



Welcome to the Parish of Saint Michael Thirroul



PARISH BULLETIN
24 / 25 FEBRUARY 2024
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT + YEAR B
PRAYER - FASTING - ALMS GIVING

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

What do we mean when we say that we make a sacrifice? I have sacrificed my career for my children! I sacrifice a lot for my job! Love demands that we make many sacrifices! Sometimes we must sacrifice life itself for the sake of integrity! Christ sacrificed himself for our sins! The Eucharist is a sacrifice!

From what is common in all these expressions we can extract Webster's definition of a sacrifice: the surrender of something of value for the sake of something else.

That is a good definition, but it contains more than first meets the eye, as is evident when we look at the concept of sacrifice in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Take, for example, the famous story where Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac. What is ultimately behind God's invitation to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on an altar?

Here are the outer elements of the story: Abraham has longed for a son for many years. Finally, after the situation was humanly hopeless, Sarah conceives and they are given a son, Isaac, who is described as Abraham's "only one," his "precious one." But then God invites Abraham to take Isaac and offer him in sacrifice. Abraham, with a heavy heart, agrees to the request and sets off with Isaac, carrying wood, fire, and a knife, all the while having to answer his son's curiosity about why they were not bringing a victim for the sacrifice.



When they arrive at the place of sacrifice, Abraham gathers the wood, lights the fire, binds Isaac, and then raises the knife to kill him. But God intervenes, stops the sacrifice, and gives Abraham a ram instead to offer. The story ends with Abraham walking back to his own land together with Isaac. What is the deep lesson inside this story?

At one level, the lesson is that God does not want human sacrifice, but there is a deeper, more intimate, inner lesson that teaches us something about the innate need inside of us to offer sacrifice. Simply put, the lesson is this: In order for something to be received as a gift it must be received twice. What is implied here?

A gift, by definition, is something that is not deserved but given freely. What is our first impulse when we are given a gift? Our instinctual response is: "I can't take this! I don't deserve this!" In essence, that gesture, that healthy instinctual response, is an attempt to give the gift back to its giver. But, of course, the giver refuses to take the gift back and re-gives it to us with the assurance: "but I want you to have this!" When we receive it the second time, it is now more properly ours because, by trying to give it back, we healthily recognized that it was a gift, unmerited, undeserved.

That is the exact set of dynamics within the story of Abraham offering to sacrifice Isaac. Isaac comes to him as the greatest, most-undeserved, gift of his life. His willingness to sacrifice him parallels the instinctual gesture: "I don't deserve this! I cannot accept this!" He offers the gift back to its giver. But the giver, Love itself, stops the gesture and gives the gift the second time. Now Abraham can receive Isaac, without guilt, as gift. When they are walking back home, Isaac is now Abraham's son in a way that he never was before. Abraham had to receive the gift twice by sacrificing it the first time.

That is the essence of sacrifice: to properly receive anything, including life itself, requires that we recognize it precisely as gift, as something undeserved. And to do that requires sacrifice, a willingness to give some or the entire gift back to its giver.

We see this as the dynamic underlying the ritual of ancient sacrifice. For example: A farmer would harvest a crop. But, before he or his family would eat even mouthful of it, he would take some of it (the "first-fruits") and offer it back to God in the form of a sacrifice, usually by burning it so that that the smoke rising up to the heavens would take some of the crop back to God whom the farmer saw as the real giver of that crop. After sacrificing some of it in this way, the farmer and his family could now enjoy the rest of it without guilt because, by trying to give it back to its author, they made themselves more aware that it was gift. They can now enjoy it without guilt precisely because, through sacrifice, they have acknowledged it as gift.

That's the inner essence of all sacrifice, whether the sacrificing of a career for the sake of our children or Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Sacrifice recognizes gift as gift. Like Abraham, it tries to give the gift back to the giver, but the giver stops the sacrifice and gives it back in even a deeper way. We would enjoy our lives considerably more if we understood that.

The destination of our Lenten journey is clearly to be seen in today's readings: the mystery of the Cross, in which the father 'did not spare his own Son', and the glory which was to be the Risen Christ's in his final triumph, glimpsed ↻ ↻

The Anatomy of Sacrifice



✠ on the mountain. The testing of Abraham is one of the masterpieces of the Old Testament. The story echoes a brutal age in which the sacrifice of children was not uncommon – in fact, the people of the old Israel were taught to sacrifice an animal in place of their offspring, to turn them away from this horrendous temptation.

