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Working for Love, Hope & Justice

Pew Reflections REFLECTIONS ABM

1 May – 30 July 2023

Readings from
An Australian Lectionary 2023
(Year A)

Written by members of
St Paul's Cathedral,
Sale

Diocese of Gippsland

The remedy for discouragement is the Word of God. When you feed your heart and mind with its truth, you regain your perspective and find renewed strength. – Warren Wiersbe

It is a pleasure to present the May to July set of ABM's *Pew Reflections* for 2023.

This set has been written by a mix of clergy and laity, all of whom are members of St Paul's Cathedral, Sale.

We hope that these reflections will stimulate you to ponder more deeply as you read or hear what God is saying to the Church, and to you, through the Sunday and feast day readings. We hope that they will be a springboard for you to delve more deeply into the Holy Scriptures.

By reading the scriptures I am so renewed that all nature seems renewed around me and with me. The sky seems to be a pure, a cooler blue, the trees a deeper green. The whole world is charged with the glory of God and I feel fire and music under my feet.

– Thomas Merton

In Christ,

Robert McLean

St Paul's Cathedral, Sale



We are delighted that this set of reflections has been written for us by clergy and lay people from St Paul's Cathedral in Sale (Diocese of Gippsland). As we continue on through the Church year, you'll hear a variety of voices exploring the sacred texts that are read in services on Sundays and on other feast days. We hope that they will stimulate you to explore the Bible more deeply, and that they will encourage and focus your prayers.



Above: St Paul's Cathedral, Sale

Left: The Diocesan window in Delbridge Hall

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How to use ABM's *Pew Reflections*

ABM's *Pew Reflections* are designed for you to be able to easily cut and paste them into your pew bulletins and apply your own formatting. As every parish bulletin has its own house style it is important that you use a typeface that fits into yours but as a general guide they can be formatted like the two examples below. We try to ensure that they take up about half of an A5 sheet, though some writers are more concise than others.

Example 1



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Pew Reflections

Good Friday

– Friday 3 April 2015

- Isaiah 52.13 – 53.12; Psalm 22
1 Corinthians 1.18-31 or Hebrews 10.16-25
John 18.1 – 19. 42

Good Friday could be called 'Where is God day?' so often is that question posed by the various texts offered today. The answer, where it is given, is in suffering, disfigurement, on a cross, wherever we would not like to look.

- Pray for the lost and the dying. Pray too for ecumenical and interfaith relationships.
- Pray for ABM's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, giving thanks for the work they do to further God's mission in the world.

Text: The Very Rev John Roundhill, Dean of Bendigo
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Example 2

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Pew Reflections – May to July 2023

St Philip and St James, Apostles and Martyrs – Monday 1 May (or Wednesday 3 May) 2023

- Isaiah 30.18-2; Psalm 19.1-6
1 Corinthians 15.1-8; John 14.6-14

Jesus is speaking to his friends, part of John's so-called Last Discourse. He makes the extraordinary promise: 'If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.' I wonder whether we take that seriously? So often prayer is reduced to a shopping list, recited to a far-distant, if benevolent, deity, who does nothing. Yet Jesus' statement is grounded in what will glorify the Father, and indeed, in the depths of his relationship with the Father – and with the disciples. What comes to mind is the wonderful precis attributed to St Teresa of Avila: 'Christ has no body now on earth but yours.' Are we willing to be the concrete answer to the prayers we offer – like Philip and James?

- Pray today with the firm conviction that if we ask in faith, we will receive that for which we ask.
- Sit quietly and offer your hands, your heart, your feet, your compassion, to be God's answer to the prayers of others.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of NATSIAC, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council.

