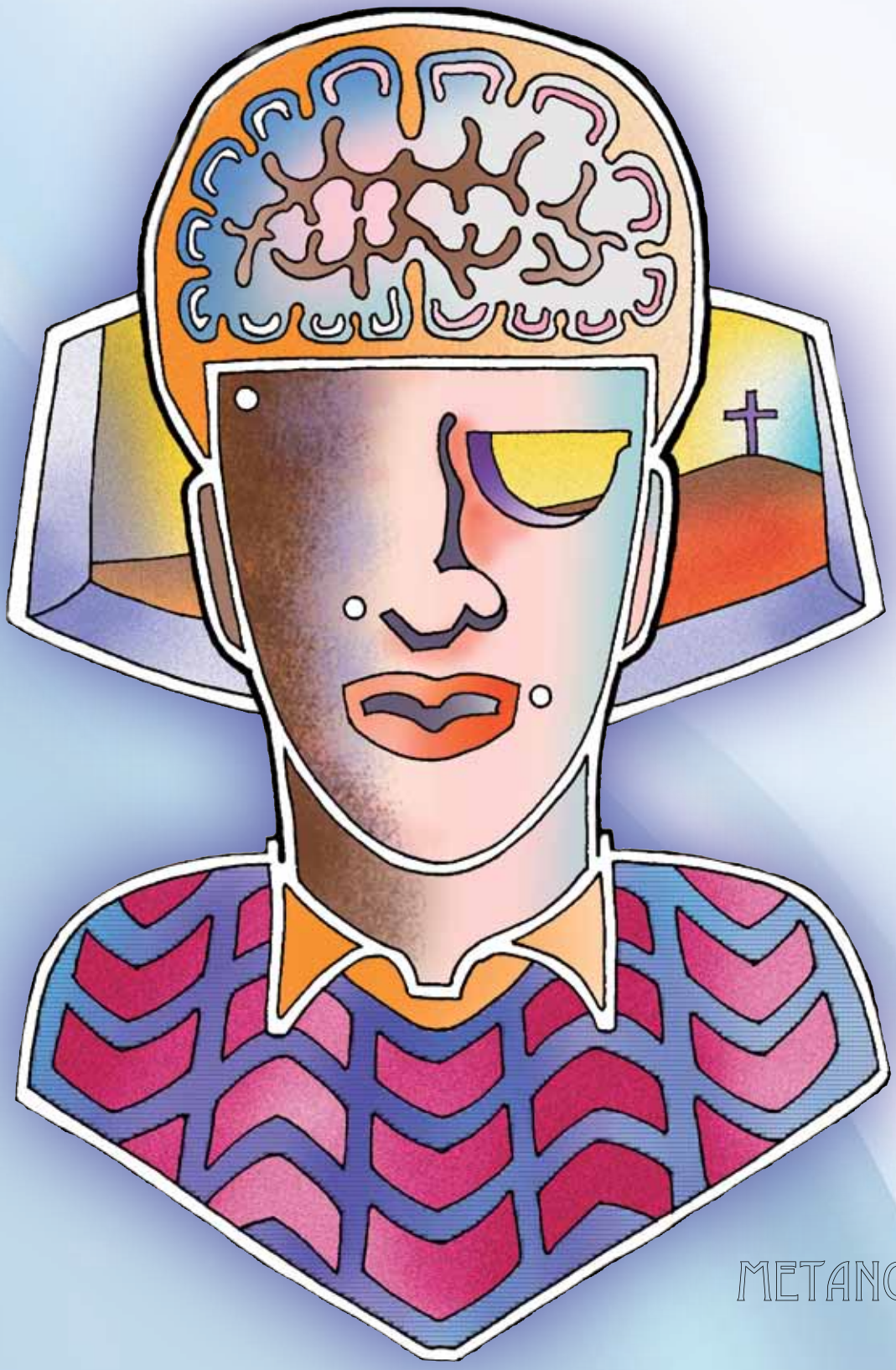
Tui Motu

InterIslands

monthly independent Catholic magazine
March 2012 | $6



METANOIA

this fertile season

Lent is such a rich concept. For us its prime meaning of 'spring' is completely lost. Rather we antipodeans experience the deep and natural turning of autumn and the annual slow dying of the earth, which brings forth a radiance of colour and life uniquely southern. If the northern spring resounds to the resurrection of Christ, his dying is reflected very clearly in what we see around us, the dropping of the leaves and their turning to mulch — that harbinger of new life. This new life takes up the deeper meaning of the word Lent: 'to long', the desire we have for God. How beautifully this is put in the reading from the book of Joel given for the liturgy of Ash Wednesday, "Come back to me with all your heart . . ." (Jl 2:12–18) Our hearts yearn deeply to tune into this call from God who longs infinitely more strongly to relate with each one of us.

Three Lenten authors illumine this multi-faceted season. Cecily Sheehy energetically 'turns us around' as she takes up the word '*metanoia*'. She focuses on how we may begin to think in a new way, to change our hearts and minds.

It is 40 years this year since James K Baxter died. His life still resonates in our national psyche through his writings and poetry. Mike Riddell takes up a previously unpublished writing, *Confession to the Lord Christ,* to show how this man of contradictions, genuinely given to the mystical way of Jesus, lived so as to die for others. Mike's final image of the wheelbarrow may help lead us to a place of transformation, a place of 'healing light'.

Finally, Stuart Sellar tunes us to one of those fulsome words John's gospel bristles with: *meno*. This 'abiding' word brings us to look deeply at the mystery of our indwelling Trinitarian God. May this indwelling flourish in us as we face towards Easter and the glory of the paschal mystery.

Donald Moorhead's front cover mesmerisingly pushes us towards the 'openness to the new' that Lent may bring. The old way of thinking (the left eye) is gone; the skull is exposed to show the brain in thought; the mouth is open, expectant; and the right eye is open fully, able to look both forwards and backwards. All these symbolize change of direction and new focus, and are beautifully encapsulated in the ending of Gillian Dowling's poem *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall* — in this issue:

Yet Christ is in my eye,
his loving beam
Restores my heart of flesh,
his love redeems.

Without doubt, your imagination will take you to other places and you will see more as you look at Donald's cover and read the Lenten articles.

catholic schools

Tui Motu has focused a segment of this issue on Catholic schools — to honour the beginning of another teaching year.

contents

Front Cover Illustration: Donald Moorhead

In one article, children from two Catholic primary schools reflect on a simple question: why I like coming back to school? While they give a host of answers that you might expect, some are insightful and different. Their writing bubbles with life!

In another article, a Catholic primary school teacher gives testimony to her passion for teaching, and her belief that in a Catholic school she can teach the whole child in a way that would not be possible in other schools. The challenge she sees for herself is to keep her faith fully alive and burning brightly — as an example for the children she teaches.

Many people ask: are Catholic Schools still Catholic? We asked Paul Ferris to tackle this important question. One of his conclusions tunes in perfectly with Liz Mulholland's expectation of herself to keep her faith fully alive and burning brightly. Paul is clear that the present challenge of the Catholic schools lies in their missionary role to their students and through them to their families. To do this, there is a need for school staffs that can present the message of the gospel as strongly as religious did in earlier times. These teachers' strong faith (Liz Mulholland would be a good example of this) will become an evangelisation of their pupils because they can see "God in the teacher" and so recognize God in themselves. As Paul says so well, "The message of the gospels is transmitted through people." It is an uncompromising challenge. **KT**

parish sales of tui motu

You may not be aware that from Whangarei to Invercargill *Tui Motu* is supported and promoted by generous women and men, whom we call our parish sellers. These are people who are familiar with *Tui Motu* themselves; some of them have subscribed since day one in 1997. They have enthusiasm for the magazine and convey that in a most practical way by volunteering to sell each monthly issue in their parish church. Perhaps you have been in parishes where at the end of Sunday Mass someone holds up a copy of the latest issue, speaks for no more than a minute or two on some article or item of particular interest, and then moves to the church entrance to sell the magazine to parishioners or visitors. Well, that is a parish seller.

We would love to have more such sellers throughout the country. If *Tui Motu* could have this regular promotion in every parish in the country, we know that many more people would be reached. Some might go on to become subscribers themselves; others might prefer to continue to purchase on a more casual basis and therefore would value the service provided by the parish seller.

The task is not difficult and advice and support can be provided from the *Tui Motu* office. So if you have always cherished a secret desire to be a salesperson, or even if you are simply willing to try something new, we would love to hear from you. All you need is knowledge of *Tui Motu*, a willingness to speak briefly once a month, a supply of small change for sales — and the support of your parish priest. In fact, the parish is often grateful if someone will take responsibility for managing this service. Because the seller is responsible for handling the magazines and the money, there is no extra burden for your busy parish priest or administrator; and the burden for the seller is slight.

How about a Lenten effort, or see it as a simple opportunity for evangelisation? Or do it just for fun! We'll be waiting to hear from you. ■

Elizabeth Mackie
for *Tui Motu* Board

Tui Motu InterIslands

ISSM 1174-8931
Issue number 158

Tui Motu – InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed.

The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

address: Independent Catholic Magazine Ltd, P O Box 6404, Dunedin North, 9059
phone: (03) 477 1449
fax: (03) 477 8149
email: tuimotu@earthlight.co.nz
website: www.tuimotu.org
editor: Kevin Toomey OP
assistant editor: Elizabeth Mackie OP
illustrator: Donald Moorhead
directors: Rita Cahill RSJ, Philip Casey, Neil Darragh, Paul Ferris, Robin Kearns, Elizabeth Mackie OP (interim chair).
typesetting: Greg Hings
printers: Southern Colour Print, 1 Turakina Road, Dunedin South, 9012

a response to the petrobras article

Ray Watembach

Your social justice article headed *Petrobras and East Cape Oil Exploration* (TM, Nov 11) touches on some aspects of the systems of unaccountablilty built into New Zealand power structures. If the existing Government of the day adopts the third world mentality of 'authorising' any development, regardless of destructive effects to third parties, in the hope that the first and second parties will make lots of money, then that's traditional capitalism as practised for centuries. It means the last people to be considered will be the locals. Their rights are always over–ridden by authorities whose job, it seems, is to fudge the issue at least — if they don't deny outright that locals are disadvantaged and their environment endangered or damaged.

At Waitara in Taranaki, local Māori, over 30 years ago, objected to the town's sewage being minced and pumped to sea where it polluted local beaches and reefs. This made support for their traditional life-style impossible, as it is dangerous to health to eat filter feeding shellfish taken from polluted reefs.

Māori objections got nowhere, until Māori went to the Waitangi Tribunal (Claim Wai 6). Not only were some local Māori the victims of the Government's illegal wars and armed occupation of those lands, but the present (illegal) occupiers failed to recognise the Māori right to keep their food — on the reefs, and in the sea — in a good healthy condition. More so in that the almost total loss of Māori lands and subsequent impoverishment of the whole people meant that the only available source of protein left to them came from seafood.

Letters to the Editor:
We received no letters in time for publication in this March issue.

At first New Plymouth City Council (which took over Waitara Borough's assets) was reluctant to have a land–based sewage treatment plant as proposed by the Clean Sea Action Group — an umbrella group representing nearly all sectors of the community including Māori. The Council wanted a long sea outfall in Waitara, and another in New Plymouth. But in 1982, after a damning Waitangi Tribunal Report, the Mayor proposed that they build the proposed facility as a regional sewage treatment system in New Plymouth, which would take in Waitara as well. Almost 30 years later, the Council has just started building the connecting sewer line, and only because of public demonstrations.

Another group, Friends of the Waitara River (Inc), has objected to the Taranaki Regional Council granting a 30+ year Water Right to the New Plymouth District Council to continue discharging through the Waitara Outfall. This ignores the promise made to include Waitara's sewage in the regional treatment facility. The District Council claimed they needed the Waitara outfall for storm water and wet weather "infiltration", for years a problem they had negligently failed to address properly. Why pay to pump storm water down an outfall, when diverting it to its proper place seems the correct and cheapest solution? When the objectors called for an Independent Commission — to bypass the perceived partiality of the Taranaki Regional Council in its close relationship with New Plymouth District Council — they were warned that they would have a $30,000 cost put on them (basically for daring to stand up for their environment and the rights of the local people).

