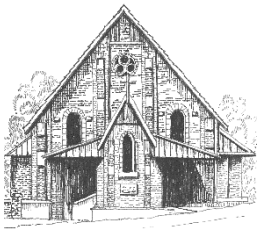

# Welcome to the Parish of Saint Michael Thirroul

**Parish Bulletin**
**14 / 15 March 2026**
**Fourth Sunday of Lent • Year A**
**Project Compassion – Week Four**

## This Week's Readings

## *The Simple Eye*

Most spiritualities say something like the following, and Ignatian Spirituality is no different: see more deeply. Feel more deeply. Pay attention to the quiet movements inside yourself and you will know more about what is outside you. Deepen yourself and you will learn to see.

Sometimes we are told "quit spending time on yourself and go get some work done" or "go help someone." But you can't see very well through a window if it is dirty, or if you have furniture piled up in front of it. In Lent we do housekeeping so that we can see clearly, without our usual prejudices pulled in front of the windows of our soul.

Take the Pharisees in today's Gospel. They could not see clearly. When they asked the blind man how his sight had been restored, the man replied simply, "He put mud on my eyes, I washed it off, and now I can see." WHAT!?!? screamed the Pharisees. THAT MAN "CANNOT BE FROM GOD BECAUSE HE DOES NOT KEEP THE SABBATH"!! ***He is therefore a sinner! He could not have cured you.*** (With these words, one high piece of furniture is shoved in front of the window).

These Pharisees run and get the man's parents, who will surely know what really happened. But the parents say an clever, mischievous, slightly condescending or teasing reply: "He is a grown man, he can speak for himself."

Back to the blind man. He explains, "It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man [Jesus] were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." (Piece of furniture number two will now rumble in front of the window of their eyes, as follows: WHAT??!! YOU ARE LECTURING US ABOUT PEOPLE OF GOD, AND YOU ARE STEEPED IN SIN FROM YOUR VERY BIRTH!!??!! GET OUT OF HERE!!

The man born blind sees well. The Pharisees are the ones who refuse to see. If they were physically blind this would be understandable. But the truth is hidden by their own need to control others, their love of being in charge. What if they had looked the man through eyes unclouded by sin? They could have beheld a miracle, with wonder and awe.

Much later in time, Saint Ignatius called this way of seeing "the simple eye." It is what we are trying to move toward during Lent.

Let us admit that we cannot see. Then pray to have our eyes opened. To have the simple eye is see with the eyes of faith. It is to let the Holy Spirit have a peaceful home within us and to help us clean house. Jesus gives the man this deeper sight. He says, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The blind man says yes. He is simply no longer blind.

The same question faces each of us as we get ready for Holy Week. "Do you believe in the Son of Man" (the name Jesus used for himself)? Can you live in the light of the Lord? Can you let the Lord be your Shepherd? You can if you let go of your own prejudices and opinions, hard as that may be.

Let's ask Jesus to give us the simple eye.

Another riveting narrative from John's gospel. More than once, Jesus was condemned for healing on the Sabbath. In this reading, one such incident is described at length, in a way that calls to mind words of this gospel's Prologue: 'The Word was the true light, and his own people did not accept him'. The courageous refusal of the 'man born blind' to be intimidated by the authorities of the synagogue, when even his family refuse to stand by him, has given us one of the most memorable incidents in the gospels. Like the story of the Samaritan woman, this incident is recounted in a manner that gives expression to a profound meditation upon the saving work of Christ.

The Saviour himself intones the theme of this meditation: 'I am the light of the world'. The powerful symbolism of light often finds expression in the Scriptures. It is often appealed to in the Psalms, the confession of faith of the ordinary people in old Israel – God's Word is 'a light on the path' of life (Psalm 119); God is Israel's 'light and salvation' (Psalm 27). The contrast between light and darkness is often appealed to in the New Testament, as in today's reading from Ephesians.