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St John, Apostle and Evangelist – Saturday 6 May 2023 – *If not observed on 27 December*

- Proverbs 8.22-32; Psalm 97;
1 John 1.1-5; John 20.2-8

In the poetic language of Proverbs, Wisdom speaks, describing how God delighted in creating the world with her. Wendell Berry, poet, farmer and essayist, quotes the poet Kathleen Raine as saying that for Christians, 'the Holy Land is remote'. She suggests instead that 'the holy land should be the place we live on', just as it was for the ancient Israelites. What if we saw the land we live on – the soil, the rivers, creeks and air around us – as holy and precious?

- Give thanks for God's creation and pray that we may joyfully care for it.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of the Province of South-East Asia.

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The Fifth Sunday of Easter – Sunday 7 May 2023

- Acts 7.55-60; Psalm 31.1-5, 17-18;
1 Peter 2.11-25; John 14.1-14

Taking refuge in the Lord in whom we can put our trust and steadfastly living in faith so that as we face our death, we will not break down but reach out in love to one another. Our Lord is all-powerful and benevolent and calls us to love in obedient faith.

- Pray that we will be obedient children keeping our eyes upon the Lord.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Melanesian Brotherhood, the Melanesian Sisterhood, the Society of St Francis and the Sisters of the Church who minister throughout the Pacific Islands.

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The Sixth Sunday of Easter – Sunday 14 May 2023

- Acts 17.22-31; Psalm 66.7-19;
1 Peter 3.8-22; John 14.15-21

Commandments in John's writings are more than moral precepts but involve a whole way of life in loving union with God, through Jesus his Son. Keeping God's commandments is maintaining our relationship with God, initiated and maintained by the very gift of God himself to us through the sending of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we know the Father and receive Jesus his Son. We can then live because Jesus lives in us.

- We give thanks for the gifts from God through the sending of the Holy Spirit: knowing God, living in God, living in the life which is in Jesus.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of Ceylon.

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St Matthias, Apostle and Martyr

– Monday 15 May 2023

– *If not observed on 24 February*

- Acts 1.14-17, 20-26; Psalm 113 or Psalm 84; Philippians 3.13-21; John 15. 9-17

The Psalmist's words (Psalm 84) and Brahms' heavenly music written for 'How lovely is your dwelling-place: O Lord God of Hosts!' to me emphasizes the blessings we receive and the hope we have in our Lord God as we rejoice in his presence with us. We long to be with him and know that even as we ask him to hear our prayers, he who knows all and whose love is endless will give us his perfect peace. Thanks be to God.

- Praise that Jesus has made it possible for this dwelling place to be our eternal home.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines.

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Ascension Day

– Thursday 18 May 2023

- Acts 1.1-11; Psalm 110; Ephesians 1.15-23; Matthew 28.16-20

Ascension Day is one of the earliest Christian festivals, celebrated forty days after Easter and ten days before Pentecost. Since his resurrection, Jesus was teaching his disciples to continue the work and witness he had begun and the message in today's gospel is for us today. It is an invitation to be immersed in the saving grace offered by our triune God. Just as Jesus was received by the Father, we can be received, in and through the Holy Spirit.

- Offer thanksgiving for God's grace and pray to be open to opportunities to share that grace with others.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

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The Seventh Sunday of Easter

– Sunday 21 May 2023

- Acts 1.6-14; Psalm 68.1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 5; John 17.1-11

In today's readings wait with the disciples – called by name – in the upper room, wondering how to make sense of Jesus' last words about receiving the Spirit and being sent as his witnesses to the far-flung corners of the world. We wait, and hear the wonderful exhortation of Peter to "cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you". And we reflect on Jesus the Master modelling for us what intimate prayer to his Father looks like, prayer in which we too are caught up as he prays for us. Let us remember, in these perplexing days, that the One who loves us has gone ahead of us to intercede for us, and that as our lips and hearts cry out, he cries out with us.

- In your prayer today, place your anxieties and the things that bother you in God's gentle hands. Pray, confident that Jesus prays in you.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the *Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui*, the Anglican Church of Hong Kong.

