

Risen Christ



Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord - Year A

28 & 29 March 2026

The Catholic Communities of Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

RCIA Candidates for Easter 2026:



Ross Bowlby

Rebecca Goddard

Matthew Peckham

Dan Glass

Brooke Nankervis

Daniel Buchanan

Welcome to Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week 2026

Dear sisters and brothers, since the beginning of Lent until now we have prepared our hearts by penance and charitable works. Today we gather together to herald with the whole Church the beginning of the celebration of our Lord's Paschal Mystery, that is to say, of his Passion and Resurrection. For it was to accomplish this mystery that he entered his own city of Jerusalem. Therefore, with all faith and devotion, let us commemorate the Lord's entry into the city for our salvation, following in his footsteps, so that, being made by his grace partakers of the Cross, we may have a share also in his Resurrection and in his life. Let us pray. Almighty ever-living God, sanctify these branches with your blessing, that we, who follow Christ the King in exultation, may reach the eternal Jerusalem through him. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Holy Week Missal

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:1-11

When they were near Jerusalem and had come in sight of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village facing you, and you will immediately find a tethered donkey and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, "The Master needs them and will send them back directly."' This took place to fulfill the prophecy:

Say to the daughter of Zion: Look, your king comes to you:
he is humble, he rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of
a beast of burden.

So the disciples went out and did as Jesus had told them. They brought the donkey and the colt, then they laid their cloaks on their backs and he sat on them. Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting:

'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on him who
comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest
heavens!'

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. 'Who is this?' people asked, the crowds answered, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Easter Liturgy Timetable

Holy Thursday, 2nd April

Mass of the Lord's Supper
7:00pm @ SFX, Montmorency

Good Friday, 3rd April

The Way of the Cross
11:00am @ OLHC, Eltham
The Passion of Our Lord
3:00pm @ OLHC, Eltham

Holy Saturday, 4th April

Blessing of the Food
5:00pm @ SFX, Montmorency
Vigil of the Resurrection
7:00pm @ SFX, Montmorency

Easter Sunday, 5th April

Dawn Vigil of the Resurrection
6:00am @ OLHC, Eltham

Easter Mass
8:30am @ SFX, Montmorency

Easter Mass
10:00am @ OLHC, Eltham



*This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.
We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.*



PARISH TEAM & INFORMATION

OUR PEOPLE & OUR CONTACT DETAILS



Parish Priest

Michael Sierakowski - Moderator

Michael.Sierakowski@cam.org.au

Parish Office

all correspondence to:
86 Mayona Road,
Montmorency Vic 3094
9435 4742

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Kate Kogler:

Parish Secretary
Tue-Fri 9am-3pm

Peter Williams:

Safeguarding Officer
RisenChrist.ChildSafety@cam.org.au

Volunteers

Marisa Capuana: Various

Kerry Mash: Wed & Fri 10am-3pm

www.melbcatholic.org/risenchristparish

Facebook: [Risen Christ Parish](https://www.facebook.com/RisenChristParish)

Risen Christ Parish Bulletin items:

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Schools

Holy Trinity Primary School

Principal: Vince Bumpstead: 9431 0888

principal@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

www.htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School

Principal: Rudy Vail: 9439 7824

school@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

www.olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

St Francis Xavier Primary School

Principal: Jo Nolen: 9435 8474

principal@sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

www.sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

Risen Christ Parish Calendar of Events

Saturday 28

12:00pm Baptisms: Myles, Paige, Clover, Jackson,
Austin, Ashton, Phoebe Montmorency

