass is recorded.
Parish of St Michael – Thirroul <i>One of the four Northern Illawarra Parishes</i> <i>Moving forward as a Parish Family</i> 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	www.thirroulcatholic.org.au 325 Lawrence Hargrave Drive PO Box 44 • Thirroul 2515 4268 1910 thirroul@dow.org.au Parish School of St Michael James Bryce Principal 4267 2560	THIS WEEK'S LITURGIES Monday Tuesday 17:30 Wednesday 09:00 Thursday 09:00 Friday 09:30 <i>Anointing of the Sick 1st Friday</i>