



Jesus Christ, our beginning and end

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Anthony Randazzo
to the community of the Church of Broken Bay

2020 - 2021





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**Lord, be the beginning and end
of all we do and say.
Prompt our actions with your grace,
and complete them with your all-powerful help.
Through Christ our Lord.
AMEN.**

Introduction

Each week over the past year I have written a short message to the people and clergy of Broken Bay as a way of keeping my heart and mind focused on you, God's holy people, who have been entrusted to my pastoral care. I have been your Bishop for just over a year and in that period, I have had time to consider what I believe are important priorities for our community of the Church. In six points I have summarised these priorities, and I bring them to your attention and offer them to you for your contemplation and prayer.

This letter is addressed to the community of communities that form the Body of Christ in our region, some 215,000 Catholics that live within the geographical territory of the Diocese, but more importantly, I address it to you. I had you in mind when I asked the Holy Spirit to inspire my words and guide my writing to communicate these important matters.

Each of you will bring to this reading your own unique perspective that will further give clarity and colour to the words and concepts within these pages. Your distinctive perspective has been shaped by the challenges and opportunities presented to us in a most memorable year. During 2020 we have seen bushfires, floods, a pandemic, and dramatic changes to our way of life. We have also been reminded that we have creative ways of living as the community of the Church. Most importantly, as a community

of faith, this year has provided new opportunities for us to see Jesus Christ in our neighbour and in our midst.

This letter begins and ends with the person of Jesus Christ. He is our Alpha, our Omega, the beginning and the end; our daily bread and our constant during change.¹ My prayer for you as you read these pages is that you will come to know Jesus Christ in a way that is more real and personal than ever before.

Know that I pray for you each day and am praying particularly as you read my pastoral letter. As you read it you are not alone because in our community of the Church we are united by the love and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Revelation 1:8

1. The person of Jesus Christ, and his message of Good News

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete. 1John 1:1-4

Over the years, throughout what we might once have referred to as Christian society, the name of Jesus was spoken with reverence. It was understood by most people that to utter the name was to refer to the Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Saviour of the world. Some nonbelievers and other impious people used the name carelessly and others to swear or cuss. It was commonplace to see Catholics bow their heads when the holy name of Jesus was spoken.

What was obvious was a sense of reverence and awe, not only for the name but for the person of Jesus Christ. Generation upon generation carried a deep love and devotion for the Eternal Word of God, who by the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate

of the Virgin Mary, and became man.²

The Prologue of the Gospel according to Saint John gives a simple yet profound teaching regarding the divinity of the Eternal Word;³ the incarnation and humanity; the work of creation and salvation; the acceptance and rejection of the Word; and prophetic witness to the Word in our world.⁴ It is a beautiful and poetic piece of Scripture which provides ample opportunity for instruction and meditation. In sum, through the use of faith and reason, it provides an initial encounter with Jesus Christ, and his message of Good News.

a. Personal encounter – one with Christ

As I travel around the Diocese and encounter members of our community

² Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Symbol or Profession of Faith prescribed in the Roman Missal for use at Mass.

³ John 1:1-18

⁴ cf. Text and Commentaries, The Navarre Bible Gospels & Acts, 545.

of the Church, I am often delighted by the personal testimonies of faith that people share. Soon after I arrived to take up my ministry as the fourth bishop of the Diocese, it became obvious to me that the Catholic community of Broken Bay is alive and Spirit-filled. I thank God for the good work and ministry being carried out by so many brothers and sisters in the Lord.

On a recent visit to one of our Catholic Schools in Broken Bay, the students ran me through my paces via a Q&A session. I was mightily impressed at the depth and thoughtfulness of their questions. It was evident that they were developing the discipline of critiquing life and society with an educated mind and an ever-deepening faith.

One question focused on my own journey of faith. I gladly spoke about my parents and how they had modeled living faith in our family, in their work, and in the community. However, I made the point that as one of Christ's baptised faithful, I could not rest upon my family's faith or their good works. At some point in my own life, I had to be open to meeting Jesus Christ in a personal way, via a personal encounter. At that moment, Jesus

was not simply someone that I had read about. Nor was he someone in whom others believed. In the moment of personal encounter, Jesus Christ was alive and living. He met me where I was, he accompanied me on the pathway, and he called me to himself. In the encounter, Jesus did not judge me, nor did he burden me. As he did to so many others before me, Jesus forgave me and liberated me. He loved me. The personal encounter was an invitation to life with Christ. It was a call to conversion, to turn away from sin and believe in the Good News.⁵

b. Communion of life – one in Christ

While the call to be one with Christ is intensely personal, it is not made in isolation. There are some people whose encounter is like that of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, however, for the most part, people come to know Jesus Christ by way of the testimony of those who are known as Christ's faithful.⁶

Christ's faithful are those who are baptised with water, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Through baptism they are

⁵We remember this moment each year on Ash Wednesday when the priest places ashes on the head of those present who come to him during the liturgy, and he says to each one: *Repent, and believe in the Gospel*, Roman Missal, 234.

