

**PAX – WITH THE GOSPEL FOR OUR GUIDE
LENT, 2021**

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

Theme: In the Eye of the Storm.

The International Catholic Weekly, (The Tablet), for 28 November 2020, used this title for an article on Pope Francis. Austen Ivereigh (same Tablet) said that “this will be seen by historians as the year Pope Francis relaunched his pontificate just as it was supposed to be winding down.” – Instead he found himself in the eye of the storm.

We are familiar with storm chasers, those who chase and travel at break-neck speed, to catch up with the eye of the storm, so that they get an adrenalin rush – a massive adrenalin rush.

We are not storm chasers, and this theme is not about chasing the storm until we reach the eye of the storm and survive (hopefully). To be in the eye of the storm, according to the Collins dictionary, means to be deeply involved in a difficult or controversial situation. And we are all involved or immersed in the eye of the storm.

We don't have to even seek out the eye of the storm, for the storm (more like a tempest) is all around us. It has found us and taken hold of us. The only road to freedom is to confront the storm. Sr. Joan Chittister says: “What we don't confront will always control us.”

So – since we are forced into the eye of the storm: a pandemic; global warming; an increase in the production of nuclear weapons; an increase in people trafficking; child abduction for slave labour or organ transplants; the destruction of wetlands and animal habitats, the cutting down of trees which are the home of the koalas – to sell woodchips outside of Australia. Yes, we are in the eye of the storm, and we have no option but to confront it, otherwise it will continue to control us. The effects of the control are depression, hopelessness, oppression, discouragement, frustration. I wonder if God has allowed us to come to this point in time, where we can face the truth of all this? David Attenborough says that the destruction of animal habitats and the logging of forests has brought human beings too close to animals and animal habitats, and that we can expect more pandemics because we are trespassing on the homes of God's creatures – we are coming closer and closer to the animals of the wild.

What comments have you heard from friends, family, TV news during the pandemic? When will the borders be open again? When will I be able to have some social life? When will I be able to work without masks which fog up my glasses?

An oblate told me that she works in a nursing home. She arrives at 6.00 a.m., puts on her mask and then has to shower thirteen patients in the dementia ward. Her glasses fog up as she is working, and she can hardly see what she is doing. The nursing home doesn't have air-conditioning, so she battles the heat of Rockhampton. (her hometown).

How do we confront the pandemic in order to stop it controlling us, or reducing us to a mental paralysis?

Sr. Joan Chittister, commenting on Benedictine spirituality says that "Benedictine spirituality is life lived with an EYE on those for whom life is a terrible burden." An awareness of the Covid victims is our first call, the first thing to do. Let us forget our own inconveniences for a while and live with an eye on those who are ill and dying. Hopefully, Covid has led us away from "dissimulation, half answers, vindictive attitudes, a false presentation of self – all the barbs in the soul of the monastic. Holiness, this ancient rule says to a culture that has made crafty packaging high art, has something to do with being who we say we are, claiming our truths, opening our hearts, giving ourselves to the other, pure and un-glossed." (The Rule of Benedict, Insights for the Ages, Sr. Joan Chittister, page 51). Holiness is what we should be bringing to the eye of the storm.

As far as possible (within Covid restrictions), we should be bringing our truth as oblates to those who are going under emotionally. There are many ways, with current technology, to do this. We can call or email people; send and receive photographs on our phones, or through Facebook, Instagram or email; we can connect via Zoom or FaceTme...so many choices!

Another oblate shared that with her husband and sons working from home, they all stop and share morning tea and lunch together. This has become an important daily ritual for them. She has even been baking scones and biscuits for the occasion. Another oblate has taken up walking and is now up to 6 kilometres a day. She feels wonderful and handles things much better.

SECTION TWO: FURTHER READING AND REFLECTION

Lent is the time when we choose a suitable book for reading and reflection.

You may have a book that you haven't read for a long time and would like to re-visit. You may have come across a book which you have wanted to read for some time, but just haven't had the chance to do so. I was pleased to be given "Dark Emu" by Bruce Pascoe. An oblate sent it to me. Bruce Pascoe is quoted as saying: "If we look at the evidence presented to us by the explorers and explain to our children that Aboriginal people did build houses, did build dams, did sow, irrigate and till the land, did alter the course of rivers, did sew their clothes, and did construct a system of pan-continental government that generated peace and prosperity, then it is likely we will admire and love our land all the more."