The hearings (1–3 November 2011) resulted in the requested Water Rights being granted, but only after a number of changes to conditions. If properly met, these should result in a lifting of water quality in the area of the outfall. A benefit from the frank exchanges during the hearing was the knowledge that since colonisation began, the water quality of every stream and river in Taranaki, at the mouth, has declined. The present largely farm–produced pollution of the streams inflicts a double blow on Māori, as the sea is still polluted regardless of the millions being spent on treatment of townies' wastes. The Waitara River, once accessible to Māori canoes, is now impossible to navigate for most of its length.

Down-river, the Ngāti Awa people are now almost unknown, having been the principal victims of the Governments' criminal activities. Their lands are now occupied by illegal settlers and *kupapa* Māori descendants. The latter tried to some extent to mitigate the destruction of forests and swamps — nature's water filters — the fouling of streams and the loss of huge fisheries and reefs that once supported the estimated 10-15,000 Ngāti Awa people. Now 'progress' means the same land area supports about half that number.

Our experience means that the East Cape tribes and communities really will get nowhere if an environmental disaster arises from Petrobras, as nobody in authority is ever held to substantive account in this country. It appears that Government in New Zealand exists to facilitate the plunder and destruction of resources and fisheries, which the Treaty of Waitangi clearly states are Māori resources. However, these resources are subject to Pākeha envy and greed driven by the old colonial desire for supremacy and acquisition by any means. ■

This abridged response comes from Ray Watembach, a long time resident of Waitara and researcher on local issues.

state assets already belong to "mum & dad"

Murray Horton

The Government has announced that Mighty River Power will be the first State asset to be put on the market. It does not have a mandate to sell public assets, despite its claims to the contrary (every single poll on the subject has shown a majority of people are opposed to flogging off the four State-owned power generators, Solid Energy and Air New Zealand).

John Key has made a big song and dance about how private ownership will be restricted to 49% and he also promised that "Kiwi mums and dads" will be the target of the shares to be issued when these public assets will be floated. Neither of those promises stand up to any scrutiny. Commentators, including Key, have admitted that even if these mythical "Kiwi mums and dads" do buy the shares, there is nothing to stop them promptly selling them to the first big corporate buyer that comes along, either from NZ Big Business or, much more likely, a transnational corporation.

That is exactly what happened in the 1990s to community-owned local electricity network operators — shares were issued to their customers, who promptly became the target of offers they couldn't refuse from corporate buyers. Nor does 49% private ownership provide any kind of protection. All you need to do is look at the *Overseas Investment Act 2006* which, despite many amendments since it was first passed in 1973, still retains the same legal definition of a foreign company — one that is more than 24.9% foreign-owned. It doesn't matter whether that percentage is held by one or many foreign owners; if it totals anything higher than 24.9%, it is recognised as a foreign company.

In other words Key is talking about accepting a level of private, inevitably foreign, ownership which is double the legal definition of a foreign company. And there is an inherently absurd contradiction in this whole "Kiwi mums and dads" nonsense — they already own these assets, because that is what public ownership means. They have paid for them by their taxes, why should they be expected to pay for them again by buying a few shares in them and diluting their ownership to the status of a minority shareholder? What happens if one of these privatised companies goes bust? Mum and dad will go to the back of the queue as unsecured creditors, just as happened with the shonky finance companies that toppled like dominos. And mum and dad will be left with nothing. Isn't that a great bargain!

Why does the Government want to privatise public assets?

Key and English are trotting out the tired old lie that it is to reduce debt. This was used during the huge wave of State asset privatisations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It couldn't be justified then and certainly can't be justified now. At least Roger Douglas had the decency to tell the truth. In an early 90s' book praising him and his cronies for the sell-off of State forests, Douglas said: "I am not sure we were right to use the argument that we should privatise to quit debt. We knew it was a poor argument but we probably felt it was the easiest to use politically".

New Zealand does have high foreign debt at present but the great bulk of it is private debt, not public. Of that private foreign debt around 70% is bank debt, which is only a problem for the Australian owners of our major banks, not the New Zealand taxpayer. NZ's public debt is very low compared to other high income countries. It is certainly nothing like the public debt levels of countries such as Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain — countries with which the Government is now comparing New Zealand in a propaganda drive to panic Kiwis into accepting 'There Is No Alternative' to privatisation. Our public debt levels provide no justification for flogging off those assets.

The answer is, of course, that the Government wants to privatise public assets for ideological reasons.

But there is a rather big fly in the privatisers' ointment, namely section 9 of the *State-Owned Enterprises Act, 1986* which states that the SOEs must act in accordance with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Key has announced that the Government doesn't intend to include that section in the legislation enabling these SOEs to be sold, out of consideration for the new part-owners. This provoked a firestorm within Māoridom, with the Māori Party threatening to quit its brand new coalition with National (at the time of writing this hasn't been resolved). The clause in particular and the Treaty in general are potent weapons. For instance, they are the reason why only the cutting rights to State forests were sold, and not the actual land the trees stand on, during the first wave of public asset sales in the 1980s and 1990s. Māori know all about colonisation; privatisation of public assets simply enables recolonisation, but by corporations this time. Pākeha would do well to get behind the Treaty as a powerful protector of our national sovereignty. ■

Murray Horton is a researcher-writer, and spokesperson for Campaign against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA), based in Christchurch.

turning our lives around

Lent, the annual time of preparation, beckons and challenges us once again. Part of the challenge is to think in a new way about the usual exhortations of 'prayer, penance, almsgiving, and taking up your cross and following Jesus'.

Cecily Sheehy

Yes, Lent is a season of reflection, and traditionally, some form of curbing self-indulgence, joining a study group, and making some gesture towards service in the community. There is something very good about all these things. Just for a little while we try to honour what is most important in our lives — coming to the Truth, and seeking a deeper understanding of the mysteries of our Faith.

So how to turn our lives around in preparation for this Easter?

a good place to begin

Repentance is a good place to begin, and a good word to examine, since it appears quite often in the Gospels, and in scripture generally. No matter how many times we hear that this word, translated from Greek, does not mean sorrow, regret, and changing our behaviour, we still come back to the idea that it does mean sorrow, regret etc, a fact which is quite unfortunate. Even some 'colloquial' translations of the New Testament still render the word in the usual way, and so imply that a moral and not a mental change is indicated.

Metanoia is the original word, and its meaning has to do with 'a change of mind, a change of direction, thinking from a new perspective'. So it's not about physical behaviour, it's about mental behaviour! In *The Mark,* Maurice Nicoll explains: "The Greek particle *meta* is found in several words of comparatively ordinary usage, such as metaphor, metaphysics, metamorphosis. In 'metaphor', it means transference of meaning . . . to carry over or beyond and so transfer the meaning of what is said beyond the words used. Metamorphosis is used to describe the transformation of form in insect-life, e.g. the grub to the butterfly. The particle *meta* therefore indicates transference, or transformation, or beyondness.

'The other part of this word translated as repentance — *noia* — is from the Greek word *nous*, which means 'mind'. The word *metanoia* therefore has to do with transformation of the mind in its essential meaning. The English word repentance is derived from the Latin poenitare which means to feel sorry, feeling pain or regret. Metanoia stands far above such a meaning, and is not a mere mood."

the heart of the matter

So having defined this maligned word — yet again — how could it be applied in our lives this Lent, if that is what we wished? Going directly to the heart of the matter, we would find ourselves maybe having to turn our whole lives around, at least from the mental standpoint! That's a bit radical. How about for one day, every week of Lent, we question every thought, especially judgments or beliefs about ourselves, others, scripture etc, and turn it around — to see these things from another perspective.

As Catholics/Christians, we have been incredibly hard on ourselves, demanding perfection, 'repentance', and seeking God's

forgiveness from sin. (Our liturgies repeat this many times). We hear the words from the creed that God 'will come to judge the living and the dead'. The Gospels might be saying: stop thinking this way, while you are able.

gospel metaphors

Turn it around. Aren't Gospel stories wonderful metaphors, hardly ever meaning what the words on the page are saying? We have to look deeper, and repent, ie, turn all our thinking around — and see what happens. Read Luke 13:1–5. Jesus tells the people they are wrong in thinking the murdered Galileans were killed because they lived worse lives than other Galileans, and were guilty. His response was, "They were not, I tell you. No! But unless you repent (change your thinking) you will all perish as they did."

Another story, also full of metaphor and relevant for this time, is that of Jesus in the desert forty days and nights. How can we rescue this story from its literal translation and find in it a meaning for ourselves, not just something that happened to Jesus two thousand years ago? What *metanoia* can take place here? If the meaning is not about devils and temples and stones, and angels, what is it about?

humanity without torment?

Here he is, the great awakened one, the Christ — and the man, Jesus, seriously hungry, depleted and tempted. Just because he is the Christ, Son of God, doesn't mean his humanity is without torment — any more or less than ours, when we find ourselves in 'deserts' and 'dark nights'. The devil comes! What is the devil? Is it nothing but our own minds and their demented thinking? We don't need an external devil to be lurking, seeking whom he may devour. Our own minds can steal our souls away quite well, tempting us to believe all kind of frightening or threatening things, about ourselves as well as others, and life and religion. Haven't we all heard those voices — money, power, greed, seduction, fear, judgment? Don't they come from our mind? Why blame a devil!

He saw through all the temptations, and he saw through all the allurements, and in the 'desert', he said: 'No thank you. Go away.' Notice he didn't run away. He didn't even seem surprised. He didn't cry out in anguish. He didn't indulge these tempting things and neither did he struggle against them. He saw through it all. He stopped believing those thoughts and they lost power. What a wonderful metaphor this story is.

Lent is a good time to retreat to the desert — to be quiet . . . in the silence, it's amazing where wisdom and answers come from.

the devil

This sounds very blunt, but our rigid, narrow thinking is the 'devil'. Our silence, presence, acceptance and letting go, and *metanoia* is the 'Christ'. The essence of Gospel stories is the essence of us, not just something of the past, or some kind of miraculous story about Jesus. That's the beauty of them. They are always dropping breadcrumbs of new understanding.

Lent is a good time to retreat to the desert — to be quiet. Doubts, fears, and spiritual lethargy may arise, even at the thought of it! But in the silence, it's amazing where wisdom and answers come from. The desert story ends: "Then the devil left him, and the angels came and looked after him." When that inner peace comes, in the deep sigh of knowing that this very moment is OK, devils disappear and angels are attending us. But as long as we entertain the devil, ie, let all the tormenting thinking germinate and develop, we are in hell — trying desperately to work it all out. 'Be still and know that I am God.'

One dark night, fired by Love's urgent longing,
I went out by a secret ladder . . . unknown.

(St John of the Cross)

divinely embodied people

The last spiritual season we enjoyed was the beautiful joyousness of Christmas. Now we have a chance to enter the darkness, not in fear or guilt, but in stillness. Our bodies may need healing, and our minds may need to change and open, but, as Daniel O'Leary reminds us in that wonderful article in last December's issue of *Tui Motu,* not that we are sinners needing pardon, but 'divinely embodied people' with all our human differences, weaknesses and strengths.

To quote from that article *Fleshy Feast*: "Christmas reveals that we are all born with a divine star. Our bodies carry auras of inner loveliness. That is the meaning of the hallowed halo around the baby's sleepy head. We all have one! Its brightness does not depend on being successful at religion, on acquiring virtues and overcoming vices, on enforced beliefs and passing worthiness tests."

blessedness

Whatever Lent means to each of us, may we all feel the blessedness of our human-beingness, and honour with justice, dignity and respect, the 'divinely embodied' in our neighbourhood and country, and all God's creatures everywhere on this amazing planet. ■

Cecily Sheehy is a Dominican sister living in Auckland, where she teaches music.

into the dark

An unpublished piece Confession to the Lord Christ *gives us the elements which shaped the spiritual pilgrimage of James K Baxter. Some are as traditional as Thomas a Kempis; others are local. All help us to reflect on our own spiritual and Lenten journey.*

Mike Riddell

In the early days of James K. Baxter's sojourn in Jerusalem, the poet/prophet lived alone in the so-called 'Nun's Cottage'. There he practised many of the spiritual disciplines that he saw as God's work in preparing him for the founding of a community. He regarded the period as an opportunity for him to relinquish the protective shell of his ego.

. . . They say it is best

To break a rotten egg in the creek
To get eels — I think I am that egg

And Te Ariki must crack me open
If the fish are to be drawn in at all.

In the small settlement of Hiruharama, there was a derelict and unoccupied building known as the *kehua* (ghost) house. It had a reputation locally as being haunted. In a bizarre ritual, Baxter would enter the house in the dark of night.