⁶Acts 9:3-9

⁷Matthew 28:19; cf. Rite of Baptism

incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church.

The word Church is not primarily a reference to a building, nor does it define an organisation or system of administration. The Church is, first and foremost, the people whom God calls to be one in Christ.⁸ It defines the assembly of those whom God's Word gathers together to form the People of God, and who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ.⁹ It is a community of believers, redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary.¹⁰

Saint Paul, writing to the community of the Church in Colossae, reminds the brothers and sisters that they had once

been "*estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds*" and that having heard and believed the Good News of Jesus Christ, they are "*now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death*".¹¹ Their reconciliation, and indeed the reconciliation of all of creation, which was accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is nurtured by the Holy Spirit who animates the community of the Church in the mission of proclaiming the message of Good News.¹²

Through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, every person is given the promise of abundant life.¹³ The community of the Church, which shares in a "communion of life, charity and truth," is where together we become one in Christ.¹⁴

Pray and think about...

- When you have experienced a personal encounter with Jesus.
- How you use the name of Jesus, in your thoughts and in your words.
- Your mission to be a messenger of the Good News to others.

⁸ cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 751-752.

⁹ cf. *Lumen gentium*, 15, 32; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 777; Code of Canon Law, canon 204 § 1.

¹⁰ cf. Colossians 1:19-20

¹¹ cf. Colossians 1:21-22

¹² cf. *Lumen gentium*, 48.

¹³ John 10:10

¹⁴ cf. *Lumen gentium*, 9.

2. The Holy Spirit leads us in the way of discipleship

Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

These verses from the end of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew are commonly referred to as "the great commission". They are rather brief; however, we should not let that detract from their importance.

With these words, spoken by Jesus to his closest disciples, they are entrusted with a mission that is weighty with responsibility. To preach the Word is but one dimension of the brief. The more onerous task is for the disciples to embody the truth of the Word through the behaviours and actions which accompany what they say. They have been living, travelling, eating, and praying with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. Their knowledge and experience of him is first-hand. Their encounter is both personal and communal. The inspiration for their mission is Jesus himself.

Even though Jesus is not visible to us

after his resurrection he continues to instruct us, his modern-day disciples, through the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

a. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to fulfil our mission

As I travel around the Diocese to pray, celebrate the Mass, and meet with people, I am regularly asked what is the greatest need in the Church today? To be honest, along with the question, I am often told what people think the answer is. Some propose that all will be well if we can gain the attention of the youth. Others suggest that the greatest need is to overhaul Church administration. Occasionally there is the recommendation to renew parish life by introducing this or that program. Strangely, to date, no one has suggested that the Holy Spirit is the answer. So often in the Church we look to our own

¹⁵ "Although Jesus Christ, after the resurrection, became invisible to our eyes, we nevertheless feel that He lives with us; because we feel his breath. By his breath I mean the breathing and outpouring of the Holy Spirit." Paul VI, Pentecost Homily, 25 May 1969.

methods and means to solve issues or to propose “new ways of being Church”. It is sad that the temptation to corporatise the Church at times is proffered as the most effective way to get things done. As the community of the Church of Broken Bay, it is essential that we do not fall into this mindset which limits us to be inward looking, only focusing on ourselves and our own well-being.

If we turn to the beginning of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we find an account of the early Christian community embarking on the mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. The disciples do not begin with a business plan, nor does the community spend its energy on blinkered maintenance models. The words of Jesus are their inspiration, “*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses*”.¹⁶ The message is clear. It is the Holy Spirit who animates and sanctifies the community of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals the gift of faith,¹⁷ and it is the same Spirit who equips the saints for mission, for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ.¹⁸ Saint John Paul II reminds us that the book

of the Acts of the Apostles is a witness that the disciples were faithful to their vocation and to the mission they had received.¹⁹ The mission of the Church is simply to live life in the Spirit and to lead others to the faith, to the freedom and the peace of Christ.²⁰

b. The life of the Church comes from the Holy Spirit

When we talk about “the life of the Church”, what do we mean? Most Christians would recount the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost as the birth of the Church. And of course, it is a significant moment when the Holy Spirit animates those gathered in the cenacle for mission. However, I would like us to take a step back in time to the dialogue between the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary. We have come to know this encounter as the Annunciation and the Evangelist Luke recounts it for us in the Gospel (Luke 1:26-36). They are ten short verses that change our lives and our world forever.

While Mary listens to the message that Gabriel brings, she is deeply moved.²¹

¹⁶ Acts 1:8

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:9

¹⁸ cf. Ephesians 4:12

¹⁹ cf. John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, 10

²⁰ cf. *Ad gentes*, 5.