The tragedy of spiritual blindness is vividly exemplified in the refusal of the Pharisees to be open to what was confronting them in the signs given through the ministry of Jesus – as their empty reasoning is made to look foolish by the straightforward honesty of the man they are trying to intimidate. 'You can be his disciple', they declare in their frustration, 'We are disciples of Moses'. And, as he responds to their arguments, pointing out that his miraculous healing shows that Jesus is surely 'a prophet' and that he must have 'come from God', the man who was born blind is progressively 'enlightened' – to be finally welcomed by Jesus into the company of his disciples, making his confession, 'Lord, I believe you are the Son of Man' – the very title that was to seal the fate of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. As he urges the Ephesians to a life of authentic discipleship, Paul contrasts a life of 'goodness, right living and truth' with the 'shameful' things done in the dark. The story of the 'man born blind' and his courage

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in the face of great odds reminds a community with deep roots in old Israel of the challenge of genuine discipleship. It is now well recognised that the meditation upon Christian faith and life that gave us John's gospel was made against the background of the Church's sacramental life. It may well be that today's narrative – with its progressive reference to anointing, washing and confession of faith – is influenced by the baptismal practice of the community. In the early centuries, the instruction of the catechumens concerning the Church's sacramental life was an 'enlightenment'. It is interesting to note, at a time when the catechumenate is assuming an increasing importance in the life of the Church, that these instructions made frequent use of John's gospel.

## Questions About This Sunday's Scripture Readings

### First Reading 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

- "The Lord does not see as the human sees; the human looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Explain how this applies to the choice of David, who was the youngest and least likely son, as king.
- Does the right grace come along with the call? What in this reading tells you that? When you feel you have been summoned to perform some task for God, what do you do? Assume that God will give you what you need to get the job done? Or back down at the thought of obstacles?

### Second Reading Ephesians 5:8-14

- Define personal and national "darkness" as it exists in the world today. St Paul says that you are light. If you could, what darkness in the world would you dispel? Is there some way you could do this on a small scale where you are right now?
- Is the Church present in every dark place that you think Christ would be if he were physically present in the world today? In which of those dark places can you find your parish working to bring light?

### Gospel John 9:1-41

- In the beginning of the Gospel, the blind man was simply a man on the street. By the end of the Gospel he was thrown out of the synagogue for defending Jesus. What changed him into a disciple? Which of these titles fits you: passer-by; believer; confessor; challenger; or disciple?
- Below, Pope Francis tracks the blind man's path from spiritual blindness to light. Can you relate to your own spiritual blindness slowly turning to sight in your life? Is it enough to receive the light? What are you supposed to do with it?

> The Gospel (cf. John 9:1-41) recounts the episode of the man blind from birth to whom Jesus gives sight. He operates illumination on two levels: a physical level and a spiritual level: the blind person first receives the sight of the eyes and then is led to faith in the "Son of Man" (cf. John 9:35), that is, in Jesus. It is all a journey. …
>
> He takes a route that leads him to gradually discover the identity of the One who opened his eyes and to confess his faith in him. At first, he considers him a prophet (cf. John 9:17); then he recognizes him as one who comes from God (cf. John 9:33); finally, he welcomes him as the Messiah and prostrates himself before him (cf. John 9:36-38). …
>
> He is no longer a beggar marginalized by the community; he is no longer a slave to blindness and prejudice. His path of enlightenment is a metaphor for the path of liberation from sin to which we are called. …
>
> The healed blind man, who now sees both with the eyes of the body and with those of the soul, is the image of every baptized person. … But it is not enough to receive the light, one must become light. Each one of us is called to receive the divine light and manifest it with our whole life.
>
> – Pope Francis, *Angelus 4th Sunday of Lent*, 22 March 2020

## First Lenten Sermon: Peace Comes from the Courage to be Small

On 6 March, Friar Roberto Pasolini, the Preacher of the Papal Household, gave the first of his Lenten Sermons, which will take place every Friday until 27 March in the Paul VI Audience Hall, with Pope Leo XIV present. The series is centred around the theme: "*If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Conversion to the Gospel according to Saint Francis.*"

This first meditation's topic was "*Conversion: Following the Lord Jesus on the Path of Humility.*" The Capuchin friar recounted how "in the days that are once again marked by pain and violence, to speak of smallness might seem to be an abstract discourse, almost a spiritual luxury. In reality, it is a practical responsibility, linked to the destiny of the world." Peace, he explained, is not only born from political agreements or diplomatic or military strategies, but from men and women who find the courage to be small. This happens when people step back, renounce violence in all its forms, refuse to give in to the temptation of revenge and dominance, and choose dialogue even when circumstances seem to deny its possibility.

