

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
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Mass

Masses are now able to be celebrated with 10 people attending, plus essential ministers. You are invited to book your attendance at a Mass using the parish 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 on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month are still on hold. However, 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 will continue to be published, containing the readings for that Sunday for your reflection. This will be uploaded to the parish website the Saturday afternoon prior.

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord – 24 May 2020

Today's Gospel records what is called the Great Commission – the command of Jesus to the Apostles: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...' (Mt 28:19-20)

Because this is the very end of Matthew's Gospel, and every three years it is our Gospel Reading for the Ascension, we might imagine that this was the occasion of the Ascension itself. Yet actually this is an earlier Resurrection appearance, which took place on a mountain in Galilee (Mt 28:16), whereas the Ascension was at Bethany near Jerusalem. St Luke tells us (in his Gospel and in its sequel, the *Acts of the Apostles*): 'Then he led them out [from Jerusalem] as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.' (Lk 24:50-51) 'Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away [about a kilometre].' (Acts 1:12)

Naturally enough however, we link Matthew's account of the 'Great Commission' with Jesus' final words at the Ascension itself, 'you will be my witnesses...indeed to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:8) In the first place, the words on both occasions are addressed to the Apostles – but of course, if the Great Commission had *ceased* with the Apostles, Christian faith would long ago have vanished from the earth. Each of us, in virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, has the urgent call from God to be a witness to Christ, and to help in the great mission to make disciples of all nations.

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.

<u>Hymns:</u>	Entrance	– CWB 400	Hail, Redeemer, King Divine
	Offertory	– CWB 449	Alleluia, sing to Jesus
	Communion	– CWB 377	Rejoice! the Lord is King
	Recessional	– CWB 577	How great thou art (<i>verses 1, 4</i>)

Memorial Acclamation: We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection, until you come again.

Recently Deceased: Delia Farrales; Noel Librea

Anniversaries: Tessie Zammit; George Glover; Kasey-Anne Oklobdzija;
Silvina Magsina Carreon; Pat Duffus; Peter English;
Pasquale & Margherita Giaquinta; Aurelio Moscatt

Readings Next Week: Pentecost Sunday: Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13; Jn 20:19-23

We continue to have Mass every day (and two Masses, most days), which can be attended by ten people (plus essential ministers). Online bookings from the parish website are currently open until this coming Saturday morning, 30 May. There are generally some weekday booking spaces that are not being taken up, so please feel free to take advantage of the opportunity and book yourself in. Bookings for next Sunday, which is Pentecost, will open from this Thursday morning. Because current government regulations expire on next Sunday 31 May, we might expect changes and further openings from 1 June.

From Church Teaching: The 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' on the Ascension

659 "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." (Mk 16:19) Christ's body was glorified at the moment of his Resurrection, as proved by the new and supernatural properties it subsequently and permanently enjoys. (Cf. Lk 24:31; Jn 20:19, 26) But during the forty days when he eats and drinks familiarly with his disciples and teaches them about the kingdom, his glory remains veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity. (Cf. Acts 1:3; 10:41; Mk 16:12; Lk 24:15; Jn 20:14-15; 21:4) Jesus' final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolised by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God's right hand. (Cf. Acts 1:9; 2:33; 7:56; Lk 9:34-35; 24:51; Ex 13:22; Mk 16:19; Ps 110:1) Only in a wholly exceptional and unique way would Jesus show himself to Paul "as to one untimely born", in a last apparition that established him as an apostle. (1 Cor 15:8; cf. 9:1; Gal 1:16)

660 The veiled character of the glory of the Risen One during this time is intimated in his mysterious words to Mary Magdalene: "I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (Jn 20:17) This indicates a difference in manifestation between the glory of the risen Christ and that of the Christ exalted to the Father's right hand, a transition marked by the historical and transcendent event of the Ascension.