"I would force myself to go in through the bramble, alone, at midnight, right into the dark door of the house — my heart pounding, sweat running off my body. To retreat to the area of the *animus* — to cast aside the experience of fear as being irrational — this would have been useless to me, because to transcend my own culture, to make a journey to the Māori side of the fence, I had to go beyond rational concepts, into the preternatural area."

his spiritual pilgrimage

This was no false bravado from Baxter. Rather it stemmed from a fusion of *taha Māori*, mysticism, and Jungian psychotherapy — all elements that shaped his spiritual pilgrimage. By facing his deepest fears and exposing himself to the possibility of dread, he was enlarging his experience to include that which he variously called darkness, *wahi ngaro*, or the *anima*. His motives were both personal and communal. For himself, he understood that his path to salvation required a journey into darkness. For the tribe he wished to found, he recognised the value of representative leadership.

"What good would I be as a father to a fearful tribe — most of them aged seventeen to twenty-five — if I could not myself go against the fears that tended to swallow them up."

Many have seen such sentiments in Baxter's writings as some sort of messianic complex. But in reality it differs little from the familiar spiritual discipline known as *The Imitation of Christ.* After all, à Kempis says, "Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern their whole life on that of Christ."

path of self-emptying

At this time of the year we focus on the journey of Jesus toward the cross. That, too, was a voyage into darkness for the sake of us all. In Lent we remember that the path toward the light often travels through the valley of shadows. Our tradition teaches us that Jesus emptied himself and adopted the path of *kenosis* —self-emptying — in order to make room for God and the other. This was a path that James K. Baxter sought to follow: "*Kenosis* means self-emptying, always with the proviso that one hopes to make more room for God and one's neighbour". Baxter chose the road that Jesus had lived out before him. This is a call that comes to us all in the season of Lent.

grace and *manuhiritanga*

Baxter — whose ringing pleas for social justice have a new relevance today — attempted, in the Jerusalem experiment, to found a community based on the

twin foundations of Christian grace and Maori *manuhiritanga*. While he actively worked against any sanctification of him as some sort of guru, he understood well enough that he had a symbolic leadership role for the broken people who gathered. As such, he recognised the need to take on board the burdens of those around him. A committed follower of Christ, how could Baxter not be shaped by the concept of bearing suffering for the sake of others?

a personal confession

His personal path toward Christ intersected with his communal life among those at Jerusalem he named *nga mokai* (the abandoned). His openness brought both suffering and transgression. Eventually it contributed to his early death at the age of 46. In the last year of his life, 40 years ago this year, he penned the remarkable unpublished piece entitled *Confession to the Lord Christ*. In it he makes his own confession with disarming honesty, doubting his right to enter heaven. He acknowledges the cost of sharing his life with the young people around him:

"It seems that I have given them the marrow of my bones to eat. Sometimes they might be a bit greedy and careless. They may eat more of my life than they need to eat. But who am I to worry too much about that?"

And he makes a plea to God on behalf of all the dispossessed and marginalised children of an uncaring society:

"Lord, damnation for this man, by all means — but there was a bargain somewhere, or something like a bargain. As if I said to you — Let my soul and body rot, let me live and die in darkness, but give these ones light, peace, joy, the gardens of Heaven to walk in . . . There was a bargain somewhere — my life for their lives — it cannot mean nothing."

the road to Jerusalem

These sorts of statements are either insufferably pretentious or provocatively insightful. My own understanding of Baxter's pilgrimage leads me to believe that his years of devotion to the path of Christ resulted in some resonance with what we might call the 'road to Jerusalem'. His life devoted to following the mystical way of Jesus produced within him a rough conformity to the paschal journey. For that reason we can see a genuinely contextual example of what it might mean for a person to die 'for' others — to carry their burdens and present them before God in the hope of mercy.

gathering up the broken

While there is no need for us to heft the weight of salvation, perhaps in this Lenten time we can remember the opportunity we have to gather up the broken fragments of shattered lives around us, and bring them to the healing light. Following Christ inevitably means making our own journey into darkness and mystery. It also grants us the grace to open our souls in hospitality, and bring the pain of our world to the cross. We have no power to heal, but we have the invitation to shovel up the anguish of humanity in our broken wheelbarrows, pushing them raggedly to the place of transformation.

And if the inextinguishable light should fall upon us, it may be that it enlightens those whom we have made friends of, and carried in our hearts. In the words of Baxter:

"Their thoughts have been my thoughts, their pain my pain, their blood my blood. I have held them in my arms and stroked their foreheads while they sweated the drugs out. They have opened their deepest fears and hopes to me. Some have called me Father. Some have even called me Mother. Some have slept beside me when they were lonely. I cannot separate my life from theirs."

Baxter, of course, is long gone. His words still haunt. ■

Mike Riddell is a filmaker, writer, theologian and lecturer, living in Cambridge. He is an expert on the life and works of James K Baxter.

‘abide in me as I abide in you’

John the evangelist is a master in the way he uses and resuses particular words to weave patterns of spiritual teaching into his writing. Father Stuart Sellar looks at one such word as a way of delving into the depths of the Christian mysteries this Lent.

Stuart Sellar

It is now many years since I first heard Fr Barnabas Ahern, the eminent scripture scholar, speaking about God dwelling in us and we in God. It made such an impression that I can still recall exactly what he said. He started by recounting the words of Jesus as St John tells it, “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” (Jn 14: 20) He then went on to savour the wonder of it saying, “We are caught up into the very life of the Trinity — the Father, the Son and us, all in the power of the Holy Spirit.” It was a special moment of revelation for me because at that time I was searching for a genuine spirituality that wasn’t preoccupied with personal sinfulness and an imagined abyss between the goodness of God and our sinful humanity. I needed a reliable spirituality truly centred on God and not wrapped up in my sinful condition.

exploring john’s gospel

And so it was that I began exploring the Gospel of St John who delights in this theme of God’s great gift of divine life, and of us being taken up into the life of the Trinity. Once I became aware of this theme in John, I discovered it in many different passages. Take for example, the account of two disciples, Andrew and John, running after Jesus because John the Baptist had told them that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Jesus turned around to ask them, “What are you looking for?” They answered Jesus’ question with one of their own, “Where are you staying?” To that Jesus simply says, “Come and see” and the narrator tells us they then stayed the evening with Jesus.

a Johannine theme

At first this enquiry seems no more than an innocent question used to start a conversation, asking someone where they live. But in this simple event John the Evangelist is introducing us to one of his favourite themes. The word ‘stay’ or ‘abide’ or ‘dwell’ is repeated in this one Gospel more than 40 times. Sometimes it is translated as remain, or live, but the central idea is always the same, namely, to dwell within the very heart of God.

the greek word *meno*

In the original Greek of the New Testament, the word is *meno*. Over and over, St John records that Jesus spoke of abiding:

- Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. (Jn 6:56)
- Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. (Jn 15:4)
- This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (Jn 14:17)
- I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:5)
- As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. (Jn 15:9)
- If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. (Jn 15:10)

Again, when Jesus teaches that, ‘I am the vine, you the branches,’ St John develops another dimension of this same mystery that we live in God and God in us.

a sense of resistance

Yet, there is often a sense of resistance when people ponder seriously what Jesus is saying about abiding in God and God abiding in each of us. One of the first reactions is a deep sense of unworthiness, rather like St Peter who, “fell down at

St John the Evangelist
by Giotto di Bondone c1267–1337

Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!'" (Lk 5:8) Some people actually say that such intimacy might be possible for really saintly people, but it is rather too much for any ordinary believer.

and awesomeness

Another common reaction is one of awesomeness, when the believer loves the idea, but the prospect of having a relationship with God that is so deep and personal and intimate is more than they can cope with. And that is true. This is awesome mystery that God would so want to dwell in us. As the Negro Spiritual says: "Every time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart I'm afraid."

> We are in the depth of mystery with the apparent contradiction that God is totally other and yet 'closer to us than we are to ourselves' . . .

yet intimate

There is yet another reason why people might be attracted to this offer of intimacy with God and yet, at the same time shy away from it. Over and over, the prayers of the church address God as almighty, omnipotent, all-knowing, eternal and everlasting, just to name a few of the divine attributes with which we are familiar. In other words, we have become completely at home with the total otherness of God. It is important to emphasise that God is transcendent and completely other – that is the unwavering Christian tradtion.

But now we are asked to consider another truth, namely, that the totally Other God invites us into an intimate relationship, so intimate that Jesus describes it as God abiding or dwelling within us, and we dwelling within God. Now we are in the depth of mystery with the apparent contradiction that God is totally other and yet 'closer to us than we are to ourselves,' as St Augustine put it. It is not the sort of mystery we will ever fathom within our minds. St John would have us simply hold this mystery in our hearts, rejecting nothing, but allowing the Holy Spirit to effect change in us. Above all it is opening to a deep change that will allow God to be in a relationship of complete intimacy with us.

the gift of divine indwelling

In more recent times, the German theologian Karl Rahner was similarly attracted to this gift of the divine indwelling. In his writings he described Grace as God's self-communication. God's gift to us was not a token of divine love and certainly not some kind of gift voucher to be cashed in on the last day. Rather, the mystery is of God communicating divine life and love into us. No wonder Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, 'If you only knew the gift of God.' (Jn 4: 10)

ponder the mystery

This Lent might be a good time to ponder the mystery of God's indwelling gift in us. We will never work it out in our heads, just as people who love one another don't try to fathom it in their heads. The best way to foster this indwelling is to read the scripture texts and then let heart speak to heart — the heart of Jesus speaking to our heart and our heart responding to his. That is one way to deepen that wonderful insight from Barnabas Ahern:

"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (Jn 14:20) We are caught up into the very life of the Trinity – the Father, the Son and us, all in the power of the Holy Spirit. ■

Stuart Sellar is a priest of the Diocese of Dunedin, teaching at Good Shepherd College, Auckland.

This is our time

Such a deep sorrow
yet
this is our time . . .

Already!
Again!
Still!

We grow new times
around us,
a security blanket;

but in a moment
we are drawn into
weeping

This our emptying
intermingling, into a river
called Grace, not Avon

Into our cup of Living Memory
into our Eucharist,
our body, broken, blessed

Ashes to ashes,
dust to dust,
Ash Wednesday, today

Our city still falling into
dust and tears
yet rising out of ashes

Already!
Again!
Still!

This is our time . . .

Cathy Harrison,
Christchurch
22 February 2012

why do I like coming back to school?

Tui Motu asked some Catholic primary schools to give their year six and seven pupils the above question to reflect on. This open question was designed to draw from the children their values and the experience they have of attending a Catholic school. As one of the principals told us, they answered without guidance or bribery! Out of 60 replies received from two North Island schools (one decile 9, the other decile 4) we discerned many common themes, and a surprising number of unique insights. It is clear from the names of the children who replied that they come from a wide range of ethnicities.

1. Community

Nina: our school shows its motto perfectly: care, courtesy, co-operation and courage. This is a great community to be in and I am proud to belong to it.

Reimar: Coming to school on the first day and seeing the smile on my friends and teachers' faces makes me feel like home.

Christian: I think this little community is very strong and will stay strong for years to come.

Eloisa: everyone in my unique school has always accepted each other's diversity — for they truly are. My school works together as a multi-cultural society, and we regularly go to church in respect of being a catholic school. Our school community mingles and mixes with heaps of interesting and different nationalities within our school.

Shelley: our school is original; we are not only a school, we are a family.

2. Relat

Lau: I like to
school because I
great teacher this year a
teachers were really nice too.

Ervin: the kids are nice, friendl
nice to every one, especially the ne
school in 2009 I made a whole load

Reimar: Knowing you've got your frie
encouraging you, always gives me a s

Leah: I personally find the students h
of school the students quickly m
day it felt like I had been at sch

Daniel: Our school is one of
a friendly school fille
never stop sm

3. Learning

Roto: Sure
we're not the richest school, but that
doesn't mean we're not going to learn anything.

Talei: I like learning new things every day.

Lucy: I really like my teacher and I have learnt a lot of stuff. It's also my last year at this school. Since I've been here I have learnt heaps and I hope to learn heaps more.

Caitlin: I really like coming back to school because I love all the activities. I am in choir and J-Rock and I want to join netball and kapa haka.

Nina: This is such a great school for learning, and that's great too.

Amesh: I love coming back every morning because there is always something new to learn and do.

