

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: [suspended during lockdown] Tue – Fri, 10am – 3pm. **Secretary:** Carmen D'Rosario
Principal, St Mary's School: Mr Paul Hogan T: 9370 1194
Principal, St Margaret's School: Mr Gavin Brennan T: 9318 1339

Mass

We are now permitted to celebrate daily Mass outdoors, with a congregation of five. This will be in the courtyard of St Mary's; scheduling will depend on weather forecasts. You can book to attend this on the parish website. Live streaming of our 10:30 Sunday Mass will continue, also accessible on the website.

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.

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 25 October 2020

'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.

The second resembles it: you must love your neighbour as yourself.' (Mt 22:37-39)

These two 'greatest commandments' as Jesus proclaims them in today's Gospel, the commandments of love, are also at the heart of salvation. So St Paul tells us, 'If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing... So faith, hope, love abide, these three: but the greatest of these is love.' (1 Cor 13:2-3, 13) (Faith and hope are absolutely necessary as *foundation stones*, but without supernatural charity, they remain dead, and ineffective for salvation.) St John teaches us, 'God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.' (1 Jn 4:16)

But this love of God and neighbour which is absolutely crucial, we do not have to, and cannot, achieve by our own human powers: supernatural charity is *infused into us by God* along with sanctifying grace (and grace and charity always stand or fall together). 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.' (Rom 5:5) This infusion of grace and charity takes place in particular by Baptism, or (if we have driven grace and charity from our souls by mortal sin) by Reconciliation.

Yet to grow in this divine love, or to regain it if necessary after mortal sin even prior to Reconciliation by perfect contrition (i.e. contrition motivated by charity), it is very important to make *acts of love* (along with acts of faith, hope and contrition): 'My God, I love you with my whole heart and soul, because of your infinite perfection and goodness, and for your sake I love my neighbour as myself.' So ask God's grace, and pray this daily – not just saying the words, but *meaning* them, by reflecting on the motive for charity: God's infinite perfection and goodness. God has given us a way to do this most easily: 'We love, because he first loved us'. (1 Jn 4:19) It is reflecting on the sufferings of Christ, who is God, that most especially leads us to realise God's immense goodness *to us*, and to a deep realisation of God's goodness *in himself*. Moved by the hidden action of grace within us, we then love this God above all things – which is salvation.

Hymns:	Entrance	– CWB 588 (<i>vs 1, 2, 4</i>)	Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven
	Offertory	– CWB 513	I love you, O my Lord most high
	Communion	– CWB 469	Christians, let us love one another
	Recessional	– CWB 416 (<i>vs 1, 8, 9</i>)	Immaculate Mary

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.

Anniversaries: Veronica Brennan; Gregory Hillas; Frances Smith; Resurecion Carreon; Rufino Pelayo; Jose Musni; Leopoldo Mallari

Readings Next Week: Solemnity of All Saints: Apoc 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Mt 5:1-12

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

Pope Francis and ‘Civil Unions’

Some parishioners have asked me about the various international news reports during the week, according to some of which **Pope Francis was supposedly changing the Church’s position on homosexuality** – specifically on the legitimacy of the State legally recognising homosexual relationships as civil unions. **In actual fact Church teaching is of course completely unchanged – but some clarification is in order.**

The confusion has arisen in the wake of a documentary on Pope Francis that premiered during the week. Amongst many other topics, that of the Church’s teaching on homosexuality came up.

Pope Francis first states [translated from the Spanish], **“Homosexuals have a right to be a part of the family.** They’re children of God and have a right to a family. Nobody should be thrown out, or be made miserable because of it.” This is actually an excerpt from a 2019 interview, so it helps to get the larger context from that: “Homosexual people have a right to be in the family, people with homosexual orientation have a right to be in the family and parents have the right to recognise that son as homosexual, that daughter as homosexual. **Nobody should be thrown out of the family, or be made miserable because of it...** They asked me the same question another time and I repeated it, ‘They are children of God, they have a right to a family, and such.’...And that doesn’t mean to approve of homosexual acts, not at all.” So this part should hopefully not be controversial: we don’t want Catholic parents to throw homosexual children out of their family!

