

PAX – WITH THE GOSPEL FOR OUR GUIDE
LENT, 2017

The Lenten Journey is not about “giving up things”, it is about be-coming more than we are. The Lenten Journey is a spiritual journey, given to us each year as a time of renewal. Let us think about be-coming more than we are, not about depriving ourselves of “things”. When we limit the Lenten Journey to a time of deprivation, we lose the whole meaning of the season. On the other hand, if giving up something helps us to become a better person, more Christian, more peaceful, gentle and so on, then that deprivation is positive.

SECTION ONE: READING AND REFLECTION

In the early 1970s, I had the privilege of listening to the Retreat Conferences of Fr. Bernard Bassett, the great English Jesuit priest. During one of these conferences, he told a story which is still fresh after forty years.

The story:

During the London Blitz of the Second World War, one house (among many) was raised to the ground following a bombardment by the German Air Force. This one house was on fire. The Air Raid Wardens put out the fire, and saw that the cupboard under the main staircase was intact. Coming close, they heard a weak voice calling, “Help me!” They made their way through the rubble and reached the staircase. Using a good deal of muscle power, they managed to open the door. Inside was an elderly lady. In one corner of the staircase cupboard was a bottle of whisky. One of the Air Raid Wardens said: ‘Come on love, ‘ave a drink of this – it will calm you down.’ The elderly lady said: ‘Don’t touch that, I’m keeping it for an emergency’.

Needless to say, I and those with me, had a good laugh. Fr. Bassett was an excellent story-teller, with a propensity to humour.

So, here we are in 2017, a long time after the London blitz. Let us ask the question: what constitutes an emergency? The elderly lady didn’t think that the destruction of her house through bombing constituted an emergency.

The word “emergency” and the word “urgent” are not found in the Sacred Scriptures. The word “emergency” and the word “urgent” are not found in the Rule of St. Benedict. The only words of St. Benedict which are close to emergency and urgency, are the words, “run” and “today”. Both words are used in the Prologue to the Rule.

“If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

“Run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness overtake you.”

Benedictines need to be more assertive, forming a counter-cultural body which stands against the “everything urgent” syndrome.

The media wants us to believe that everything is urgent, or is an emergency: “Breaking News” is announced in a voice that is dramatic, and has us on the edge of our seats waiting to hear what has happened. Sometimes it is urgent, other times just sensational.

With the increase of technology over the last forty years, we have been catapulted into the “everything urgent” society. Technology allows us to view every natural disaster and every human catastrophe, as it is happening – and this is good, especially when it leads us to embrace the suffering of others and enter into prayer for these our brothers and sisters in the human family.

Technology also allows intrusive advertising to tell us that we must set out quickly for Westfield Shopping Centre, or the nearest Shopping Square, because electrical goods and furnishings are offered for half the normal price, between 6.00 p.m. and midnight. How many times have we fallen for this advertising scam?

Did we imagine it, or did we see Hot Cross Buns and Easter Eggs in the Supermarket by January 5th, 2017, just as we came up for air after New Year’s Day?

Is it time for us, as monastics, to stand back and look at this emergency/urgent reality which has us in hand-cuffs, or worse, in the prison of illness-related stress. The tapes in our head play on and on: “It’s urgent.” “This is an emergency.” “I want it done now.” “I want it yesterday.” “We only have an hour left for that Sale. It closes at 9.00 p.m.” We must be lined up outside David Jones by 5.30 a.m. on Boxing Day, to catch the Sales. Perhaps it is better to sleep out on the footpath or in the nearest park all night, so that we won’t miss that long-awaited moment when the doors of David Jones are opened.

There **are** emergencies – and the State Emergency Service is there for such disasters: bushfire and floods, tornadoes and mining disasters, road-accidents, where every minute counts if a life is to be saved.

SECTION TWO: FURTHER READING AND REFLECTION

Choose your own book this year.

Try books about living in the present moment.