Ruby: School is fun and I am so glad to be here because some other kids do not get an education at all.

Caci: It is great to be at school because we learn new things like what is happening in the newspaper and learning facts about native birds and all different things.

4. Cal

T
sho
Mercy
pono,
tanga and

Lau: I love h
learning about

Kareena: Because
we get to learn an ex
is all based on Jesus Ch

Ruby: We love our schoo
are Catholic. We pray to G
We get to learn new things eve

It is impossible to print all the children's answers in full. Some were long, some one-liners. But here is a sampling of their replies. We have chosen to group them under four headings:

come to this
saw that I had a
nd that all of the other

y and helpful. They are always
ew kids. When I first came to this
of friends instantly.

nds learning, helping and sometimes
mile when I go to school.

here are friendly, like on my first day
ade me welcome. By the second
ool for months already.

the best schools to me. It is
d with children who
iling.

ionship

Daniella:
his school
ws me the
values of *tika*,
aroha, *manaaki-*
tapu . . .

ow we have R.E. and
God.

ours is a Catholic school,
xtra subject which is R.E. and
hrist. We also go to Church.

l because it is safe and because we
od, Jesus and other people in heaven.
ry day. We get to go to church and pray.

tholic

'let the little children come to me'

Liz Mulholland

For me, teaching in a Catholic school is simply a response to this call from Jesus in Luke's gospel. I have a passion for teaching and I enjoy interacting with children especially to assist in their learning. The Catholic school system allows me to go further than this, enabling me to teach the whole child — the physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual reality of each student. Daily my students learn about God, come to know God through prayer and are guided to follow the directions of the Holy Spirit to live good and virtuous lives. This also allows me to express myself as a spiritual person.

The religious education programme in our Catholic schools is excellent. Its doctrinal base keeps me on the straight path but allows me to explore varying teaching styles and to be creative. To begin each day in prayer is a great joy and after many years in the Catholic system I find that the children's stillness and sincerity in spontaneous prayer 'wows' me and affirms my faith in a very real way.

It is also a joy to be able to bring the children to celebrate the Eucharist and Reconciliation and to be able to witness the ways in which they are transformed by these sacraments. As a teacher in the classroom it is very clear to me how their lives are enriched. It is sad that they are not always encouraged in the practice of their faith in their family life.

Today, the children come from varied levels of family commitment to Christian and Catholic practice, but their parents wish them to be educated in a system of excellence. I believe there is hope for each and every child to pick up their faith at any stage of their journey through life if they have been given the knowledge of it in the first place. This gives me much hope and purpose. I am also heartened by the story of the good thief, which always reminds me of my dad, who was educated in a Catholic school as a boy, ceased to practise his faith, but was able to come back to the Lord on his death bed.

Much about the Catholic character of the school enriches the lives of us all. For example, Caritas informs and inspires our school through their mission activities and focus on justice, which put Jesus' teaching into real and practical application. The challenge is that these ideals are counter to the culture my students hear about and meet in a community that focuses on the 'self' instead of the 'other', as evident in the social media of our day.

I belong to a school community of faith-filled people. The commitment and service of priests, religious and colleagues of faith are inspirational and very supportive to me. They have walked with me on my faith journey. The challenge is always to keep my faith fully alive and burning brightly.

During the past year, through the earthquakes in Christchurch, when our parish church and school were destroyed and we had to move three times, I have witnessed a true pastoral community within the school, support from other Catholic schools throughout New Zealand and from the wider community. This has allowed teachers, parents and students to be real witnesses keeping the gospel message alive by the way we 'love one another'. ■

Liz Mulholland is a primary school teacher living in Christchurch.

are catholic schools still catholic?

Recent history shows the connected changes occurring within religious education in Catholic schools. The writer traces the effect of these changes on our Catholic schools and asks some pertinent questions.

Paul Ferris

It is not surprising that this question can arise among people in their fifties when reminiscing and sharing memories of their own education in Catholic schools. Generally, they reflect on a time when it was assumed that nearly all children in the schools were practising their faith and that the catechesis of the time was focused on supporting the home through the presentation (not necessarily the understanding) of doctrine. The formal delivery of education into the late 1970s meant that Catholic schools had a very different feel about them from what they have now. They were often seen as good academically, strong in discipline, sport and culture. Our schools punched above their weight. They were not always so successful in supporting students with learning difficulties, or providing alternative education paths for those less academically inclined.

a new curriculum introduced

By the 1970s a new curriculum was introduced called *We Live and Teach Christ Jesus.* It was an inspired catechesis, provided teachers had had sufficient formation in faith to allow them to develop and expand the themes of faith that were well placed in the document. In the late 1970s many of the religious orders were no longer so involved in schooling and their replacements were frequently teachers with little more formation than their own schooling and home environment. Many coped well but for those less confident there was a move to make the catechesis more of an activity book. Many teachers stayed close to the recommended lesson formats, whether they were relevant or not, to give them the confidence to present the faith to their students.

integration and change

During this period, integration became the focus for our schools and we tended more and more to be assimilated into other aspects of state education and reporting. There is no doubt in my mind that integration saved our schools economically but I am not sure that we protected our catechesis at the same time. As more and more lay teachers entered the system they did so with very limited understanding of the catechesis and even less personal formation.

challenges now

Having traversed that important period of our history within a very short focus, I want to move to the question that challenges us now. If in the 1970s we could assume that nearly all students were engaged with their family in their faith what do we understand now? I cannot comment on all schools but I know it was a great struggle to maintain that engagement through secondary schooling when I was principal at Kavanagh College. We regularly checked the level of engagement with church to find that as they progressed through the senior secondary we were left with a very small percentage of year 13 students still active in their faith.

Presenters at conferences talked about the postmodernist period which represented the generation X and Y students and postulated that this was a normal part of a modern day faith search. There was a belief that we would restore their relationship with the church as they entered family life themselves and sought for their children the right to enter a Catholic school. The circle would be complete and the catechesis of adults would be as important as the catechesis of the children.

catechesis to evangelization

It is true that in the last few years many schools have spent significant time and energy trying to support parents in their growth in faith even as the schools continue to support their children. So the very nature of Catholic schooling has moved from catechesis to evangelization of both child and parent. Now, unlike the 1970s, more and more children come to the school with little or no experience of faith practice. Often their parents are drawn by a memory of their own schooling but more often they are attracted by the successes of the local Catholic school. It is a great tribute to the way Catholic schools today have become important instruments of evangelisation. They are often beacons in a community. For many they are more visible and responsive than the parishes are and for some they have the capacity to displace the parish as the primary faith community if the parish is not strong and proactive.

supporting the mission

The Bishops of New Zealand recognised that a transformation has taken place in our schools but

they also recognised the important part they have to play in supporting and proclaiming the mission of the Church. Some years ago they began a process of Catholic reviews on a cyclical basis for all Catholic schools in New Zealand. Sometimes we irreverently call these reviews the 'Catholic ERO' or the 'God Review'.

'the god review'

The most important question for these reviews is: 'What does the school do to protect and grow its special character as a Catholic school?' There are three key parts to a review. There is a full review of the spiritual life of the school and its participation in, and promotion of, a prayerful and sacramental life. There is a full enquiry into the way the pastoral care within the school represents the gospel and finally there is a close inspection and review of the way the Catholic curriculum is planned and delivered. The reviews are about assessment and development and so the emphasis is on how the school is and how its community is planning to become a better Catholic school and what resources and focus are given to make this happen.

a new question

The question arises then, 'Do our reviews tell us that our schools are truly Catholic?' Schooling today is different from our experience, but so was the education of our parents compared to our own. The question might better be: 'How effective are our schools as agents of the gospel in a postmodernist time?'

parish/school relationship

There is certainly a challenge for the schools to make more of the relationship between parish and school and for people to see that time in the school is part of the experience of belonging to the wider Catholic life of parish. For secondary schools this is harder. Students are enrolled from many different parishes and at a time when adolescence and 21st century living challenge the traditions and beliefs of our faith. Finding ways to make the parish/school relationship happen is the most important task of our schools. If we judged schools on the number of pupils engaged in church life we would need to acknowledge we are failing in retaining engagement with Church.

magnets of hope

What we can also say is that the schools remain magnets of hope in a range of communities and for the people within the school communities. Many staff who become part of the Catholic school system find they do not want to work in any other system. They are supported by, and supportive of, the values and pastoral systems of the schools. Non-Catholic staff are often the first to talk about these differences and name them as strengths.

article in *north and south*

A recent article in *North and South* extolled the success of a number of Catholic schools in the Auckland region and, in particular, schools that had had significant success with students from lower decile communities. The article made a number of significant comparisons with other high decile schools and showed how the selected schools had given significant academic, sporting and cultural success for students. The comparison was made from a state school perspective.

The article did not focus on engagement with the Church. This kind of publicity has led commentators on education to ask if the absence of a values or belief system is part of the reason for a lack of success for students in state schools and it has led to roll pressure for successful Catholic schools. Here we have an opportunity for real evangelisation. We know that to be fully human a relationship with God through Jesus is an integral part of our journey of success.

missionary role

So we ask: 'Are our schools still Catholic?' We have to be prepared to examine their missionary role in today's society and to make changes that preserve the very reason for their existence. One of the great challenges for Catholic schools is to have a staff that can, by both example and teaching, represent the message of the Church as religious did in earlier times. The great challenge for the future is to invest heavily in staff formation and development and to be uncompromising about the requirement to be continually formed in faith while teaching in a Catholic school. I would support much wider enrolment than the current system of preference, provided we had much stronger requirements for the development and formation of staff. Too often there are much stronger messages given to students by aspects of the teacher's personal life than by any form of catechesis.

transmitting the message

If we are successful, then we will have students who come to faith through the evangelisation of the school because they see 'God in the teacher' recognizing 'God in them'. We transmit the message through people. If people are the key, then the Church and school Boards need to be quite hard–nosed about ensuring that the people who are the face of God can be recognized by the students.

The challenge is to turn the enthusiasm parents have for the school into enthusiasm for a life of faith. ■

Paul Ferris is the acting principal of the new Catholic Institute of Aotearoa New Zealand (CIANZ). Till recently he was the principal of Kavanagh College, Dunedin.

The mocking of

Angelico and Manet take two different paths. One shows the mystical Christ of
Each challenges us to see anew, to confront what Jesus Christ was all about.

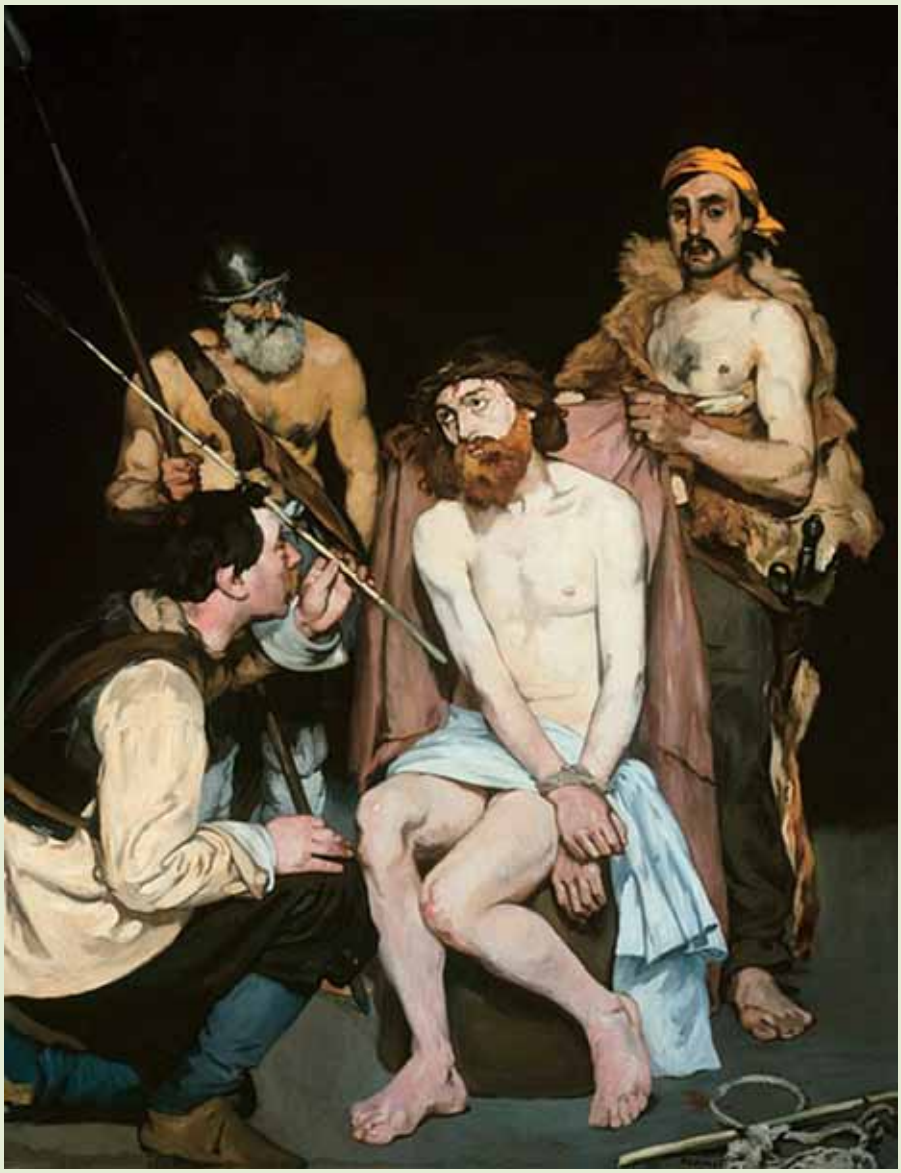
The 14th century Dominican friar, known as 'fra Angelico' for the mysticism of his painting, depicts the 'Mocking of Christ' not as a narrative work but as a series of iconographic symbols. Christ is a luminous figure, seated on a red box and mounted on a marble slab — to represent a throne. Blindfolded with closed eyes, crowned, holding a rod and a stone orb as his kingly symbols, Jesus' bearing is regal, mystical and otherworldly. 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). The green curtain behind him, usually depicting a figure in glory, heightens this imagery. On this green screen are painted emblems of Christ's humiliation: a spitting face, slapping hands and a beating rod. These are a painful recognition for us, as they conjure up photos in the media and on *You Tube* of the cruel, sardonic mocking of prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

