



## Welcome to the Parish of Saint Michael Thirroul



PARISH BULLETIN  
21 / 22 MARCH 2026  
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT • YEAR A

PROJECT COMPASSION – WEEK FIVE

### THIS WEEK'S READINGS

### *Love and Death*

Very soon Holy Week will be here. Let us be frank. Jesus will go from the status of great healer and holy man to that of a common criminal who is humiliated and put to death.

What could he be thinking as he goes toward such a fate? What was Jesus' attitude toward death and Good Friday? Was he unmoved by such a prospect?

This Sunday gives us a clue.

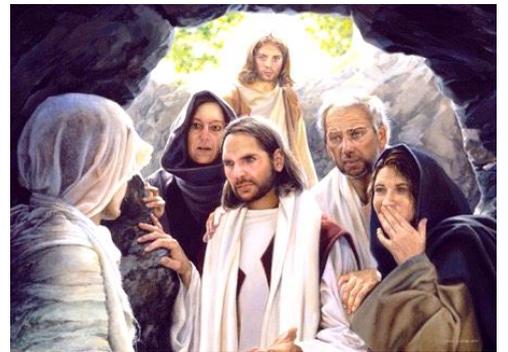
Human love gets its life from God's love. Even life itself gets its being from God's love.

It seems that he gives a real life illustration. Even though our Gospel reading says, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," yet oddly he had remained out of town during the days of his friend's illness and death. He could have gone but delayed instead. When he finally makes the trip, Martha says, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Hard words. She sends for her sister Mary who says, "Where were you?"

As the psalm puts it, God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

When Jesus sees the tears of Mary and the friends who surrounded her, he "becomes disturbed and deeply troubled." This is a picture of Jesus we do not ordinarily see. The famous words that follow are unlike any others in the Gospels: "And Jesus wept."

Jesus was not indifferent toward death or toward his loved ones, not at all. But his tears make Mary and Martha's question still more poignant. "You love us and you loved him; why did you not come to us when he was still alive, when you could have saved him?" I think many of us are tempted to ask God that same question when a loved one dies.



Look back at the beginning of Sunday's Gospel to find the answer. Jesus told the disciples, "this illness of my friend is not going to end in death." What? It isn't? Lazarus is dead!

And then we see Jesus' re-arrangement of human values. "This is happening for the Glory of God," he tells them.

He is saying that he knows this is hard for them to comprehend so he has to show them in the flesh that even sorrow and death are immersed in God's always gentle love. They are like flowers sprouting out of an "earth" which is love. The glorious love of God undergirds everything else. Every other love gets its growth from God's love. Even life gets its life from God's love.

So, Jesus calls out in a loud voice, calls to the love where Lazarus' soul is resting even in the midst of death and decay. He calls to God's pregnant love. From that womb the life of Lazarus was born and now is born again. Out of the tomb he walks.

And so, Jesus is right. Lazarus' illness does not lead to final death. We usually have it backwards. We always think of love as an emotion that springs from the fact that we are alive. But the opposite is true. Life is a condition that springs from the fact that we are rooted in God's love. This love is the real earth and real ground. When life ends, we are drawn back into love's rich loam.

Jesus cast his voice into this fertile ground when he said, "Lazarus, come out!" And love, stronger than life or death, gladly obeyed, letting earthly life be there again.

The cross is referred to in advance here. Jesus' own death and resurrection are foretold. Very soon Jesus will have to trust in his own words, that his suffering "will not end in death," death of his oneness with the Father. "It would be happening for the Glory of God."

Trust love. Life has its roots there.

Our Lenten journey is drawing to a close; today's readings remind us of what lies ahead, with Ezekiel's vision of new life for a valley of bones and Paul's promise that the Spirit that will 'give life to our mortal bodies'. The gospel reading from John tells the story of the raising of Lazarus. This sequence – carefully crafted as a prelude to the passion narrative – prepares us for what is to come; Jesus confronts death itself and emerges victorious.

As the narrative opens, the Lord's coming death is called to mind, Mary the sister of Lazarus is identified as the one who, at this time, 'anoints the Lord with ointment' – for 'the day of his burial' (cf. John 12:7). The illness of Lazarus 'will not end in death, but in God's glory' and the glory of the Son of God. The death of Jesus, if he 'goes to Judaea' is a real and terrifying prospect for his disciples – leading Thomas to exclaim, 'Let us go too, and die with him'. The narrative highlights the 'friendship' of Jesus with the family of Bethany: soon to be caught up in the drama of the Saviour's rejection by the nation's leaders. Such a detail, we know, has significance in the meditative style of John's gospel. 'I call you friends, not servants' (John 15:15), Jesus will tell his disciples. And the repeated reference

✠✠ to ‘the beloved disciple’ in the narrative that follows brings out in graphic detail the implications of these words – an encouragement for all who follow the way of discipleship.

