

PARISH OF ASCOT VALE

ST MARY'S CHURCH, 123 ST LEONARDS ROAD, ASCOT VALE
ST MARGARET'S CHURCH, BARB STREET, MARIBYRNONG

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Mass

Public Masses are currently suspended in Melbourne, until 19 August. Livestreaming of our 10:30 Sunday Mass continues, accessible from the parish website. Priests continue to offer Masses personally for the praise and worship of God, for the needs of the faithful and the world, especially the alleviation of the current crisis.

Reconciliation (Confession)

By appointment - no name required. Arrangement will be made for the confession to be anonymous, not face-to-face, with suitable distancing.

Baptisms at St Mary’s

Our normally scheduled Baptisms remain on hold. Baptism will be administered if there is urgent and grave need.

Baptism Information Sessions are also still on hold. To discuss a future baptism, please ring the parish office during office hours.

Weddings at St Mary’s

6 months’ notice required. For information on weddings please ring the parish office during office hours.

Private prayer in our churches

Our churches are not currently open for private prayer.

Parish Bulletin

The Bulletin, containing the Sunday readings for your reflection, will be uploaded to the parish website the Saturday afternoon prior.

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 19 July 2020

In today’s gospel parable of the wheat and the darnel (weeds), Jesus warns us that the Church, in its imperfect form here on earth, will always contain both saints and evildoers.

In September 2019, Fr Justin gave a talk at the monthly ‘Theology at the Pub’, on the topic ‘The Church and the Faults of the Past’, relating especially to this theme. The full text is available on the ‘Links and Articles’ page of the parish website, and is recommended for a fuller understanding of this important subject. Some summary points are presented here:

1. Our faith is always in Christ’s promises, summed up in his words to Peter: ‘Upon this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’.

(Mt 16:18) Those words, linked as well with other promises of Christ, give us the certainty that the Catholic Church, founded by Jesus on Peter as the first Pope, will be upheld in truth and grace until Jesus returns in glory at the end of time. But they also warn us that the gates of hell – the spiritual forces of evil – will battle with great fury until the end of time to *try* to tear down his Church. So the life of the Church isn’t a tea party: it’s a spiritual war. And when the forces of evil do infiltrate, and even seem to get the upper hand – that doesn’t lead good people to desert the army. It leads them to fight all the harder.

2. God’s Holy Church has divine and human aspects; it’s the divine aspects that never fail in holiness, and are all that we’re ultimately committed to. But we, her members (leaders included), have free will, and so sin can enter. True, we can’t divide the *visible* Church, or what some call the ‘institutional’ Church, from a supposedly *invisible*, spiritual Church. (Vatican II explained how the one and same Church is both spiritual and visible – like Christ, the Word made flesh.) However, we *can* make a distinction between what is from Christ and is guaranteed by him – her teachings, her sacraments, her visible hierarchical structure – and on the other hand, what *merely* comes from human beings.

Pope St Paul VI explained in the *Credo of the People of God* (1968): ‘[The Church] is holy though she has sinners in her bosom, because she herself has no other life but that of grace: it is by living by her life that her members are sanctified; it is by removing themselves from her life that they fall into sins and disorders that prevent the radiation of her sanctity. This is why she suffers and does penance for these offences, of which she has the power to free her children through the Blood of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.’

3. For proper assessment, we need accurate historical judgements, rejecting legends and false generalisations; we also need to keep perspective of all the good things the Church has brought, as well as of the evils existing (often even more strongly) outside the Church. (That’s not to legitimate the evils *inside* the Church, but it indicates the ‘problem’ isn’t with the Faith as such, but with humanity more broadly.) Not dealing here with the scandals of our own times (which, being ongoing matters, bring in other issues), examples of evils in Church history include well-known instances of popes who were corrupt; times of persecution of non-Catholics; occasions when popes or Catholic monarchs have instigated unjust wars, or when Catholics (clerical or lay) have violated human rights – for example during European colonisation, or by practising slavery. (Note that various of these were sins of *lay* Catholics. Often, when people discuss evils in Church history, they just mean sins of popes, bishops and priests. That’s a very *clericalist* approach, since the Church isn’t just the hierarchy. It includes all the baptised (which actually greatly multiplies the number of sins).)

Also, in judging people’s actions we keep in mind the knowledge and conditions of that time and culture; and recall that the Holy Spirit works gently and gradually with the whole human race – including Catholics. The Gospel comes to a person and a society that are already influenced in all sorts of ways by their culture and history, and that impacts how fully they

receive the Gospel (again, not just the laity, but the hierarchy, who aren't magically immune from their culture). It's only step-by-step that the Church has fully applied Gospel principles to things like slavery or religious freedom. No false teachings on such matters have ever been proclaimed as dogmas of faith, and yet the full truth doesn't get understood all at once either.