We, as a Christian community, are appalled by the violence of our world, which seems to be escalating at an uncontrollable rate. Lent is a time to make a difference, to reflect and repent not just alone, but collectively; a time to find together new solutions, new ways of acting; and a time to think differently. We have been led to believe that there is such a thing as a 'just war'. In the light of recent experiences, is this 'just war' justifiable? It seems we might imagine another way of dealing with conflicts, differences, fears and real injustice. This other way never sees war as a possibility. Jesus handled violence with suffering, offence with forgiveness, enmity with love. He has set down a model, albeit a difficult one for us, but achievable nevertheless. As he had to grow in wisdom and knowledge, so do we to achieve this 'way'. We are challenged to advance in Christian thinking and acting. Doing this requires study, prayer and service — and most of all new attitudes: attitudes of trust and sharing. These new attitudes are not just about some things, but about everything: about self, people, creation, our nation, our world, and every single thing. Not to develop such new attitudes is to run the risk of mocking the hopes Jesus had for us and taught us. ■

Christ

f Glory, the other the very human Jesus.

Mary Horn OP



Edouard Manet, painting in the 19th century, uses a narrative style. When this painting, one of his only two religious paintings, was exhibited he was reviled for his use of vulgar lower-class people and the almost shocking frontality of his Christ. This is not 'Christ in Glory', but a human Jesus, whose physicality is undeniable. Nothing is idealised, not the untidy beard of Jesus, nor the tightly bound hands with the bonds cutting off the circulation; nor the rough clothes and callused feet of the torturer — not the usual depiction in religious art. Far from being torturers with rough faces, the three men seem something different. The one in the front seems to kneel in homage more than carrying out a grim task which he enjoys. The fur-clad figure holds Jesus' cloak as if it were a royal robe. Manet seems to suspend time for a moment before the insults occur. At this moment these men are almost stunned in the presence of Christ. However, they will continue with the eventual torture as Jesus in his humanity is revealed.

holy hearts that know how to adore

Communion and Down's syndrome have been much debated in one English diocese recently. Those with the condition may not always fully grasp the concept of transubstantiation, says a priest whose brother had the syndrome, but they receive the sacrament with the utmost reverence.

Daniel O'Leary

A hot afternoon during the summer sales and Tesco's cafe was teeming. Overdressed and overspending, a perspiring woman bought a packet of biscuits and a cup of tea to calm her nerves. She spotted an empty table only to find, when she finally pushed through the crowd, that a young man with Down's syndrome was already seated at it.

Making no effort to conceal her exasperation at this turn of events, she stacked her heavy parcels around the other chair, removed her overcoat, sat down and finally opened the packet of biscuits on the table. Each time she reached for a biscuit, her unwelcome but smiling companion reached for one too.

This impertinence was too much for the woman. Not wishing to make a scene, but inwardly raging, she gulped down her tea, and reached for her belongings and her coat. As she got to her feet, her own packet of biscuits, lying hidden in her ample lap, rolled gently to the floor.

One of the reasons given for our negativity towards those who have disabilities is that they remind us of all that is 'not normal' within ourselves, all that is 'different', all that we interpret as ill or unacceptable. In his beautiful *The Road to Daybreak*, Henri Nouwen offers an insight painfully gained during the year he spent at L'Arche, in France, a community devoted to the care of vulnerable people with learning difficulties.

"Often they are capable of unmasking our own impatience, irritation, jealousy, thus making us honest with ourselves. For them what matters is a true relationship, a real friendship, a faithful presence. Many mentally handicapped people experience themselves as a disappointment to their parents, a burden to their families, a nuisance to their friends," wrote Nouwen.

> Despite a term like 'handicapped', Joseph was the most gracious and free spirit of all of us.

"Their hearts, never sure of their worth, register with extreme sensitivity what is real care and what is false, what is true affection and what are empty words. Thus they often reveal to us our own hypocrisies."

The whole point of the Incarnation, and of every moment of the life of Jesus, is to reveal that such people are, in fact, our spiritual teachers. Jean Vanier, the spiritual giant and champion of the *anawim* — the disabled, the poor, the marginalised, the alienated — of our times wrote: "In some way their anguish awakened my own anguish, their poverty my own poverty. This is an incredible discovery . . . that the Good News is announced to the poor, not to those who serve them. Our acceptance of handicapped people as they are, with all their disabilities, weaknesses and frailties, teaches us to accept every human being, and ourselves, to accept the fundamental wound inside . . ."

How do they teach us? Here are a few very personal memories. My brother Joseph had Down's syndrome. He lived at home all his life. And during the most difficult times, especially when Joseph's severe diabetes demanded unrelenting attention, my mother was sustained by her belief that in caring for Joseph she was entertaining angels unaware.

Many decades ago, I asked her to write a few things about her life with Joseph. She recounted the depth of her pain. She glossed over nothing. The whole family was intrinsically caught up in the mess and mystery of it all. There was nothing romantic in her letter. But in her eyes, Joseph was utterly beautiful. Her life, she wrote, was 'crammed with blessings'.

She recalled how he loved to celebrate, to play, to break every negotiable regulation. He faithfully followed Meister Eckhart's recommendation 'to live without a why'. He had his own timing — the timing of the present moment. He forgave even as he breathed. He carried no resentment; nor could he remember our recent impatience with him, our irritation, our petty complaining. On a good day, his presence was healing; his grace tangible.

"Joseph was in Killarney one day, with Maura, his sister," my mother had written, "and there was a street fiddler playing merrily at the corner. The man's cap was on the ground waiting for the money from the passers-by. Joseph indicated to Maura his need for a coin (he never 'owned' anything, or carried anything in his pockets). But he did not think it was right to throw the 20p into the cap, so he handed it, instead, to the music man who appreciated Joseph's gesture of recognising his dignity. He stopped playing to smile and shake Joseph's hand."

Joseph and his friends had a deep sense of the sacred. They carried a special awareness of the holy. They loved the songs, the ritual, the lights, the whole atmosphere of their beloved 'Faith and Light Masses'. With the utmost reverence they would receive Holy Communion. Their minds knew nothing about transubstantiation or consubstantiality, but their hearts knew how to adore.

Joseph never spoke a normal word. What really upset me, as I read my mother's words again, was my memory of Joseph's frustration, almost despair, when he could not figure out what we were talking about, laughing about, getting excited about at our meals at home. We tend to forget their inner pain. Any form of rejection is a knife through the souls of people like Joseph.

My mother wrote that Joseph knew little about conformity or social expectations. To live with him, you had to loosen up, lighten up, let go of all pretensions to grandeur. Impervious to class, he saw everyone as equal. At home as he was with visiting bishops, the sight of a crying baby, a bandaged head or any sign of human distress commanded his full and loving attention. She noted that despite a term like 'handicapped', he was the most gracious and free spirit of all of us. Nobody taught Joseph how to dance.

Towards the end of Morris West's *The Clowns of God*, there is a poignant scene where some doubtful but well-intentioned people are asking God for a sign — to heal a girl in their community who has learning disabilities. God replies: "I could do it; but I will not. I gave this mite a gift I denied to all of you — eternal innocence. To you she looks imperfect, but to me she is flawless, like the bud that dies unopened . . . She will never destroy. The little one is my sign to you. Treasure her." ■

Fr Daniel's website is www.djoleary.com
This article is published by the kind permission of the London Tablet www.thetablet.co.uk

A PRAYER

Source of all being
Eternal Word
Abundance of our earth

We seek you in
the patience of the ocean
the fertility of soil
the grandeur of mountains
the gentleness of loving hands
the vastness of unending sky
the fragility of a new-born child

O God with all in all to all
Be close about our frailty
Be far beyond our hopefulness
Be still within our restlessness
Yet stir our dull content

— Neil Darragh
'At home on the earth: seeking earth centred spirituality'
(Accent Publications, 2000)

going deeper

Life has had more than a few twists and turns for Marg Schrader, mother to eight children, counsellor, minister, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and lifelong spiritual seeker. She talks to Michael Fitzsimons about the spiritual life that underpins it all.

God has a habit of making sudden and surprising interventions in life, says Marg Schrader. Right now she's considering selling up and moving into a retirement village, a bold and perhaps unexpected step for this vibrant, independent woman sipping tea across the table.

The sun is streaming in and peace reigns in the well-tended garden in Waikanae, not far from the beach.

Yes, God's unmistakable call doesn't just belong to the realm of the Bible. "I recently visited my brother and sister in Australia, who both have Alzheimer's. I came home thinking I couldn't put my kids through that. Last week I went to a street party and talked to two women who both work in retirement villages. I asked them whether it was better to move at my age, 72, or 85, and they both immediately said 'Now.'

"Two neighbours have since told me they'd buy my house. I have a deep knowing that however hard such a transition might be, God is in the midst of it. These things happen to me. I won't move immediately but I have started to sort out my books and files so when it's time, it won't be such a big job."

Dramatic intuitions have been a recurring motif in Marg's life. Life is not totally under control, in fact not really under our control at all in a lasting sense.

"I grew up in Melbourne in a non-Christian family," says Marg. "I didn't know anything about God, but when I was five I went to a Sunday school and found a community of love and care. A friend of mine told me they'd give me a birthday cake which turned out to be plasticene. I don't think I fell in love with Jesus there, it was just a nice place to go on a Sunday. I went every Sunday to this Methodist Church until I was converted.

"Then I trained to become a teacher. I recall talking to someone who was recruiting for the Deaconess order, before going to summer school, and I was sure I wasn't going to be a Deaconess. But as he spoke my heart started to beat and my stomach churned and I knew I was being called to the Methodist Deaconess order. This is how calls happen for me.

"I met my future husband, Warren Schrader, when I went to an ecumenical conference in 1966. I later met his seven beautiful kids, but didn't think anything of it when I went back home to the Methodist Ladies' College in Tasmania, where I was chaplain. Then I received a letter from Warren, and when I picked it up I knew I was going to marry him. We hadn't even held hands. In August we were married and I moved to New Zealand to live with him and raise his seven children. This was at the same time as *The Sound of Music* came out. Our situation was very similar, only they were rich and could sing, and we weren't and the kids couldn't!"

Marg Shrader

The unexpected struck again much later in life when 'a call' came to sell The Still Point, a house of prayer which Marg had helped set up when Warren died. The two religious sisters Marg had worked with had both left to follow calls from their Order.