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis already taught, “We would like before all else to reaffirm that **every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration**, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, (*Catechism* 2358) particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives.” (250) Nothing whatsoever prevents those with homosexual orientation from becoming saints – the Church’s highest honour.

The greater controversy has come from the Pope’s next words (in the documentary, spliced together with the previous, but actually said separately): **“What we have to create is a civil union law** [Spanish: *una ley de convivencia civil*, literally, ‘a law of civil co-existence’]. That way they are legally covered. I stood up for that.” (The last sentence refers to when as Archbishop of Buenos Aires he fought against same-sex marriage in Argentina but supported lesser legal measures as an alternative.)

Clearing a couple of other points out of the way first: **as is well-known, the Church teaches that homosexual acts are gravely sinful.** (This is at least according to the *objective* nature of the act – the Church judges nothing about the *subjective* conditions of an individual’s full knowledge and freedom that are also necessary for

mortal sin.) Pope Francis has never said anything to express disagreement with this (and reaffirms it even in the interview quoted above). **The Holy See has indicated that it views this teaching as definitive and unchangeable** (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF] *Notification* 31/5/1999) – unsurprisingly, considering the teaching of Sacred Scripture on the matter. As with various other moral doctrines, the definitive nature of this teaching would derive from its being infallibly taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. (cf. CDF *Doctrinal Commentary* 29/6/1998: 6; 8; 9; 11) In adhering to magisterial teachings on moral issues such as homosexuality, we do so in full certainty that God’s law is always the way of true love – rejecting the counterfeit ‘love’ that actually harms others by trying to justify spiritually damaging actions contrary to that law.

Secondly, Pope Francis has firmly maintained the teaching of the Church that same-sex marriage is impossible. So for example in *Amoris Laetitia*, he takes up the statement of the Synod of Bishops to this effect: “In discussing the dignity and mission of the family, the Synod Fathers observed that, ‘as for proposals to place unions between homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family’.” (251)

The supposed shift of Pope Francis is on a third question. Granted the point that same-sex couples by being in a sexual relationship act against the moral law (as known not just by faith but also by natural moral reason), **could the State nonetheless legitimately grant some legal recognition (short of marriage) to such relationships? When this question came up under Pope John Paul II, the answer was clearly negative:** although the State is not obliged to legally prohibit everything that is objectively contrary to the moral law, still, it is morally obliged not to give *direct positive endorsement* to immorality. In 2003, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published teaching to this effect in its document, *Considerations regarding proposals to give legal recognition to unions between homosexual persons* – formally approved by St John Paul II, and so participating in his magisterial authority.

Such a document is not infallible (so in principle could contain error and be open to revision); nonetheless, these statements are guided by the Holy Spirit in a general way, and are therefore authoritative, calling for the adherence of Catholics: the ‘religious submission of will and intellect’. (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 25) A theologian may in exceptional cases respectfully withhold assent from this or that non-infallible teaching if, after prayer and study, he or she is convinced that good reasons show the teaching to be clearly incorrect. **So has Francis now legitimately ‘withheld his own assent’**, and further, even reversed this particular teaching on civil unions?

Firstly, **Church teaching is obviously not created or changed in documentaries or interviews.** When popes

intend to bind the faithful to a law or teaching, they always do so in official documents. So leaving aside for the moment whether the expressed opinion of Pope Francis does actually conflict anyway with the earlier non-infallible teaching of 2003 – even if it did so, it would only express his personal opinion, leaving the actual teaching unchanged, and leaving us fully free to disagree with him. It may suggest a possible *intention* of his officially changing the teaching in future, but that is speculation – and in any case, would also be in the hands of God, who could prevent it if he disagreed!

The words of Pope Benedict XVI from the Foreword to his book *Jesus of Nazareth* published during his pontificate are relevant here: “It goes without saying that this book is in no way an exercise of the magisterium, but is solely an expression of my personal search for the face of the Lord. **Everyone is free, then, to contradict me.** I would only ask my readers for that initial goodwill without which there can be no understanding.”

