

Naming the Present Moment

There's a story told about Anna Akhmatova, a Russian poet. During Stalin's purges (or the Great Terror as we know it as), thousands of Russians had been imprisoned and she, along with others, was standing in line outside of a prison, waiting to leave food and letters for loved ones inside. The waiting was doubly frustrating because they didn't know how long they would have to wait to see their loved ones and they didn't know whether their loved ones were still alive or not. In the midst of this, a woman recognised Akhmatova and asked her: "Can you describe this?" "Yes, I can!" Akhmatova replied. Afterward she remembered that, as she said this, something like a smile passed between the other woman and herself. Just to be able to put words to what was happening was somehow freeing, an act of defiance.

To name something properly brings a certain peace of mind. We know this from experience. For instance, when a person we know falls victim to an accident, a crime, or a tragedy of any sort, we have no peace of mind until we know exactly what's happened to him or her. No matter how painful the revelation might be we need to know what's happened. The reality has to be named, described. This isn't a question of morbid curiosity, but of peace of mind. The soul needs to know.

This is indeed the basis of spiritual direction. What good direction does is to help us to name properly what we are undergoing. John of the Cross tells us that the process of spiritual direction works this way: first, there is raw experience itself, the flow of events in our lives that triggers a bevy of thoughts and feelings that both stimulate and perplex the soul. This is like uncut-dough, in need of shaping. Good direction begins with that uncooked material.

Next comes the *objectification* of that experience. The person seeking guidance must in some way give expression to his or her experience, either through words, a drawing, a dance, whatever. But this initial expression is not yet an interpretation. That's the next step.

With the help of the director, the person now searches for a name to properly describe what is happening inside him or her. Using paradigms drawn from scripture and Christian tradition, the one being directed tests various images, like one would try on shoes in a store, looking for a good fit: "Could this be the same thing as Job experienced? Could this be an experience of the 'desert'? Is God testing me as he did Abraham and Sarah?"

When there is a proper fit, peace ensues. The experience has been properly named and we have turned raw circumstance into shaped destiny. To name something properly is an act of faith, an act that manifests transcendence. Raw forces are forever impaling themselves upon us, but we get to determine their meaning. We do that by naming our experiences correctly.

Psychotherapy works in the same way, except that it uses psychological paradigms rather than faith-based ones in its efforts to name what is happening inside of a person.

If this is true, then putting proper names to what is happening inside our experience is the place where we can read the language of God. John of the Cross suggests that God's daily word is written inside of ordinary experience. Our task then is that of examining our own experiences and trying to name what God is saying to us inside these, by using images from scripture and our faith tradition.

For example, today, a group of believers might ask itself: "What time are we living in? Is this the time of the desert? Is this again the time of the Babylonian exile? Are we on the road to Emmaus? Are we meeting Jesus, along with the Syrophenician woman, on the borders of ethnicity, religion, gender? Are we in the upper room, awaiting a new Pentecost, taking seriously Jesus' counsel to not leave the city until we feel ourselves clothed with power?"

And, given our experience of being Christian within a post-ecclesial society, we might ask too: "What is God saying to us inside of a culture that is spiritual but not ecclesial, Christian but mostly bitter and grandiose about its own roots? Is this a time of pruning, of special humbling? What is our task in a time of ecclesial, historical dis-privilege? What should our waiting consist in?"

To pray and to struggle naming our experiences biblically and in faith is to "read the signs of the times." It's also good spiritual direction, as John of the Cross defines this. Moreover, it is too, in Anna Akhmatova's words, "an act of political defiance." When we get it right, a smile will pass between us.

I like a comment I once heard from Richard Rohr: **"Not everything can be cured or fixed, but it should be named properly."**

Fr Ron Rolheiser

Used with permission of the author, Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser.
Currently, Fr Rolheiser is serving as President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio Texas.