We were educated with the "hunter-gatherer" label for pre-colonial Aboriginal people. If we are stuck there, we need to read Bruce Pascoe's book, which was short-listed for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Indigenous Writing – 2014. This book also won the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award, 2016; and was short-listed for the Queensland Literary Award, 2014.

It is a must for every Australian and will lead us to a better understanding of our First Nations people.

Lisa Hill, blogger and educator, says of this book: "His sources are the journals of notable explorers and surveyors, of pastoralists and protectors. He quotes them verbatim, describing all the signs of a complex civilization but viewed through the blinkered lenses of appropriation and white superiority. As a teacher...I recommend it as essential reading for any educator."

As Oblate Director, I recommend it as essential reading for any Oblate.

If you have already read this book of "truth", you will know its worth and recommend it to other oblates or family members.

I also suggest that you pray with the liturgy readings for each weekend. These are on our website every week in the "Fresh Words" section. There is a little background to each reading and a shared response to each reading.

SECTION THREE: ABOUT THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

Prologue: 14-17. *Seeking workers in a multitude of people, God calls out and says again: 'Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?' If you hear this, and your answer is 'I do', God then directs these words to you: 'If you desire true and eternal life, keep your tongue free from vicious talk and your lips from all deceit; turn away from evil and do good; let peace be your quest and aim.'*

Thomas Merton reminds us that "the peace which Christ brings is not a formula for individual escape, not for egotistical self-fulfillment. There can be no peace in the heart of the one who seeks peace for self alone. The peace which Christ brings is not the peace of a tyrannical 'order' which is disorder because in it all opposition is merely suppressed, and differences are violently wiped out. Peace does not mean the suppression of all differences, but their coexistence and fruitful collaboration." (The Monastic Journey, by Thomas Merton, page 41).

And Albert Einstein said, in 'Notes on Pacifism' that "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding."

Tacitus, (A.D. 56 – 120) has the most powerful words of all when describing peace. He said: "They create a desert and call it peace." In the 20th century, there were 31 wars across the world that did just that – created a desert and called it peace....think the holocaust, Rwanda, Cambodia and on and on. But this slaughter did not result in peace.

Looking at violence and disregard for all living things in another sense, in the 19th and 20th centuries human beings set out to hunt and kill in Africa, Australia, England, and America. In fact wherever there were elephants or deer, human beings dreamed of killing them and bringing the tusks or antlers home to boast about the kill. This was war of a different kind, a callous slaughter for trophies or delicacies.

What can we do about the peace of Christ this Lent? Since many churches are still closed, we can't even turn to someone at Mass and offer them the sign of peace, and we certainly can't touch them.

However, peace begins at home, so let us concentrate there.

SECTION FOUR: COMMUNITY HISTORY

For the first time in our history, the Easter ceremonies (2020) were celebrated without a priest and without guests. We did our best. The ceremonies were streamed by video from the Cathedral for those who wanted to participate that way.

This brought us face to face with the possibility of a virtual Church in the future: no priest, no parishioners. Christopher Lamb, in the 21 March 2020 Tablet comments on a pandemic that will change Catholicism forever. Easter 2021 promises to be a little better for us. So far, Fr. Paul is keeping well. We can only welcome a few guests at a time in our retreat cottages. The reason is a simple one. We are an Aged Care Provider and therefore have to follow the rules set down by the government to be Covid-safe. The shop is still closed, the cottage dining room is closed, and the small library is not available. Guests are cooking for themselves and wearing masks when they come to the church. This is all laid out in the guidelines.

SECTION FIVE: LITURGY

Our liturgical calendar is as follows:

ASH WEDNESDAY: February 17

February 21: First Sunday of Lent.

February 28: Second Sunday of Lent.

March 9: St. Frances of Rome

March 7: Third Sunday of Lent.

March 14: Fourth Sunday of Lent. (Laetare Sunday.

March 17: St. Patrick

March 19: St. Joseph

March 21: Fifth Sunday of Lent.

March 22: The Passing of St. Benedict, transferred from Sunday.

March 25: The Annunciation of the Lord.

