

In Exile - Happiness and Meaning

“Are you happy?” How would you answer that honestly?

My suspicion is that, for most of us, this would be a painful question which, given our fantasy of what happiness should be, we would tend to answer in the negative: “no, I don’t think I’m happy. I would like to be, but there are too many limitations and frustrations in my life which block happiness.”

“Are you happy?”

To stare that question square in the face can make you more unhappy. A torturous self-scrutiny can result from it. What this suggests is that perhaps it is not a good question to ask in the first place. To ask myself: “Am I happy?” is to confuse things and to begin to demand things from life and from God that are not realistic.

For a Christian, there is a better question. The essential question should not be, “Am I happy?” but rather, “is my life meaningful?” That is a different question, one which can help purify our perspective on things.

What God has promised us in Christ is not, as is unfortunately so often preached and believed, a life free from pain, sickness, loneliness, oppression, and death. The preacher who tells you that you will have less pain in life if you take Jesus seriously is not in touch with the gospel. What the incarnation promises is not that Christ will do away with our pain, but that God will be with us in that pain.

That is something quite different. In fact, one can go further and say the opposite: If you take the gospel seriously, you will probably have more pain in your life because you will be a more sensitive person.

To take the gospel seriously is not to be given immunity from the human condition. No. For the Christian, as for everyone else, there will be the same sicknesses, the same cold lonely seasons, the same painful frustrations, the same choices that are regretted, and the same bitter losses. Like everyone else, too, eventually we will have to face death.

Faith in God does not, in this world, save one from pain, misunderstanding, loneliness, and death. Faith does not offer a life free of pain. What God does promise is to be with us in that pain. That is why our Saviour’s name is Emmanuel, a name which means God-is-with-us.

To have faith in God is to have God with you. This, as Avery Dulles ** once so aptly put it, does not give you a ladder to crawl out of the human condition, but a drill to burrow into the heart of it:

Jesus enables us to believe that human life, with all its contradictions, is the place where God is pre-eminently found. Unlike every other mythology, the myth of the Incarnation gives us strength to face up to the harsh realities of our fragmented world, to feel and to transmit the touch of God’s reconciling love. The Incarnation does not provide us with a ladder by which to escape from the ambiguities of this life and scale the heights of heaven. Rather it enables us to burrow deep into the heart of the planet earth and find it shimmering with divinity.

For the Christian, then, the important question is not: “Am I happy?” but “Is my life meaningful?” By asking the latter question rather than the former one, I do not torture myself with some unattainable romantic ideal and, more importantly, I do not ask God to exempt me from the human condition. My life is meaningful precisely when I sense God’s presence in the midst of my suffering, sicknesses, loneliness, and pain.

My faith should never pressure me to ask God to exempt me from these. Why should I be spared the human condition? Rather my faith should allow me to stand inside of every reality in my life, positive and negative, and see some meaning in it.

“Is my life meaningful?” When I ask the question this way the perspective is very different. Now my happiness will no longer depend upon my never getting sick, or upon my never getting lonely, or upon my never being misunderstood, or upon my never making wrong choices, or on somehow being exempt from death’s shadow.

Life can be frustrating and still be very meaningful. We can be lonely, sick, sorrowful about wrong choices, over-worked and unappreciated, staring old age and death in the face and still experience deep meaning. Happiness will be a by-product of that.

Are my symbols working? Is my faith deep enough so that every corner of my experience, no matter how painful, makes some sense in a higher plan? Is God with me as I walk through both health and sickness, joy and sorrow, friendship and loneliness, success and failure, youth and aging? Does my life have a meaning?

The question about happiness comes after that question.

Ron Rolheiser

Currently, Father Rolheiser is serving as President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio Texas

*** Avery Robert Dulles SJ was a Jesuit priest, theologian and cardinal of the Catholic Church*

St Thomas Aquinas Parish Bulletin

168 Hawkesbury Road, Springwood, NSW, 2777
PO Box 4410, Winmalee, NSW 2777
Parish Office: 02 4754 1052

Parish Office Hours: Tuesday to Friday 8.30 am - 3.30 pm
Parish Email: springwood@parracatholic.org
Parish Website: www.stachurchspringwood.org.au
Parish Facebook Page: St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Community Springwood
Parish Priest: Fr Paul Slyney - 4754 1052 *Emergency ONLY:* 0418 461 316
Assistant Priest: Fr Shinto Francis - 4754 1052 *Emergency ONLY:* 0415 077 969

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

Rosary Devotion: Tuesday - Friday 9.00 am
Adoration, Rosary & Chaplet: 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



**MASKS ARE
COMPULSORY**

A Poem to Sit With

As plants become the earth
are fed by earth

we rooted in Christ become Christ

to deny this is to deny Truth
to abort ourselves from Truth

and the consequence is death

and here lies the mystery
of the deference the respect

of our Father

he will not coerce or force our love -

and here lies the mystery of our selves

that having seen light
we choose darkness

having lived in Truth
we prefer the lie

J. Janda

THE GOSPEL

John 18:33b-37

For this was I born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Oh Jesus,
before you came
we only guessed at the truth.

Could we have known that God loved the poor, that
God healed the broken-hearted,
the sick and the distressed?

Nor that God would offer his
very Son for our sake?

Yours is the
kingdom of love.

Help us know, belong and testify
with you to this loving truth.