²¹ Luke 1:29

During the dialogue she journeys from fear to discernment, ultimately arriving at acceptance and participation in the Will of God. The Annunciation reminds us that God, who covered Mary with the Holy Spirit, has offered us the Saviour – Jesus Christ Our Lord. As Mary is filled with the Holy Spirit, she brings to birth the Body of Christ. At Pentecost, she becomes the spiritual Mother of the Body of Christ – the Church.²²

So, when we talk about the life of the Church, we rightly speak about those moments when the Holy Spirit generates and animates the Living Word of God in our lives and in our world. Like Mary at the Annunciation and like the Apostles gathered with Mary in the Upper Room at Pentecost, we too seek to be covered, filled, and empowered by the Spirit. Through her constant “yes” to God, Mary teaches us to search for Christ, in the Spirit.

For the Christian, to live life in the Spirit is both an invitation and a command. The invitation is to be open to receiving the Word of God. The command is to allow the Word to come to birth in our every thought, word, and action. I urge and encourage you to pursue the Spirit in

prayer and to look to the wonder of Christ whose dying and rising washes away our sins and restores us to new life.

The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Church at Corinth, reminds us that the Spirit does not reveal himself. The Spirit reveals Christ. The fullness of the Spirit is the abundance that he gives as we contemplate Christ. The power of the Spirit is the strength we feel in the presence of Christ. The joy of the Spirit is the delight we experience from the promises of Christ.

Each one of us in the community of the Church of Broken Bay is called to live this life in the Spirit. In the Spirit we are equipped to take up the work of discipleship, because the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus and His Good News of salvation. Lest we are overwhelmed by this work, the Spirit provides us with the gifts that we need. Saint Paul reminds us also that these gifts produce fruit such as love, joy and peace. To live in the Spirit is to be patient, kind and good. It is being faithful and gentle and having control of oneself.²³ The one who lives life in the Spirit has the mind of Christ.²⁴

²² cf. Paul VI, General Audience 26 May 1971

²³ Galatians 5:22-23

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

Pray and think about...

- The greatest need in the Church today.
- The moments when the Holy Spirit generates and animates the Living Word of God in your life.
- Mary's "yes" teaching you to search for Christ, in the Spirit.

3. Building together a culture of vocation for all the baptised

The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son. This vocation takes a personal form since each of us is called to enter into the divine beatitude; it also concerns the human community as a whole. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1877

In the same way that an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ is both personal and communal, God's call to men and women to make visible God's image is personal and communal. The question as to how we make visible the image of the unseen God might seem perplexing at first, however, rather than a philosophical method I would like to suggest a biblical-theological approach.

The Book of Genesis opens with the narrative of creation which describes in beautiful language and imagery the handiwork of God.²⁵ As the foundation of the world is laid and the times and seasons are arranged, "*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*".²⁶ The pinnacle of creation is man and woman who are in the image and likeness of their Divine Creator.

In our time, there are some who dismiss

the creation narrative as merely a myth or fable. Others attempt to overlay various ideologies in an attempt to limit God to our human form. This approach to reading Sacred Scripture is not beneficial, it does not seek the goodness and wisdom of God, nor is it faithful to our belief that "God, who creates and conserves all things by his Word, provides us with constant evidence of himself in created realities".²⁷

Read with the eyes of faith, the creation narrative can be seen as the prelude to the covenant that God makes with humankind. It is the beginning of salvation history. Throughout the Scriptures, God is revealed as love, mercy, compassion, justice, and peace. Time and again, humanity's response to God is self-centered, unfaithful, cruel, oppressive, and belligerent. It is my hope that by listening to the voice of God speaking to us, as individuals

²⁵ There are two accounts of creation in the Book of Genesis, chapter 1:1-2:3 and chapter 2:4-25.

²⁶ Genesis 1:27

²⁷ *Dei verbum*, 3.

and as a human community, we will understand more clearly our vocation. If we respond with open hearts and minds, then we will be configured in the image of God. Our vocation is to love one another; to show compassion and mercy to our sisters and brothers; and to aspire to build a world where justice and peace are core values of culture, society, and way of life.

a. Vocation – listening to the voice of God

In the greeting from the letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul boldly attributes his vocation unconditionally to the Will of God: *“Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead”*.²⁸

There are many examples in Sacred Scripture of people who, like Paul, have received a personal call from God. This call has a similar pattern. God’s call is always personal, made to men or women in a given place and time. While the call is to an individual, it is always in response to the needs of the People of God (Moses, Ex 3:7-12; Deborah, Judges 4:4-10).

In this regard God forever looks to the community, calling people to leadership and service within it. The reaction is not always placid, in fact the initial response is commonly one of shock on the part of the one who is called (Jeremiah 1:6). More often than not the one called will query, but how can this come about? (Mary, Luke 1:34). They might offer excuses as to why they cannot respond, only to be told by a mediator that God is calling “for just such a time as this” (Esther 4:5-15).