6:00pm Mass Montmorency

Sunday 29 - Palm Sunday

8:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Mass Eltham

Monday 30

9:00am Days for Girls Montmorency

6:30pm Music Rehearsal for Easter Liturgies Montmorency

Tuesday 31

9:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Rosary Montmorency

Wednesday 1 April

6:30am Meditation Montmorency

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Eltham

1:00pm Kairos Small Church Community Montmorency

Thursday 2 - Holy Thursday

10:15am SFX School: Holy Week Tableau Montmorency

7:00pm Mass of the Lord's Supper Montmorency

Friday 3 - Good Friday

11:00am Good Friday: The Way of the Cross Eltham

3:00pm Good Friday: The Passion of Our Lord Eltham

Saturday 4 - Holy Saturday

12:00pm Easter Sacrament Rehearsals
for ALL Masses Montmorency

5:00pm Holy Saturday: Blessing of the Food Montmorency

7:00pm Easter Vigil Montmorency

Sunday 5 - Easter Sunday

6:00am Dawn Vigil of the Resurrection Eltham

8:30am Easter Mass Montmorency

10:00am Easter Mass Eltham

Tuesday 7

9:30am Mass Montmorency

10:00am Rosary Montmorency

10:00am Craft Group Montmorency

11:00am Funeral: Alice Ley Montmorency

11:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry Eltham

2:00pm Bethany Small Church Community Montmorency

Wednesday 8

6:30am Meditation Montmorency

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion Eltham

RECONCILIATION

available half an hour before
any weekday or weekend Parish Mass.

Collections: 15 & 22 March 2026

Thanksgiving	Cash	\$1,478.00
	Electronic	\$8,184.17
Presbytery	Cash	\$1,494.95
	Electronic	\$500.00

Thanksgiving Offering

Month	Total
December	\$18,205.17
January	\$20,974.17
February	\$20,922.62

Thanksgiving

Dear Parishioners,

Following is a list of ways in which you can give towards the running of our Parish (left to right):

A) EFTPOS terminals

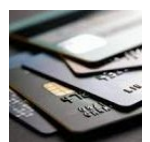
B) scan the QR code (<https://bit.ly/45ifhRp>) & donate to any Parish finance campaign including Thanksgiving, Presbytery Offerings, baptisms etc

C) cash/coins in the collection baskets at each church

D) thanksgiving envelopes

E) set up payments from credit/debit cards/bank account

Thank you for your generous support,
Michael





Let us pray for all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith ...

For those in need of **healing**, remembering especially:
Darby (13 years old), Stephen Andrew, Des Arneson, Elizabeth Benson, Bill Boyce, Penny Boyce, Ruth Decker, Nora Edmond, Pat Hosmer, Siobhan Lappin, Mary Luttick, Jarrod Mizzi, Cindy & Ed Morrissey, Bernard Murray, Regina Roszczenko (mother of Liz Gray), Phil Rovtar, Audrey Tunks, Jeanne Vanderwert

For those who have **died** recently:
Annabella Elliot

For those whose **anniversaries** are at this time:
Eugene Collins, Martha Fernandes, John Hedigan, Teresa Pfeil, Janet Taylor

To include an anniversary please contact Parish Office
 9435 4742 or RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au.



Congratulations to all who celebrate their sacraments this weekend:

Saturday, 28th March, 2026

St Francis Xavier, Montmorency, 12:00pm

Paige Elizabeth Brenan	Baptism
Ashton John Hollyoak	Baptism
Phoebe Paige Hollyoak	Baptism
Clover Iaquinto	Baptism
Myles John Matheou	Baptism
Austin Gunnar Widing	Baptism
Jackson Murray Widing	Baptism




OPEN DAY

SUNDAY, 17 MAY 2026: 1.00PM - 4.00PM
 BOOK NOW VIA WWW.LOYOLA.VIC.EDU.AU/BOOKATOUR

Empowered to Be More

Parishioners - One Hundred Old Redwood Sleepers freely available

We are presently replacing redwood sleepers with concrete ones in the retaining wall behind 3 of the units at Eltham.