Friar Pasolini called it "a demanding and daily task," one that concerns everyone who sees themselves as children of God and knows that "this conversion of the heart" is their responsibility. Introducing his reflection—related to the life of St. Francis—Friar Pasolini described him as a "man traversed by the fire of the Gospel, capable of rekindling in each of us the longing for a new life in the Spirit." But what exactly does "conversion" mean? This is a question we must ask because "if we get the starting point wrong, we risk building on fragile foundations," he said. "Evangelical conversion," the preacher said, "is first and foremost God's initiative, in which a person is called to participate in full freedom." It happens "in the most intimate point of our nature, where the image of God impressed upon us waits to be reawakened." St Francis speaks of "doing penance" when he enters the path of conversion. He refers to a "change of sensitivity," a way of seeing others with mercy and through the light of the Gospel, sweeping away "the bitterness of a life filled with many things but still empty of its essential value." Doing

penance marks the beginning of a fight to defend the "new taste of things," while faithfully nourishing the seed that God has placed in each person's heart. Conversion is no longer the attempt to straighten life out with one's own strength, but a response to a grace that has redefined the parameters of our way of perceiving, judging, and desiring.

Conversion is connected to "the depth of the furrow that sin has etched in us," the Capuchin friar explained, but sin is a word that today seems to have disappeared. "In the collective consciousness – and sometimes even in the life of the Church – everything is explained as fragility, wound, limitation, conditioning. When sin is still mentioned, it is often reduced to a small mistake or weakness. If every sin becomes just a symptom," he pointed out, we risk losing something essential: "the greatness of human freedom and its responsibility." If there is no longer the possibility of true evil, we cannot believe in the possibility of true good. If sin disappears, holiness too becomes an abstract and incomprehensible destiny.

In sin, a person recognizes that "his or her freedom is real, and that with it he/she can build or destroy: himself, herself, others, the world." A "deep healing" is therefore necessary to recover a relationship with God—repeatedly choosing to live in love and freedom, even enduring hardships that are not "sterile" but are expressions of "fidelity of those who have already glimpsed the meaning and value of what they are living".

St Francis is seen as the saint of poverty. But it is also impossible to separate him from humility. Both spring from the mystery of the Incarnation. They are the very traits of God that humanity is invited to live in order to resemble God. "Humility," Friar Pasolini highlighted, "is a path that every baptized person is called to follow if they want to fully embrace the grace of life in Christ." It is "a way of inhabiting the world and relationships" to reduce the "the inflated image we have of ourselves" and to return to truth. He called it "a gift of the Spirit even before it is an ascetic exercise."

However, humility does not impoverish a person. Rather, it returns persons to themselves. It does not lessen a person, but restores them to their true greatness. For this reason, it is so closely linked to conversion. Original sin arises precisely from a rejection of humility: from not wanting to accept ourselves as human beings, finite and dependent on God. Conversion, then, must also be understood as a return to humility.

The greatness of humanity, the preacher explained, comes through one's smallness. The saint of Assisi—by embracing the smallest—understood that this is "the privileged place" chosen by the Lord. "In them that the 'power' spoken of in the Gospel is manifested, that of becoming children of God." A child who is not ashamed to ask the Father for things experiences "a particular strength: the ability to inspire goodness in others. The little ones, with their fragility, awaken mercy," Friar Pasolini continued, "which is perhaps the most precious energy in the world." It is a radical openness that requires the hospitality of the other; "becoming small is an essential dimension of being Christians."

When we choose to become—not remain—small because we have recognized God's smallness and have felt welcomed and loved by God, then this choice is not a form of regression or renunciation. It is the face of the new person that Baptism restores to us.