"I was listening to a speaker at a spiritual directors' meeting in Christchurch in 2003 and all of a sudden I started to cry. I knew I had to sell The Still Point and move to a beach. I didn't know whether this would be San Francisco, or India, or the Kapiti Coast. I moved to the Kapiti Coast where I looked at 95 more houses before I found this one in Waikanae. So faith for me is a combination of really knowing that God is faithful, as well as a deep sense of my body saying 'this is the way to go'."

Faithfulness to God's call wherever it might lead has been the spine of the Marg Schrader story. It led her to become a Christian, deaconess, the wife of a Minister and mother to his seven children (his first wife died giving birth to twins), Presbyterian Minister, Moderator

of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand, spiritual director, counsellor and a seeker of God in all things.

It certainly hasn't all been smooth sailing, says Marg.

"I've known darkness too. I brought up seven kids that weren't mine, and one of my own. Eight teenagers in a row, that's desolation at times. Life wouldn't be as rich if there wasn't desolation. My relationships with these kids wouldn't be as strong if we hadn't gone through a bit of hell. The painful bits make me who I am. I'd be a simpering woman if everything was sunshine in my life.

"When I first became a Minister's wife, and the children were young, that was a tough time for me. I struggled with prayer. This was at the beginning of the Charismatic movement, and a small group of Charismatics came into our parish. It seemed to me that if anyone was in need in our parish, it was this group that was there to help. But I was as resistant as can be initially because my theology was more liberal than I thought theirs was. Justice for gays was a big deal for me. I asked for God's help, and I called the group to see if they would pray with me. I said to God, 'OK I want you more than anything, so if that means I have to change my belief about gays and the way I view Scripture then I choose you.'

> "I'd be a simpering woman if everything was sunshine in my life."

"This was absolutely transformational, a sense of bodily weight being lifted off me, of electricity coursing through my body. God became very real and my prayer life changed completely.

"After that I became much more contemplative. I trust that if I allow myself to be really open, then God will meet me. Contemplation is being still and open. I use centering prayer as my main method. My original training directed the way I prayed for a long time. I guess I still do that but in a much more spontaneous way."

Life's journey has brought with it a real desire to go deeper, says Marg, along with an openness to different approaches to body, soul and spirit.

"In 2010 I went on a month-long Buddhist retreat focusing on dreams. I truly believe that God is in everything, so if I'm going to discover more about God I need to follow the call even when it takes me out of my comfort zone. One of my sons is Buddhist, and I've seen him being transformed through meditation. Although I find some of the Buddhist concepts and language very foreign, I realise that at depth it is the God I know so well who is speaking through this.

"In fact as I meditated with the Buddhists and explored the 'Spirit in Nature' at a Shamanic retreat, I became even more conscious of the presence of Jesus. I saw that the way his spirit permeates all things in his interaction with nature was very shamanic."

Through it all, the surprises and the struggles and the seeking, Marg has the sense of 'being held, of knowing you are loved'.

" My abiding image is of going deeper! My sense is that this stage of the journey involves letting go of all the protective barriers that I have built up in order to keep myself safe, things such as, 'if I do this will they still like me? Can I really speak my truth and still be okay in their eyes?'

"My challenge now is to be really open to hearing what God is saying, knowing that deep peace that does pass all my understanding. The more I discover God within me, the more I recognise God in all people and all of life."

There's nothing nebulous about this kind of faith. Just like for the prophets of old, it's an enduring conviction, powerful enough to confront her deepest fears.

"With my family history I've been really scared of Alzheimer's Disease. I've just read this most amazing book, *The Majesty of Your Loving* by Olivia Ames Hoblitzelle. In the midst of this fear I sensed God saying that even if I get Alzheimer's I will survive, I'll still be held.

"I'm deeply optimistic about the world, despite the floods and the earthquakes. I don't understand evil. But there's something happening that's bigger than we are, and good will come of it because that's who God is." ■

preparing a homily

The number of occasions during the week and on a Sunday when lay people are being called upon to preach in a liturgical context is growing. The more lay people can prepare themselves well for preaching, the more the Church will be enriched. The helpful notes that follow are an encouragement to people who may consider taking up this ministry.

Neil Darragh

A homily (or sermon or scripture reflection) in the contemporary Liturgy of the Word is essentially an interpretation of preceding scripture readings applied to a contemporary congregation.

Most commonly, but not always, the homily is based on the Gospel reading, with the other readings playing a complementary role. The first reading on a Sunday has usually been chosen because it is related in some way to the Gospel reading.

homily preparation

The process of homily preparation can be summarized in the following three steps:

1. text for first century hearers

This step is an interpretation of the scripture text that takes into account the context of those early Christian communities as well as the place of this particular reading within the overall plan of the book that it comes from. In other words, this first step is an interpretation of the text taking into account the criteria normally used by contemporary scripture scholars.

Most homilists will need access to recent scripture commentaries to do this. If you do not have access to recent scripture commentaries, some helpful New Zealand websites are the Society of Mary site (www.sm.org.nz/about/nz-province/homily-helps/) which has many links to other homily sites; Bill Fletcher's site (home.clear.net.nz/pages/bfletch/index.html) (or google The Practice of Jesus) which has a strong social justice orientation not often found on other sites; Bosco Peters' site (www.liturgy.co.nz) has many liturgical resources including reflections on the readings and seasons.

The homilist should be aware though that scripture scholars are not just neutral observers. Like the rest of us they are influenced by their wealth, their culture, their gender, their geography, etc. Nevertheless, keeping this in mind, scripture commentaries can give us access to information about the context of the scripture readings that most of us do not have time to investigate for ourselves.

The key point here is that the hopeful homilist should not be put off by having to do a little research beforehand. Scriptural interpretation is not just the domain of professional scripture scholars. It can be done by anyone who has tried to live the scriptures and is prepared to check out some commentaries or websites.

2. key message for now

From the initial investigation of what the text was saying to its original hearers, the homilist discerns a message that is relevant to this contemporary congregation. The homilist does this out of familiarity with both the scripture text and the congregation. What is the most important message from this text that I need to convey to this congregation? Usually a homily can have only one such message, perhaps two. Here the homilist needs conviction. A homily carries a message. It is not just a general explanation of a scripture text.

Without this discernment and conviction, the homilist is likely to resort to banalities or time-filling stories or personal experiences that are essentially ballast rather than a message delivered with conviction. If you have nothing to say, don't try to make it attractive.

3. to change the congregation now

Once the key message is clear to the homilist, the form of the presentation becomes the next step — the way in which this message can most effectively be communicated to this contemporary congregation.

It is a good idea to keep in mind four broad areas of application:

- the personal conversion or development of the people within the congregation
- the church itself and how it should live as a Christian community (e.g. relationships within the community, leadership, ministries)
- the mission or outreach of the Christian community into the wider society (e.g. about social justice, peace, evangelization)
- Christian responsibility towards the natural environment and within the planet Earth.

A homilist will seldom be able to make applications to all four of these areas in a single homily, but does need to decide which are actually to be made in this particular homily. Be worried too if, over time, one or several of these areas has been consistently ignored.

The homily presentation can then be concerned with ways to illustrate, concretize, and bring home the message to this congregation: stories, contemporary events, role models (ancient or contemporary) are important here. People listen most easily to stories. But homilists are better to avoid stories that have little to do with the message of the homily and in fact distract from it. Similarly, personal confessions of the homilist can be used sometimes, but occasionally is better than often.

relevance to my congregation

Sometimes websites can also help with stories, role models, and applications. But most of those sites are speaking to a different congregation with different needs and different strengths. Is this relevant to my congregation?

Key phrases or even slogans that focus the main message of the homily can also be effective. And homilies are usually more memorable when they finish with a brief conclusion that similarly focuses its main theme or message.

If the homilist preaches frequently to the same congregation, this is also the point where s/he needs to make sure that this is not essentially the same message that has been delivered repeatedly on earlier occasions. If it is, this is a cue to return to the scripture readings to look for another message — there is never just one message there.

script

Homilists need also to decide about how they use their backup script: to write it out in full and read out the whole homily? To write it out in full, and then speak mainly from memory? To write it out in note form, and then speak from memory? These are decisions where homilists try to play to their own strengths rather than regard one style as desirable for all.

feedback

Feedback is important for the homilist. Relying on spontaneous feedback at end of the liturgy results very often in no feedback at all, and in any case people are likely to be compassionate rather than honest. Sometimes, feedback is just critical and dispiriting with no indication of how widespread that criticism is. It is better if feedback is sought in some kind of organized and friendly yet honest way. If you yourself want to offer a criticism to another homilist, don't do it at the end of the liturgy when the homilist can't do anything about it anyway, and enthusiasm may be dashed. Give it at a later time, preferably when the homilist is preparing for another homily, and can do something constructive about it. ■

Neil Darragh is a priest of the Diocese of Auckland, a writer, theologan, and ecologist.

peter and cornelius: sifting the tradition

This is the second of a two-part article in which Mike looks in a new way at what happened to Peter in Acts Chapter 10. He proposes that in this event we have a paradigm that helps us rethink what needs to happen within the church now. Acts 10 allows us to sift our tradition to look for clues to negotiate previously unknown situations.

Mike Riddell

The New Testament narrative of Peter and Cornelius is a watershed moment for humanity and for the tradition as understood by Peter. In that moment the game changes. Peter had thought he knew what the rules were. Now he is forced to reconcile three things: his knowledge of scripture; the vision of God calling him to eat what he had believed to be unclean; and his experience of the Spirit descending on Cornelius. Something has to give. And Cornelius, the gentile, is at the centre of the call to Peter to "widen the space of his tent".

I'm not suggesting we exegete this passage. An alternative approach is to improvise, using the tradition as the underlying melody. Let's look at the historical assumptions that underlie Peter's encounter with Cornelius, and fiddle about with possible harmonics for our own situation.

closed community

Peter operates with a shared set of parameters that defines who God's chosen people are. The people of God are those who are defined by Torah, and the male members are easily distinguished by virtue of circumcision. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah — a Jew sent to Jews to bring them to completion. All of us know who's in and who's out. And the starting point for any such definition is that the ones making it are in. The prerequisite for defining 'them' is belonging to an 'us'. Pretty much every human activity follows this pattern, and the worst offenders are religious traditions. The church has made a career out of persecuting or despising or patronising those who fall outside its umbrella. It's difficult to conceive of a situation in which there's no 'us and them'. And yet, as James K Baxter pointed out, "The wind blows in a thousand paddocks, inside and outside the fences."

St Peter and Cornelius the Centurion by Bernado Cavollino (1616–1656)

fixed rules

Peter knows what's acceptable and what's not acceptable. That is to say, he lives out of an ethical, social, legal and religious framework that is prescribed. There's no need to waste time working out what's right and wrong because it's all laid down in black and white. And not by human legislature, but from the very hand of God. For example, certain foods can be eaten and others not. Whether there's a reason for it or not doesn't matter — it's the way things are. Many of us assume we know what's right and wrong as well. And the church presumes to declare that it knows God's mind on these matters. This can be useful in sorting out the good people from the bad people. The good thing about fixed rules is

that they can't be changed. We all know, don't we, that God approves slavery but doesn't like women?

outsiders and fringe dwellers

The impetus to understanding on Peter's behalf is driven by the spiritual exploration of Cornelius — a person who is an outsider. It is his quest for meaning that catalyses the reframing of the tradition, not Peter's. If we know our own story we will recognise that time and again wisdom and insight come not from the centre but from the fringes, and often from those who are regarded as beyond redemption. Could this simply be coincidence, or is it a reminder that God is essentially the God of the stranger and outcast? How can we be open and alert to voices that challenge from the periphery?

forbidden flesh

Peter has his own battle with forbidden flesh, pork, which represents crossing a line for him. Not surprising then that he's a little angsty about being invited to go where he's never been before. How many of the church's enemies are genuine threats, as opposed to projections of the dark side of the ecclesial inner life? What do our enemies teach us about our own fears and shadow side? Is it possible that redemption may mean going where we've never gone before?

new possibilities

The genuinely new is by definition unknown. How then are we to prepare for it? The dimensions of the new experience can't be used as guidelines because they haven't yet transpired. The best that can be done is to draw on analogous narratives such as Acts 10. These help to communicate that it is possible to experience massive theological shifts without betrayal or disaster. The cultural and historical setting of humanity is in constant flux, and at certain junctures the realignment of faith demands seismic disruption. While we might resist change for the sake of change, the history of God suggests that our journey will inevitably lead to new territory.

progressive revelation

Whether or not you subscribe to progressive revelation, there are few alternatives to that interpretation of Acts 10. The game plan has changed in a very significant way. As the text tells us, what was previously described as unclean must no longer be regarded as such. In terms of the self-understanding of the church and its mission in the world, new horizons have been opened up. God is doing a new thing, and consequently the thinking of the people of God needs expansion and revision in order to make sense of it. Of course it might be possible that since that time God has had no other fresh thoughts. Yeah, right.

the way forward

In troubling times, the church is in danger of betraying its roots by becoming a cultural fall-out shelter — a place for those bruised and broken by fractured foundations to immerse themselves in a warm bath of nostalgia. The water is scented with a faint whiff of Christendom, from days of glory past. While all this might provide some temporary respite and comfort, we would have to wonder if providing an ecclesial day spa is the intended role for a community that bears the name of Jesus. It would pay to take some interest in the waters in which we're bathing. That foul soup carries the stench of the torture and oppression of innocents; the diminution of women; the theme song for the holocaust; the sexual abuse of children; the legitimation of war; the oppression of every sort of minority; the persecution of dissenters; the abuse of authority and the accumulation of power.

