

PARISH OF ASCOT VALE

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

Parish Priest:	Rev Fr Justin Ford
Assistant Priest / Lithuanian Chaplain:	Rev Fr Joseph Deveikis
Presbytery / Parish Office:	123 St Leonards Rd, Ascot Vale (Postal: PO Box 468 Ascot Vale 3032)
Telephone:	9370 6688
Website:	www.stmaryschurch.org.au
Email:	ascotvale@cam.org.au
Office Hours:	Tue – Fri, 10am – 3pm. Secretary: Carmen D’Rosario (Wednesdays)
Principal, St Mary’s School:	Mr Paul Hogan T: 9370 1194
Principal, St Margaret’s School:	Mr Gavin Brennan T: 9318 1339

Mass

Public Masses are currently suspended in Melbourne. Livestreaming of our 10:30 Sunday Mass will continue, 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.

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 27 September 2020

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PREMIER FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF VICTORIA

Friday 25 September 2020

The Premier, The Hon Daniel Andrews

Dear Premier,

It has been very encouraging to see COVID-19 numbers dropping so dramatically in recent weeks. We are grateful for the efforts and commitment of the government and health officials in containing the second wave of the pandemic, and for the clear leadership you have provided personally in your daily communication updates for all Victorians.

Throughout the various changes in restrictions over the last six months, the Catholic dioceses of Victoria have shown themselves to be resilient, well-managed and safe, carefully communicating each set of restrictions and ensuring their implementation, even when this caused much hardship.

However, people of faith across regional and metropolitan Victoria have raised serious concerns about the unfairness and inconsistency in the numbers allowed for religious gatherings by comparison with other sectors in the current ‘third step’. We are being asked what the reason is for this dramatic difference, and we are unable to provide an answer, even after several meetings with DHHS in which we have sought explanations.

Over the last two weeks, we have worked cooperatively with members of the government and health authorities, and have resolved a number of inconsistencies and communication difficulties. However, a pressing need remains to address the unfairness of the disparity in numbers.

In the most simple of measures, the current restrictions in regional Victoria literally fail the ‘pub test’: if people of faith can gather in a restaurant or bar catering for a particular number of patrons (and remove their face covering), they ought to be able to put on 2 their mask, cross the road and worship in their faith community with the same numbers, provided equivalent COVID-safe practices are in place.

We ask that this disparity be rectified urgently and that the principle of fairness be applied for each subsequent step on the roadmap to reopening. Catholic communities have shown their commitment to acting responsibly and cooperatively throughout the pandemic, and they will be greatly encouraged in this if they can see that people of faith are being given the same consideration as other sectors of the community.

You remain in our prayers and we look forward to finding a constructive solution to this issue, which is causing unnecessary pain and distress for people of faith across Victoria.

Yours sincerely,

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli

ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE

Most Rev Shane Mackinlay

BISHOP OF SANDHURST

Most Rev Paul Bernard Bird CSsR

BISHOP OF BALLARAT

Rev Peter Slater

DELEGATE OF DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATOR, SALE

Feast of the Archangels, 29 September: The Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel

Tuesday 29 September is the Feast of the Archangels, Sts Michael, Gabriel and Raphael – ‘Michaelmas’ in the Middle Ages; and Friday 2 October is the Memorial of the Guardian Angels. Previously we’ve looked at Church doctrine on the existence and nature of the Angels, at their role in our prayer life; and at more specific details about each of Sts Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. St Michael appears in Scripture especially in his captaincy of the Holy Angels in their combat against the Devil and his angels. (*Rev* 12:7-9; cf. *Dan* 10:13, 21; *Jude* 9) What this combat really involves for these non-physical spirits is not clear, but we should certainly pray to St Michael for protection against our spiritual enemies, the demons.

For the month of October 2018, Pope Francis invited all the faithful ‘to pray the Holy Rosary every day...and thus to join in communion and in penitence, as the people of God, in asking the Holy Mother of God and Saint Michael Archangel to protect the Church from the devil, who always seeks to separate us from God and from each other.’ And he also ‘asked that the recitation of the Holy Rosary during the month of October conclude with the prayer written by Leo XIII’:

‘St Michael the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle, be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who wander through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.’

