

## Holy Cross Retreat

### Letter 203



5 January, 2024



Greetings,

We extend best wishes to everyone as 2024 unfolds. Given that an optimist stays up until midnight to see the New Year in, and a pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves, it's probably best to remain a realist!

The community wants to express our **gratitude** for the prayers and financial generosity extended to us over Christmas. We are most grateful.

At the present time, half of the community are away having a **holiday**. **Erick** and the **postulants** are away until January 10th. **Chris** is away for a week. **Rafael** and **Budi** left for two weeks in Sydney on Wednesday and **JD** returned on Thursday.

**Phi** returned to Vietnam for eight days to arrange the transfer of his visa from a study visa to a religious worker. It was the first time in 25 years that he celebrated Christmas with his family! He returned early on Tuesday morning and after less than four hours sleep he was off to his Clinical Pastoral Education programme. On returning home it was straight to the study desk. We celebrated his 36<sup>th</sup> birthday a day late, on Tuesday January 2<sup>nd</sup>.

A number of people purchased a copy of **Chris' book** 'The Lost Gospel' on Sunday. There will be copies available this coming Sunday, or via the Holy Cross office.

News this morning arrived from Debbie Pichut that she and Peter's grandson, **Alfred Theodore** has entered the world in London and while still in hospital, there is no immediate need for surgery. Thank you for the prayers

The **Holy Cross Office** will reopen on Monday, January 8<sup>th</sup>.

**A modern day pieta from Gaza**



### **Destruction of a neighbourhood**



### **Pregnant mothers in Gaza**

By [Zena Chamas](#) December 30<sup>th</sup>

**Much of this article had to be omitted because it might cause distress.**



The United Nations Children's Fund has warned that women, children and new-borns are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the current war. The Fund estimates about 180 babies are being born in Gaza each day. Amid the raging war, women are reportedly giving birth on rubble-filled floors, undergoing emergency

caesareans with no anaesthetic or pain relief, and some even dying after childbirth due to a lack of medical supplies.

In early November, the UN agency reported there were some 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza. One 25-year-old woman had an emergency caesarean and due to heavy bleeding, the woman had to have her womb removed after birth — a situation that could have been avoided if proper health care was available, she said.

Yafa Abu Akar who lives in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip says "Pregnant women are living amid the rubble and women are facing dire circumstances in every aspect of their life here.". The World Health Organization (WHO) warned in October that patients were being operated on without aesthetic due to low medical supplies.



Since then, the situation has gotten worse, with the WHO decrying the "decimation" of Gaza's health system while commending health professionals there for continuing to work under extreme circumstances.



UNICEF expressed concerns that women who were unable to make it to hospitals in Gaza would have to give birth in unsafe conditions. Juzoor is one of a handful of organisations operating in northern Gaza. It supports 500 pregnant women among up to 35,000 others crammed into 13 shelters that are without clean water or proper sanitation. In some situations, up to 600 people are sharing one toilet. People in Gaza don't have enough eat, and pregnant women are unable to receive enough nutrition.

According to Juzoor's network of doctors, premature births have also increased by between 25 per cent and 30 per cent, as stressed and traumatised pregnant women faced a myriad of challenges, such as walking long distances in search of



safety, running away from bombs and being crowded into unsafe shelters. At least one in four households — or 577,000 people — in Gaza are already facing catastrophic hunger, suffering from an extreme lack of food, starvation and exhaustion of coping capacities, the IPC found.

Hospitals and ambulances are under siege. Patients and medical staff are being injured

and killed, and access to the wounded and sick is impeded by insecurity, lack of fuel, and mobile phone connectivity.

In addition to the daily struggles of finding drinkable water, food, and proper shelter, practising feminine hygiene, is a daily struggle for women. They are living in an environment where you can't keep yourself clean, you can't shower. It may not be the most dramatic manifestations of the war but it is extremely dehumanising



**The Epiphany (the good news is welcomed by the Gentiles. Feast: January 7<sup>th</sup>,**

### **Journey of the Magi (T. S. Eliot)**

This poem is told through the 'eyes' of one of the Magi. TS Eliot had recently had a religious conversion and the poem reflects the pain and struggle of letting go of one way of life one faith (magic, astrology and paganism) and acknowledging the huge shift it is to embrace a new faith and parting from old ways. Spiritual transformation makes the past feel alien and the discovery can for a moment feel underwhelming.

A cold coming we had of it,

Just the worst time of the year  
for a journey, and such a long journey:

The ways was deep and the weather sharp,

the very dead of winter.