The challenge before us is to overcome the fear of the future, and give up our museums of cultural power for the sake of risking authenticity. It may well be that the storm we resist is God's invitation to partnership. We travel across the border, or we stop travelling altogether. If we are to regard the future with hope and anticipation, and cross the threshold, it will bring cultural and theological dislocation. Like Peter, we will need to confront our own resistance to the rules being changed part way through the game. Our encounter with the surrounding world and with God must allow new insights. We have a self-subverting tradition that at least provides a model for such a strategic evolution. ■

Mike Riddell is a filmaker, writer, theologian and lecturer, living in Cambridge. With his wife, Rosemary, they successfully put out the film The Insatiable Moon.

"we must work the works of the one who sent me . . ."

John 9:1-41 — Fourth Sunday of Lent (18 March)

Kathleen Rushton

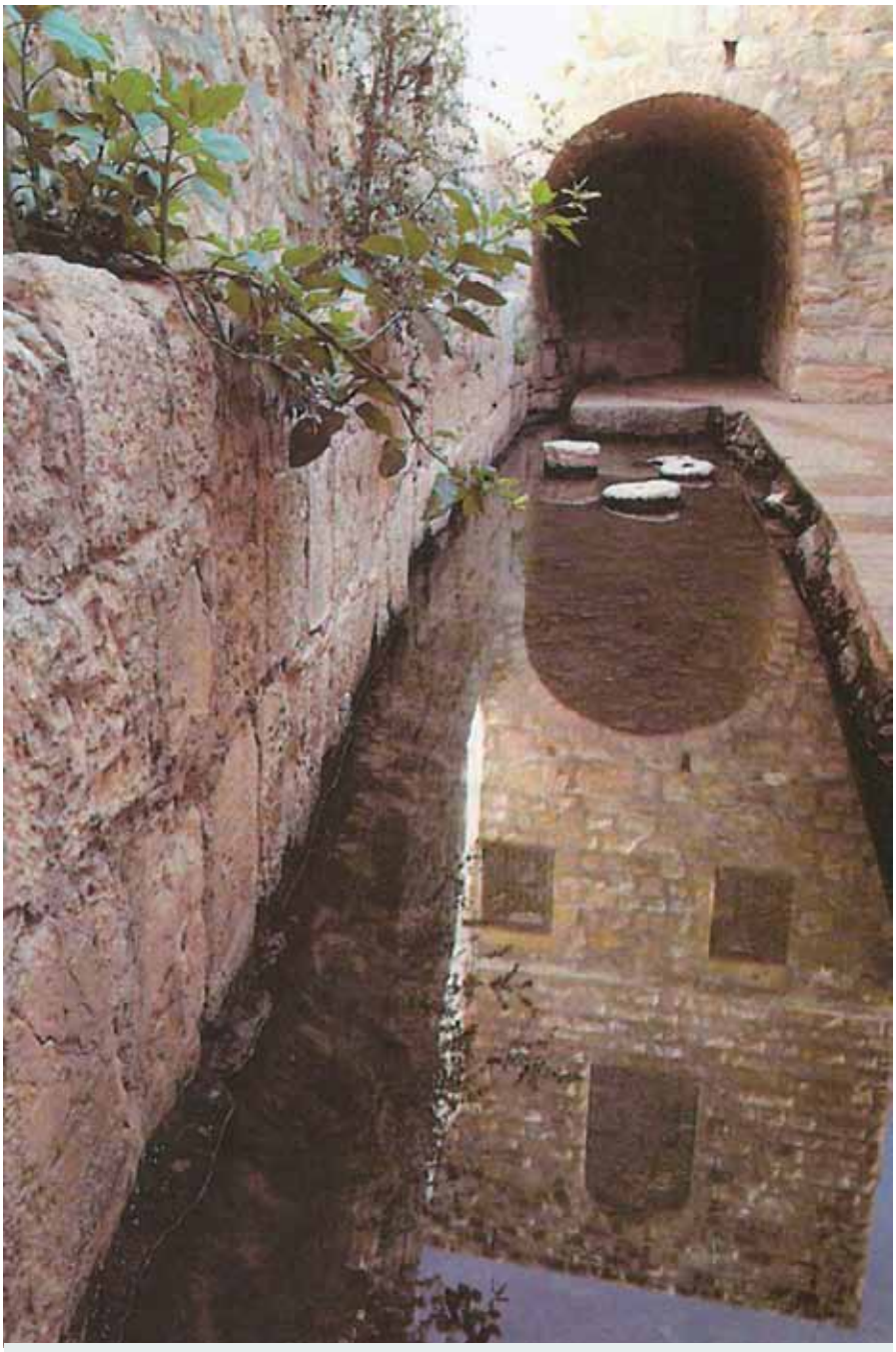
Have you met one of those unlikely people who are not forgotten easily or ignored? Surely you will meet another one in the gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Lent. The pluckiness and courage of the man born blind along with the ironic humour and drama of his story become more evident when read by four voices: the narrator, Jesus, the man born blind and a speaker for all other characters. (See *Tui Motu* website)

According to an ancient saying, no more than two active characters shall usually appear on stage at one time and the scenes are divided by following this rule. John 9, one of the jewels of John's storytelling, may be divided into eight scenes on that basis. All scenes take place near the Temple during the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles which celebrates God's care when the people lived in tents during the Exodus. Two images from this festival are in John 9.

context of temple festival

In Scene One, Jesus and his disciples saw a man blind from birth. The disciples' interest is in: "Who sinned?" For them, suffering is an occasion to moralise about the victim. For Jesus, it is an occasion to do the work of God, that is, to relieve suffering. Significantly, included are the disciples and us: "We must work the works of the One who sent me . . ." (9:4).

Jesus declares: "I am the light of the world." He is the embodiment of scripture passages about light and of the festival ceremony of light. In the latter, four youths climbed ladders to light four huge candlesticks topped with golden bowls filled with oil and wicks made from the worn out clothing of the priests. Dancing and singing lasted most of the night on each of the seven days of the festival. It is said that there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of those candles.



The pool of Siloam.

In Scene Two, Jesus tells the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. On each festival day, a procession led by the priests went there to bring back water in a golden container. This evoked the gift of rain and also the gift of God's well of the Torah. Jesus'

claim to be the source of living water caused consternation (7:40-44).

questioned and cast out

In Scene Three, the man is doubted by friends and neighbours who in the next scene bring him to the Pharisees. In Scene Five, he is abandoned by his parents and questioned, insulted and cast out by 'the Jews'. Perhaps the most shocking aspect of the story is the action of his parents. Their "He is of age, ask him" turns their questioners' attention to their son knowing that he will cop the very sentence they are too afraid to face. Self-protection involves the betrayal of another. Yet, as others move to darkness and blindness, the man became not only sighted but an enlightened disciple who moves from belief in Jesus as a man (v 11), to Jesus as a prophet (v 17) and to proclaiming him to be from God (v 33).

why is jesus absent?

Jesus is absent for Scenes Three–Six which comprise 27 of this story's 41 verses. His absence is for a greater span than any other in this gospel. What is going on here for events to be told without Jesus being in them? This man's story is possibly the story of John's community. When they came to believe in Jesus a couple of generations after his death they were alienated from family, friends and the synagogues. Like him, they received their sight from the one who is the Light of the World. Like him, they suffered for confession of it. His daring attitude to the Pharisees contrasts with that of his parents and of Nicodemus (7:50–51). Nearest to the man's attitude is that of Jesus before the high priest (18:19–23). Jesus can be absent as his role is taken over by the man born blind.

his progress to faith

The significance of the man born blind's progress to faith in Jesus is the circumstances under which it develops. He comes to deeper understanding, not as did Thomas and the Samaritan woman — in reflective conversation with Jesus — but in the process of confrontation with the Pharisees. He had to struggle for his understanding which came in the process of confession, rebuke and stubbornly continued confession. Those faced with a similar choice are to be confident it is not a disaster but a way to a deepened encounter with the One who gives sight.

In Scene Seven, the man is asked by Jesus to take a further step in his journey into true light and sight. Is he able to accept that in Jesus, the one standing before him and whom he hears and now sees, he will find the revelation of God? He replies "Lord, I believe" and worshipped him.

our progress to faith

This story began with the question: "Who sinned?" Words relating to sin occur more often in John 9 than anywhere else in this gospel. In Scene Eight, Jesus makes clear that it is no sin to be blind. Sin comes in rejecting the works of God. It is not the Pharisees who see what is most important to see but a blind beggar who sees more and more as he takes his stand against them.

When am I, or have I, been a secret follower afraid to acknowledge Jesus? When have I been like his parents? When, in the process of confronting 'blindness,' have I come 'to see'? If necessary, am I willing to set out on this journey of faith? ■

Kath Rushton RSM has returned from undertaking a fellowship in scripture at the Catholic University, Leuven, Belgium.

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

Quicksilvered mercury
Reflects light from my eye.
It glances back
On glistening tears I cry.

My snow white mouth asks
"Mirror on the wall"
(My past hovers behind me)
"Did I love at all?"

I see the Gorgon
Perseus pursues
My own face chills me now
My heart is stone.

Yet Christ is in my eye, his loving beams
Restore my heart of flesh, his love redeems.

– Gillian Dowling (deceased)

too soft on the iron lady?

The Iron Lady

Director: Phyllida Lloyd

Reviewer: Paul Sorrell

Years ago, an English political scientist told me something very unsettling about the subject of this film. On a Friday afternoon, Margaret Thatcher and British press baron Rupert Murdoch would sit down together and decide whose reputation would be destroyed the following week. On Monday, the chosen victim — sometimes one of her own cabinet ministers — would be crucified on the front page of the Sun.

The Iron Lady never reflects the naked malice of actions like this. And although we are served up several of her vintage quotes, her infamous remark that "there is no such thing as society" — an implicit denial of the social contract — goes unheard. The film's structure — an intimate view of the elderly Lady Thatcher, experiencing delusions brought on by dementia and vivid flashbacks of her long career in politics — serves to elicit our sympathy for her. Britain's only woman prime minister, and its longest-serving leader of the twentieth century, is superbly portrayed here by Meryl Streep, with the excellent Jim Broadbent as her loyal husband Denis.

The film covers the major landmarks of her career — the Brixton riots, the miners' strike, savage spending cuts and the privatisation of public assets, the Brighton hotel bombing and the Falklands War — all seen through her own, now dimming, eyes. From her early years in politics, Thatcher was driven by an ideology based on steely resolve followed up by decisive action. By her own admission, doubt, wavering and compromise — even considering opposing viewpoints — were fatal signs of weakness. These attitudes hardened as she continued in power. Only weaklings, fools and traitors could oppose her views, and they were to be ruthlessly weeded out.

As the film progresses, the destructive course of this logic unfolds, culminating in her proposal for a poll tax whereby the poorest household in the land would pay the same as the wealthiest. This measure, which provoked widespread rioting in the UK in 1990, was too much even for her cabinet colleagues, and effectively ended her long rule.

This film is a timely one, as it becomes increasing apparent that the monetarist experiment of the 1980s, initiated by Thatcher and her opposite number across the Atlantic, Ronald Reagan, is a root cause of the meltdown of the world financial system that we are presently facing. The culture of massive bonuses handed out to corporate bankers and the wholesale deregulation of Western economies were set in motion during the Thatcher years.

