

Reflection - Gaudete (Rejoice)

A man named John was sent from God. (Jn 1:6)

Among the many ways we might receive the word of God, we can hear and read it in the context of its presumed original setting. Thus Isaiah's beautiful prophecy of glad tidings to the poor, healing for the broken-hearted, and liberty to captives is the likely promise of restoration of homeland and freedom to an exiled and defeated ancient people.

We could also investigate the word from the point of view of the author and the author's audience. This could be our focus, whether we investigate the historical situation of the Hebrew people and the actual time a prophecy was recorded or look into the matter of this prophecy's presence in the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus reveals his ministry in Nazareth's synagogue. No matter what might have been on Jesus' mind and lips, the use of Isaiah was certainly in the minds and hearts of the early church's articulation of its encounter with Christ.

A third level of our engagement, a third type of focus, is presented by the context of our own lives and times: how we receive and respond. In some ways, it is this focus which is so difficult to hold. For if we allow ourselves to stand unmasked and unguarded before the Word of God, we may be shaken, transformed, and winnowed.

It might well seem safer to read and hear the gospel as if it all applied to something that happened long ago. We are willing to stop at its historical meanings or its dogmatic implications. But that is not the full range of its voice. It is spoken to us here and now.

That is why Jesus' use of the Isaiah passage in the fourth chapter of Luke is particularly suggestive. After he gave the scroll back and all eyes were fixed on him, he said, "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen." It is fulfilled in our own hearing of it. Thus we are the Israelites receiving the promise that God will make "justice and praise spring up before all the nations." We are the Thessalonians "waiting for the coming of the Lord," advised not to stifle the Spirit or despise prophecies. We must in some way make John the Baptist's words our own.

It is rather easy to objectify and externalize God's voice in the world. The poor, the broken-hearted, the blind, the captives were "back then and out there." But Jesus insisted that Isaiah's words were not merely for previous generations. They were for the present. They are for our present.

Even if we accept his words, however, for the present time, we still have a struggle to take them to heart. Perhaps we presume that the broken-hearted of our world must be healed; perhaps we think we ought to work for prison reform; perhaps we imagine ourselves challenged to work for the poor. But this is still not the deepest point of revelation.

For the prophecy is fulfilled in my, in our, very receiving of it addressed to us. It is you and I who are the poor. We are impoverished, not only in the matters of our unfulfilled desires, material or otherwise, but in the more secret matters of our personal vulnerability, our inability to save and heal ourselves, our utter incapacity to manage our way through life and love.

And it is we too who suffer broken hearts in those very lives and loves and labours that mark our existence. There is no woman, man, or child I have ever met who has been exempt from this condition. There are many of us, however, who have repressed or ignored that very fact. The receiving of the prophecy is the recognition of our truth.

So it is with our blindness before grace, to the bounty of life, to the gift of each breath and movement of our hearts. So also with our inability to see the wounds and gifts of those near and far. We have eyes but see not.

We too are captive: prisoners of barred rooms and closed roads, unable to see our way out of failure, our betrayals and egoisms, our fears that paralyse, our attachments that hold us frozen.

So too is this church captive, sinful and poor, broken and held in thrall by its own idols and obsessions. Let us count the ways.

And so also our nations are caught in nationalisms, our tribes trapped in tradition that crushes human life and spirit, our economic and political classes locked in vested interest.

As we hear the word sounded or read it written, let it first "be fulfilled in our hearing of it." O God, be with us, be our Emmanuel. Come to our poor inadequacy. Open our tired eyes. Free us — all of us. Unlock our hearts and minds.

If we do not encounter the Word of God on this most primary and existential level, all the historical reflections of human hermeneutics will not move us. All the high speculative theologies in the world will not transform our hearts.

We must, in effect, take upon ourselves the attitude of the Baptist; one thing I know for sure: "I am not the Messiah."