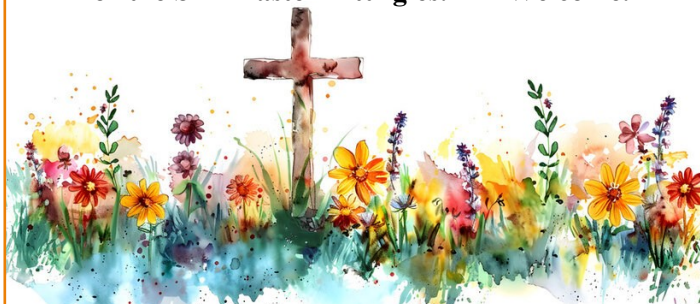
For a short window of opportunity (the next 3 weeks), if anyone is interested in utilising some of the sleepers for firewood or any other purpose, eg low gardening retaining walls, please contact either Peter Rigg (0421 703 523) or Greg Scully (0419 134 236) to facilitate access.

Ideally you will need a chain saw and a trailer or other method of transport, plus a few strong people to help lift!



Fabulous Free Fire Wood Available for Winter

Easter Music Rehearsal will be at SFX Church at 6:30pm on Monday 30th March for the SFX Easter Liturgies. All Welcome.



An exciting new venture has commenced at All Saints, 14 Church Street, Greensborough!

"The Nest" is a drop-in centre for the people of Banyule and surrounds!

It is a place of connection, companionship, friendship and hospitality!

A simple, safe, lounge-room type space where people can chat and enjoy a warm drink, share a hobby or maybe even find a quiet contemplative/prayer space.

Everyone is welcome to drop by and say 'Hi!'

OPEN: 10:30am to 12:30pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays

Run by volunteers from local churches from a range of denominations, it aims to partner with the local health professionals and agencies to support wellbeing.

Are you a good listener with a heart for others? We would love you to join our volunteer team, share your ideas and be part of this exciting new venture!

Please contact Johanna at All Saints, Greensborough on 9435 5266 or Marion from Southern Cross Community Church, Eltham on 0411 348 766.



STOP THIS MADNESS

Who will shout: “Stop - this is madness”? The Middle East resembles two runaway trains hurtling towards each other on the same track, seconds from a catastrophe. They are heading nowhere. In the desire of some of its leaders to exterminate Israel, there is no way Iran has an achievable goal. Seven million Jews cannot be made to vanish just by launching missiles at them, nor indeed by any other means. Similarly, in their desire to smash Iran into ruins, Israel’s leaders have set an objective that can never be realised. Persian civilisation is too deeply and proudly embedded ever to be overthrown by bombing from the air, or even by invasion on land or sea. There are more than 90 million Iranians. The population of Nazi Germany in 1939 was 70 million. The population of imperial Japan in 1941 was about the same. The land area of Iran is vastly larger than that of Germany and Japan added together. By the spring of 1945 their major cities had virtually been obliterated. Yet they did not give in. The conclusion is obvious.

The third train on this track to nowhere is the United States, controlled by a man whose mind is visibly degenerating, with no grasp of strategy and scarcely any tactics, and which has allowed itself to be manoeuvred into an impossible position which will cost it dearly. In this crisis the future of the American Republic itself is at stake, blinded by the possession of the most powerful military apparatus the world has ever seen. Powerful and yet pointless. It cannot impose its will on others by force alone. A policy relying wholly on “bluster, blackmail and bombing”, as one military analyst described it, cannot succeed; never has and never will. To reverse Von Clausewitz’s famous dictum, all wars end in politics sooner or later. The Korean War ended in a messy armistice in 1953; the US and the Taliban signed an “agreement for bringing peace” to Afghanistan in 2020 which culminated in the chaotic evacuation of over 120,000 people and the fall of Kabul in 2021. Diplomacy is often a necessary device to save face. The United States lost those wars. They were unwinnable. The US war against Iran is no different.