We are left in no doubt that Jesus triumphs over death in all its horror. The mortal remains of Lazarus have been in the tomb for ‘four days’: ‘He will smell’, his sister warns. Numerous mourners have now assembled, not all of them well disposed towards Jesus – an intimation of what is soon to follow. ‘Could he not have prevented this man’s death’, some of them ask.

This confrontation with death, Jesus makes clear, is a sign. As he sets out for Bethany, after the death of Lazarus, he declares, ‘I am glad for your sake, because now you will believe’. And although he knows that the Father ‘always hears him’, he addresses the Father publicly, ‘for the sake of those who stand around, so that they may believe that it was you who sent me’ – the claim of his divine mission that is many times repeated in the course of John’s gospel.

In the exchanges that take place between Jesus and the sisters of Lazarus, he leads them towards the fullness of faith that will unite them with him in his final victory over death – his Paschal Mystery. Like his other disciples, Martha has already found faith in Jesus as ‘the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world’; now she is led to recognise the full implications of this coming, as she affirms her faith in the truth of Jesus’ words, ‘I AM the resurrection and the life’ – the very source of ‘eternal life’. ‘Lazarus, here! Come out’: the victory is complete and absolute. ‘Unbind him, let him go free’: words of promise for all who will believe in his coming triumph.

Today’s readings take us to the depths of our human need. A fortnight ago we saw Jesus offering himself to the woman at the well to slake the deep thirst in her soul for love. Last week we saw Jesus offering himself to the blind man who desperately longed to see. Today’s readings confront us with death, not primarily our physical death, but the death we experience in our soul and the despair that overwhelms us when we have no hope, no future, no energy for life.

It is easy to see Lazarus as a symbol for us all. How often we, too, feel that we are in a tomb: cut off from life – dark, hopeless, dead; disappointed in a relationship that has lost its spark; sucked into the quicksand of sin and unable to find any solid ground or to struggle free; entombed in a cold dark place with a huge boulder blocking out the light – a boulder too heavy for us to move aside by our own power. Today’s Gospel is a powerful reminder that God does not want things to be like this. God wants us to live and to live to the full. We see Jesus weeping, and he is weeping for us and for those we love. The climax comes when the voice of the Son of God pierces through the darkness: ‘Lazarus, here! Come forth!’ followed closely by the authoritative command: ‘Unbind him! Let him go free!’

We are invited to think of the darkness and pain of our world and to remember that the Heart of Jesus wants to free everyone from our many and varied tombs. God will redeem us from *all* the evils which entomb us. We who know that Jesus weeps for us and keeps calling us into the light want others to know this as well. Jesus embraces Lazarus. He longs to embrace us.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SUNDAY’S SCRIPTURE READINGS

### First Reading Ezekiel 37:12-14

✠ God says to the Israelites, “I will bring you up from your graves. ... I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.” Compare these two gifts that God promised, life on earth and God’s spirit, then rate them on a scale of one to ten. Are these promises made to you also?

✠ Would your actions change if you really believed you had access to the Holy Spirit at all times? How?

### Second Reading Romans 8:8-11

✠ Hans Urs von Balthasar said that if you are guided by the Spirit rather than by the flesh “the germ of divine, eternal life already lives in you with this Spirit and you hold a ‘down-payment,’ as it were, a ticket to God’s life.” Discuss.

✠ According to St Paul, “those of you who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Do you think he meant, “those of you who are led by the temptations of the flesh cannot please God”? Is there a difference?

### Gospel John 11:1-45

✠ How do all the elements in the story of the raising of Lazarus point to Jesus’ words, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live”? Compare Jesus’ statement, “Untie him and let him go,” with Moses’ statement to the Pharaoh, “Let my people go.”

✠ How does Pope Francis in this Angeles talk on the raising of Lazarus describe the beginning of our resurrection?