This is the prayer prayed at the end of Mass from 1886 by order of Pope Leo XIII, building up a wall of angelic protection. From 7 March 1965, it was no longer part of the liturgy (and some Catholics may have concluded in those times that we no longer needed to be concerned about demonic attack). But St John Paul II encouraged us to keep using it as a non-liturgical prayer: ‘Although today this prayer is no longer recited at the end of Mass, I ask everyone not to forget it, and to recite it to obtain help in the battle against the forces of darkness and against the spirit of this world.’ (*Address*, 24/4/1994) With this encouragement of Pope John Paul and Pope Francis, the prayer is commonly prayed in our parish – not as part of Mass, but at Holy Hour and after Mass is over. St Michael is patron of the entire People of God (cf. *Dan* 12:1; Pope Francis *Address* 5/7/2013, consecrating Vatican City to St Michael) so when we use this prayer, protection is given both to us as individuals, and also to the whole Church.

This year we’ve looked at some of the history of devotion to St Michael – through the GIFT Paper article on the ‘Sword of St Michael’ (the mysteriously aligned shrines of Skellig Michael in Ireland; St Michael’s Mount in Cornwall; Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy; Sacra di San Michele in Piedmont; Monte Sant’Angelo sul Gargano in Apulia; and the Archangel Michael of Panormitis Monastery in Greece); and through the account of Rome’s deliverance from plague through St Michael’s intercession at the time of Pope St Gregory the Great (590-604), and St Gregory’s vision of St Michael on what is now Castel Sant’Angelo.

We conclude that today with further background on the Prayer to St Michael composed and promulgated by Leo XIII in 1886 – according to reports, in response to a mystical vision he experienced. (Factual details in the following are from *Pope Leo XIII and the Prayer to St Michael: An Historical and Theological Examination* by Kevin Symonds (2015).)

History of the Prayer to St Michael

In 1859 Pope Bl. Pius IX (1846-78) had added special prayers for the end of ‘Low Mass’ (i.e. Mass that was read, not sung); and in 1886 Leo XIII (1878-1903) issued a modified form of this. It was then that he also added the Prayer to St Michael; subsequent indications from the Holy See and elsewhere are that this was his own composition. The context of the times from Pope Leo’s perspective was the threat of freemasonry (against which wrote a strong encyclical in 1884), and the loss of the Papal States to the Kingdom of Italy (1860/1870).

When the issue of the pope’s temporal (civil) power was finally resolved with the 1929 Lateran Treaty with Italy that established Vatican City as an independent state, Pius XI in 1930 kept the prayers, which were now to be prayed for Russia (under communism since 1917).

In 1963, Vatican II established that liturgical rites were ‘to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance; elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded’. (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 50) It was on the basis of this passage that those implementing the liturgical reform decided to remove the Prayer to St Michael from the end of Mass. (*Inter Oecumenici* 48 (j), 26 September 1964, approved by St Paul VI) Thus things have stood for 55 years.

Why did Pope Leo XIII compose the prayer?

Such are the ‘externals’ concerning the Prayer to St Michael. But there have long been stories, well-known to Catholics having an interest in ‘private revelations’, of a deeper reality going on. What we learn is perhaps disturbing on the surface, yet in the end strengthens us, as we come to understand better our own times; and perceive how God, whose providence rules all things, never abandons us, but gives us all the help we need to navigate safely through the dangers of this world. It is clear in Scripture (for example in the *Book of Revelation*) that God will have final victory, already firmly planted in Christ’s Resurrection; yet that the forces of evil will still cause what turmoil they can, until the last day.

So it is reported that Pope Leo composed and ordered this prayer after experiencing, at the end of Mass, a vision of demons unleashed upon the world, or upon Rome. In one version, St Michael appears and casts the demons back into hell. That account also has the Pope collapsing in fear; another account simply has him going straight to his study and emerging with his newly-composed prayer some time after. A common version has the Pope ‘overhearing a conversation’ between God and Satan, in which Satan is permitted 100 years, or ‘the 20th century’ to try to destroy the Church.

