

PRAYER THE CHURCH'S BANQUET



A Pastoral Letter to God's People of the Diocese of Bathurst

Dear Friends in Christ,

On the last Sunday of October this year, we concluded celebrations marking one hundred and fifty years of the Diocese of Bathurst. We looked to the future that day by commissioning a new Pastoral Council for our local church, which will work with me in planning and implementing the details of living more faithfully the mission that God has given us right here and now.

Among other activities that day, we also sealed a time capsule containing material from our parishes, schools and other apostolic works, giving a picture of life in 2016. It will be opened on the bicentenary of our Diocese in 2065. I wonder what they will make of it; and I wonder what our local church will look like then.

When the Diocese of Bathurst celebrated her centenary in 1965, the Church and the world we lived in looked very

different from today. The Second Vatican Council was nearing its conclusion, but the big changes in the Church and the major upheavals in our society were yet to have their full impact.

Today, we have to understand the world we live in and think clearly and courageously about the mission of the Church in the reality of these circumstances.

The Future

Our ultimate and only future is the Kingdom of God. In discovering it now and travelling to its fulfilment, we have to trust in God's providence and surprises. However, we are not passive spectators as the future unfolds. What we do and what we don't do will have its effect as it is shaped. Each one of us has a part to play in that.

Once again, I repeat what I said at the beginning of my ministry here: *I am only a bishop. There are some things that a bishop can do and some things he can't do. There are things that only he can do. So he must do them, or else they will not be done. The same may be said for every member of the Church. There are some things that only you can do, so you must do them, or else they will not be done.*

Prayer

What can I do? you may ask. The first thing that each of us must do is to pray. In prayer, we can tune in to the voice of God and learn to distinguish it among the many voices that surround us. In prayer, we can learn to love God's will and want to do it. In prayer, we can find the perseverance and hope that will sustain us when following God's call becomes difficult or when its fruits do not appear at once.

But prayer is not only useful: it is a basic duty we owe to our Creator, in whom we live and move and have our being. It begins with praise and thanksgiving; moves through asking for what we need, beginning with his mercy; and goes on to rest trustingly in the power of his love, knowing that all things are possible with God.

In our tradition, there have been many giants in the life of faith who have shared with us their hard won wisdom on how to pray, in classic writings of spirituality. I am not one of those giants, nor is this letter one of those classic works. I am simply a pastor offering some words of guidance and encouragement that prayer is not for a select few, but for everyone.

Jesus and Prayer

The Gospels reveal Jesus, the Son of God who became human like us in all ways except sin. It's no surprise that the evangelists tell us that Jesus himself prayed. Again and again, he goes away to spend time, sometimes all night, praying to the Father. Sometimes, these attempts to pray are interrupted by the demands of his disciples and the people eager for his words and healing. It reminds us not to give up when our own attempts to find a quiet place and time for prayer are disrupted. Like Jesus did, we can always return again.

Jesus spent the night in prayer before calling the twelve apostles. There are moments in the Gospels where he prays, not alone, but out loud in front of his followers. "Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer... I speak for the sake of all those standing around me." (Jn 11:41-42). The whole chapter 17 of John's Gospel is an extended prayer of Jesus in the company of the disciples as he prepares for his passion and death.

And the other Gospels recount that, after the Last Supper, he took his friends to the Mount of Olives and begged them to keep alert and pray. As we know, they could not

keep awake, but Jesus did. According to Mark, he "threw himself on the ground and prayed... *Abba, Father! For you everything is possible. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I would have it.*" (Mk 14:36)

Jesus also taught about prayer. There are four main themes in his teaching. First, that prayer is not a matter of performance or showing off in front of God or others. Second, that prayer must be authentic, linked to what is in our hearts and how we live. Third, to persevere and not to give up in praying. And fourth, to pray to be alert and attentive to our reality.

Jesus taught us to pray for what we want, just as he did. The answer to our prayer is sometimes the discovery of God's will and learning to love and rest in that.

Forms of Prayer

There are many forms of prayer. It is always good to be open to finding new ways to pray. However, no method works unless the attitude of your heart is right. No method works unless you acknowledge that what you bring to prayer is your availability and that it is the Holy Spirit who prays in you bringing you into the love of the Trinity.

We do not look for joy and consolation every time we pray. The witness of so many saints reminds us that the emotional experience of prayer will often be dry. It is then that we persevere, believing that God is working in our hearts, whether we feel it or not.