The same ‘freedom to contradict’ actually applies to all ‘non-official’ acts of any pope – for example, the book-interviews or in-flight interviews of John Paul, Benedict and Francis; or the homilies of Pope Francis at daily Mass in his residence (as distinct from his more formal homilies). Popes would be in a state of paranoia if every personal opinion that dropped from their lips was going to bind the consciences of the faithful throughout the world, regardless of whether the Pope himself wished to bind them or not! Such wild exaggerations of papal authority have no place in Catholic Faith, and Francis himself would totally reject them. (A famous case from papal history is of Pope John XXII (1316-34) who, while pope, gave forth the opinion in sermons that saved souls do not yet enjoy the beatific vision of God in heaven, until the Last Judgement at the end of time. This caused consternation, the Pope recanted before he died, and his successor Pope Benedict XII infallibly defined the contrary, making it thenceforth clearly heretical to say what Pope John XXII had said.)

So Catholics *may* disagree with the personal opinions of this or that pope; and in fact the presumptive position remains that if the personal opinion that a pope is expressing contradicts existing official teaching (albeit non-infallible), then they *must* disagree with him – since their personal obligation of religious submission of will and intellect to the existing teaching continues. If we have exaggerated ideas of what papal authority entails, this may seem paradoxical, but is perfectly logical once we know the distinction between *official magisterial teaching* (infallible or non-infallible) guided by the Holy Spirit, versus all the countless *unofficial* acts of a pope.

We take every single word and action of Jesus as absolute and perfect (since he is both human and divine) but the same is not true of his merely-human representatives! (There is a certain parallel here with the administration of the Sacraments: it was established in the early Church that even an immoral priest validly administers the Sacraments, since he acts not by his own power and holiness – rather, Christ works through him *at that moment*, as long as the ritual is properly performed.)

What then is really going on in this case of the papal documentary? One would think it very irresponsible of a pope to express an opinion that he knew the general faithful were obliged to disagree with! But while history shows that papal irresponsibility is hardly impossible (which has no effect on our confidence in *official* papal teachings, guided by the Holy Spirit), common sense calls for a more careful examination of the case.

An Argentinian bishop who is close to the Pope gives the view that what Francis is referring to is in continuity with what he supported when Archbishop: **a law that enables two people living in the same dwelling** [*convivencia* / co-existence / cohabitation] **without reference to any sexual relationship or lack thereof**, to have mutual rights concerning inheritance, hospital visitation, insurance, etc. Now, it may be that in actual fact such laws would chiefly be made use of by couples in sexual relationships – but it does mean that the State is not specifically and formally *recognising and endorsing* illicit sexual unions (which as a matter of principle, the Church says, is always wrong). And there do truly exist cases of two people living together without sexual relationship, who also desire to make use of such laws to enter into a ‘union’ so as to protect their wishes.

We may legitimately disagree with Pope Francis’ personal conclusion on this, weighing up whether ‘civil union’ laws *even when not specifically referencing sexuality* do still tend to undermine marriage, the family, and morality; weighing up also the rights of various individuals to have their interests and legitimate wishes protected. (Of course, in Australia it is somewhat a moot point, since we already have same-sex ‘marriage’.)

However, this is a separate question from whether Francis’ opinion actually contradicts existing Church teaching (e.g. the 2003 document). Doubtless, he thinks personally that it does not, explaining why he would have no angst openly expressing his opinion to the faithful and to the world. **If a position is accused of being unorthodox the onus of proof lies on the accusers** – especially if it is *the Pope’s* position (in view also of the huge advantages he has to inquire from those around him the exact intended meaning of previous teaching).

Relevant passages from the 2003 document include the following: “Those who would move from tolerance to the legitimisation of **specific** rights for cohabiting homosexual persons need to be reminded that the approval or legalisation of evil is something far different from the toleration of evil...Laws in favour of homosexual unions are contrary to right reason because they confer legal guarantees, analogous to those granted to marriage, to unions between persons of the same sex...Nor is the argument valid according to which legal recognition of homosexual unions is necessary to avoid situations in which cohabiting homosexual persons, simply because they live together, might be deprived of real recognition of their rights as persons and citizens. In reality, they can always make use of the provisions of law – like all citizens from the standpoint of their private autonomy – to protect their rights in matters of common interest. It would be gravely unjust to sacrifice the

common good and just laws on the family in order to protect personal goods that can and must be guaranteed in ways that do not harm the body of society.” (5; 6; 9)