After grappling with God’s call for some time, the individual often discovers his or her life is changed. The initial upset shakes the entire foundation of life to the point where the response is one of freedom (Paul, Acts 9:1-19), and the one called is prepared to leave behind family, friends, in sum, the familiar life (Isaiah 6:9; Ruth 1:1-17).

God’s call is charged with a task. The person is called to do something, to lead, to guide, to teach, to go on a mission (e.g. Abraham, Gen 12:1-9; Mary Magdalen, John 20:17). However, they are never sent alone. God promises to be with them (e.g. David, 1Sam 16:13). God pledges fidelity, and the one called is often surprised that with God, all things are possible.

²⁸ Galatians 1:1

b. Every member of the Body of Christ has a vocation

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul addresses the community of the Church as “*those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*”.²⁹

Paul is speaking to those who have been baptised in Christ and who through the waters of the font have been given the dignity of sons and daughters of God. It is easy to forget that the goal of baptism is eternal life, and that through baptism we participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

I feel the frustration of some of our priests and deacons when they are asked to baptise a child because the grandparents insist or because the parents want to enrol the child in one of our Catholic schools. While there is often good intention behind the request, it seems at times that there is little understanding or belief that the Sacrament of Baptism is a moment of grace that washes away original sin and incorporates the baptised into the Body of Christ. It is sometimes reduced to merely a process of “belonging” as if being a Catholic Christian is akin to some sort of club membership.

Baptism is the gateway to the life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.³⁰ Through the Sacrament of Baptism all are called to “perfection in charity” and to be holy people.³¹ This is our first vocation as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

As such, every member of the Body of Christ has the vocation to be holy. Pope Francis reminds us that the call to holiness is present in various ways from the very first pages of the Bible. He points to the words that were spoken by God to Abraham in Genesis 17:1, “walk before me, and be blameless”.³² These are not mere words spoken in the far distant past, they are the same words that God speaks to you and me today. They are an invitation to remain in God’s presence and to be a sign of God’s presence in our world. They are the foundation to a life of holiness, and they are spoken anew to every person in every generation.

In my life as a priest, I was blessed to have been entrusted with the ministry of Director of Vocations and Rector of the Seminary. It was enormously rewarding work because I was given the privilege of accompanying people in their vocational discernment. Both men and women would often ask, “what will I do with my life?” My response was

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:2

³⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1213.

³¹ cf. Matthew 5:48; *Lumen gentium*, 40.

³² Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 1.

normally to suggest that that question, while important, is not the best place to initiate the conversation. Instead, I would suggest that we might ask the Lord to draw near, to visit them, to speak to them, to fill their hearts with Divine love. Only then are we able to ask the question, “what will I do with my life?”

What is important for us in the Diocese of Broken Bay, is that we make the time as individuals and as a community of communities to spend time with the Lord. I would urge and support you to read the Scriptures daily. By listening to and meditating upon the Word of God, we will become people of the Word who are better equipped for the mission of Evangelisation. I would encourage you to frequent the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. In the Eucharist, the Lord himself feeds us with his Body and Blood, strengthening us for the journey that lies ahead. When we stumble on the way, we can avail of God’s forgiveness and mercy by confessing our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These are time honoured ways, fostered through an interior spiritual life, to ensure that we remain close to the Lord who calls

each of us into discipleship, mission, and eternal life. They are also ways for each of us to be in communion with our sisters and brothers in Christ.³³ As we are nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ and filled with his Holy Spirit, we become one body, one spirit in Christ.³⁴ They are an outward expression of the interior movement of the Holy Spirit, whose work it is to sanctify us and make us holy.

If our first vocation is holiness, we now need to ask how and where do we live that life of holiness? For the majority of Catholic Christians, the vocation to holiness will be lived as members of Christ’s lay faithful, as single people; married couples; consecrated Religious. Some men will be called to the ministerial life of service and will be ordained deacons, presbyters, and bishops. Whatever the particular call, all of us are called and sent as labourers in the vineyard of the Lord.³⁵ Each and every one of us in the community of the Church is called and sent to work for the coming of God’s Kingdom in this moment, in this time in history. The call to holiness and the mission and work of proclaiming to the world that God reigns, in heaven and on earth, is the

³³ “This union is expressed and made real especially through the Eucharist, in which man shares in the sacrifice of Christ which this celebration actualises, and he also learns to ‘find himself...through a...gift of himself,’ through communion with God and with others, his brothers and sisters”. John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, 62

³⁴ cf. The Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer III.

³⁵ Matthew 20:1-2

foundation to the dignity and duty of each and every disciple of Jesus Christ. In the Body of Christ, every member

has a place, a dignity, a role, a gift, and a vocation for the benefit of all.

Pray and think about...

- The ways that you are called to be holy: promoting love, mercy, compassion, justice, and peace.
- Your baptism; your Eucharistic and sacramental life; your discipleship.
- How you might promote a culture of vocation within our community of the Church.