Jesus calls to us as he called to Lazarus in his tomb: “Come forth!” This call is addressed to every human person because we are all marked by death. Christ is not resigned to the sepulchres that we have constructed with our choices of evil and death, with our mistakes, our sins. [Jesus] invites us, almost orders us, to come out of the tombs into which our sins have plunged us. This is where our resurrection begins: when we decide to obey the command of Jesus to come into the light, to life; when the masks fall from our faces ... and we rediscover the courage of our original faces, created in the image and likeness of God.

[ ... the raising of Lazarus shows us that] there is no limit to the divine mercy, which is offered to everyone. ... The Lord is always ready to roll away the tombstone of our sins, which separate us from him, the light of the living.]

– Pope Francis, *Angelus 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent*, 6 April 2014

## SECOND LENTEN SERMON: GOING FURTHER – FREEDOM IN THE SPIRIT

In his second meditation for Lent 2025 (13 March), Fr Roberto Pasolini OFM Cap, the Preacher of the Papal Household, reflects on a number of lesser-known aspects of Jesus' public ministry, which manifest an attitude that aims at obtaining "a profound freedom both for ourselves and for those before whom we place ourselves in a spirit of service."

At the beginning of his ministry, Fr Pasolini noted, Jesus did not immediately embrace the acclaim and the enthusiasm shown him by the crowds. "Jesus did not give in to the temptation to accept our facile approval straight away," he said, but instead remained somewhat reserved, in the hopes of facilitating "the development of authentic trust."

Turning then to the episode of the Canaanite woman who asked Jesus to heal her daughter, who was possessed by an unclean spirit, Fr Pasolini acknowledged that Jesus' initial response seemed insensitive, even disappointing.

Rather than withdrawing at Jesus' apparently dismissive comments, the woman persists, "with great dignity," in repeating her request. The Lord sees in her responses "a gigantic manifestation of that faith capable of obtaining salvation and healing.

Finally, in the account of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus demonstrates "His ability to distance himself from the crowds."

Father Pasolini emphasized that the people were impressed by the miracle, more because they were filled than because they understood the full import of the miracle. The disciples, themselves disappointed, left Jesus to cross the Sea of Galilee, but encountered a violent storm. "What happens reflects their inner turmoil and agitation," Fr Pasolini said. "The attempt to distance themselves from Jesus has thrown them into a much worse storm."

Jesus, however, goes out to meet them, walking on the water; like the disciples, we need "to recover the desire for communion with him, so that his light can illuminate our darkness once more."

Concluding his reflection, Fr Pasolini said, "Our desire to remain anchored in Christ... cannot but confront us with our ability to live the Gospel, even in its less obvious and immediate manifestations."

These include allowing relationships to mature by giving them time to mature; having the strength to disappoint other people's expectation, "to ensure that encounters may be authentic and free"; and fully respecting our own freedom and that of others, by never demanding anything from anyone. "Truth and love," he concluded, "have no need of imposing themselves, but know how to wait, allowing things to mature until they develop into free and full adherence."

This, he said, "is how God has saved and continues to save the world in which we live."

## AHMAD FROM GAZA

When war intensified in Gaza in late 2023, Ahmad, a Caritas Jerusalem employee in their Media and Communications team, was forced to flee his home in northern Gaza. Like thousands of families, his family carried almost nothing as they sought safety in Khan Younis. Two months later, disaster struck again when the house where they were sheltering was bombed at night. Ahmad was buried under rubble, his eardrum ruptured. His brother survived with devastating injuries, including the loss of a leg.

For two months Ahmad stayed with his brother in an overwhelmed hospital with few doctors and scarce supplies. His family was displaced several more times, sometimes living in tents, sometimes in borrowed homes, often leaving behind the few belongings they had managed to gather.

Despite personal suffering, Ahmad continued his role with Caritas Jerusalem, helping to support families in need.

"Thank God we work at Caritas, allowing us to serve people in the most challenging conditions despite the lack of medicine," he explains.



programs, but through the courage and resilience of its frontline staff.

Together, we can *Unite Against Poverty this Lent* by donating to Project Compassion, helping people in Gaza and other vulnerable regions to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

**Please donate today.** You can support Project Compassion 2026 through the donation boxes, envelopes or by scanning the QR code. Thank you for standing with us, as we *Unite Against Poverty this Lent*.



**Fifth Sunday of Lent**  
21–22 March 2026

Since October 2023, Caritas Jerusalem staff in Gaza have endured displacement, personal loss, and danger alongside the communities they serve. Despite unimaginable challenges, they remain committed to providing lifesaving support, standing in solidarity with families enduring this conflict.