The Iron Lady is certainly worth seeing. But we must take our own moral frame of reference into the cinema to allow us to form the judgment on this remarkable — and notorious — political leader that the film invites us to make. ■

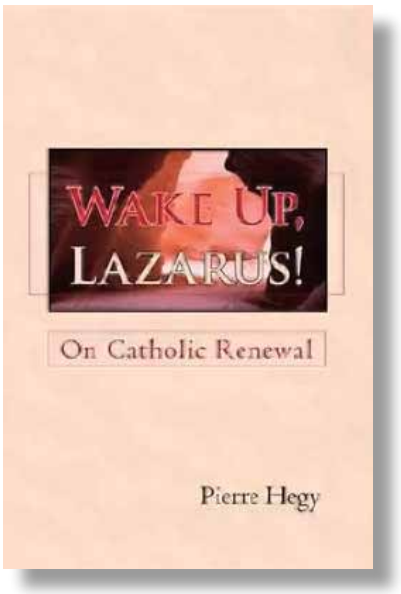
evangelise or fossilise!

Wake up Lazarus! – On Catholic Renewal

by Pierre Hegy.

iUniverse , Inc. Bloomington.

Reviewer: Jim Elliston



The pre-Vatican II Church was very authoritarian, but so was western society in general. The formalism of the Church (read hierarchy) was offset by the devotional practices it fostered, and this helped the faithful to develop their spiritual life.

Vatican II, which coincided with a general rejection of authoritarianism, set out the theological principles the implementation of which could lead to a similar change within the Church. Progress has been slow. For many, 'Church' still means clergy, with the teaching on the priesthood of the laity being misunderstood or ignored.

Meanwhile the traditional devotions (Sodalities, Novenas etc), being more geared to an authoritarian atmosphere, fell out of favour. Formerly it required effort to opt out; now it is the opposite. This is the background to the dramatic and accelerating exodus from the Catholic Church in recent times.

Hegy, an emeritus professor of Sociology, details two examples of partial success. The first is a non-denominational missionary church 'Bayville'. Its central focus is mission to those who haven't heard of Christ, or haven't been able to 'find' him in their own churches. It takes people through a series of steps aimed at enabling them to progress from a state of self-centred individualism to one of spiritual maturity, centred on Christ as a Person, rather than just church–centred. Although continually growing, it has no interest in changing dysfunctional social conditions.

The second is a Catholic parish 'St Mary's'. His verdict: ". . . with all its vibrancy St Mary's is a model for parish life, but not for church growth." That is because there is no sense of mission to the world. It is weak on action for social justice, and 'Evangelisation' is regarded simply as trying to win back lapsed Catholics.

He outlines a detailed pastoral strategy based on widespread research, citing three social causes of spiritual decline: the retreat of religion from social prominence, prevailing consumerism, and non-transmission of values. Three factors are specific to Catholic decline: narrow presentation of sacramentality, of theology, and a vacuum of moral teaching.

Catholics become stalled at two levels of spiritual growth. At the lower level outside influences are the cause (people are satisfied with church services). At the higher level they are dissatisfied, needing challenge and help with further spiritual growth. A fundamental task is to make the parish a community of communities.

A radical change in focus is needed: "The first Christians gathered on Sunday to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. They did not gather on Fridays to mourn his death."

Sacraments must be seen in the context of a process of conversion; the Church is not a sacrament-dispensing service station.

This is a work of great erudition, clearly written, amply detailed. Its study should be mandatory for all personnel involved in diocesan pastoral leadership. Its basic theme: Bring them in as members, build them up to maturity, train them for ministry, and send them out on mission.

'Evangelise or Fossilise!' ■

Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

win–win

Many Pacific Island people remit money from NZ and, to a lesser extent, from Australia, to their families back home. For Tonga such transfers amount to about 70% of GDP, and for Samoa, about 25%. World Bank remittance figures for 2009 total $US470 million; bank charges are about $NZ2 million per week.

Not many Islanders have a bank account, but mobile phones are common.

A recent *Business Herald* article described how some New Zealand entrepreneurs have entered into an arrangement with the largest supplier of mobile phones to the Islands, whereby money can both be remitted and accounts (such as groceries etc) can be paid, via phone. While these businessmen aim to make money from the scheme, they estimate that they can halve the remittance cost for customers.

evolution

George Coyne SJ, when Director of the Vatican Observatory, wrote in the *Tablet* that those who support 'Creationism' (literal interpretation of Genesis) understand neither science nor the Bible, and that there is no scientific basis for 'Intelligent Design' (God intervening at various points). "Judaic-Christian faith is radically creationist, but in a totally different sense, it is rooted in a belief that everything depends upon God. The universe is not God and it cannot exist independently of God. Neither pantheism, nor naturalism is true. God is working with the universe. The universe has a certain vitality of its own like a child does."

saving money and (some) lives

We read a lot in the papers about strikes by US 'drones' in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is reported that the US has about 7,000 of them, and can't get enough. They are relatively cheap, and if they crash the 'pilot' sitting in an office doesn't get hurt — though there are reports of post traumatic stress disorder. One pilot talked about spending twelve hours killing the enemy, then driving home and talking to his children. Facial recognition software is expected to be tailored to allow drones to identify a target and 'decide' whether to kill 'it'. Welcome to the glorious future, where warfare is conducted by robots.

50 years on

Background: In October 1958 Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was elected to succeed Pius XII. He had spent nearly 30 years as Vatican representative in three non-Catholic countries — first Orthodox, then Muslim, and then stridently secularist. Aged 77 he was considered a safe bet to continue the 19th century reaction of the Roman Curia to the new challenges — namely the relationships between faith and modern science, the church and the modern state, and the church and other religions. But John XXIII, whose experience enabled him to see the Church from the outside, had other ideas, much to the Roman bureaucracy's consternation. On 25 January 1959 he announced his intention to call a general meeting of all the Catholic bishops — an Ecumenical Council. Preliminary comments were sought from a great variety of Catholic bodies, including Bishops, Universities, Religious Orders, Lay Apostolate groups etc. The resulting material was processed into themes by the 'Ante-Preparatory Commission' and then sent back for further comment. The subsequently established 'Preparatory Commissions' prepared, from the updated material, drafts for consideration by the 2300 Bishops during 4 sessions held between 1962 and 1965.

Development in understanding: This preparatory work itself began what became the hallmark of the Council, namely, a process clarifying the distinction between the essentials of the Church's mission and the means used to further it. More relevant approaches to preaching the Gospel emerged to respond to those new challenges. This development is reflected in the modifications to be found in the later documents, particularly in the *Decree on the Lay Apostolate*. It was one of the last documents to be promulgated, and one of the longest in preparation. The process was largely an exploration of the meaning of Baptism. Many of its proposed paragraphs were incorporated into other documents during the process — at one stage it had over 300 paragraphs, but ended up with 33.

Triple focus: The Council documents fall into three groups by way of their primary focus: the nature of the Church; the Church's internal role (regarding its own members); its external role (regarding the rest of the world).

Post-conciliar development: The Bishops ensured that there would be follow-up studies and activities within each of these three basic centres of primary focus, including regular Synods of Bishops. The first of these, in 1969, drew up an outline of the topics to be covered. In addition there were a number of specific developmental studies ordered by the Council Fathers, to work out in more detail how to put Council Decrees into practice at the local level. From the beginning there have been strong currents of opposition; progress has been slow, the Church appears in disarray with all sorts of cracks appearing in the façade. However, this year's Synod on 'The New Evangelization' is a call to re-focus the Church at all levels on its fundamental mission. ■

where two or three are gathered . . .

We met in the back room of the old Sacred Heart hall in Addington. A dusty light bulb dangled from the ceiling. The folding seats were hard. In the winter we took turns at standing in front of the one-bar heater in the corner. This was the weekly meeting of one local group of the Catholic Youth Movement where we gathered with our chaplain, to pray, reflect, report and plan.

Every week we worked through a programme of formation:

- After praying we would each report on a gospel action
- We would study a gospel passage and reflect on the meaning for our own lives and decide on an action for the coming week
- We were expected to attend one extra Mass each week
- We would plan social and formative activities

Other CYM groups met in the parish and met with leaders and a parish president. This structure would be duplicated in most other parishes and coordinated by a diocesan executive. The CYM was part of a national and international Young Christian Workers Movement founded by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn in Belgium and officially established in 1925. It is still headquartered in Brussels. The movement was initiated in New Zealand by three visionary Dunedin priests shortly before World War II.

see – judge – act

The unique feature of the CYM was a formation through coming to know the Gospel and applying it to everyday life. The 'see' step was the 'social enquiry' which focussed on seeking information on a community issue such as drunkenness, violence, pornography, communism and poverty. Information gained was 'judged' in the light of assigned scripture and 'action' was planned. The Christian Family and Young Christian Students Movements were offshoots of the same model.

Although the movement reflected the moral codes of the time it was authentically radical in its outreach and a precursor to Vatican II where the role of the laity was addressed for the first time. This was a new model of mission with a focus on the world where the laity were now involved in the Church in their own right.

Cardinal Tom Williams described the CYM as "probably the most durable and effective movement this country has known. Durable because it recruited and trained youth in parish groups over a full three decades. Effective, because it provided two generations of lay leadership within the Church." The bold and challenging approach to the gospel meant that only a minority of Catholics joined. Many dedicated chaplains were fundamental to the success of the movements.

The late 1960s saw the decline of all traditional organisations within the Church and in society across the western world. The lay movements were no exception. The obvious turmoil that came with change after Vatican II, has yet to find expression in any new movements.

The Christian Churches have lost their societal influence and are declining rapidly in the western world yet the movement of the spirit has never been more vibrant — manifested by the numbers of spontaneous groups emerging globally addressing 21st century challenges facing the people of God.

Any new movements would, like the CYM, need to be prayerful, rooted in scripture, the vision of Vatican II, be ecumenical and have social justice in their DNA.

All institutions need to re-think their purpose. The Christchurch earthquake was a dramatic wake-up reminder of the fragility of our human existence. Surely this is a time to gather in small groups for prayer, contemplation, education, reflection, discernment and friendship.

As James K. Baxter said:

Lord, Holy Spirit,
you blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks,
Inside and outside the fences . . .' ■

Robert Consedine
Robert@waitangi.co.nz

a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

- Eating slightly grimy snow didn't seem to make the kids sick after all. As they pointed out.
- Stopping to talk to Sunita didn't end up making dinner catastrophically late. So I'll do that again.
- Sending that knee-jerk email about the change in plans didn't actually help the situation. As was pointed out.
- Sitting and actually listening to my daughter's speech practice made it far more enjoyable, and enlightening even, than the three previous times during which I'd folded washing and tidied the bench.
- Staying up past midnight to finish work did actually make me grumpy and irritable the next day. But exactly how does one keep up with work responsibilities in the school holidays, I wonder?

And so the daily lessons continue. When will I ever learn? It frustrates me no end that I keep getting things wrong. Not that I was really wanting four children with upset stomachs to prove I was right about germ theory and dirty snow.

Last week I appreciated talking to an older friend. She talked through her frustrations with her own response to a difficult situation. Her long battles with being critical. But I am somehow energised by her self-critiques. I'm inspired that she cares to seek wholeness. I am reminded that we are all on a journey — if we choose to keep walking, and persevering.

One theme I keep stumbling across in the scriptures, is that people make mistakes. Big mistakes and small ones. David, Peter, Thomas . . . and smaller ones, like the disciples shooing children away from Jesus, apostles squabbling over permissable foods. Yet acknowledging our mistakes makes us stop. And feel sorry. But then, somehow as followers of The Way, we dare to ask forgiveness. Find a clean start. Lift our faces up again. Start walking the path again. We get a second chance, and a third and a fourth.

So today as I write, it is the first day of a new school term (which is why I have got close to the computer!). And like every single new day, it is a chance for a new start. I will accept this as a new opportunity to get things right — and no doubt I will get some things wrong too. But here are my resolves for the coming weeks:

- Let children eat snow.
- Stop and talk to friends even if dinner preparations will be delayed.
- Avoid knee-jerk email responses.
- Sit and listen — be present — to children's speeches, to work colleagues.
- Stop work before midnight (unless its Super Urgent?).

So help me God. Amen ■

Kaaren and Jeph, with their four children, live in North India and work in health and community development.