Praying Alone and Together

St Teresa of Avila told us that we are always in God's presence; and praying is when we become aware of that.

We need times of prayer alone with God, speaking to him, listening to him in silence and the Scriptures. And we should learn to pray briefly and frequently to God in our hearts in the ordinary events of the day. And then, because no one follows Christ alone, we also need times of prayer together.

There are two time-tested ways to pray that can be done alone or together: The Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary.

The Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office, developed and maintained in monasteries, is available now to all the faithful. At its heart are the 150 Psalms. At different times of the day, we pray selected Psalms and other prayers, Scripture and sacred writings, as set out in a book called a Breviary. (These days, the Breviary can be accessed on smartphones etc too.) Month by month, we pray through all the Psalms, which contain every mood of prayer, from desperate pleading to joyful praise. Whether the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed alone

or with a group, it is the Prayer of the Church, for the Church and the world.

The Rosary developed because many people could not read the Psalms. But this simple prayer has been and continues to be used by the most learned as well. Yet so simple that a child can do it: an Our Father, ten Hail Marys and a Glory Be (a decade). Even if we don't have rosary beads, we can count on our fingers! As we repeat the prayers of five decades, we can meditate on different events in the life of Jesus and Mary. A list is printed at the end of this letter.

Family Prayer

Families and married couples need prayer together. It need not be complicated or lengthy, but it is vital for weaving these relationships together in the love of God.

Many families do not pray because they are not sure how to do it. I have asked our Pastoral Council to look for ways we can help and encourage this practice, which could bring so many blessings to our families and the Church they belong to.

The Eucharist

The title of this letter comes from the first line of George Herbert's poem *Prayer*, printed in full at the end. Today, "banquet" connotes a lavish feast. In Herbert's day, the word was used to describe a snack. However, the same message about prayer as necessary nourishment remains.

We see this very clearly in the Eucharist, the source and summit of our worship of God. It is a prayer that actually becomes a sacred meal, in which we participate in the sacrifice of Christ and anticipate the heavenly feast. It is important to recapture the understanding that we come to Mass not as spectators, but to pray. We deepen our participation when we meditate on the Scriptures of the day before coming to church; and when we find time to adore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, still really present outside the celebration of the Mass, though always linked to it.

I leave the last word to Christ himself:
Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side. (Rv 3:20)

+Michael McKenna
Bishop of Bathurst

Solemnity of Christ the King 2016



Mass at the Cathedral of St Michael and St John as part of the closing celebrations of the Sesquicentenary and the Commissioning of the Diocesan Pastoral Council

Prayer

By George Herbert

Prayer the Church's banquet, Angels' age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;
Engine against th' Almighty, sinners' tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world-transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted Manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well dressed,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices, something understood.

Mysteries of the Rosary

The Joyful Mysteries

1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation
3. The Nativity
4. The Presentation
5. The Finding of the Child
Jesus in the Temple

The Sorrowful Mysteries

1. The Agony in the Garden
2. The Scourging at the Pillar
3. The Crowning with Thorns
4. The Carrying of the Cross
5. The Crucifixion

The Luminous Mysteries

1. Christ's Baptism
2. The Wedding at Cana
3. Christ's Proclamation of
the Kingdom of God
4. The Transfiguration
5. The Institution of the Holy Eucharist

The Glorious Mysteries

1. The Resurrection
2. The Ascension
3. Descent of the Holy Spirit
4. The Assumption of Our Lady
5. The Crowning of Our Lady

Our Lady of the Central West

Iconographer ~ Mary Clancy

The icon on the front cover shows Mary praying with us and for us. Crafted with earth pigments, the colours come from across Europe, the Middle East and Australia, representing the soil of many of the homelands from which the people of the Diocese of Bathurst originate. Gold highlights are included, as gold plays a pivotal role in our region's past and present.

The border incorporates the totems of the local Wiradjuri and Gamilaraay nations. The four concentric circles at the top represent the Cathedral of St Michael and St John; 16 triple concentric circles represent the parish churches; and 37 others represent small Eucharistic communities. These are joined by a wandering line of dots; the pathways which connect all these groups together.

The icon was commissioned by Bishop Michael McKenna to mark the Sesquicentenary of the Diocese of Bathurst, which was established in 1865.