**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](http://www.projectcompassion.org.au/donate)

**Or by calling:** 1800 024 413

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

"I hope this ordeal ends so we can go back to rebuild Gaza, our children's future, our country, and our organisation."

Ahmad's story is a reminder that Caritas' mission of accompaniment is lived not only through its

## SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

Sundays Year A • Weekdays Year II

Monday	23 Mar	Monday of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Week of Lent	Daniel 13:1-9,15-17,19-30	John 8:1-11
Tuesday	24 Mar	Tuesday of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Week of Lent	Numbers 21:4-9	John 8:21-30
Wednesday	25 Mar	<b>The Annunciation of the Lord</b>	Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10	Hebrews 10:4-10 Luke 1:26-38
Thursday	26 Mar	Thursday of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Week of Lent	Genesis 17:3-9	John 8:51-59
Friday	27 Mar	Friday of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Week of Lent	Jeremiah 20:10-13	John 10:31-42
Saturday	28 Mar	Saturday of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Week of Lent	Ezekiel 37:21-28	John 11:45-56
Sunday	29 Mar	<b>PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD • YEAR A</b> – <i>Scripture Readings are listed below</i>		

## FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

✦ Weekend, 21/22 March	3 <sup>rd</sup> 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]
✦ Tuesday, 31 March	19:00 Chrism Mass at St Francis Xavier Cathedral
✦ Wednesday, 1 April	19:30 Spirituality on the Sofa – “Peace in the Holy Land”
✦ Holy Thursday, 2 April	19:30 Mass of the Lord’s Supper – 21:50 Night Prayer of the Church
✦ Good Friday, 3 April	10:30 Way of the Cross
	15:00 Celebration of the Lord’s Passion
✦ Easter Vigil, Sat, 4 April	19:00 Easter Vigil with three adult Baptisms
✦ Easter Sunday, 5 April	08:00 Mass of the Resurrection

## RAYMOND’S SUPER SEED AND CINNAMON NO-BAKE MUESLI BARS

½ cup unprocessed honey; 150g tahini OR black tahini; 100g butter, chopped; 1½ tsp ground cinnamon; 1½ cups rolled oats; ½ cup sunflower seeds; ½ cup flaxseeds; ½ cup pumpkin seeds, plus extra, to garnish; ⅓ cup toasted almonds; ⅔ cup desiccated coconut; ½ cup sesame seeds; ½ cup chia seeds; ⅓ cup cocoa nibs, plus extra, to garnish.

Line a 15 x 30cm slice tin with baking paper. Put honey, tahini, butter and cinnamon in a small saucepan. Stir over low heat, until melted. Put oats, sunflower seeds, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds and almonds in a blender and pulse until combined but still slightly chunky. Pour into a bowl and add coconut, sesame seeds, chia seeds and cocoa nibs. Add warm tahini mixture and, using your hands, mix thoroughly until well combined. Press mixture firmly and evenly into the tin – it should be about 1.5cm thick. Use the back of a wet spoon to smooth the top and push extra pumpkin seeds and cocoa nibs into the top, to garnish. Put in freezer for about 2 hours until firm. Once set, cut into slices about 3 x 6cm. Store in an airtight container in the freezer. The slices will keep for up to 2 months.

**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

We all have the right to feel safe and be treated with dignity and respect, but this isn’t the reality for some older Australians. Elder abuse is any act that causes harm or distress to an older person. Elder abuse is any act that causes harm to an older person. It can be an intentional act that is physical, psychological, financial, verbal, or neglect. Signs of elder abuse can include: preventing access to family or friends; no longer receiving services needed to live; being prevented from spending or accessing money. If you suspect or have experienced elder abuse you can make a report by phone or online. ☎ 1800 353 374.

### THIS Sunday’s Readings – on website

#### FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT ♦ YEAR A

1 <sup>st</sup> Reading	Ezekiel 37:12-14
2 <sup>nd</sup> Reading	Romans 8:8-11
Gospel	John 11:1-45

### NEXT Sunday’s Readings – on website

#### PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD’S PASSION ♦ YEAR A

1 <sup>st</sup> Reading	Isaiah 50:4-7
2 <sup>nd</sup> Reading	Philippians 2:6-11
Gospel	Matthew 26:14–27:66

### 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

🌐 [www.thirroulcatholic.org.au](http://www.thirroulcatholic.org.au)

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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 1<sup>st</sup> Friday</i>	