Try books about living in peace – rejecting the urgent pace that dominates society at large.

Try books on Christian Meditation, or Centering Prayer.

And there are a number of very good books on *Lectio Divina*, which is already part of our daily prayer.

We have in our shop, copies of “Wisdom Distilled from the Daily” by Sr. Joan Chittister.

We also have copies of “Sacred Rhythms, The Monastic Way Every Day” edited by Fr. Francis de Sales Wagner, O.S.B. In this very good book, we can read articles by: Fr. Michael Casey, of Tarrawarra Abbey, Australia, by Kathleen Norris, by Sr. Joan Chittister, by Sr. Laura Swan, O.S.B. and by Fr. Joel Ripinger, O.S.B. One chapter, “The Psalms as Soul Food”, by Matthew Mattingly, O.S.B. has already been used by one of our very dedicated Oblates, in his Parish Ministry. The article on “Invitation to Prayer: Time and

Being with God”, by Br. Francis de Sales Wagner, O.S.B. is helpful for slowing down, and escaping from the chains of urgency.

If this particular work sells out by the time you want to place an order, Sr. Joanna (the Book Department), has assured me that she will re-order for us.

We also suggest that you pray with the liturgy readings for each weekend. These are on our website early each week in advance of the coming weekend. They are an honest sharing by sr. Hildegard. There is a little background to each reading, and a shared response to each reading. This exercise may help, or you may prefer to go to *Lectio Divina* your way.

SECTION THREE: ABOUT THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

St. Benedict implies urgency only in the following section of the Prologue: *Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say: “It is high time for us to arise from sleep”, (Rom. 13:11). Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: “If you hear God’s voice today, do not harden your hearts” (Psalm 94:8). And again: “You who have ears to hear, .listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:7) And what does the Spirit say? “Come and listen to me; I will teach you the way of life.” (Ps. 34:12) “Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you” (John 12:35).* Of this vital text, Sr. Joan Chittister offers the following insight: “The paragraph is an insistent one, full of intensity, full of **urgency**. We put off so much in life –visiting relatives, writing letters, [sending that card we’ve been meaning to send, taking that course in order to be better qualified], finding a new job. But one thing stays with us always, present whether pursued or not, and that is the call to the center of ourselves where the God we are seeking is seeking us. Benedict says: Listen today. Start now. Begin immediately to direct your life to that small, clear voice within.” St. Benedict reminds us that life is short, that we don’t have time to waste time, that some things are significant in life and some things are not. We all have to ask ourselves what time it is in our own lives. We each have to begin to consider the eternal weight of what we are spending life doing. We have to start someday to wonder if we have spent our lives on gold or dross.” (Page 22, “The Rule of Benedict – Insights for the Ages”, Sr. Joan Chittister, osb)

SECTION FOUR: COMMUNITY HISTORY

Most of us would have heard the news during Christmas, as the media focused on the different Churches throughout the world. On this news, Pope Francis pleaded to Israel and Palestine to move for peace and lay down arms. Our community Chronicles recall a similar plea by Pope Pius XII in 1949; He asked that on Passion Sunday, (then, the Sunday before Palm Sunday), the world unite with him in prayer, pleading for peace and the settling down of social unrest throughout the world. Our community, led at that time by Mother Mary Joseph Brady, made the day one of deep prayer. As we look across the world today, we see the same social unrest, the same

suffering, the same hate and revenge – Jesus came to teach us a different way. But - is G.K. Chesterton right, when he says that “the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and left untried”? In 2016 alone, there were 90,000 Christians who were martyred for their faith. They believed that Christianity was worth the effort. Let us pray to them for our broken world, and for one another, that we will continue to fly the flag for Christianity.