The ‘conversation’ is reminiscent of that between God and Satan at the start of the biblical *Book of Job*. (*Job* 1:6-12; 2:1-7) This is hardly to be interpreted – whether in *Job*, or in Leo’s mystical experience if valid – as ‘literal reporting’ of an actual conversation in the other world: doubtless God used some level of symbolism here (as also in the visual aspect of Leo’s experience). And God only ‘withholds his hand’ from preventing any evil because in an eternal perspective, he will draw from that evil an even greater good: ‘Do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen’. (*Lk* 21:9) Christ himself in his Passion seemed to have been defeated by the Devil; and the Church, the Body of Christ, shares her Lord’s Passion – but then also, his Resurrection.

Leaving aside the non-rational prejudice some people have against *any* accounts of angels or demons, we still need to ask, is this story well-founded? First, it must be said that we have no account from Pope Leo himself. An 1891 publication did report an 1886 audience with Leo shortly before the prayer was sent out, at which he spoke with deep feeling on the danger of demonic forces and quoted the full prayers; but the report did not mention the vision. (In line with that deep feeling, the Pope was indeed known to pray the Prayer to St Michael in St Peter’s Basilica with power and commitment.)

The first known written account of the vision is in a book by a German priest, Fr Carl Vogl, in 1931, which gives no further sources. Critics in the 1930s questioned the ‘legends’ making the rounds at that time. Stronger evidence comes from Cardinal Giovanni Battista Nasalli Rocca (1872-1952), Archbishop of Bologna. In his 1946 Pastoral Letter, ‘God, Man, the Devil’, the Cardinal attributed to the personal secretary of Leo XIII, Msgr. Rinaldo Angeli (1851-1914), the report of Leo’s vision of demons gathering upon Rome, and Leo’s having shared that vision with Angeli and others in confidentiality. Angeli was Leo’s secretary for most of his pontificate, and became his confidant; and Nasalli Rocca stated that Angeli shared ‘many times’ about the Pope’s vision. (Angeli and Nasalli Rocca would have had some interaction at a Vatican department starting from 1898.)

(An assertion sometimes made is that Leo’s vision was on 13 October 1884 – exactly 33 years before the ‘Miracle of the Sun’ at Fatima in 1917. However, sources for this are lacking, and it may be speculated if the event at Fatima itself indirectly fed into this claim.)

Italian priest, Fr Domenico Pechenino (1873-1950), Major Rector for the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, stated in a

1947 article (citing unfortunately only an unnamed source, whom he could name ‘if required’) that Pope Leo, assisting at a thanksgiving Mass after his own Mass, seemed to be looking intently at something above the head of the celebrant. He went to his study for half an hour, and emerged with the new prayer. While not mentioning the ‘gathering of demons’ in Rome, Pechenino described the alleged conversation between God and Satan, giving ‘50 or 60 years’ as the time Satan would be given to try to destroy the Church. (The ‘100 years’ often given as the length of Satan’s power seems to have no basis anywhere, Symonds’ book states.)

Pechenino, somewhat elderly and in poor health, is mistaken in a detail of dates, which may put his accuracy in a bit of question. But this is the first affirmation from a Church official of some stature concerning this ‘conversation’ Leo is said to have heard. Pechenino’s account does not state when the supposed 50-60 years would begin, so people can only speculate. Immediately in 1886? 1900, the new century? 1917, Fatima and communism? 1965, with the ceasing of the protective power of the prayer at the end of so many Masses?

Surveying the evils that have advanced over these times against humanity and the Church, we can hardly say there is no match to reality – world wars; communism and Nazism; persecutions; widespread moral decay; over a billion abortions; the abuse crisis; the serious decline in many places of Catholic faith and practice.

In the end we distinguish *details* in the story (which may be less reliable, given our accounts are third-hand) from the *basic event*. Assessment also depends on our level of background knowledge. Someone not yet even aware of the reality of the spiritual world would hardly be convinced by this evidence alone; but especially in context of the certain knowledge we already have by Catholic Faith of the reality of angels and demons, it gains credibility. Given Nasalli Rocca’s account in particular, but also Pechenino’s, (supported by some minor corroborating sources Symonds gives), it seems unlikely the story is totally invented from nothing.