The word I have bolded – ‘specific’, a word laden with theological and philosophical meaning – may be crucial here. It would appear that strictly speaking, **the condemnation of the document (to which Catholics must continue to adhere) is reserved for civil union laws that somehow single out, approve and ‘reward’ homosexual relationships or immoral behaviour as such:** such laws would amount to *formal* cooperation in sin, and would directly undermine marriage (even if the laws didn’t call the same-sex relationships ‘marriage’). But the types of law Pope Francis appears to have in mind don’t do this, but confer rights *with no reference to matters of sexuality*. That doesn’t mean all must agree with his personal opinion that enacting such laws is actually *prudent and good*, but it does indicate that his position is still *within the bounds of Catholic teaching* as it has so far been explicated.

Having resolved the question of what this latest event means for our Catholic faith [i.e. nothing], we may still have anxiety as to the confusion that may have been caused to less-informed Catholics and non-Catholics. This is an issue of a different order. There are many evils in the world (religious confusion, war, immorality,

etc.) that arouse our rightful concern, prayer, and strenuous action; yet that ultimately we also nonetheless serenely entrust to the ultimate care of divine providence.

Some Catholics (online for example) also seem eager to determine what degree of blame must be placed on Pope Francis, or other popes, for this or that problem in the Church (such as, in the present instance, ‘confusion of the faithful’). I avoid such questions of blame as neither necessary, relevant nor helpful to our believing and living the Catholic Faith ourselves; and liable to lead to sins against charity, or even to seduce someone into sinful distancing from full union with the Church. It is hardly the task of every Catholic to debate the prudence of every action of popes, past or present. We are not papal advisors; our personal ‘judgements of blame’, correct or not, would have zero effect on events in the Vatican; and we have quite enough to do discerning how God wants us personally to act, without worrying about the prudent course for every other person as well.

So we continue in peaceful union of faith and charity with our beloved Pope Francis (Successor of Peter in his divinely-appointed authority over the One Church of Christ) – not viewing him (as some accuse) as a sort of ‘god’ incapable of any personal wrong or error, yet fully obedient to his Magisterium and that of his predecessors.

30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A – READINGS

FIRST READING

Ex 22:20-26

A reading from the book of Exodus

The Lord said to Moses, “Tell the sons of Israel this, “You must not molest the stranger or oppress him, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt. You must not be harsh with the widow, or with the orphan; if you are harsh with them, they will surely cry out to me, and be sure I shall hear their cry; my anger will flare and I shall kill you with the sword, your own wives will be widows, your own children orphans.

“If you lend money to any of my people, to any poor man among you, you must not play the usurer with him: you must not demand interest from him. If you take another’s cloak as a pledge, you must give it back to him before sunset. It is all the covering he has; it is the cloak he wraps his body in; what else would he sleep in? If he cries to me, I will listen, for I am full of pity.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 17

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

1. I love you, Lord, my strength,
my rock, my fortress, my saviour.
My God is the rock where I take refuge;
my shield, my mighty help, my stronghold.
The Lord is worthy of all praise:
when I call I am saved from my foes. (R.)

2. Long life to the Lord, my rock!
Praised be the God who saves me.
He has given great victories to his king
and shown his love for his anointed. (R.)

SECOND READING

1 Thess 1:5-10

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians

You observed the sort of life we lived when we were with you, which was for your instruction, and you were led to become imitators of us, and of the Lord; and it was with the joy of the Holy Spirit that you took to the gospel, in spite of the great opposition all round you. This has made you the great example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia since it was from you that the word of the Lord started to spread – and not only throughout Macedonia and Achaia, for the news of your faith in God has spread everywhere. We do not need to tell other people about it: other people tell us how we started the work among you, how you broke with idolatry when you were converted to God and became servants of the real, living God; and how you are now waiting for Jesus, his Son, whom he raised from the dead, to come from heaven to save us from the retribution which is coming.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jn 14:23

Alleluia, alleluia! All who love me will keep my words, and my Father will love them and we will come to them. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 22:34-40

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, ‘Master, which is the greatest commandment of the law?’ Jesus said, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: you must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.’