On our website, there is a power-point presentation showing highlights of the life of Sr. Elizabeth Funder, who turned 90 on October 26th, 2016. It was designed by Mother Abbess, (with some help by Sr. Petra). It is an important historically, because Sr. Elizabeth, is the last surviving nun who entered the Monastery when we were resident at “Subiaco”, Rydalmere. You can view the presentation here: <http://www.jamberooabbey.org.au/news/fx-articles.cfm?loadref=101&id=270>

SECTION FIVE: LITURGY

In the liturgy of Advent, there is a hymn sung at Vespers. It has the following theme: *Throughout a world in shadow, John’s urgent voice we hear, prepare for Christ our Saviour, the Son of God is near.* It seems to be the only hymn in the monastic liturgy which uses the word “urgent”. John’s voice is an “urgent” voice. May the voice of every monastic person become an “urgent” voice that forms a counter-attack against the voices which exhort us to rush (for no reason), to drive at break-neck speed, to wait outside a department store for the doors to open on Boxing Day, to label every piece of news “urgent”, to live as if I have only one more hour to complete my list of “things to do” today, remembering that I am the one who made the list in the first place. What is my problem, that I would make a list of tasks to be done in one day, realizing that it is practically impossible to get through them?

Lent in its Latin context is adapted from: *Lente* (slowly, without haste, calmly, leisurely). It is related to “lento”, which means to make flexible, to bend. Inflexible people do not bend,. On the whole, they don’t even have time to consider bending. And yet, the great trees of our forests bend and sway with the winds of change, the storms of our land. They bend and sway and then when the storm is past, they stand tall again. By bending and swaying with the storms of this life, we will be sure not to snap. It also has the meaning of being compliant or flexible. This is important if we are to place our lives in the hands of God. We need to think about our ability or inability to bend, be compliant, take time.

OUR LITURGICAL CALENDAR IS AS FOLLOWS:

March 1: Ash Wednesday

March 5: First Sunday of Lent

March 12: Second Sunday of Lent

March 17: St. Patrick – Solemnity in Australia

March 19: Third Sunday of Lent

March 20: Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of Mary. This day has been transferred, because of the Third Sunday of Lent falling on March 19.

March 25: The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

March 26: Fourth Sunday of Lent

April 2: Fifth Sunday of Lent

April 9: PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD.

HOLY WEEK FOLLOWS.

The Sacred Paschal Triduum begins with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening and finishes with the Office of Compline on Easter Sunday night. It consists of three days: Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

SECTION SIX: YOUR COMMUNITY

Congratulations to three beautiful women who made their commitment as Oblates of the community on 19th November 2016:

Helen Howard, who took the name "Anna". Helen lives at Berry, NSW.

Lucy Sneesby-Tooth, who took the name "Lioba". Lucy lives at Lismore NSW.

Judith Kendall, who took the name "Anne". Judith lives at Toongabbie, NSW.

Their ceremony was on the Saturday of our Oblate Retreat. It was a beautiful retreat, made so by the Oblates and Oblate-Novices who attended with open hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit worked some beautiful miracles on that weekend, some apparent, and some more private.

Anniversaries of Oblation:

MARCH

Donn (Gregory) Corcoran – March 5.

Nazin (Hildegard) Atalay – March 7.

Julie (Frances) Redican – March 8

Ian (Godric) Thomas – March 15

June (Benedicta) Jenkins – March 16

Bernard Quinn – March 19

Cecilia (Teresa Thomas) Larkin, and Carol (Mary of the Cross) Xuereb – March 21

Elizabeth Mary Hildegard Muntz, and Jennifer Ancilla Shirvington – March 25.

Elizabeth (Beth) Teresa Montgomery, and Leo Thomas Montgomery – March 29. Since moving to Brisbane, both Beth and Leo have been ill. They need our prayer, so that they can go on being there for one another.

Maria Matilda Curtis – March 29.

APRIL

Helen Seraphim Shorter – April 16

Solemn Profession Anniversaries:

March 2: Sr. Mechtild Crawford

Feast Days During Lent:

Happy feast day to:

MARCH 5 Donn Gregory Corcoran

MARCH 9 St. Frances of Rome.