It's when we've cleared away these matters that we're faced with the real sinfulness of Catholics. And it's then we can say – leaving final judgment of individuals to God himself – 'Guilty as charged!' Free will can always reject grace and truth. Many leaders in the Church have been saints, but others have been unworthy – even as one of the Twelve Apostles was a traitor.

4. Sin in the Church is actually what Jesus prophesied.

He warned that the 'kingdom of heaven', in the form it takes in this present world as the Church on earth, would be like a net, containing good fish and bad, (*Mt 13:47-50*) or a field where the Enemy has sown weeds among the wheat. (*Mt 13:24-30*) He also speaks of the unfaithful steward, a parable applying very naturally to unfaithful Church leaders. (*Lk 12:42, 45-46, 48*) So how could the actual *fulfilment* of his prophecies in the course of history invalidate his promises? He also said of the Jewish religious leaders, 'The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.' (*Mt 23:2-3*) Likewise, we always trust Church *teachings*, guided by the Holy Spirit, even if transmitted through sinful leaders; but, we don't follow the *example* of the sinful leaders themselves.

5. If our faith depends on the goodness of the clergy, that's a form of the error of clericalism.

If we thought the truth of Church teachings was *because* this or that pope or bishop was so wise or so holy, then the discovery they actually *weren't* wise or holy *would* logically undermine our faith in Church teachings. Or, if we thought that the grace of the Sacraments came from the holiness of the *minister*, then discovering the minister *wasn't* holy would destroy our trust in the grace of that sacrament. But really, no mere human being, no matter how holy, can produce the grace of the Sacraments; and no mere human being is wise enough for us to put faith in their teachings as infallible. It's because *God* guides Church teachings that we put faith in them. It's only because *Christ* acts in the Sacraments that we believe they give grace. The wisdom or holiness of the human instrument God uses – well, it's an enhancement. But not central: Christ is central, not the priest.

6. The Sacraments aren't magic. In particular, Holy Orders doesn't magically give total immunity from sin any more than Baptism or Confirmation. People with the clericalist mindset often have the feeling that sins of clergy challenge their faith in a way that the sins of the laity *don't* challenge faith: as though, from the promises of Christ, we would've expected the clergy to all be saints, or at least good people. Maybe we should be nearly as surprised by the sins of laity violating their Baptism, as of clergy violating both Baptism and Ordination – or maybe, not be especially surprised by either. We all have free will.

7. We need to be guided by reason and the laws of logic, not blind emotion and association. True, we *should* have negative emotions when we hear about evils. And Catholics, one might hope, would have a *deeper* sense than others of the evil of sin. So when a non-Catholic denounces something genuinely evil from Church history, we should denounce the evil even more strongly than them. The more we love the Church, the more we hate the evil that hides her true face.

The trouble is when someone lets those emotions substitute for reason. So they make a simple transfer of their negative emotions about the evil that was done *by Catholics*, across to the Catholic *Faith*. But that transfer has no rational basis. It's done simply by emotional association. Emotions *guided by reason* are good, but without this guidance, our negative emotions can irrationally overflow, from sinful actions *contrary* to Catholic teachings, to those teachings themselves.

Logic follows definite laws, and we can analyse if someone's thinking follows those laws or not. Taking an example of the logical form called the syllogism (two statements, the premises, leading to a third statement, the conclusion):

1. Christ promised that the leaders in the Church would never commit great sins.
2. But leaders in the Church *have* committed great sins.
3. Therefore, what Christ promised was false.

Now, that's valid logical *form*; if the two premises are both true, then the conclusion would logically follow. But obviously, Premise 1 is false. Christ never even hinted at such a promise, and that's why the *conclusion* doesn't follow either. (And as we saw, he even indicated the opposite – some Church leaders would be unworthy.) So the existence of sin in the Church doesn't invalidate his promises even slightly.

Now an example of two true premises, yet where there's no logical connection to the conclusion – a total *lack* of logical form. It's a transfer simply by association:

1. Some bad popes did evil things, against Catholic teachings.
2. Those bad popes were the leaders of the Catholic Church.
3. Therefore, the Catholic Church and her teachings are evil.