A  
and the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,

lying down in the melting snow.

There were times we regretted.

The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,  
And the night-fires gong out, and the lack of shelters,  
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
And the villages dirty, and charging high prices.:  
A hard time we had of it.  
At the end we preferred to travel all night,  
Sleeping in snatches,  
With the voices singing in our ears, saying  
That this was all folly.  
Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,  
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;  
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,  
And three trees on the low sky,  
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.  
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel.  
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,  
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.  
But there was no information, and so we continued  
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon

Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,

And I would do it again, but set down

This set down

This: were we lead all that way

for

Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,

We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,

But had thought they were different;

this Birth was

Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,

But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,

With an alien people clutching their gods.

I should be glad of another death.

["We Three Kings of Orient Are"](#) is another piece of writing from the point of view of the magi.

### **Feast this Sunday: The baptism of Jesus**



It can seem a bit soon to be celebrating Jesus' baptism this Sunday, however in the Eastern church, the birth of Jesus, the Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus are celebrated as the one feast. This is to show the continuity between Jesus entering the world in Bethlehem, being recognized

by all peoples through the Magi as the Messiah (Christ) and the initiation of Jesus into his work by being baptised in the Jordan river. Jesus' baptism highlighted that he was a true member of the human family. He shared their longings for liberation.

Perhaps one aspect of this feast we might reflect on today, is that no one becomes a commissioned follower of Jesus without having to grow and develop in his or her understanding of what this vocation means. Growth in faith was real for Jesus too.

Jesus did not sit up in the manger and recite his 'six times' tables. He had to learn like everyone else. He did not arrive with everything worked out. We can see from the events in the gospels that his ideas grew and he had his vision expanded by some of the people he met.

Jesus was baptised a disciple of John, but after John's death, Jesus took a different path. He began spreading good news about a way of living in which people could be liberated from religious oppression. His focus was not on the next life. Jesus began offering a way of living here and now. He became totally dedicated to 'the reign of God' (it is mentioned 120 times in the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke) and to the universal family that included the marginalized.



So Jesus' baptism was the beginning of a faith journey that like any of ours, was shaped by many events and encounters. Sometimes the worst events are our best teachers. Sometimes our greatest insights come from simple events or ordinary everyday experiences. Everything is a learning opportunity. It was a very sad event that brought Jesus to tears and that changed his direction. John's death was a call to review and change.



Jesus set out to preach that everyone belonged to one family and no matter who we are, we are brothers and sisters. Then he met a Canaanite woman! She asked him to cure her daughter. But Jesus told her his message was only for the people of Israel. Like a typical desperate Mother, she said "that's alright, do that, but we outsiders should have anything that is left over'. Even *puppies pick up the scraps that fall for their Master's*

*table", she said.*

Jesus praised her for her faith and promised healing for her daughter. The woman helped Jesus to expand his view. Now he knew that God wants to include **everyone** in his family. His baptismal vocation continued to grow. Strangely, not all his followers have come yet to the same insight!



We can reckon that Jesus did not know he would be crucified, but he did know the risk to his life, because he knew what had happened to John. Jesus had seen what happened to John the Baptist, and there is ample evidence in the gospels that he avoided the large towns, so he knew what he was doing was dangerous.

*not  
my will  
but  
yours*

His baptismal faith was to be totally open to the will of God – that whatever happened to him, God would shape for good. His baptismal vocation led him to accept that his message was not tolerated by the secular and religious authorities, but he would not - he could not, back down. This was who he was. He took the path of faithfulness, and accepted where it took him.

Celebrating the feast of Jesus' baptism gives us the opportunity to acknowledge that he has shown us the way – the path of total faithfulness. It does not demand the same of every one of us, but we can each strive to imitate that example. It calls for us to be open to new understandings and new directions. Above all, it calls for us to remember that we are baptised "into Christ". We are called to be one with him. To think like him. To act like him; to love like him. That is what it means for us to be baptised. Baptism is for mission!

### Humour



**I hate it when  
people act all  
intellectual and talk  
about Mozart, while  
they've never even  
seen one of his  
paintings...**

- Batteries were given out at Christmas free of charge
- A dentist and manicurist married. They fought tooth and nail
- A will is a dead giveaway
- A boiled egg is hard to beat
- When you've see one shopping centre you've seen a mall
- Police were called to a childcare centre where a young boy was resisting a rest
- A worker was injured. He's entire left side was cut off. He is all right now.
- I bicycle can't stand alone. It is two tired
- When a clock is hungry it goes back four seconds
- The man who fell into an upholstery machine has now fully recovered
- Bill had a photographic memory which was never developed



- Acupuncture is a job well done; that's the point of it
  - Those who get too big for their pants will be totally exposed in the end
- Why are 1984 bottles of whiskey more valuable than 1977 bottles of whiskey?  
(see answer further below).