4. A united message reflecting the voice of the bishop at the service of his people

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2-3

When I addressed you for the first time as your bishop on 4 November 2019, I cited Saint Paul and Saint Charles Borromeo and their utter conviction that the love of God is given to us in Jesus Christ. I said they remind us that the Holy Spirit binds us together into one body, the Church – me, your bishop and you, God's holy people entrusted to my care. Because we are one in the Body of Christ, we do not exist apart from each other, nor are we in isolation from the human society in which we live. The unity we share comes from our faith in Jesus Christ and our profession of that faith in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.³⁶

Occasionally I meet sisters and brothers in our community of the Church who interpret unity as uniformity, or they believe that configuration is synonymous with conformity. As sons and daughters of God, we are equal, however, a quick glance around the community will reveal that we are not

all the same. It is troubling when some people think that equality means 'the same'. This kind of vision of the Church and the world is bland, stagnant, and uninteresting. It lacks a spirit of creativity, ingenuity, and authenticity. It tends to overlook charisms and abilities by reducing all and sundry to the lowest common denominator. That perception hardly captures the dynamic and creative Spirit that we know in the Book of Genesis. As sisters and brothers of Jesus, unity, configuration, and equality are key dimensions of our life in Christ. Why? Because they are central in the life of Jesus and his Disciples.

Much of Jesus' time and mission was spent forming his disciples in the way of holiness. His teaching was innovative in that it was creative and revelatory. Jesus used simple life experiences and opportunities to teach the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

³⁶ Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

a. Jesus prayed for unity – that they may all be one

In the Gospel according to Saint John, shortly before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus prays for his disciples.³⁷ Jesus speaks directly to the Father a prayer from the heart, asking the Father to protect the disciples by way of unity, joy, perseverance, and holiness.³⁸

In this example of Jesus at prayer, we can discover the Good Shepherd who cares for his flock. Jesus' prayer for unity is essentially pastoral in character. By entrusting the disciples to the care of the Father, Jesus seeks to encourage and protect their efforts to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. Jesus' prayer for unity is an example of charity in action. He seeks the good of others, he desires the well-being and the success of his disciples. His love is their strength.

Saint Paul urges us to imitate Jesus when he says, *“above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony”*.³⁹ Love and harmony are signs of unity in the community of the Church. Saint Thomas Aquinas describes this relationship beautifully

when he says, “The Church is one (...) through the unity of charity, because all are joined in the love of God, and among themselves in mutual love”.⁴⁰

b. Unity calls for a radical conversion to the Gospel

The Season of Lent is a wonderful, joy-filled time where grace flows abundantly to all who seek the love and mercy of God. It is a time when as believers our hearts and minds are renewed in preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery. It is a time when, consumed by the Father's mercy, our lives are purified and God is glorified by our humble, yet sincere efforts to live in the image and likeness of our creator.

Lent is not a time of misery and deprivation. It is a time of delight and abundance in the Spirit. It is not a time of indulgent self-mortification and shame. Rather, it is a time of honour and privilege. Honour – because we are sons and daughters of the Father. Privilege - because in Christ Jesus we are given a new way of approaching the heart of the Father.

³⁷ John 17:11-19

³⁸ Colossians 3:14

³⁹ Colossians 3:14

⁴⁰ cf. Aquinas, Col 3:14. *Exposit. in Symbol. Apost.*, a. 9

While we make a special effort during Lent to repent and believe in the Gospel, for the Catholic Christian, each day brings opportunities for the Spirit to change our minds and hearts, to guide us on the way and to bring us to a radically new way of living the Good News of Jesus Christ. These opportunities are ways that God enters our lives and how we, as disciples of the Lord, make mystical contact with God. By and large they are the ordinary moments of life, and yet so often we seek God in the extra-ordinary or the supernatural, as if God is in some far distant heaven. Instead, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God meets us in day to day life and especially in our moments of interior

silence, prayer, and contemplation.

In the Letter to the Colossians, Saint Paul speaks about Jesus as God's mystery.⁴¹ That is unusual language to the 21st century reader. However, Paul used the Greek word "mysterion" for the people of Colossae who understood it for its deeper meaning and reference to something hidden such as a work or purpose of God.⁴² The hidden work of God, to which Saint Paul refers, is the death of Jesus on the Cross which brought salvation to the world.⁴³ The Cross is God's work of love and mercy, bringing us to conversion. The mystery of the Cross is the sacrament of our salvation.

Pray and think about...

- Your desire for unity in Jesus and with your sisters and brothers in faith.
- The gifts and fruit of the Spirit in your life and how you might use them for the good of others.
- The ordinary moments of life where God meets you in love and those moments when the Good News of Jesus has moved you to conversion.

⁴¹ Colossians 2:2

⁴² (Greek) μυστηρίου, (Latin) sacramentum

⁴³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 617.