What are the signs of hope, that sanity might assert itself? The hopeless logic of the situation is glaringly obvious to all who are watching. Iran has deployed the weapon of blockade on a vital shipping route, while mounting devastating attacks on its Gulf neighbours. This is ostensibly because they house American military bases but in reality is to pressure them to persuade the United States to cease its intervention in support of Israel. That is never going to happen. Public opinion in the United States may be turning against its close alliance with Israel, in the worst cases driven by antisemitism, but the US is still far too deeply invested in that relationship to abandon it. Nor would the rest of the world stand by and watch Israel be annihilated. If the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz is designed to destroy Israel, it is an exercise in deluded futility. Sooner or later,

Iran itself must see this.

Nevertheless, it is becoming imperative in Washington to watch the opinion poll trends closely, not least the growing divisions regarding Israel in the ranks of Donald Trump’s MAGA support base. When Trump loses the prospect of a lucrative deal, he backs off. His deal with the American people was that he would make them “great again” - by which he meant he would make them richer. As petrol pump prices surge, with food prices not far behind, he is in fact making them poorer. So this is one direction where the cry “Stop this madness” may come from. Meanwhile, the dynamic equilibrium of the world economy depends on energy supplies, which at this stage in human history still means fossil fuels - oil and natural gas. The cost depends on the balance between supply and demand. Scarcity drives up prices and drives down living standards. But such economies are general in an unstable balance. There is a limit to the shocks they can absorb. Pushed too far, they fall over. Only after much pain and much turbulence does a new balance emerge. Inevitably and invariably, it is those at the bottom of the pile who are least resilient and who suffer most. They must be given a voice. And their cry too is “Stop this madness”. Every citizen, the majority of whom are neither rich nor poor, has a voice. In a democracy governments rely on consent. Even totalitarian regimes have to win over the crowds. There comes a point where if governments do not bend, they break, and the madness has to stop.

A lot of money has been made from fossil fuel energy supplies, and the standard of living in the Gulf States depends on them. Yet the key commodity here is not oil and gas, but water. Escalation of the conflict towards all-out war, which could be only days away, would threaten not just their oil refineries but their desalination plants, vital for life support. Iran is vulnerable too, but not to the same extent. Without clean water from desalination plants tens of thousands in the Gulf may die. So this is another direction where the cry, “Stop this madness” may come from.

And it is time for this cry to be heard in Israel too. Despite heavy censorship it is known that Israelis have suffered much damage from Iranian bombardment. The real danger to them comes not from outside aggression but from the logic of Jewish nationalism. This ideology impels Israel towards conquest and annexation, both of Gaza and the West Bank and maybe also of southern Lebanon. But it is self-defeating. If it succeeded it would bring within its enlarged borders a population of Arabs greater than its population of Jews. If Israel refused its Arab citizens their democratic rights in order to preserve its Jewish character, it would no longer be a democracy but a theocracy. It could only survive by repression. It would begin to resemble Iran. And that is the destination towards which the current US and Israeli leadership is driving it. Unless this madness stops.

Jerusalem holy sites to be closed for public liturgies

PATRICK HUDSON

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has cancelled its Palm Sunday procession due to the threat of airstrikes.

“The restrictions imposed by the conflict do not bode well for any imminent improvement,” said the Latin Patriarch Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa last Sunday, confirming that large public liturgies would not take place in Holy Week. He also postponed the diocese’s Chrism Mass.

“In constant dialogue with the competent authorities, and with the other Christian Churches, we are evaluating how, in ways to be agreed upon, we can celebrate the central mystery of our salvation in the heart of our Churches,” the patriarch said. He designated 28 March to pray the Rosary “to implore the gift of peace and serenity, especially for those suffering because of



A cloud of debris rises after a missile fragment hits Jerusalem

the conflict”.

The announcement followed reports that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre faces closure during Holy Week. Shortly after the US and Israeli airstrikes on Iran on 28 February and subsequent retaliation, the Jerusalem civil administration announced that “all holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the Western Wall, the Temple

Mount and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, will remain closed ... for security reasons in light of the current tensions in the region”.