Anne Osdieck

Today’s Readings: *Dan 7:13-14; Apoc 1:5-8; Jn 18:33-37*

Entrance Antiphon: How worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and divinity, and wisdom and strength and honour. To him belong glory and power for ever and ever.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 92:1-2, 5

R. The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Blessed is he who inherits the kingdom of David our father; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Alleluia!

Communion Antiphon: The Lord sits as King for ever. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Next Week: FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Recently Deceased: Peggy Dengate, Barry Ward

Sick: Gerry Thistleton, Roshan Rupesinghe, Evelyn Robinson, Susie Ziino, 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

CAMPION COLLEGE SUMMER PROGRAM: Registration for the Campion College Summer Program is now open! If you know a 16-20 year old with an interest in history, literature, philosophy and theology, encourage them to sign up for one of the immersive four-day programs in January 2022. Attendance is fully funded but spaces are limited! Find out more and register on the Campion College website: www.campion.edu.au/summer-program.

ST FINBAR'S ADVENT RETREAT: The goal of this retreat is to reflect on the birth of Jesus. Advent is the beginning of the new Liturgical year. We can come in touch with God through reflection on creation and through prayer, walking meditation in the garden with the Stations of the Cross and through the reading of Scripture and quiet meditative examen of conscience. Morning tea and lunch provided. \$5 per person. Please RSVP to secretary@stfinbars.org.au prior to 29th November.

Deanery Council News

We met via Zoom on Saturday, 13th November and the discussion was fruitful!

Our **Gathering of Talents** workshops (GOT) have been rescheduled for Sunday, 3rd April 2022. This exiting initiative was torpedoed by the Covid lockdown but we still have the many expressions of interest, which were submitted in May. We plan to resuscitate the concept across the mountain parishes so please await future details and save the date.

Carol Teodori (Lawson Parish) reported positively as a delegate to the on-line national **Plenary Council** discernment in October. We await a comprehensive response later this year in preparation for stage 2 to be held in Sydney in April 2022. You may be aware that Pope Francis has called all Bishops to a synod in 2023 so, presumably, our Australian experience will help shape this agenda. See www.synod.va

For a number of years the weeklong January **Epiphany pilgrimage** has traversed our mountain's parishes. In 2022, an abbreviated 2-day experience is planned to enable more post-Covid family time but this will be complemented by a Springtime/October pilgrimage. The emerging vision is that this will be ecumenical with a focus on Seasons of Creation and *Laudati Si*. Further details are available at www.epiphanypilgrimage.org

Other local initiatives include

- ≈ Exploring the possibility of a **Sacramental team** to share resources and programs across the deanery parishes. This may include both the Sacraments of Initiation and the R.C.I.A.
- ≈ Ongoing supporter **faith formation** initiatives. You may be aware of Fr Joe's Theology and Scripture and Glenbrook parish also invites us to their Advent retreat day on Sat Dec 4. Details at www.stfinbars.org.au

Significant Diocesan documents are in the pipeline:

1. A **Statement of Inclusion** regarding marginalised groups is in draft form and;
2. A **Review of Governance** in the Diocese is available at www.parracatholic.org

Kim Crawford (STA rep)

Schools in our Parish



St Thomas Aquinas Primary School

Principal - Ms Marina Hardy 4723 3800



St Columba's Catholic College

Principal - Mr Paul Ryan 4754 8900



St Vincent de Paul Society

good works



**CHRISTMAS
HAMPER APPEAL**

This is the time of year when the St. Vincent de Paul Society members ask parishioners to support families in need by providing something special for Christmas.

We are aware that our Mass attendee numbers are well down, and that everyone has in some way been affected by Covid-19, so conference members have decided that this year our main area of support will be vouchers for food, fruit, vegetables and meat or fish.

Envelopes for your donations are available on the table near Our Lady's statue at the entrance to our church and conference members will be at all Masses on the weekends of 4th / 5th and 11th / 12th December to accept all donations.

If your family feels able to provide **towards a hamper** that would be wonderful. Please make it suitable for a family of 2 adults and 2 children. We have a priority list of families which, with your support, we will endeavour to fill. Many thanks for your ongoing support to Vinnies and the people we support. Any inquiries may be made to Margaret on 4753 1031.



Welcome to our Parish Community



Mr Phillip Scollard has been appointed as Principal of St Columba's Catholic College from 2022 and we would like you to please join us in welcoming Phillip to our Parish and School Community.

St Thomas Aquinas Parish Sacramental Program 2022

First Reconciliation

First Parent Meeting - Tuesday, 1st February 2022, 7pm, St Thomas Aquinas Church

Second Parent Meeting - Tuesday, 8th February 2022, 7pm, St Thomas Aquinas Church

Commitment of Candidates - Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th February 2022 at any of the weekend Masses

First Reconciliation - Tuesday 29th March, 5.30pm and 7.30pm, St Thomas Aquinas Church

First Holy Communion

First Parent Meeting - Tuesday, 10th May, 7pm, St Thomas Aquinas Church

First Holy Communion - Saturday, 18th June, 10am, St Thomas Aquinas Church

Confirmation

First Parent Meeting - Tuesday, 19th July, 7pm, St Thomas Aquinas Church

Second Parent Meeting - Tuesday, 26th July, 7pm, St Thomas Aquinas Church

Commitment of Candidates - Saturday 23rd and Sunday 24th July at any of the weekend Masses

Confirmation - Tuesday, 30th August, 7pm, St Thomas Aquinas Church

Confirmation Candidates 2021

If your child is currently in Year 6, 2021 and they would like to be confirmed at Easter 2022, please contact the Parish office before the end of November so arrangements can be made.