The final step is to recognize that conversion never ends. We remain sinners, always asking to be sanctified by the Spirit. "To convert means to continually begin again this movement of the heart, through which our poverty opens itself to God's grace," even in our reluctance to diminish our self-image, by doing ongoing inner work that places us "at service, freely and concretely." St Paul understood that "weakness is not a phase to be overcome, but the very form of his life in Christ, the form of baptismal life." However, we often think that evangelical smallness is only possible when everything is going well. In reality, the opposite is true. It is precisely in conflicts and difficulties that this littleness is even more necessary. When the instinct is to defend oneself or impose oneself, that is where we see if we have truly learned the Gospel of the cross. Light, in fact, shows its strength not when everything is clear, but when darkness reigns.

The meditation ended with a prayer from St Francis and an invocation to "follow in the footsteps of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

## MANAINI FROM FIJI

Life in rural Fiji has always been a struggle for 44-year-old Manaini, a mother of six and grandmother of two. The family lived from what they grew, but meals were plain and often lacked nutrition. Store food was too expensive. At night, the village was in darkness, leaving children and the elderly unsafe.

Holding back tears, Manaini shared: "The things I worry about the most is my kids' education. The requirements that need to be met are hard for me to achieve with my daily income." **Almost one quarter of Fiji's population live in poverty**, and rates are higher in rural villages. Any extra income can mean the difference between children completing school, being able to buy medicine, or simply managing daily costs. This is what poverty looks like in rural Fiji – every dollar counts.

The nation also faces one of the worst health crises in the Pacific. Diabetes and heart disease are widespread. On average, every eight hours, three people lose a limb to diabetes. Viloki, who works with Caritas Australia's partner FRIEND (Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development), explained: "Fiji has one of the highest rates in the Pacific in terms of non-communicable diseases. That's like 80% of the people here have one or the other form of non-communicable diseases, including diabetes... Every eight hours, there are three amputations."

Thanks to your generosity, Manaini joined training with local partner, FRIEND. She learnt food processing skills to transform leftovers from crops like cassava and taro into flour and increase her weekly income. Her family eats healthier meals, and she saves money. With the women's group she bakes cakes and pies to sell for extra income. Seeds from the program gave her a thriving garden, and she makes her own organic fertiliser and pesticides. Solar lights now brighten the village, helping children to study and walk safely. Manaini is proud of what she has achieved. She said, "The project totally changed the life of my family and even the community.".

**Please donate today**. You can support Project Compassion 2026 through the donation boxes, envelopes or by scanning the QR code. **Or online at**: www.projectcompassion.org.au/donate or **by calling:** 1800 024 413

Thank you for standing with us, as we *Unite Against Poverty this Lent.*

## SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

**Sundays Year A · Weekdays Year II**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Monday** | **16 Mar** | **Monday of the 4th Week of Lent** | Isaiah 65:17-21 | | John 4:43-54 |
| **Tuesday** | **17 Mar** | **St Patrick**, bishop | Jeremiah 1:4-9 | Acts 13:46-49 | Luke 10:1-12,17-20 |
| **Wednesday** | **18 Mar** | **Wednesday of the 4th Week of Lent** | Isaiah 49:8-15 | | John 5:17-30 |
| **Thursday** | **19 Mar** | **St Joseph**, husband of Mary | 2 Samuel 7:4-5,12-16 | Romans 4:13-22 | Luke 2:41-51 |
| **Friday** | **20 Mar** | **Friday of the 4th Week of Lent** | Wisdom 2:1,12-22 | | John 7:1-2,10:25-30 |
| **Saturday** | **21 Mar** | **Saturday of the 4th Week of Lent** | Jeremiah 11:18-20 | | John 7:40-52 |
| **Sunday** | **22 Mar** | **THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT · YEAR A** – *Scripture Readings are listed below* | | | |

## FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

- **Saturday, 14 March** — **18:30** **Dinner at Club Thirroul with parishioners after 17:30 Mass**
- **Weekend, 14/15 March** — **2nd Scrutiny of Catechumens preparing for Baptism**
- **Weekend, 21/22 March** — **3rd Scrutiny of Catechumens and presentation of the Our Father**
- **Tuesday, 24 March** — **19:30** **Reconciliation Rite II for Lent**
- **Thursday, 26 March** — **19:15** **Baptism Preparation Meeting for Easter Infant Baptisms**
- **Weekend, 27/28/29 March** — **Thirroul Seaside & Arts Festival:** Art Show; Kite Day; Festival in the Park
- **Weekend, 28/29 March** — **Palms needed for Passion (Palm) Sunday [drop them in]**

## LAETARE (REJOICING SUNDAY) – ROSE-COLOURED

***Laetare*** is Latin and it means **rejoice** – it was the first word of the "Entrance Antiphon" for Mass on the 4th Sunday of Lent. The Church expresses hope and joy in the midst of our Lenten fasts and penances – we are just over halfway through Lent. The use of the colour "rose" (or pink) indicates a glimpse of the joy that awaits us at Easter, just before we enter into the sombre days of Passiontide. ***Laetare* Sunday** – another of our rich, catholic traditions … Rejoice and enjoy!

## URGENT NEED FOR FOSTER CARERS

Could you open your heart and home to a child in need? There is an urgent need for foster carers in our community. For over 30 years, CatholicCare has supported carers to provide vulnerable children with a loving, safe home and a brighter future. Foster carers receive comprehensive training, regular case worker support, and a carer allowance for the child's day-to-day needs. If you've ever considered fostering, now is the time. Call: **1800 967 894**. Email: fosteringfutures@catholiccare.dow.org.au We will support you every step of the way.

## RAYMOND'S MARS BAR SLICE – *FOR THE SUNDAYS OF LENT!*

4 x 47g-60g Mars Bars (chopped); 3–4 Snickers Bars (chopped, plus extra for topping); 125g unsalted butter; 1 tbsp Golden Syrup (optional, for extra chew); 3–4 cups Rice Bubbles (Rice Krispies); ½ cup Peanuts (salted or unsalted, optional); 200g milk chocolate (for topping).

Line a 19cm x 29cm or 20cm square baking tin with baking paper. In a saucepan over **low** heat, melt the chopped Mars Bars, Snickers, butter, and golden syrup, stirring constantly until smooth. Remove from heat and stir in the Rice Bubbles and peanuts until well combined. Press the mixture firmly into the pan using the back of a spoon. Refrigerate for 15–20 minutes. Melt the milk chocolate (you can add a small knob of butter or copha for easier slicing) and spread over the base. Top with extra chopped Snickers if desired, and refrigerate for 1–2 hours until firm. Cut into bars using a hot knife to prevent cracking.

**PLEASE BRING IN … ONE NON-PERISHABLE ITEM PER FAMILY EACH WEEK**
**TO HELP THE NEEDY IN THE LOCAL ILLAWARRA – FOOD ITEMS ARE ALWAYS NEEDED**

## ELDER ABUSE – EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Elder abuse is any act that causes harm or distress to an older person: ⓘ and support 1800 ELDERHelp [1800 353 374]

**THIS Sunday's Readings** – *on website*

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT ♦ YEAR A**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Reading | 1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13 |
| 2nd Reading | Ephesians 5:8-14 |
| Gospel | John 9:1-41 |

**NEXT Sunday's Readings** – *on website*

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT ♦ YEAR A**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Reading | Ezekiel 37:12-14 |
| 2nd Reading | Romans 8:8-11 |
| Gospel | John 11:1-45 |

**SUNDAY MASS TIMES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Saturday | 17:30 |
| Sunday | 08:00 |

Masses NOT recorded at present.


**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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**James Bryce** Principal ☎ **4267 2560**


**THIS WEEK'S LITURGIES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Monday | ——— |
| Tuesday | 17:30 |
| Wednesday | 09:00 |
| Thursday | 09:00 |
| Friday | 09:30 |

*Anointing of the Sick 1st Friday*