On 16 March the Israeli foreign ministry reported that an Iranian missile had exploded over Jerusalem and “fragments fell on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Armenian Patriarchate, the Jewish

Quarter and the Temple Mount near the Al-Aqa Mosque”.

Church leaders in Jerusalem confirmed last week that liturgies would continue even if the public could not attend. On 21 March, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land said: “The community of Franciscan friars present at the Holy Sepulchre has never ceased, day or night, to carry out the scheduled celebrations ...

“Even during these days, although access to the basilica is restricted to the faithful for security reasons, prayer continues unceasingly in the holy places.”

Last week, illegal Israeli settlers broke into a cement factory and quarry in Taybeh, the only Christian town in the West Bank, conducting Talmudic prayers and raising an Israeli flag.

Prayers of the Faithful for 29 March Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Leader: Today, Jesus is acclaimed as King in the streets of Jerusalem. Soon the King of Glory will be hanging from the Cross at Golgotha. But we turn with confidence towards you Jesus Christ, our King of glory, asking that you heed our prayers.

Blessed are you, our Messiah! For our Catechumens who will be baptised, or confirmed, at Easter, and for all who have discovered the way of the Good News: may they be fortified in their faith and gathered in your joy.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Blessed are you, our King of Glory! For our leaders who serve our communities: may they be guided by a desire to create peace in our world.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Blessed are you Lord, innocent but condemned! For all those entrusted with the care and support of prisoners, and those who are journeying with the sick or frail: may the Spirit sustain them in their work, giving them a listening heart.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Blessed are you, King of goodness and humility! For we who are gathered here who proclaim your glory, when we are tested, grant us strength, when we doubt, enfold us in your love and when we suffer, show us your joy.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Blessed are you, King of compassion! For those who are dealing with illness, especially those listed in the bulletin: may they receive the support they need and may they experience God’s love through His divine grace.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Blessed are you, King of Eternal Life! For those who have died recently, especially *Annabella Elliot*; and for those whose anniversaries occur at this time, including *Eugen Collins, Martha Fernandes, John Hedigan, Teresa Pfeil and Janet Taylor*: may they find eternal peace in the loving arms of their God.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Lord, Jesus Christ, come to the aid of your people who turn towards you. Deign to listen to our prayers, you who live and reign for ever and ever.

All: Amen

During the three years he was Archbishop of San Salvador, St Óscar Romero preached a message of conversion that was so disturbing it cost him his life / By Todd Walatka

The prophet's shout

In many ways, St Óscar Romero had a spectacularly positive vision for human life. He knew God's presence, he saw the beautiful image of God all around him and he trusted in the coming of a Kingdom in which all will be fully alive. His preaching was filled with hope to the end. As he said just moments before he was shot dead celebrating Mass on 24 March 1980, the grain of wheat may need to fall and die in order to bear fruit, but the harvest of the Kingdom will be abundant beyond measure: "This is the hope that inspires us as Christians. We know that every effort to improve society, especially when injustice and sin are so widespread, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God requires of us ... Our work does not remain here; it is gathered and purified by the Spirit of God."

These gems of hope are plentiful in Romero's preaching. And yet his far more dominant note is an urgent, prophetic call for conversion. It is as if Romero, looking at the violence, oppression, suffering and disunity all around him, again and again found himself repeating the message of Ash Wednesday: "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Lent is a journey towards Easter, a journey in hope. Romero frequently describes it as a time of renewal, as a time of remembering our true identity and dignity as those baptised into Christ. But "renewal" sounds too weak, and frankly too *nice*, to describe the actual content of Romero's preaching.

It is often said that a preacher really only has one homily, repeated in various ways week after week. For Romero, if we bring together his constant rejection of violence and hatred, his constant call for mercy and justice for the poor, his constant desire that the Church would simply carry out its mission here on earth, his one homily would be: "A shout like that of Christ who says, 'Be converted, return to the good path'" (12 May 1977). Or, as he says elsewhere, "I will never tire of shouting this word to you, brothers and sisters: conversion!" (21 August 1977).