So Leo most probably did indeed communicate to his aides some experience of the unleashing of demonic power, that (in God’s plan to still protect the Church) moved him to compose the Prayer to St Michael. This prayer then, is not just ‘one prayer among many’, but one uniquely composed by the Successor of St Peter for the spiritual dangers of our times. All Catholics could profitably use it as one of their own daily prayers.

SAINT OF THE WEEK 30 September: St Jerome, Priest, Doctor of the Church (c. 340 – 30 September 420) This Wednesday is the 1600th anniversary of the death of St Jerome, pre-eminent Scripture scholar among the saints. [*‘Jerome’ in its original Latin is ‘Hieronymus’; Italian versions are ‘Girolamo’ and ‘Geronimo’, Spanish ‘Jeronimo’. It derives from Greek and is unrelated to Jeremiah / Jeremy, from Hebrew.*] Jerome was born in the Roman province of Dalmatia, in the city of Stridon (thought to have been in modern-day Croatia, Slovenia or Bosnia). Although brought up Catholic, as was then common he was not baptised until adulthood, after a loose life as a student in Rome. Studying in Gaul and Constantinople, ordained priest about 378 in Antioch, from 382 to 384 he was secretary to Pope St Damasus I, who entrusted him with revising existing Latin translations of the Gospels. This eventually became part of his translation (completed 405) of nearly all the Bible into Latin from Hebrew and Greek – his most famous work, known as the Vulgate [*meaning ‘commonly-used’*]. We also have many letters, works of biblical commentary, theology and history. From 386 he lived in Bethlehem in a monastery near the Basilica of the Nativity, until his death there in 420. The Vulgate, used widely through the Middle Ages, was officially made the Church’s standard Latin text (1546) by the Council of Trent.

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A – READINGS

FIRST READING

Ezek 18:25-28

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel

The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows: 'You object, "What the Lord does is unjust." Listen, you House of Israel: is what I do unjust? Is it not what you do that is unjust? When the upright man renounces his integrity to commit sin and dies because of this, he dies because of the evil that he himself has committed. When the sinner renounces sin to become law-abiding and honest, he deserves to live. He has chosen to renounce all his previous sins; he shall certainly live; he shall not die.'

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 24

R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.

1. Lord, make me know your ways.

Lord, teach me your paths.

Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
for you are God my saviour.

(R.)

2. Remember your mercy, Lord,
and the love you have shown from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth.

In your love remember me,

because of your goodness, O Lord.

(R.)

3. The Lord is good and upright.

He shows the path to those who stray,

He guides the humble in the right path,

He teaches his way to the poor.

(R.)

SECOND READING

Phil 2:1-11

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians

If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self-effacing. Always consider the other person to

be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus:

His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jn 10:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

My sheep listen to my voice, says the Lord;

I know them, and they follow me.

Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 21:28-32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people, 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?' 'The first' they said. Jesus said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, a pattern of true righteousness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Memorial Acclamation: When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

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 – CWB 543 (*verses 1, 2, 5*)

Lord of creation, to you be all praise

Offertory – CWB 461

Servant song

Communion – The heavens shall declare

Recessional – CWB 537 (*verses 1, 4*)

Lift high the Cross

Feast Days:

28 September: St Lorenzo Ruiz & Companions, martyrs; **St Wenceslaus**, Duke of Bohemia

29 September: Feast of Sts Michael, Gabriel & Raphael, Archangels **30 September:** St Jerome

1 October: St Therese of the Child Jesus

2 October: The Holy Guardian Angels

Recently Deceased:

Helen Endaya; Giuseppina Caval

Readings Next Week:

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Is 5:1-7; Phil 4:6-9; Mt 21:33-43

Daylight Saving starts 2:00 am next Sunday 4 October – clocks forward, lose an hour's sleep or risk being late!

***Remember to pray a decade of the Rosary every day for the parishioners of
St Patrick's, Bega, who are especially praying for our parish at this time of lockdown***