661 This final stage stays closely linked to the first, that is, to his descent from heaven in the Incarnation. Only the one who "came from the Father" can return to the Father: Christ Jesus. (Cf. Jn 16:28) "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man." (Jn 3:13; cf. Eph 4:8-10) Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access

to the "Father's house", to God's life and happiness. (Jn 14:2) Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us. (*Missale Romanum*, Preface of the Ascension)

662 "and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (Jn 12:32) The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it. Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, "entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands. . . but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." (Heb 9:24) There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he "always lives to make intercession" for "those who draw near to God through him". (Heb 7:25) As "high priest of the good things to come" he is the centre and the principal actor of the liturgy that honours the Father in heaven. (Heb 9:11; cf. Rev 4:6-11)

663 Henceforth Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father: "By 'the Father's right hand' we understand the glory and honour of divinity, where he who exists as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified." (St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.* 4, 2)

664 Being seated at the Father's right hand signifies the inauguration of the Messiah's kingdom, the fulfilment of the prophet Daniel's vision concerning the Son of man: "To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (Dan 7:14) After this event the apostles became witnesses of the "kingdom [that] will have no end". (Nicene Creed)

On the one hand, the physical 'lifting up' of Jesus was something real and historical as experienced by the Apostles and reported in the New Testament. Yet Jesus obviously didn't go to live in the upper atmosphere, or outer space! Rather, God used this physical sign to convey to the Apostles a spiritual and transcendent reality. Pope John Paul II explains:

'We are dealing with a mystery which is an object of faith. It completes the mystery of the Incarnation. It is the ultimate fulfilment of the messianic mission of the Son of God who had come on earth to redeem us. Nonetheless, it is also a fact which can be known from the biographical and historical data concerning Jesus, which are contained in the Gospels.

'Let us refer to the texts of Luke, and first of all to the last verses of his Gospel: "Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (Lk 24:50-51). This means that the apostles had a sensation of "movement" of the whole figure of Jesus, and of an action of "separation" from the earth. The fact that Jesus blessed the apostles at that moment indicates the salvific meaning of his departure. As in the whole of his redemptive mission, his departure included and gave to the world every spiritual good.'

'... "He was lifted up": this expression corresponds to the sensible [*i.e. sensed*] and spiritual experience of the apostles. It refers to an upward movement, to a passage from earth to heaven, especially as a sign of another "passage": Christ passes to the glorified state in God. The first meaning of the ascension is precisely this: a revelation that the risen one has entered the heavenly intimacy of God. That is proved by "the cloud," a biblical sign of the divine presence. Christ disappears from the eyes of his disciples by entering the transcendent sphere of the invisible God.'

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD, YEAR A – READINGS

FIRST READING

Acts 1:1-11

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

In my earlier work, Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. He had shown himself alive to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God. When he had been at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. 'It is' he had said, 'what you have heard me speak about: John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

Now having met together, they asked him, 'Lord, has the time come? Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.'

As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky when suddenly two men in white were standing near them and they said, 'Why are you men from Galilee standing here looking into the sky? Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, this same Jesus will come back in the same way as you have seen him go there.'

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 46

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy;
a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

1. All peoples, clap your hands,
cry to God with shouts of joy!
For the Lord, the Most High, we must fear,
great king over all the earth. (R.)

2. God goes up with shouts of joy;
the Lord goes up with trumpet blast.
Sing praise for God, sing praise,
sing praise to our king, sing praise. (R.)

3. God is king of all the earth.
Sing praise with all your skill.
God is king over the nations;
God reigns on his holy throne. (R.)

SECOND READING

Eph 1:17-23

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power that he has exercised for us believers. This you can tell from the strength of his power at work in Christ, when he used it to raise him from the dead and to make him sit at his right hand, in heaven, far above every Sovereignty, Authority, Power, or Domination, or any other name that can be named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come. He has put all things under his feet, and made him, as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church; which is his body, the fullness of him who fills the whole creation.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Go and teach all people my gospel.
I am with you always, until the end of the world.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 28:16-20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commandments I gave to you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Entrance Antiphon:

You kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
praise the Lord, who ascends above the highest heavens;
his majesty and might are in the skies, alleluia.

Communion Antiphon:

Christ, offering a single sacrifice for sins,
is seated for ever at God's right hand, alleluia.

The Catholic Bishops of Australia, at their annual Plenary Meeting just concluded, agreed, at this time of the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, to entrust Australia anew: 'to the Immaculate Heart of Mary under the title Our Lady Help of Christians, seeking her intercession for the safety of all our people especially in this time of COVID-19 pandemic'.