St Thomas Aquinas Parish Bulletin



Parish Website:

Parish Facebook Page:

Parish Priest:

Assistant Priest:

Parish Pastoral Council:

Parish Office Hours:

168 Hawkesbury Road, Springwood, NSW, 2777
PO Box 4410, Winmalee, NSW 2777
Phone: 02 4754 1052
Email: springwood@parracatholic.org
www.stchurchspringwood.org.au
St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Community Springwood
Fr Paul Slyney - 4754 1052 **Emergency ONLY:** 0418 461 316
Fr Shinto Francis - 4754 1052 **Emergency ONLY:** 0415 077 969
Email - springwoodppc@gmail.com
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 & Chapelet:

2nd and 4th Wednesdays of every month, 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

Funerals:

By appointment - restricted numbers

A Poem to Sit With

*It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you
and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.*

We may learn that
we are rooted in Christ
that regardless
the atmosphere
regardless our
stunted growth
regardless our daily dyings

**we have the potential
we are the potential**

to bloom

because of
Christ our earth

because of
Christ our atmosphere

we are the seed from
the Father's hand
we are the breaking shell
sending down roots
Reaching our shoots
up-stretching toward
our Maker

J.Janda

THE GOSPEL

John 15:1-8

Remain in me as I remain in you

The
branches
move and live and
have their being—in the vine.
The prayer of the spindly branches
is one with the prayer of the anchor vine.
Abba listens to the beseeching of the vine.

Lord,
you tell us to ask for whatever
we want and it will be
done for us.

**We
want:**

no greed
no hunger
no violence
no prejudice
no pandemics
no global warming
no suffering children
no suffering immigrants
We want to learn to love.
Abba, please hear
our prayers.

Anne Osdieck

Today's Readings: Acts 9:26-31; 1 Jn 3:18-24; Jn 15:1-8

Entrance Antiphon: O sing a new song to the Lord, for he has worked wonders; in the sight of the nations he has shown his deliverance, alleluia.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21:26-28, 30-32

R. I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people or Alleluia!

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Live in me and let me live in you, says the Lord; my branches bear much fruit. Alleluia!

Communion Antiphon: I am the true vine and you are the branches, says the Lord. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, bears fruit in plenty, alleluia.

Next Week: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; 1 Jn 4:7-10; Jn 15:9-17



Sick: James Wallace, Mischa Damaguc and family, Margaret Day, Adam McCully, Christopher Coombs, Kate Moore, Luca Hurley 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.

Parish and Local Community News

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN DOING SOMETHING ABOUT THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY? You may be interested in Christians Together for Climate, a Blue Mountains ecumenical group that is looking to take some political action inspired by our faith calling to care for the Earth. The group is meeting **via Zoom once per month** and has a broad range of Churches involved from across the region and with other groups across the nation. For further enquiries, please contact Dennis Farrar 47517096 or Sally Butler at Catholic Care, Springwood 88432545.

BELOVED 2021 WOMEN'S RETREAT: A retreat filled with peace, prayerfulness, adoration, Mass, reconciliation, inspiring guest speakers, praise and worship. St Finbar's Catholic Church, Glenbrook, 12th June 2021 from 8.30am to 8.30pm. Registration is \$60, and with places limited, register now at <https://forms.gle/KkBaTAVm1qkYYCzm8>. For enquiries, email beloved2021info@gmail.com.

PASTORAL COUNCIL MEETS 1ST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH: St. Thomas Aquinas Pastoral Parish Council meets on the 1st Wednesday of every month. Next Meeting: Wednesday 5th May at 7:30 pm, STA Church. Please Email - springwoodppc@gmail.com if you would like to contact the Parish Council.

IF YOU ARE OVER THE AGE OF 18, THIS MAY BE OF INTEREST TO YOU : The 2021 ACU Prize for Poetry will be awarded for outstanding poetry with the theme Resilience, reflecting on Jaeda DeWalt's supposition, "When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience," and Sharon Salzberg's thesis, "Resilience is based on compassion for ourselves as well as compassion for others." To enter, please go to: <https://catholicoutlook.org/18000-prize-purse-for-2021-acu-prize-for-poetry/> **GOOD LUCK!**

NEW DISABLED PARKING SIGNAGE: *We are delighted with the new paintwork which was completed on Monday, 26th April specifically for disabled parking. We now have three parking spaces available for your convenience.*



Catholic Women's League:

Sister Linda Ferrington RSC (many of our Parishioners will know Sr Linda), will be our guest speaker on **FRIDAY 21st MAY**. Sr Linda will engage us in conversation and focus on **THE YEAR OF ST JOSEPH**.