Lent is the opportunity to embark again on a journey, and Romero-the-prophet would paint this journey as the stark choice between two paths. He is like Moses at the end of Deuteronomy: "I have today set before you life and good, death and evil" (30:15). Or the opening of one of our earliest Christian texts, the *Didache*: "There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but a great difference between the two ways." Or Jesus' stark pronouncement in the Sermon on the



'Dethrone every idol': Romero at his church

Mount: "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24; cf. Luke 16:13). For Romero, Lent is a time to hear and respond to such prophetic provocations: "Lent gives us the opportunity to dethrone every idol that is not the true God. This is the moment to review your life and the way you judge things, to see if you value anything more than God" (18 March 1979).

It is striking how often Romero speaks of idols and idolatry - in nearly half of his homilies and increasingly as he comes closer to his death. On average, he speaks of "sin" over eight times per homily. Of course, he knows that there are many Christians who will bristle, who "want to hear the priest speak words sweet to my ears and not touch my wounds" (16 July 1978). But as a poor *campesino* once told Romero, the Gospel is like salt water: if your hand is wounded, it will hurt when you put it into the water (29 May 1977). Yet the sting may be the beginning of healing, because the wound must be exposed and cleansed.

Romero did not hesitate to lift up inspiring examples of faithfulness and grace. He loved to recount pastoral visits where he encountered true Christian communities alive in the Gospel. However, as Romero looked all around his beloved El Salvador, he saw how easily we kneel before other gods - money, power, political party. And he knew that when we worship idols, we also serve them and sacrifice for them.

Romero saw the worship of money as "the root of structural and repressive violence". Its twin is the worship of power, which Romero describes in a way that sounds like our own day: "The omnipotence of

these national security regimes, the total disrespect they display towards individuals and their rights, the total lack of ethical consideration shown in the means that are used to achieve their ends, turn national security into an idol, which, like the god Molech, demands the daily sacrifice of many victims in its name" (Fourth Pastoral Letter, 6 August 1979). All of this leads Romero to a provocative conclusion, proclaimed on Trinity Sunday 1978: "The divinising of money and the idolatry of power create false idols which take the place of the true God. Sadly, we live in an atheistic society."

Can we honestly say Romero's words would not apply to today? The great preachers of every age have recognised that the Gospel's message encounters a world, a society and a human heart marked by sin. This reality does not call for demagoguery or exaggeration, but rather honesty and courage. As Pope Leo preached during Mass with the cardinals in the Sistine Chapel on the morning after his election: "Even today, there are many settings in which the Christian faith is considered absurd, meant for the weak and unintelligent. Settings where other securities are preferred, like technology, money, success, power or pleasure. These are contexts where it is not easy to preach the Gospel and bear witness to its truth, where believers are mocked, opposed, despised or at best tolerated and pitied. Yet, precisely for this reason, they are the places where our missionary outreach is desperately needed. A lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life, the neglect of mercy, appalling violations of human dignity, the crisis of the family and so many other wounds that afflict our society" (9 May 2025).

Romero's preaching is like a continual Lent, one that demands an honest appraisal of our society and of our own heart. The ideology of our time says that happiness comes through accumulation, convenience and freedom from constraint. But these narratives are not only "out there"; they shape every human heart. Romero's vision of Lent as a time to "dethrone every idol that is not the true God" remains fitting; it is an enduring call for conversion, of ourselves and of the world around us: "Repent and believe in the Gospel".

Todd Walatka is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame and the author of *Words of Life: The Preaching of St Óscar Romero*. He delivered the 2026 Romero Lecture in Durham on 12 March.