A gifted portrait artist named Joe developed a reputation for his work. One day, a woman arrived at his house in a stretch limo, and asked if he would paint her in the nude. She said she was willing to pay \$10,000. Joe wanted to get into any marital strife, so he asked the woman to wait while he went into the house to confer with Mary, his wife. Finally his wife agreed, on one condition which Joe relayed to the woman. "I'd be happy to paint your portrait. Madam in the nude, but I have to leave my socks on, so I have a place to wipe me brushes."



### How Politicians are defined (and have been for a long time)

**We hang petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office.**

*Aesop, Greek slave & fable author*

**Those who are too smart to engage in politics are punished by being governed by those who are dumber.** (*Plato, ancient Greek Philosopher*)

**Politicians are the same all over: they promise to build a bridge even where there is no river.** (*Nikita Khrushchev, Russian Soviet politician*)

**When I was a boy I was told that anybody could become President; I'm beginning to believe it.** (*Quoted in 'Clarence Darrow for the Defense' by Irving Stone*)

**Politicians are people who, when they see light at the end of the tunnel, go out and buy some more tunnel.** (*John Quinton, American actor/writer*)

**Politics is the gentle art of getting votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich, by promising to protect each from the other.**  
(*Oscar Ameringer, "the Mark Twain of American Socialism."*)

**I offered my opponents a deal: "if they stop telling lies about me, I will stop telling the truth about them".** (*Adlai Stevenson, campaign speech, 1952*)

**A politician is a fellow who will lay down your life for his country.**  
(*Texas Guinan, 19th century American businessman*)

**I have come to the conclusion that politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians.** (*Charles de Gaulle, French general & president*)

**Instead of giving a politician the keys to the city, it might be better to change the locks.** (*Doug Larson, English athlete and gold medalist at the 1924 Olympic Games*)

**What happens if a politician drowns in a river? That is pollution.  
What happens if all of them drown? That is solution.** (*Bibek Debroy*)

**I have come to the conclusion that one useless man is a shame, two are lawyers and three or more are the government.** (*John Adams (1735 - 1826)*)

**Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Government. But then I repeat myself.** (*Mark Twain (1835- 1910)*)

**I don't make jokes. I just watch the Government and report the facts!**  
(*Will Rogers (1879- 1935)*)

**I contend that for a nation to try and tax itself into prosperity, is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle.**  
(*Winston Churchill (1874 - 1965)*)

**A government which robs Peter to pay Paul, can always depend on the support of Paul!** (*Will Rogers (1879- 1935)*)

**The problem we face today is that the people who work for a living are outnumbered by those who vote for a living.** (*George Bernard Shaw (1856- 1950)*)

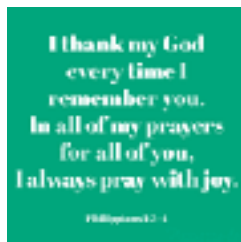
**Actually I don't like political jokes, but a lot of them get elected.....**

Answer

Why are 1984 bottles of whiskey more valuable than 1977 bottles of whiskey?  
**Because there are more of them!**

### Prayers

We remember those whose anniversaries occur around this week, especially  
[Thomas Butler](#) (Jan 8<sup>th</sup>) Geraldine's father  
[Norma Norris](#) (9<sup>th</sup> January)  
[Barry Hanrahan](#); [Brian Kelly](#) (Christine's husband) (13<sup>th</sup> January)  
We remember all others in our Holy Cross family who are unwell, especially.



Marie Foale RSJ, Jeff Foale CP, Paul Geoghegan, Maree Bartoli, Tony Tome, Pam Storey, Peter McNamara, [Michael O'Callaghan](#), Peter & Bernadette Owen, Alexander Lim, Dawn Heffernan, Gerry Bond, Maeve & John Reardon, Greg Agosta, Phil Drew, Bronwyn Burke, Helen McLean, Mary Hackett, Pam Gartland, Sr Gen Walsh RSC, Errol Lovett, Patricia Keeghan, Kate and Mary Dunn, Anne Jenkins, Chris O'Toole, Gerald Quinn CP and Peter and Debbie's grandson Alfred Theodore.

The **Mass link** for this Sunday will be sent on Saturday by Chris.

Brian