5. Authentic Catholic education for the flourishing of human and faith development

The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed. Evangelii nuntiandi, 22.

Last year during the *Ad limina* visit of the Australian Catholic Bishops in Rome, I had the opportunity to visit the Congregation for Catholic Education.⁴⁴ I was interested to discover that the highly developed system of Catholic Schools and education in Australia is held up as a model for others around the world. I should not have been surprised given that the first Catholic School in Australia was established in 1820. For 200 years Catholic parents have exercised the right and obligation to educate their children in the Catholic faith in our Schools. Likewise, the community of the Church has engaged the mission of educating, helping all to arrive at the fullness of Christian life.⁴⁵

In Broken Bay, we are blessed to have hundreds of teachers and catechists who live their vocation educating our youth and accompanying them in

the faith. Their work is primarily one of personal witness to the Gospel. Supporting families throughout our communities, they collaborate in the common goal to support our youth to be at least as good as the very best.

Authentic Catholic education is more than the work of our schools or of our catechists in public schools. The scope of the Church's mission in the field of education is such as to embrace all people, without exception, according to the command of Christ, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*".⁴⁶

a. Inspiring hearts and minds to know Christ

The Good News of Jesus Christ is the only news that is good for everyone.

⁴⁴ Every five years the diocesan bishop is bound to submit a report to the Supreme Pontiff and to venerate the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

⁴⁵ Pius XI, *Divini illius magistri*, 85.

⁴⁶ Matthew 28:19

It is so because Jesus' mission was to restore life to a fallen world.⁴⁷ While he was sent to the "*lost sheep of the house of Israel*" Jesus did not restrict or limit his movements and relationships with others.⁴⁸ In the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Jesus travels outside the territory of Galilee crossing the district of Tyre and Sidon. It is a Mediterranean coastal region in modern day Lebanon where our Christian brothers and sisters are still living to this day.

In the first century the region was pagan. Matthew records an episode where a Canaanite woman approaches Jesus and pleads for mercy, as her daughter is severely possessed by a demon.⁴⁹ At first it appears that Jesus is not interested in the plight of the woman nor does he show outward concern for the child. And yet, this encounter is not one of rebuff or rejection. Ignoring his disciple's plea to send the woman away, Jesus speaks with her. He stirs her to the point that, kneeling before him, she asks him to help her. At this point it might be tempting merely to see a mother entreating on behalf of her child. However, the woman asks that he help "her". Jesus' response is illuminating because he sees deeply into her heart and meets her there.

"Woman", he says, "great is your faith!" It is a moment of merciful love between two hearts.

In this brief encounter between the woman and Jesus, she comes to know him for who he is – the merciful Saviour. Their dialogue is one of the heart and the mind. She is now free to return to her home and family where life is restored.

This account in the Gospel is one of the foundation blocks of education in our community of the Church. Why? Because the woman's experience was one that involved faith and reason. She articulately and intelligently engages in the dialogue of reason with Jesus, all the while the gift of faith is being stirred up in her heart. There is a long tradition in our Church that values and promotes education and learning. Authentic Catholic education is an essential support for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it.⁵⁰

b. Evangelisation, Catechesis, and Mission

"There is no doubt that the effort to

⁴⁷ Revelation 11:15

⁴⁸ Matthew 15:24

⁴⁹ Matthew 15:21-28

⁵⁰ cf. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 5.

proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time often oppressed by fear and distress, is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity.”⁵¹ These words from Saint Paul VI are as meaningful and relevant now as they were when they were written in 1975.

There are two dimensions that call for our attention when we take up the mission of evangelisation. The first is the message itself, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The second is the people to whom we must communicate the Good News. What is common to both dimensions is our fidelity – to the Word and to the people. Fidelity, in this instance, might best be described as the way we think and speak about the Gospel, but even more foundational is the way we live the Gospel. Putting the Gospel into practice in our own lives is an outward sign that we believe what we read, that we teach what we believe, and that we practice what we teach.⁵²

As the community of the Church of Broken Bay, we will be fruitful in our

work of evangelisation and catechesis only if we are first witnesses to an authentic Christian life.⁵³ Giving Jesus Christ first place in all we think and say and do will bind us more deeply in the communion of love – with God and with our neighbour. Jesus is “*the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*”⁵⁴ Beginning and ending with Christ keeps us focused on who we are and what we believe. The work of evangelisation is both a grace and a vocation for the whole community of the Church, for in it we discover our true identity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

I would not want to understate it, however, sometimes the simple things are the most effective. In more recent times, there has been a tendency to overthink our teaching and identity. In some parts of the community, faith and mission have become a little “sophisticated”, which has the tendency to alienate people.⁵⁵ Sometimes in the process of reading the Scriptures and learning about the doctrine of the faith, we can become formulaic. The trap is simply to repeat the Word or the teaching verbatim without first praying,

⁵¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 1.

⁵² Rite of Ordination of Deacons, 210.