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Pentecost – Whitsunday

– Sunday 28 May 2023

- Acts 2.1-21 or Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104.26-36; 1 Corinthians 12.1-13 or Acts 2.1-21; John 20.19-23 or John 7.37-52

Out of Egypt but now in the wilderness, the people complain to Moses that manna is not enough – they want meat. Moses complains to God about the burden of leadership and God says he will put some of his spirit on 70 elders to share out the responsibility. It happens and Moses is glad. This is also just what happened at Pentecost, and ever since – God's Spirit is given to all believers so that we can share in mission and ministry, and no one has to carry all the load. How good is that?!

- Thank God that his Spirit equips us all and pray that we may know and do our part.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East

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The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth – Wednesday 31 May 2023

- 1 Samuel 2.1-10; Psalm 113;
Romans 12.9-16b; Luke 1.39-57

In Samuel, we read of the chaotic times but it remains a song of thanksgiving for the Lord. And this repeats in the Psalm of praise for the Lord who loves the vulnerable, the poor, and the needy those who society see as outcasts. It is the Lord who will judge and for us to continue being prayerful and to offer a genuine love for all of God's creation.

- Pray that in difficult and uncertain times we rejoice in the Lord for he has plans for all his people.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Anglican Church of Japan, the *Nippon Sei Ko Kai*.

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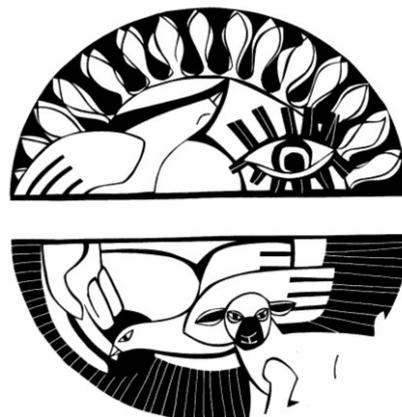
Trinity Sunday – Sunday 4 June 2023

- Exodus 34.1-8; Song of the 3YM 29-34;
2 Corinthians 13.11-13/14; Matthew 28.16-20

When the Lord appeared before Moses, he worshipped. When the eleven disciples saw Jesus risen from the dead, they worshipped. When we meet the Triune God in our reading of the Scriptures, in our prayers to the Father through Jesus his Son, in our meditation and contemplation in our communion with the Holy Spirit, when we meet together in fellowship with others who know God, we too can do nothing but worship.

- We pray that our worship of our Triune God might grow richer and deeper.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of the Province of Central Africa.

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Thanksgiving for the Holy Communion – Corpus Christi – Thursday 8 June 2023

- Exodus 24.3-8; Psalm 116;
1 Corinthians 10.14-21; Mark 14.12-16 (17-21) 22-26

Mark tells us how Jesus provided perfect answers to the disciples' questions. They did what he told them and consequently, shared the Passover together.

We too have only to ask. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." 1 John 5.14-15 NIV. The result might not be as momentous as the breaking of bread (his body) and drinking from the cup (his blood), but it is the same Christ who listens and answers.

- Pray that we will open ourselves with our questions and problems to a God who longs to hear us and guide us.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Anglican Church of Kenya.

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Ordinary Sunday 10 A [Pentecost 2] – Sunday 11 June 2023

- 1 Samuel 8.4-11 (12-15) 16-20; Psalm 138;
2 Corinthians 4.13 – 5.1 (2-5); Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

The Israelites demand a king as ruler instead of a judge – Samuel warns about the likely outcomes of that request, but the people did not listen. I think we can be like that sometimes and in the gospel we read of Matthew's calling and two healings - the haemorrhaging woman and the leader's daughter. Jesus calls Matthew to follow him and in turn the woman and the leader call on Jesus. It is a reminder that we are called to follow Jesus and to take that call out to the boundaries, just as Jesus was known and often challenged for his connections with tax collectors and others on the boundaries of society.

- Pray for the courage to listen and be challenged out of our comfort zone, to reflect Jesus' love and compassion, through words and actions.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of Wontulp-Bi-Buya College in Cairns and Nungalinya College in Darwin.