Now here, Premises 1 and 2 *are* both true. But the supposed logical conclusion actually has no logical connection whatsoever with the two premises. Search as you will, you won't find a valid logical link. It's a complete *leap* of logic, so it doesn't help anyone get in touch with the truth even one little bit. And often enough, some irrational transfer of emotions might come in here: the negative emotions we would *rightly* have in connection with the evil actions of some pope, irrationally get transferred across to the *divine* aspects of the Church coming from Christ. So when someone attacks the Catholic Faith because of sinful Catholics, always ask yourself – 'What logical syllogism are they using – if any?'

8. 'Collective guilt' doesn't exist: sin, even by leaders, is always in the end the choice of specific individuals. Even if there were *lots* of individuals making sinful choices in how they lived out their role in the Church, there's no 'collective guilt' supposedly falling on all the *other* individuals who *didn't* make those sinful choices, or on the group as a whole.

This is a universal principle. Individuals who in no way consent don't take on the *blame and guilt* of wrongs done by other people – for example, by their country's leaders, or by some fellow citizens, or by a family member. Likewise, when a pope sins, or a lot of bishops sin, or a lot of Catholics sin, this doesn't make it that somehow 'the Church as a whole', with all her members, is guilty of the sin. To be and remain a Catholic means choosing to be in moral and spiritual union with Christ, and with the good things he established – as God's law obliges. But to the precise extent that someone else sins, they *reject and depart* from their moral union with Christ, and with the rest of us. So our being in union with Christ in no way places us in moral union with their sin.

In all this, we need to be alert to another logical fallacy. Often there's a switch between different layers of meaning of the word 'Church'. But in logic, if you change the meaning of a word midstream, it invalidates the logic. So: people *can* use the word 'Church' as a sort of shorthand, meaning, 'what lots of individual Church leaders, or Church members, are in fact doing'. So someone might say: 'In the Renaissance, the Church was mainly interested in wealth and power' – meaning, a lot of popes and bishops were mainly interested in wealth and power.

Or, we can use the word 'Church' in a more theological way, meaning, for example, those aspects of the Church coming from Christ, and bringing us his grace and his truth. So using *that* meaning, we might say, for example: 'The Church teaches that Christ is really present in the Eucharist.'

If we're not alert to the different meanings, we can incorrectly transfer them. So someone at the Renaissance might have said, 'Why should I care what the Church teaches? The Church is only interested in wealth and power.' The word 'Church' has been used in two different ways. They've put down the aspects of the Church coming from Christ, based on the things *contrary* to Christ's teachings that some popes and bishops were doing.

9. It's not astounding that good things God established get twisted to evil: this is the way evil *always* works. Evil can't exist by itself – it's always parasitic, always a distortion of something good given by God (whether in creating the world or redeeming it). For example, people's legitimate desire for their own happiness leads them to trample the happiness of others. Someone's skill with weapons is used for murder. The authority of political leaders, or police, or clergy, meant for human benefit, makes them all the more dangerous if they're corrupted. It doesn't mean we abolish the good thing – but we remain vigilant, because any human being can go astray.

10. The good remains the good, which evil can't take away. We mustn't give evil the false victory of imagining that

it somehow *diminishes* the goodness of good things with which the evil might have become associated. True, evil does damage or destroy the good *directly opposed* to it. For example, a sin damages the moral goodness of the person committing the sin. But suppose the sinner is a great musician: their sin doesn't damage the goodness of *music*, as though music itself is now somehow tainted. Likewise: the good coming forth from God's hand remains the good. All the good things in the Church remain what they were, to the glory of God.

When sunlight shines through a stained glass window, it produces beautiful colours within. If the window has dirt on it, that affects how well those within can see the sunlight, and the stained glass. Yet the sunlight itself is totally untarnished; and underneath the dirt, the stained glass still has the same beauty. We just need to clean the dirt away. So we see the meaning: the sunlight – truth and grace, coming from Christ – shining through the stained glass – his holy Catholic Church.

So: the truth of the Catholic Church, established by so much rational evidence as being the Church founded and upheld by Jesus, the Son of God, remains untouched by all the different evils of history. The Church is still the family into which God calls and invites all people.

The Church's true holiness shines forth in the saints.

We don't judge a medicine by those who buy it but never use it, but by those who actually take it. So, the power of the Church to produce holiness has to be judged by looking at those who actually believe and obey her teachings, who pray, and who make prayerful use of her Sacraments; not by looking at those members of the Church through history who have neglected these things. Then we receive a vision not just of the universality of sin, but of the universality of grace – which is far more powerful and abundant, and through which Christ will keep bringing forth saints in his Church until the end of the world.