⁵³ “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Pope Paul VI, Address to Members of the Council for the Laity, 2 October 1974.

⁵⁴ Revelation 22:13

⁵⁵ cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 41.

or asking for the gifts of the Spirit, which include knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.⁵⁶ The fifth century bishop and Saint, John Chrysostom, urged Christian believers to pray before reading or listening to the Word of God so that the eyes of the heart might hear the Word and understand God's will in their lives.

I would like to encourage every member of our community of the Church to learn more about the faith we profess, however, the learning is always directed towards bringing us to

a deeper understanding of the Truth, which will reveal who we are and what we believe. Then we can invite others to probe the mystery of faith with us.

Lest we think that evangelisation, catechesis, and mission are all about us, we might also remember that all this work belongs to God and is for our salvation. Saint Paul reminds us to keep our feet on the ground, *"for we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."*⁵⁷

Pray and think about...

- Jesus' command to "go and make disciples of all nations".
- The moment when you first encountered Jesus – in a dialogue between your heart and Jesus' merciful heart.
- The opportunities in your life to evangelise daily: in your relationships, family, place of study, workplace, community.

⁵⁶ cf. Isaiah 11:1-2

⁵⁷ Ephesians 2:10

6. Justice and mercy place the poor at the heart of the Church

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. Psalm 85:8-11

Much ink has been spilled over the years, in both the Church and society, about the poor. It is a subject that I have thought about many times since I was a child. I was raised in a working-class family of farmers and fruit vendors. My parents worked hard and provided for our family. They loved us. My three sisters and I grew up in a faith-filled home where daily prayer and Sunday Mass were a vital part of our family life. We were well provided for, given a good education, and we always had food on our table. The first encounter with a person who was poor that I remember occurred one day while I was working with my father. A scruffy looking homeless man came up and began to rummage through the garbage looking for something to eat. I remember being troubled by what I saw, and I asked my dad what this fellow was doing. Without embarrassing the man my father quietly made me realise that while we are all equal, there is great disparity in the human family regarding wealth,

education, employment, and many other aspects of life. However, being poor does not mean that a person has no value, no dignity, or no purpose. I believe that I encountered Jesus twice on that day. Once in the poor man who was looking for food to eat and once in my father, who showed respect and kindness to the man, regardless of his life circumstance.

Across our community there are many people like the man I met when I was a child. CatholicCare Broken Bay, which I refer to as the merciful arm of the Church, works with and for people in making a positive difference in their lives. The objective is to assist people by improved well-being; sustained support networks; and a sense of hope for the future. In many of our parishes there are programs for food distribution, contacts for emergency accommodation, and we have outlets for clothing and other essentials available for a marginal cost or cost free. The excellent work of the Saint

Vincent de Paul Society across Broken Bay is also worthy of recognition. What is common in all this work is that there is community engagement with people who might otherwise be overlooked or forgotten. In addition, New South Wales Social Services has a number of positive initiatives to prevent poverty with a special focus to ensure children and young people have a good start in life.

All this work in Church and society is good. However, if we are not careful, it can appear as powerful institutional bodies who have the task of fixing people's lives.

People are never problems. People have issues, carry burdens, endure suffering, but they are never problems. To view a person as a problem is to rob them of their human dignity. While there may be challenges in a person's life, those challenges do not define the person. To see it any other way is to compromise the integrity of the person and to inhibit their right to freedom.

a. Who are the poor in our community?

In his letter on the Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis reminds us that God's heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself "became poor" (2 Cor 8:9).⁵⁸ It seems to me, therefore,

that to ask "who are the poor", is the same question as "who is Jesus Christ?" It might also be of greater benefit to begin with myself, rather than to look out of my window or to search the neighbourhood for "the poor."

What do I mean? Recognition and acceptance of poverty begins with each one of us. To acknowledge that I am poor, is to confess that I am in need, that I am not self-sufficient, that I am not perfect. In the context of Christian faith, it is to open oneself to the power of the Holy Spirit who desires to animate the virtue of humility in each of us. Saint Mary of the Cross, who devoted her life to the poor, reminds us that true humility is inspired by charity and thoughtfulness for others.⁵⁹

Too often the search for the poor begins by looking at others – usually from the high ground – which can result in a negative judgement. I do not believe that method will produce fruit in us, nor will it be of true benefit to others who are burdened by the circumstances or situations of life. Saint Teresa of Calcutta is often quoted as saying, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them". These words are helpful as they remind us that our vocation is to love as Jesus loved, to give our life for others as he did on the Cross. This

⁵⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 197.