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St Barnabas, Apostle and Martyr – Sunday 11 June 2023

- Job 29.11-16; Psalm 98;
Acts 11.22-30; 13.1-3; Matthew 10.7-23

The name of Barnabas is associated strongly with that of the Apostle Paul.

We celebrate saints because they model for us what it looks like to live lives shaped by our baptismal calling. Barnabas is named as a teacher and prophet, a good man, "full of the Holy Spirit and faith". What a testament to this man's ministry! Perhaps he was also modelling in this the other exhortation Jesus gives in today's gospel reading: to take nothing for the journey except faith, to stay where the disciples he was exhorting were welcomed, and to come and go in peace.

- Pray for those who are prophets and teachers in the church. Pray that God will raise up more people for these ministries.
- Offer prayerfully your own intention and work to be blessed by God.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Anglican Church of Melanesia, remembering especially the priests and people of St Barnabas' Provincial Cathedral, Honiara

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Ordinary Sunday 11 A [Pentecost 3] – Sunday 18 June 2023

- Genesis 18.1-15; (21.1-7); Psalm 116.1-2, 11-18;
Romans 5.1-11; Matthew 9.35 –10.8 (9-23)

God's plans for saving humanity and all creation will not be thwarted. It was no wonder Sarah laughed at the idea of conceiving a child, since she was past child-bearing age – but all things are possible with God, and through this child came many descendants, all the way to Jesus. Then through Jesus' perfect life, death and resurrection all that was broken has been restored – we have peace with God, access to God's grace, and hope for the future. Thanks be to God!

- Praise God for sending Jesus and pray that we may grow in grace so that we may love others as he loved us.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Anglican Church of Korea, the *Daehan Seong Gong Hoe*.

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The Birth of John the Baptist – Saturday 24 June 2023

- Isaiah 49.1-6; Psalm 139.1-11;
Acts 13. (16-21) 22-26; Luke 1.57-66, 80

John the Baptist may be called the ‘Servant’s Role’. God’s agent to do God’s work in the world. To bring justice to the nations, to serve faithfully and in love. There is nothing hidden to the Lord. He has searched us and knows us intimately. As John and Jesus who were intertwined from the beginning so are we all interconnected in our humanity from the start of creation, and we all need each other to walk together in love.

- Pray that we will honour our call to be a servant in this world. Help us to act on our faith by the daily choices we make for justice and peace and to bring reconciliation to a broken world with joy in our hearts.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of *La Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, the Philippine Independent Church

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Ordinary Sunday 12 A {Pentecost 4} – Sunday 25 June 2023

- Genesis 2.18-21; Psalm 86.1-10, 16-17;
Romans 6.1-11; Matthew 10.24-29

In Romans, Paul presents the gospel that we enter into a right relationship with God only by the grace of God, which is a free gift. We receive this gift by putting our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And only by faith: there is nothing else we ourselves can do to earn being put right with God. But for Paul’s interlocutors, if a right relationship with God is ours for free, then we can keep on doing bad things because we will always be forgiven anyway. In fact, the more bad things we do the more grace there will be. Grace has no ethic. Paul’s answer is that in our baptism, we were baptized into Christ’s death which put to death our old life of doing bad things. And gave us new life which enables us to do good. Grace does have an ethic.

- We give thanks that we are put right with God by his free gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And that grace does have an ethic.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of Province of Myanmar

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St Peter and St Paul, Apostles and Martyrs – Thursday 29 June 2023

- Acts 12.1-11 or Ezekiel 34.11-16;
Psalm 87 or Psalm 34.1-10;
2 Timothy 4.6-8 (9-16) 17-18; John 21.15-22

To quote William Cowper ‘God moves in a mysterious way / His wonders to perform’. How true this is when we consider Peter, bound and heavily guarded, being led by an angel of the Lord from his prison cell and Herod’s tyranny to freedom. Do you think Peter was praying for a miracle? A.M. Hunter says, ‘True prayer and anxious care cannot co-exist: the way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything’.