A very warm invitation is extended to **ALL PARISHIONERS**, men and women, to join us on this occasion. The meeting will be held in the Church, immediately after 9.30am Mass. For further details please contact Colleen Kime on 4754 4335 or Josephine MacKenzie on 4751 1002.

Find happiness in making others happy.

Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop

A Parishioner reflects on the next stage of the Plenary process

Instrumentum Laboris is the technical name for the working document which has been developed and released in preparation for the Plenary which will be held in two stages - Adelaide in October 2021 and Sydney in July 2022.

The document is reader friendly and available at plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au. It consists of 207 paragraphs and 69 pages. The 5 chapter titles reflect its comprehensive content - Story So Far, Theological reflection, Looking within: renewal for a Christ-centred Church, Going Forth: the Church at the service of the World, I am with you always.

The *Instrumentum Laboris*, draws heavily on the voices heard during the Listening and Dialogue & Listening and Discernment phases of the Plenary Council, but also from the other key sources. It is entitled **Continuing the Journey**.

A number of key themes emerge in the document, including:

- ≈ renewing a Christ-centred Church that heals wounds and warms hearts;
- ≈ strengthening practices of discernment and synodality; (*capacity which the Spirit gives*)
- ≈ the call to co-responsibility in mission and governance;
- ≈ embedding a response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse;
- ≈ renewing and supporting the ordained ministry;
- ≈ promoting discipleship in parishes, families and young people;
- ≈ forming prayerful and Eucharistic communities that are eager to engage in society for the service of all;
- ≈ proclaiming the Gospel in a change of era;
- ≈ renewing the Church solidarity with First Australians and those on the margins of society;
- ≈ promoting an integral ecology of life for all persons, societies and our common home, the Earth.

I have selected five random paragraphs from the Plenary paper to a) give you a flavour of its content and b) to encourage you to access the complete document for your personal reflection. **Please refer to plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au**

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Several contentious issues that emerged from the Thematic Discernment papers relate to the fundamental question of the exercise of authority, governance and leadership in the Church. The report of the Governance Review Project, **Light from the Southern Cross**, commissioned by the Australian bishops in response to a formal recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, touches directly on this question. It is also a prominent feature of submissions to the Plenary Council.

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Every **parish** should be a school of holiness and evangelisation. These two dimensions provide a framework for urgently needed parish renewal. In relation to this need, the National Consultation provided a number of suggestions: restructure parishes within a diocese to make the best use of limited resources; assess the sustainability of current diocesan boundaries; strengthen formation of adult leaders; encourage the sharing of resources and fostering of collaboration between parishes, schools, agencies and movements; re-examine the effectiveness of sacramental programs; promote the spiritual life and intentional, missionary discipleship.

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As drought, bush fires and extreme weather become more common in Australia, we realise that our baptismal calling must necessarily propel us towards God's mission of love for the whole creation, understanding and respecting how systems of life and love are deeply interconnected. A humble and merciful approach to caring for our **environment** cannot be separated from the way we care for each other, and the outcome of both is healing and restoration for our land and our people.

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There is a crucial need, therefore, for vocational discernment and **ongoing formation**, particularly in key areas of Catholic belief, sacraments, the Church and Christian living. Numerous positive efforts exist to support Catholics knowledge of scripture. However, many people desire more spiritual direction and formation in prayer so that they can live as Christ's disciples, experiencing the renewal of ongoing conversion. This is needed more in rural areas where people lack access to Mass and sacraments. Preaching is another area that many see as needing renewal to enhance formation for Christian living.

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Instrumentum Laboris is an invitation to follow in **Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop's** footsteps, seeking new ways to share the joy of the Gospel with each other and with the communities in which we live. Central to Mary's spirituality was her absolute commitment to "the will of our good God" to discover, together, what God is asking of us at this time. Mary's mantra of "Never see a need without doing something about it" challenges us to discover new ways of living the Gospel.