HOLY WEEK

March 28: Palm Sunday of the passion of the Lord begins Holy Week, the most solemn week of the year.

April 01: Holy Thursday - TRIDUUM

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.

The sacred paschal triduum consists of three days: Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

April 02: Good Friday - TRIDUUM

April 03: Holy Saturday - TRIDUUM

April 04: Easter Sunday - TRIDUUM

April 4-11: Octave of Easter.

SECTION SIX: YOUR COMMUNITY

Prayers are asked for:

Bob (Anselm) Cashman has terminal cancer and is facing it bravely at present. He has written his autobiography, "Drinking from my Saucer" for his children grandchildren and one day, great-grandchildren. He has used the word "saucer" because as he sees it, his cup runneth over! Chapter 26 is entitled: My Faith. Bob shares: "One of the many lessons I've learned over recent years is to follow this little piece of advice from St. Francis of Assisi – 'Preach, always preach; never cease to preach, and if necessary, use words.' That's how I now try to live my life. If I can lead one other person to know, love, and serve God, I've succeeded."

And for: Nereda (Gertrud) Blake, who has had a very rough time with breakages – the last one being a broken arm. Nereda is one of the first persons to make Oblation here at the Abbey. She has given many years to God through the Benedictine way. She is a woman of deep prayer and ever faithful to her commitment.

Two other oblates I know of, are in nursing home care and need the gift of our prayerful solidarity.

Anniversaries of Oblation:

FEBRUARY

17: Giovanna Scholastica Tesoriera, Matthew Edward Dowsey, Vincenzo Gerardo Cappetta, Elaine Brigid Guy,
Wendy Lucy Browning, Barbara Elizabeth Jamieson.

18: M. del Carmen Teresa Boharull-Vila

20: Christine Frances Angus, Patricia Hildegard Benedict

21: Fr. Henry Bernard Byrne

27: Robert Anselm Cashman and Colleen Augustine Cashman.

MARCH

05: Donn (Gregory) Corcoran

07: Nazin (Hildegard) Atalay

08: Julie (Frances) Redican

15: Ian (Godric) Thomas

16: June (Benedicta) Jenkins

19: Bernard Quinn

20: Fr. John (Ignatius) Anderson

21: Cecilia (Teresa Thomas) Larkin, Carol (Mary of the Cross) Xuereb

25: Elizabeth Mary Hildegard Muntz, Jennifer Ancilla Shirvington, Mark (Maurus) Hamilton

29: Elizabeth (Beth) Teresa Montgomery, Maria Matilda Curtis

Solemn Profession Anniversary:

02 March: Sr. Mechtild Crawford

FEAST DAYS DURING LENT. Happy feast day to:

05: Donn Gregory Corcoran for St Gregory

09: Maureen Frances Williamson, Catherine Frances Turek, Isabel Frances Vicary, Kevin Francis Vicary, Helena Frances O'Neill, Elizabeth Frances Fahey, Denise Frances Hill,

Julie Frances Redican, Christine Frances Angus for St. Frances of Rome

14: Maria Matilda Curtis for St. Matilda

17 Ian Patrick Crooks for St. Patrick.

Necrology

FEBRUARY

26: Sr. Mary Mildred Smythe

MARCH

07: Oblate Bernie Daniel Fitzgerald

09: Sr. Mary Cecily Bourke

11: Sr. Mary Jones

16: Most Rev. John Bede Polding O.S.B.

17: Oblate Peter Bernard Smith

18: Sr. Margaret Gallagher

20: Sr. Mechtilde O'Grady

21: Oblate Sidney Stephen Long

21: Sr. Maria McKenzie

22: Sr. Bridget Kelly

25: Sr. Marguerite Burke

26: Sr. Mary Clare Gabriel

28: Mother Mary Magdalen le Clerc, Founding Mother

28: Oblate Mary Gertrude Connors.