- Pray that we ask with child-like faith for his direction, knowing that the God of Love hears us.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea.

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The Coming of the Light – Saturday 1 July 2023

- Isaiah 58.8-11; Psalm 27;
2 Corinthians 4.5-6; John 12.35-47

Light and darkness appears throughout the scriptures as metaphor for many opposites. We are called to be servants of Christ, to let the light of Christ shine from within us out into the world around us, into the dark places. Jesus describes himself as the light, the one who came to save the world and our challenge is to be faithful to the message of Christ and not be overcome by any darkness. This Taizé chant may be a helpful mantra; ‘The Lord is my light, my light and salvation: in God I trust, in God I trust’.

- As you reflect on your life, where might any darkness be present for you and others that you know? Pray for the light of Christ to enter those situations.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of Gawura School within St Andrew’s Cathedral School in Sydney

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- Genesis 22.1-14; Psalm 13;
Romans 6.12-23; Matthew 10.40-4

The story of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac is troubling. How could God condone child sacrifice? Such things were horrific, banned later in the law of Moses, because that's what the Canaanites did. Jewish scholars look at this passage and contrast Abraham's blind obedience to God telling him to sacrifice Isaac with his passionate arguing on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah earlier in Genesis. While at the end God blesses Abraham's faithfulness, they argue, ultimately Abraham failed - precisely because he chose not to argue with God; this is the last time God speaks to Abraham in Genesis. God expects us not to be slaves who blindly obey God, but friends who will converse, and debate; not passive recipients of mercy, but active partners in bringing about of the realm of God.

- Offer to God your deepest thoughts and struggles – even the struggles you might have with faith. Strive to listen for God's response in your heart.
- Pray for the safety and integrity of children everywhere, that they may have loving and supportive environments in which to flourish and grow.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Episcopal Church in South Sudan.

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St Thomas, Apostle and Martyr – *unless observed on 21 December*
– Monday 3 July 2023

- Habakkuk 2.1-4; Psalm 117;
Ephesians 2.19-22; John 20.24-29

Habakkuk complains to God about the violence and wickedness he sees, and God apparently doing nothing in answer to his prayers. In Chapter 2, God replies with a promise of a vision 'for the appointed time', telling Habakkuk to wait for it, that an answer will surely come. God even says to write the vision on tablets 'so that a runner may read it'. Imagine – a billboard on the highway, announcing God's promise of an end to violence and injustice, a righting of all the wrongs in the world.

- Pray that we may trust in God's faithfulness and timing.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of South India.

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Ordinary Sunday 14 A
– Sunday 9 July 2023

[Pentecost 6]

- Genesis 24.34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 45.10-17; Romans 7.14-25; Matthew 11.15-19 (20-24) 25-30

Abraham, of course, is the one whom God has chosen and promised to bless, and God does bless him even through tough times. As we read in Romans Paul is sharing his personal struggle with sin and one that all Christians face. Part of our struggle is that we stand with one foot in this world and one foot in the Kingdom of God. 'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls'. Rest!

- Pray that we burdened by many things learn to find rest for our souls.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of Pakistan.

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Ordinary Sunday 15 A
– Sunday 16 July 2023

[Pentecost 7]

- Genesis 25.19-34; Psalm 119.105-112; Romans 8.1-11; Matthew 13.1-9 (10-17) 18-23

The book of Genesis presents the epic narrative of the founding of the people of Israel. It begins with the creation of life, the universe and everything, especially humankind. Then God makes a promise to Abraham that he will be the father of a great nation and possess a land. The question then throughout the narrative is: how can God keep his promise in the face of this particular calamity which has just happened? Isaac's wife is barren, how will Isaac produce descendants? Isaac prays, then Rebekah conceives. But with twins, who fight. Will Rebekah survive? Will her babies survive? Will the right twin be born first? Then there is parental rivalry: one loves one, the other the other. Will the family survive? Then the most terrible thing: the older son despises his birthright and throws it away to the younger brother who steals it. How will the family heritage survive? To be continued.