A time to be counting your beads

In the fifth of our Lent series, an 81-year-old journalist and broadcaster makes an audit of her life, and finds herself troubled by small failings as much as by big sins / **By Mary Kenny**

Crossing that Rubicon into the decade of the eighties becomes, eventually, an invitation to audit one's life. During Lent, the audit zooms more into focus.

I regret, among many rueful reflections, that I never undertook a proper pilgrimage, although I have visited holy places like Lourdes and Knock and Mount Sinai - now, I think, rather superficially.

Optimists tell us "it's never too late", but optimists may not always be realists. It becomes too late for many things when the infirmities of old age creep on. Although, naturally, individuals differ, and we may aspire to be the David Attenboroughs of our own little worlds, still active at 99. Some exceptional souls have walked the Camino in their eighties.

One mustn't give up hope. And what you may not be able to do physically, you may still do in your imaginations. Edna O'Brien said to me, in her seventies, "I may not be able to climb Mount Errigal anymore, but I can look at it."

People in Ireland used to describe old age as "a time to be counting your beads": that is, saying prayers in preparation for the next life, while contemplating departing this one. This could imply that the "auld wan" in the corner might be better suited to reciting her Rosary than to pontificating on the contemporary scene.

And indeed, though I retain an interest in current affairs - one can scarcely ignore what we are living through - I also feel a certain detachment. My late husband, in his final years, took to remarking philosophically "twas ever thus" when some new appalling headline broke the latest news. That sense of detachment is surely a preparation for leaving this life.



The author at a literary lunch

Doing the audit is something else. Again, the optimists tell us there is no point in regrets. But the examination of conscience must yield such regrets, and painful ones.

It's often the little failings as much as the big sins that prompt the heart-scorching: the careless acts of unkindness, the lack of gratitude, the hurt caused, the chances missed. Examined in a morose light, my life has been a disgrace.

Then the optimists say, stop beating yourself up and drop the Catholic guilt: you're supposed to be forgiven for your sins. Now move on.

Jung believed that the reason why human beings lived beyond their reproductive years was to fulfil the elders' role of transmitting tribal memories. But surely another purpose of living into old age is to reflect on the course of life. We who have the privilege of a long span have also been given the time to improve ourselves more, to shed our sins and become better people.

At first what I disliked about entering old age was being patronised. Strangers feel entitled to use terms of endearment, saying "Sorry, darling" if they jostle you, or asking, in a baby voice, "Are you all right, dearie?"

"Don't forget your gloves, my lovely," a middle-aged woman cautioned me recently, as I was making a shop payment. I've been tempted to respond with sarcasm, yet I've come to see this reflex as a sin of pride. What does it matter if someone is patronising me? They mean to be kind. I might be glad of their help, soon enough.

Perhaps contemplating the Seven Deadly Sins is a framework for a moral audit in old age. Let go of pride.

Covetousness is mostly gone, but not avarice: I've become stingier over time. "Think not on the morrow - let

the morrow take care of itself," I took quite literally in my prime, taking few prudent measures to provide for old age. So I've become one of those pensioners fearing penury, and being appalled that a cup of coffee in London can cost a fiver. Some prices are genuinely shocking, but my increasing meanness isn't edifying.

If avarice has gained ground, lust has thankfully receded. I who once thought of sexual liberation as an outburst of joy now turn, when a film or book is advertised as "raunchy", into my Victorian aunts (I actually did have aunts born in the Victorian age), purse-lipped with disapproval.

Explicit screen depictions of sexual congress only call to mind the Attenborough TV forays among the mating habits of jungle and savannah - those "brute beasts of the fields". This is also part of the detachment of old age.

Anger, gluttony, sloth? Progress has been made. Gluttony is somewhat restrained by fear of a bad reaction to over-indulgence.

Vanity has weakened, although there's an ongoing question whether I should continue to dye my hair, currently orange. Why not be authentic and let it grow naturally grey? Women friends of my vintage tell me it shows solidarity to keep up personal presentation and I'm willing to consider that point.