John Kavanaugh, SJ



St Thomas Aquinas Parish Bulletin

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Parish Priest: Fr Paul Slyney - 4754 1052 Emergency ONLY: 0418 461 316
Assistant Priest: Fr Shinto Francis - 4754 1052 Emergency ONLY: 0415 077 969
Parish Pastoral Council: Email - springwoodppc@gmail.com
Parish Office Hours: Tuesday to Friday 8.30 am - 3.30 pm

Weekend Masses: Saturday Vigil Mass 5.00 pm, Sunday 8.00 am and 9.30 am
Weekday Mass: Tuesday - Saturday 9.30 am

Rosary & Devotions: Tuesday - Saturday 9.00 am
Adoration, Rosary & Chaplet: 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 7.30 - 8.30 pm
Intercession & Adoration: None until further notice

Baptisms: 2nd and 4th Sundays of every month - 10.30am and by appointment
Reconciliation: By request
Weddings: By appointment - restricted numbers

A Poem to sit with

Dialogue

The custom of scapegoats
has perjured, Jesus,
how
can I live with this

I want to blame
others
for what I do

I cannot carry
this burden —

"Leave all" said Jesus
"then come, follow me"

but Jesus,
they will think I'm
crazy

"I know" said he.

J. Janda

THE GOSPEL

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

Lord,
you bring glad tidings to the poor.
Let us rejoice in it.

You heal the broken-hearted.
Heal us too.

You free prisoners from their jails.
Free us from everything that shackles us today.

Loving God,
please come to us,
and send us out — forgiven, healed —
to the poor, the broken-hearted, and the prisoners.

Anne M. Osdieck

Today's Readings: *THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year B* Is 61:1-2, 10-11; 1 Thess 5:16-24; Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Entrance Antiphon: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.

Responsorial Psalm: Lk 1:46-50, 53-54. R. Isa 60:10

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, Alleluia! The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he sent me to bring Good News to the poor. Alleluia!

Communion Antiphon: Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear. Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.

Next Week: 2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16; Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38

We acknowledge the Darug and Gundugarra people, the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to elders both past and present.

**Recently Deceased:** Noreen Russell

Sick: Mary Ellen Schell, Joan Eastwood, Gwen Daly, Angela Brown, Patricia Duffy, Lorna Lyons, Lucinda Goodwin, Leila Baker, Mary Coombs, Luca Hurley, Shirley Anderson, Val Hardy, Thomas Glavas and all Private Intentions.

Due to the strict privacy laws, names of the deceased and sick can only be included in the Bulletin with the express permission of the immediate family. Thank you.

Please Note: *Our sick list will re-start in 2021 with no names. If you wish to have a relative placed on to the sick list in January/February, please advise the Parish office.*

THE WEARING OF MASKS - The Diocese of Parramatta **STRONGLY recommends all worshippers at Masses** in the Diocese to wear a mask to, during and from Mass and other services. We sincerely thank you for your understanding, and for playing your part in keeping our community safe. **We request that as we move to larger Masses, that you please bring along your own Mask to Mass. Thank you.**

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY - This is the time of year when the St Vincent de Paul Society members ask Parishioners to support families in need by providing Christmas Hampers or cash to purchase fruit and vegetable vouchers. Envelopes for your donations are available on the table near Our Lady's statue and conference members will be at weekend Masses until Sunday 13th December. If your family feels able to provide a hampers that would be wonderful. Many thanks for your ongoing support to Vinnies and the people we support.

HOUSES TO HOMES - **St Thomas Aquinas Parish Christmas Appeal.** In Partnership with CatholicCare we are appealing to our Parishioners to help support young mothers and babies through the Houses to Homes program. This amazing service is for pregnant girls or parenting young women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The demand for this program has grown and we would like to be able to present Houses to Homes with practical gifts i.e. nappies, wipes, baby clothes, small children's toys (please not used toys due to COVID-19 regulations), toiletry items for women etc. Please place your items under the Christmas Tree from Advent. Thank you.

IMMACULATA MISSION SCHOOL 2021 - *5 days of Prayer, Adoration, talks, daily Mass, community friendship, recreation, praise and worship.* Featuring talks from Archbishop Julian Porteous, Fr Bob Galea, The Sisters of the Immaculata and Lay Community, Paul Elarde, James Parker plus more! Cost is \$220pp with basic shared accommodation, \$170pp with no accommodation. Includes food, speakers, activities and youth & children's ministry. Register at sistersoftheimmaculata.org.au/ims, phone 0406 372 608 or email immaculatamissionschool@gmail.com.