- We pray that God will continue to work in the world to establish his kingdom in a secular world in which injustice prevails.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of Bangladesh

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St Mary Magdalene
– Saturday 20 July 2023

- Song of Songs 3.1-4a; Psalm 63; 2 Corinthians 5.14-21; John 20.1-18

What a raft of emotions was shown on that first wonderful Easter morning. Mary would have been inconsolable and utterly bewildered that her beloved Master had disappeared from the tomb.

Then the voice of the same beloved saying 'Mary', followed by his words 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' How great her joy would have been and how great is our joy as we relive this precious, sacred and wonderful morning.

What a tremendous honour too as Jesus told her to go and tell the apostles what had transpired – a woman being the first to carry this greatest of news. Praise the Lord!!

- Prayers of praise that the love of Christ has redeemed us for eternity.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of North India.

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Ordinary Sunday 16 A
– Sunday 23 July 2023

[Pentecost 8]

- Genesis 28.10-19a; Psalm 139.1-11, 23-24; Romans 8.12-25; Matthew 13.24-30 (31-33) 36-43

In this week's parable Jesus speaks of a small wheat seed and throws in some weeds for good measure. The combination of seed and weed brings to mind an image of a world where good and evil co-exist under God's creative hand. We all have weeds, sin, in our lives, and our insurance, to reduce our weeds, is committing to and living a life of faith; it requires ongoing renewal, commitment and effort. God will do the weeding for God's kingdom to live and thrive.

- Pray for the daily renewal of Jesus' presence and share that with unbridled generosity, patience and love – with a heart that sings under God's creative hand!
- Give thanks for all who work with or otherwise support refugees and asylum seekers around the world.

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St James, Apostle and Martyr
– Tuesday 25 July 2023

- Jeremiah 45; Psalm 126;
Acts 11.27 – 12.3 or 2 Corinthians 4.7-15
Matthew 2.20-28

The realm of God is upside down! Jesus replaces the order of the world with the order of vulnerable weakness: anyone seeking greatness should be the servant of all, and the one who wants to be first, a slave. This has been taken literally in the sense that bishops in our church structure are often called “the servant of all”. But have we missed the point somewhat? Perhaps Jesus spoke these words specifically because he suspected his followers would one day call institutions with their hierarchies the realm of God. It’s worth our while as we contemplate St James and his leadership and modelling of the realm of God, to revisit whether in our contexts we are living as each other’s servants, valuing the gifts each person brings so that we together may embody the realm of God.

- Remember to pray for those called to ministry lay and ordained, for missionaries, visionaries, and those ministering on the fringes.
- Pray that we may have the grace to serve one another as Jesus serves (and saves) us.
- Give thanks for those who are working to reform the juvenile justice system in Australia so that it helps young offenders and does not damage them further.

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Ordinary Sunday 17 A
– Sunday 30 July 2023

[Pentecost 9]

- Genesis 29.15-28; Psalm 105.1-11 or Psalm 128;
Romans 8.26-39; Matthew 13.44-58

Romans 8 is a wonderful chapter, brim-full of hope: because the ‘downpayment’ of the Spirit means God is with us, making everything work for our good, making us better and growing us in faith and maturity. Paul’s words are majestic and powerful as he declares that ‘nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’, and that there’s nothing that can question or threaten our status as God’s very own children. Every time I read this passage as it sweeps along, I feel breath-taken at God’s goodness, and such a welling hope and excitement that the Spirit indeed lives in me, the guarantee that God’s ‘got’ me, come hell or high water.

- Let your heart and mind sing today of God’s goodness to you.
- Pray that those around you might come to know the ‘height and breadth and depth’ of God’s love for them.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of Anglican Religious Orders throughout the world.

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