If I make a sincere attempt to correct my failings as I move towards my final years, I shouldn't fear the next world. Yet one does fear what may occur at *this* life's end: incapacity, dementia, paralysis from a stroke or disability from Parkinson's. Contemplating the reality of such afflictions evokes compassion for those who endure such suffering. Maybe an increase in compassion also comes with age.

Growing old is a lesson in humility. There is inevitably physical enfeeblement, and a loss of what feminists call "agency". To grow old is to lose autonomy, and to become more dependent. This is expressed so well in Newman's "Lead Kindly Light": "I loved to choose and see my path, but now, / please lead me on!"

Yet it's also a lesson in gratitude for so many blessings, and great thankfulness for family and friends. What Julian Barnes calls "involuntary Autobiographical Memory" brings sweetness as well as regret (though spare me Mrs Barnes's atheistic bleakness).

Facing the last years, one turns to St Augustine: "Trust the past to the mercy of God; the present to his love; And the future to his providence."



11. What synodality is NOT

Synodality is not about changing doctrine according to popular opinion. The faith handed down through the centuries is not negotiable. What synodality seeks to renew is how we live, communicate, and embody that faith in changing times.

12. Synodality and unity

Walking together does not mean everyone thinks the same way. The Church has always held unity alongside diversity. Synodality helps us learn how to disagree respectfully, discern patiently, and remain united in Christ even amid differences.

13. Why discernment is essential

Discernment is more than discussion. It is a prayerful process of seeking God's will. In a Synod, time is given to silence, prayer, and reflection so that decisions emerge from faith, not haste.

14. Synodality begins locally

Synodality is lived first in parishes, schools, families, and communities. When people feel heard and valued locally, the Church becomes more credible and more missionary.

15. A listening Church is a credible Church

In a world where many feel ignored or dismissed, a Church that listens becomes a sign of hope. Synodality teaches us that listening can heal wounds and rebuild trust.



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

Melbourne Catholic Digest - A deep well

God doesn't promise a path free of difficulties or obstacles, and sometimes life will throw up challenges we feel ill-equipped to meet. At these times, it can be helpful to remember that Christ walks before and beside us, and that we can draw from the deep well of inspiration to be found in the lives of those who have travelled the road before us.



Venerable Mary of the Sacred Heart Glowrey has provided just this kind of inspiration for Sr Dr Helen Mary Anthony, who spoke with us on her recent visit to Melbourne and who will soon follow a path first trod by Mary Glowrey, becoming only the second sister-doctor to lead the Catholic Health Association of India.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/reaching-the-unreached-mary-glowreys-mission-in-india-continues>



As part of Catholic Education Week, thousands of Catholic school students and staff gathered at St Patrick's Cathedral last week for the annual All Schools Mass, where Archbishop Peter A Comensoli encouraged them to walk in the footsteps of St Patrick, finding strength and inspiration in knowing 'Christ beside me', just as Patrick had.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/catholic-education-week-all-schools-mass>



A special anniversary Mass on Sunday marked 50 years of the Augustinians' care of the Parish of South Yarra, providing an opportunity to give thanks for the parish's distinctive Augustinian legacy and the inspiration it has provided for the building of a strong and inclusive community.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/celebrating-the-augustinians-50-years-in-south-yarra>



'Keep your eyes focused on Christ': ACU hosts art retreat through the Paschal mystery A Lenten art retreat at Melbourne's ACU campus has served as a gateway into the Paschal mystery for students, staff and visitors. Using a selection of artworks by Australian artist Terry Fyffe, the exhibition has guided visitors through key moments from Holy Thursday through to Easter Sunday, highlighting the brutality of the crucifixion and the hope of the resurrection.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/keep-your-eyes-focused-on-christ-acu-hosts-art-retreat-through-the-paschal-mystery>

<https://melbournecatholic.org/events>

For more information: www.melbournecatholic.org or www.facebook.com/CatholicArchdioceseofMelbourne