Maureen Frances Williamson, Catherine Frances Turek, Susan Frances Carter, Isabel Frances Vicary, Kevin Francis Vicary, Helena Frances O'Neill, Elizabeth Frances Fahey, Denise Frances Hill, Julie Frances Redican, Christine Frances Angus

MARCH 14 St. Matilda

Maria Matilda Curtis, and Kay Matilda Myers.

MARCH 17 St. Patrick. Rev. Ian Patrick Crooks, Irene Patricia McAllister.

March 25. Feast of the Anunciation

Mary (of the Annunciation) Wyatt, Bernadette (Mary) Maher, Jenny (Ancilla) Shirvington, Sr. Hannah, Massy-Greene, Sr. Ancilla Leech.

NECROLOGY

Oblate Bernie Daniel Fitzgerald, 7 March, 2004

Sr. M. Cecily Bourke, 9 March, 1984

Sr. Mary Jones, 11 March, 1995

Most Rev. John Bede Polding, 16 March, 1877

Oblate Peter (Bernard) Smith, 17 March, 2009

Sr. M. Margaret Gallagher, 18 March, 1913

Sr. M. Mechtilde O'Grady, 20 March, 1888

Oblate Sydney (Stephen) Long, 21 March, 2008

Sr. Maria McKenzie, 21 March, 1997.

Sr. Mary Bridget Kelly, 22 March, 1960.

Sr. Marguerite Burke, 25 March, 1997.

Sr. Mary Clare Gabriel, 26 March, 1910.

Mother Mary Magdalen le Clerc, 28th March, 1878. (Founding Mother)

Sr. M. Hildegard Doyle, 3rd April, 1969

Sr. M. Monica Hardie, 7th April, 1956

Sr. M. Aelred Bradshaw, 10th April, 1959

Sr. M. Editha Thompson, 17th April, 1983

Since the new year, we have had three "Pax" booklets returned to sender with the note: "Recipient is deceased".

This is very sad. Please tell family and friends that you are an Oblate of the Jamberoo Abbey Community. Then they will notify us, and you will receive the prayer of our whole community, which if we count every oblate, is over 350 people.

SECTION SEVEN: SAINTS

A DIFFERENT LOOK AT "FAST" AND "SLOW":

From the Philokalia, on the Prayer of the Heart - the wisdom of Blessed Callistus: *Some living and running waters flow fast, others are slow...the former, flowing swiftly, cannot remain muddy for long, and even if at times,*

they become slightly muddied, their movement soon clears them again. On the other hand, if the flow of water is too slow, it is easily muddied, and remains that way, [until the Spirit of God hovers over the water once more and sets it free to flow and run].

The fast running water is surely the “run” of the Prologue to our Rule, and the “today” of the Prologue. It is also John the Baptist’s “urgent” voice. The slow waters? Do these waters represent our spiritual laziness, a laziness that makes us content to be surrounded by the mud and muck of stagnant pools?

SECTION EIGHT: FOR REFLECTION

To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

Sr. Joan Chittister, writing in her beautiful book, “Illuminated Life”, brings us right back to a sane view of what attitude is needed if we are to stand up to the voices in our heads, telling us to hurry, drive at break-neck speed, rush to the latest sale, and so on. She says: *In our haste, our generation has lost a sense of the value of time. Speed has not saved us time. It has simply enabled us to fill it with twice as much work as we used to do. The faster we go, the more we leave ourselves behind. We do not stop for sunsets anymore. We take pictures of them, instead, and then never take time to look at the pictures again...to be a contemplative, we must begin to see time, not as a commodity, but as a sacrament revealing God to us in the here and now. Always.*” (pages 111-112)

Let us set out then, on our Lenten journey and meet God in the “here and now”. We will do so, if we slow down, become calm, take leisure for God.

MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF US AS WE GO FORWARDS INTO LENT, 2017.