⁵⁹ "True humility... is accompanied by a sweet and thoughtful charity." Mary MacKillop to Julian Tenison Woods, 3 June 1870.

is not some exalted idea or philosophy, rather as Pope Benedict XVI affirms, it is “the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”⁶⁰

If we are docile to the Spirit of God, then our commitment to the poor is not limited to activities or welfare programs, it is primarily an attentiveness which considers the other “in a certain sense as one with ourselves.”⁶¹ At times it is a challenge to move beyond an external, superficial appearance or situation of a person in need. For example, human limitations can impede our ability to engage with someone who looks different, who smells different, who comes from a different culture or ethnic background. It might be motivated by fear of the unknown, by ignorance, or by a previous negative experience. In moments such as these I once again ask myself the question “who is Jesus Christ?”

b. To hunger and thirst for righteousness

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus began his ministry in Galilee,

where he called his first disciples, and ministered to crowds of people who were in need of healing.⁶² Jesus cared for the poor. On the way, Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom, he cast out demons and cured the people of their infirmities. Immediately afterwards Jesus went up the mountain, gathered his disciples around him and began to teach, “*Blessed are the poor...*” Christians have come to know this teaching as The Beatitudes.⁶³ By means of a litany of blessings, which refer to aspects of life, peace, joy, love, justice, and salvation, Jesus reveals the beatitude or blessing of God.

The People of Israel would have understood the Beatitude as referring to God Himself, believing that the blessing signified being with God forever.⁶⁴ The disciples would have had little difficulty in relating what Jesus was teaching with what they already prayed in Psalm 41: “*Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble. The Lord protects them and keeps them alive; they are called happy in the land.*”⁶⁵ To consider the poor and to care for them, is to be just. It is a sign of righteousness, which both then and now means to live

⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 1.

⁶¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 199; cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, S. Th., II-II, q. 27, a. 2.

⁶² Matthew 4:12-25

⁶³ Matthew 5:3

⁶⁴ You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11

⁶⁵ Psalm 41:1-2

virtuously, honourably, and freely in the knowledge that God's salvation is at hand.

How are we to understand this in our community of the Church of Broken Bay? I would suggest that the Beatitudes, as described by the Evangelist Matthew, are a pattern for our own lives and ministry in the Church as well as being signposts for our mission in the world. The

Beatitudes keep us focused on Jesus, God with us, and on the good of others rather than on ourselves.⁶⁶ They place the poor at the heart of our community of the Church. In a world where self-importance, personal success and a sense of unbridled freedom are billed as the highest ideals, this is important. It is especially so if we are to be faithful to our vocation to holiness and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

Pray and think about...

- An encounter you had with someone who was burdened by life's circumstances and how you responded.
- How you are poor and in need.
- Your life as a Christian when you have changed direction for the benefit of another.

⁶⁶ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." Matthew 1:24

Conclusion

The first priority I offer you in this letter is the person of Jesus Christ, and I conclude with the priority of the poor. In the face of the poor we recognise the person of Jesus Christ, and so we come full circle.⁶⁷ All things begin with Christ and to Christ we will return.⁶⁸ He is with us, truly and tangibly as we navigate our way through life.⁶⁹

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit I hope to lead you as a community of the Church of Broken Bay, along the way of discipleship with and towards Jesus Christ. This has been the call of God's holy people down through the ages and that is our calling today. We hear it in the context of our ordinary lives and amidst the challenges and opportunities that each day brings.

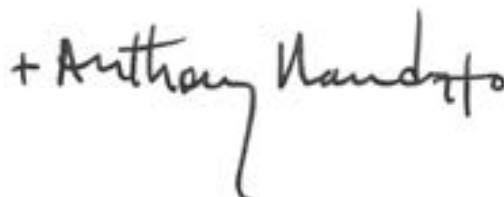
The lighthouse which guides a path forward and warns against peril has always been a symbol for us in the Diocese of Broken Bay. Our real lighthouse is Jesus Christ, who is the

light and who guides us as we draw near to him through prayer, through relationship, and through his Word.⁷⁰ He is "the way, the truth and the life" that leads us to God the Father.⁷¹

With this pastoral letter I offer to you, my brothers and sisters, the thoughts of my mind and heart and the fruit of my prayer. I hope that you will see in this work my desire to be close to you as your bishop so that together we might follow Jesus Christ as his disciples, seek the path of holiness, proclaim the Gospel to the world, and live life in the Spirit.

First Sunday of Advent

29 November 2020



Most Rev Anthony Randazzo

Bishop of Broken Bay

⁶⁷ Matthew 25:40

⁶⁸ Revelation 1:8

⁶⁹ Matthew 28:20

⁷⁰ Psalm 119:105

⁷¹ John 14:6

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Notes and personal reflections

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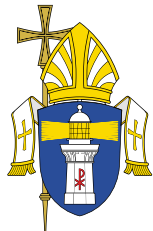
Notes and personal reflections



Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom before reading the Scriptures

O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear your word and understand and do your will, for I am a sojourner upon the earth. Hide not your commandments from me, but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your law. Speak unto me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom. On You I set my hope, O my God, that You will enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. For You are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness, and from You comes every good deed and every gift. AMEN.

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