FEAST OF THE WEEK

24th May: Solemnity of Our Lady, Help of Christians, Patroness of Australia

(transferred this year to 25th May)

This feast is normally celebrated on 24th May, but when a solemnity (the highest of the three levels of feast) happens to coincide some year with a 'higher-ranked' feast (such as the Ascension, or indeed any Sunday of the Easter Season), its celebration is not cancelled as would happen with a lesser feast, but is moved to the next available day.

(Another solemnity for any parish is the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Parish Church. For our parish, that is also 24th May, since our parish church, St Mary of the Immaculate Conception, was dedicated on 24th May 1946.)

Catholic devotion honours Mary under various titles, and the title of 'Helper' goes back to the ancient Fathers. *Auxilium Christianorum* (Help of Christians) appears as a Marian title in sixteenth-century Italy, and was inserted in the Litany of Loreto. It reminds us particularly of Mary's intercessory role, in which she helps us by her prayers to Christ her Son, especially her prayers for the needs of all who bear his own title: 'Christian'.

Regarding Mary's feast day under this specific title, in our recent historical surveys we've seen how the institution of a feast day sometimes reflects a historical event – the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary on the anniversary of the Battle of Lepanto, 7th October 1571; or the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary on the anniversary of the lifting of the Siege of Vienna, 12th September 1683. The feast of Our Lady Help of Christians is similar, originating with the experiences of Pope Pius VII (1800-23), and the Church of his time.

The era of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (1789-1815) was a period of great tribulation for the Church. After the persecutions and martyrdoms in France at the time of the Revolution, especially during the Reign of Terror (1793-94), the papacy also fell victim to the revolutionary forces. French troops occupied Rome in 1798, and Pope Pius VI was taken captive. The following year he died in captivity at Valence in France, and many assumed the papacy was finished. The cardinals were unable to meet in Rome; but following instructions left by Pius VI for emergency conditions they met in Venice, and elected Pius VII.

At first the new pope was able to negotiate a settlement with Napoleon Bonaparte, who had come to power in France in 1799. In 1801 a Concordat was signed that regularised the situation of the Church in post-revolutionary France, and in 1804 Pius VII came to Paris for the coronation of Napoleon as Emperor in Notre Dame. (Napoleon placed the crown on his own head rather than let the Pope do this as at other papal coronations in history – coronation by the pope could symbolise that the crown was in the gift of the pope, and that what the pope had given he could also take away.) In 1808, France again occupied the Papal States, leading Pius to excommunicate Napoleon. But the Pope was himself taken captive by the French in 1809, first to Savona, then Fontainebleau.

Finally in 1814, with the decline of France's military fortunes, Pius was freed. On his journey home, he visited many sanctuaries of Our Lady and crowned her images, and was enthusiastically welcomed by the Catholic people. And on 24th May 1814, he at last reached Rome. The following year, he instituted in thanksgiving the annual Feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians, to be celebrated on 24th May, the anniversary of his return, honouring Mary for the deliverance of the Church from all the tribulations of the Revolutionary era.

That era was also the first period of the British colony in Australia, so it was in this historical context that in 1821 the foundation stone was laid for what was to become St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, and 'Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians' was chosen by the pastor, Fr Therry, as the title of the mother-church. 23 years later in 1844, the First Provincial Synod of Sydney chose Mary, under the title 'Help of Christians', to be the patroness of Australia.

Pius VII died in 1823, having seen the restoration of the Papal States by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The cause for his beatification was opened in 2007 and he now has the title 'Servant of God'.

As for Napoleon, after his final defeat at the Battle of Waterloo on 18th June 1815, he was exiled to the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic. In his recorded conversations with his British captors, he would hold forth at this or that time in defence of Islam, or Protestantism, or materialist atheism. But as his health declined, on 15th April 1821 he wrote his last will and testament, which opens with the words, 'I die in the apostolic and Roman religion, in the bosom of which I was born more than fifty years ago.' He died on 5th May 1821; having on 29th April confessed his sins and having received from Abbé Vignali the last sacraments of the Catholic Church.