APRIL

03: Sr. Mary Hildegard Doyle

SECTION SEVEN: SAINTS

Wisdom from St. Frances de Sales: "I do not approve of those who begin reforming a person with external things – hair, face or dress. On the contrary, we must begin from within. 'Turn to me with your whole heart' is God's call. 'My child, give me your heart.' For the heart is the mainspring of our actions. So our Lord says: 'Set me as a seal upon your heart...' for whoever truly has Jesus Christ in the heart will soon show it in all outward actions." This is the essence of the Lenten journey – that we remain in touch with Christ within the heart. This means daily prayer, especially *Lectio Divina* with the Gospels. John Cassian taught his monks to till the soil of the heart every day with the plough of the Gospel. Tilling the soil hurts. It's not easy to make the necessary furrows in the earth to plant crops. Sometimes there are rocks to move and clods of clay to turn over. So, if the next six weeks are a bit challenging, that's good. It means we are on course.

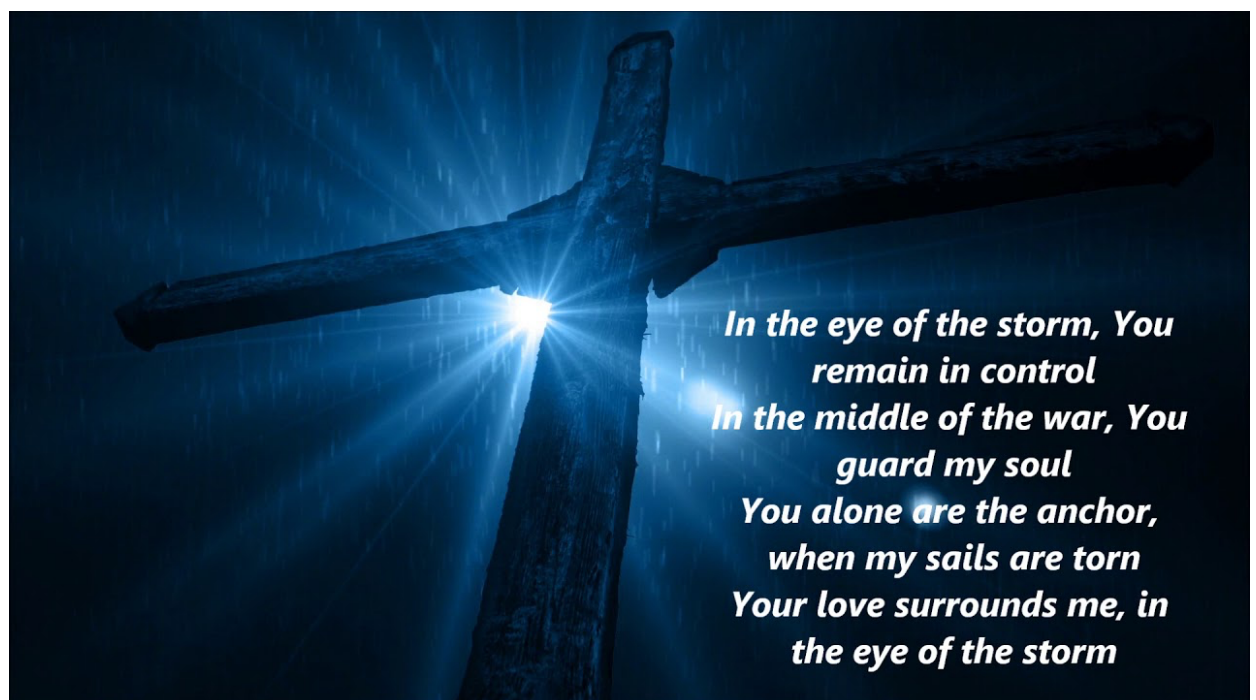
SECTION EIGHT: FOR REFLECTION

From the wisdom of Mike Riddell: "A great number of people around the

world are angry because their previous lifestyles have been disrupted and are looking for candidates to blame. Our obsession with economics, with profit-making and taking, with extracting every last sliver of value from the natural environment, with suppressing voices of dissent, with elevating our own position at the expense of our neighbours – these forces seem unabated by anything that has happened in the last 12 months. It never seems to occur to us that in fact WE are the virus.”

(Tui Motu InterIslands, Issue 255 December 2020)

I am always happy to be told if I have omitted to mention a feast day or anniversary. Please email me oblatedirector@jamberoobbey.org.au



*In the eye of the storm, You
remain in control
In the middle of the war, You
guard my soul
You alone are the anchor,
when my sails are torn
Your love surrounds me, in
the eye of the storm*