16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A – READINGS

FIRST READING

Wis 12:13, 16-19

A reading from the book of Wisdom

There is no god, other than you, who cares for everything, to whom you might have to prove that you never judged unjustly. Your justice has its source in strength, your sovereignty over all makes you lenient to all. You show your strength when your sovereign power is questioned and you expose the insolence of those who know it; but, disposing of such strength, you are mild in judgement, you govern us with great lenience, for you have only to will, and your power is there. By acting thus you have taught a lesson to your people how the virtuous man must be kindly to his fellow men, and you have given your sons the good hope that after sin you will grant repentance.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 85

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

O Lord, you are good and forgiving,
full of love to all who call.

Give heed, O Lord, to my prayer

and attend to the sound of my voice.

(R.)

All the nations shall come to adore you
and glorify your name, O Lord:
for you are great and do marvellous deeds,
you who alone are God.

(R.)

But you, God of mercy and compassion,
slow to anger, O Lord,
abounding in love and truth,
turn and take pity on me.

(R.)

SECOND READING

Rom 8:26-27

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans

The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means, and that the pleas of the saints expressed by the Spirit are according to the mind of God.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATIONCf. *Mt 11:25*

Alleluia, alleluia! Blessed are you, Father,
Lord of heaven and earth; you have revealed to little ones
the mysteries of the kingdom. Alleluia!

GOSPEL*Mt 13:24-43*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus put a parable before the crowds, ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, the darnel appeared as well. The owner’s servants went to him and said, “Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?” “Some enemy has done this,” he answered. And the servants said, “Do you want us to go and weed it out?” But he said, “No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn.”’

He put another parable before them: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all and

becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches.’

He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.’

In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfil the prophecy: ‘I will speak to you in parables and expound things hidden since the foundation of the world.’

Then, leaving the crowds, he went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, ‘Explain the parable about the darnel in the field to us.’ He said in reply, ‘The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the evil one; the enemy who sowed them, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that provoke offences and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the virtuous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Listen, anyone who has ears!’

The Gospel of the Lord.

Memorial Acclamation: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

Spiritual Communion: My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

Hymns: Entrance: 588 (vs 1, 2, 4) ‘Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven’ Offertory: 580 ‘As gentle as silence’
Communion: ‘Faithful One’ Recessional: 624 ‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy’

Recently deceased: Don Pena; Joseph Galea; Maria Lien Dang

Anniversaries: Fe Tatel; Joscelyn Ford

Feast Days: 20 July: St Apollinaris 21 July: St Lawrence of Brindisi 22 July: St Mary Magdalene
23 July: St Bridget of Sweden 24 July: St Sharbel Makhlūf 25 July: St James, apostle

Readings Next Week: 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time: 1 Kg 3:5, 7-12; Rom 8:28-30; Mt 13:44-52

SAINT OF THE WEEK 23 July: **St Bridget of Sweden (1303-73)** A model of living both marriage and widowhood, Bridget (or Birgitta) was the daughter of the governor of Uppland in Sweden. (Pagan Sweden had become Catholic from the 1000s, until 1527, when Lutheranism would displace Catholicism over the 1500s.) In 1316 Bridget married Ulf Gudmarsson, Lord of Närke, five years her senior; they had eight children (including St Catherine (Karin) of Sweden). Their happy marriage included prayer, penance and charity. They founded a hospital, and Bridget would personally serve the poor. King Magnus IV of Sweden called Bridget to be chief lady-in-waiting to Queen Blanche and introduce the queen to Swedish culture.

Ulf died in 1344, shortly after their return from pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. In widowhood, Bridget devoted herself to prayer, and to caring for the poor and the sick. She gave her possessions to the poor, and (without herself becoming a consecrated religious) founded the order known as the Bridgettines (today with 800 members). Originally it had both nuns and monks in joint communities with separate cloisters, presided over by an abbess (in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary). Braving the Black Death that was still raging through Europe, Bridget went on pilgrimage to Rome with her daughter Catherine for the Jubilee of 1350, seeking papal approval for her order. She resided there for the rest of her life, doing charitable works, and making pilgrimages through Italy. From childhood Bridget had visions and mystical experiences, but especially in her widowhood she received revelations, with a frequent focus on Christ’s Passion, recorded in 9 volumes. These became popular in the later Middle Ages. Recognised as a prophet, Bridget sternly urged moral reform in the Church and society, and counselled kings and popes – calling the latter to return to Rome from Avignon in France (where they lived from 1309 till 1377). She died in Rome on 23 July 1373, not long after having led her spiritual children on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She was canonised in 1391 by Boniface IX. In 1999, John Paul II declared her Co-Patroness of Europe, alongside St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein); and Co-Patrons St Benedict and Sts Cyril & Methodius.