CHRISTMAS MASS and RECONCILIATION TIMES - Christmas Mass and Reconciliation Times from parishes across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains are available now on the Diocese of Parramatta website www.parracatholic.org, on Catholic Outlook www.catholicoutlook.org and on our Diocesan social media channels. *Merry Christmas from the Diocese of Parramatta!*

BISHOP'S CHRISTMAS APPEAL - This Christmas, let us unite in demonstrating God's unconditional love and keep families together. Your compassionate gifts and prayers will help CatholicCare's Project Elizabeth to support vulnerable families to build strong, loving relationships. You can help give people the emotional and practical support they need to live their lives in love and hope. Please give generously to the Bishop's Christmas Appeal: yourcatholicfoundation.org.au/appeal
Envelopes are available at the back of the church. Please place into the first collection box if you wish to donate. Thank you.

THE EPIPHANY PILGRIMAGE 2021 - The Epiphany Pilgrimage is a not-for-profit event of the Diocese of Parramatta and outreach of the Blue Mountains Deanery. From 2 - 9 January, pilgrims walk through the beautiful Blue Mountains bushland and spend time in prayer and fellowship. Limited overnight registrations are available, and day walkers are welcome. For more information and to register, visit www.epiphanypilgrimage.org. To follow the journey see <https://www.facebook.com/epiphanypilgrimage/>

CATHOLIC OUTLOOK MAGAZINE SUMMER 2020/21 EDITION - Catholic Outlook Summer edition is out now and free to all parishioners. Read about our amazing HSC students, the new bells of St Patrick's Cathedral and how the new Vatican Ambassador who originates from Castle Hill is settling in. Plus what the symbols of Advent really mean. Please collect your copy from the back of the Church.

CHRISTMAS MASS TIMES 2020:

	Springwood	Lawson (OLN)
Christmas Eve, Thurs 24th Dec	5.00pm Children's Mass ** 8.00pm VIGIL	5.00pm Children's Mass 8.00pm VIGIL
Christmas Day, Fri 25th Dec	8.00am, 9.30am	8.00am, 9.00am
Boxing Day, Sat 26 Dec	9.30am Communion Mass/Rosary	No Mass
Sun 27th December	8.00am, 9.30am	8.30am
Tues 29th, Wed 30th Dec	9.30am	5.00pm
Thurs 31st Dec	9.30am	9.00am
Fri 1st January	9.30am	

5pm Children's Mass will be held under the covered area at St Thomas Aquinas Primary School.

Please bring along a chair or picnic blanket to sit on.

Normal safety protocols will be in place. You must sign in upon entry through the gates of the school.

**** 8pm Vigil Mass will be held in the Church.**

Booking for Christmas Masses:

Please either ring or email the Parish as soon as possible to guarantee your place.

Ph: 4754 1052 / E: springwood@parracatholic.org

The 2nd Rite of Reconciliation has been scheduled for Tuesday, 22nd December at 7:00 PM

Fr Paul and Fr Shinto will be present on the evening

The Sacrament of Penance, at this time during Advent, is an ideal way of remaining focused on the beautiful spirituality of Christmas.

St Thomas Aquinas Primary School Community News:

St Thomas Aquinas has a **new school bag** which will be available for purchase at the school office during MAI testing, before school commences in 2021. Only a small stock will be available during this time otherwise all purchases can be made through The School Locker. The cost of the bag is \$50.00. STA is reminding parents to pay via their new QKR! App.

Tel: 4723 3800 / E: StThomas@parra.catholic.edu.au / Principal: Ms Marina Hardy

St Columba's Catholic College Community News:

St Columba's Catholic College has provided online safety webinar information, giving parents and carers the knowledge, skills and tools to support your children so they have safe and positive online experiences. Limited spaces are available! Visit: safety.gov.au/parents/webinars to find more information.

Register now: register.gotowebinar.com/rt/28984335107213971215

Tel: 4754 8900 / E: StColumbas@parra.catholic.edu.au / Principal: Mr Paul Ryan