But the real point of the story, made so wonderfully, is the absolute trust that is asked of Abraham, making him the model of all true believers. To the people of Abraham's world there was nothing more important in life than descendants who would remember and honour them. Long after the age when he could expect a child, God gave Abraham a son. If he gives up Isaac, he has nothing left but his trust in God. That trust is rewarded – those who will call him their father will be countless; all the peoples of the earth will be blessed in his name – through the salvation brought by the Cross of Christ.

This heart-rending story of the testing of a father's love is linked in today's liturgy with the basic truth of our Christian faith, proclaimed by St Paul, in the second reading. The eternal Father, who for our sake 'did not spare his own Son', will not refuse anything to his people in their need.

The promise made to Abraham was to be fulfilled in the victory of the Saviour's resurrection. As he undertakes the journey towards the Cross and its glorious aftermath, he gives the chosen three among his followers a glimpse of the triumph in which he would fulfil the promise of the Law (Moses) and realise all the hopes of the prophets (Elijah). Again, the Father's love shines through: 'This is my beloved Son – listen to him!'

It was a long journey from Abraham's testing to the final fulfilment of God's promises. We are privileged that the route our journey must take is so clearly marked out for us. God has made wonderful promises to us by the very fact that we have received life. Trust this truth, and we will find the courage let go of things when called to do so.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

✠ In Genesis 15:5 God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. It is to this promise that Abraham clings as he raises the knife to kill his son. Where do you fall on the continuum when blind trust is required of you, with 1 being low and 10 high?

✠ Abraham discovers that God does not allow human sacrifice. How does human trafficking relate to human sacrifice? Would raising the minimum wage eradicate some kinds of human sacrifice?

Second Reading Romans 8:31b-34

✠ The Old Testament translates "Emmanuel" as God with us. This reading says God is not only with us, but for us. "Christ indeed intercedes for us." Explain how this statement could be a real antidepressant.

✠ How does intervening "for" someone, taking a stand for him or her, relate to the commandment, "love your neighbour?" For whom can you intervene? Do you ever do it?

Gospel Mark 9:2-10

✠ It took a blinding light for Peter, James and John to begin to see or understand who Jesus was. Think of some problems in your country that need illumination (such as racism, immigration, environment). What needs to happen in these areas before you would be able to see something divine in them?

✠ When his friends heard about Jesus' upcoming death, they were "beset by anguish." So, he took them up the mountain. Pope Francis speaks about the Transfiguration. What does he say needs to happen when we come down from the mountain?

At times we go through moments of darkness in our personal, family or social life, and we fear there is no way out. We feel frightened before great enigmas such as illness, innocent pain or the mystery of death. ... We too are called to climb up the mountain, to contemplate the beauty of the Risen One that enkindles glimmers of light in every fragment of our life and helps us to interpret history beginning with the paschal victory.

Let us be careful, however: that feeling of Peter that "it is well that we are here" must not become spiritual laziness. We cannot remain on the mountain and enjoy the bliss of this encounter on our own. Jesus himself brings us back to the valley, among our brothers and sisters and into daily life. We must beware of spiritual laziness: we are fine, with our prayers and liturgies, and this is enough for us. No! Going up the mountain does not mean forgetting reality; praying never means avoiding the difficulties of life; the light of faith is not meant to provide beautiful spiritual feelings. No, this is not Jesus' message. We are called to experience the encounter with Christ so that, enlightened by his light, we might take it and make it shine everywhere. Igniting little lights in people's hearts; being little lamps of the Gospel that bear a bit of love and hope: this is the mission of a Christian. – Pope Francis, *Angelus*, Second Sunday of Lent, Year B, 28 February 2021

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Last year, Ascension Press ran the Catholic Bible in a Year Podcast featuring Fr Mike Schmitz and Jeff Cavins. It was the world's number 1 Religious Podcast with over 250 million downloads. It will run again throughout 2024 – and while a new podcast is released daily, you can do it at your own pace by signing up at the website shown here, and it's not too late to catch up or just work through at your own pace. It is a great resource for personal formation for anyone in our parish! <https://ascensionpress.com/pages/biy-registration>

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER, 10:30, FRIDAY, 1 MARCH

The World Day of Prayer is a global ecumenical movement led by Christian women who welcome you to join in prayer and action for peace and justice. Through preparation and participation in the worship service, we can come to know how our sisters of other countries, languages and cultures understand the Biblical passages in their context. We can hear their concerns and needs and can feel ourselves in solidarity with them as we pray with and for them. In this way, it is possible to enrich our Christian faith as it grows deeper and broader in an international, ecumenical expression.

The motto of the World Day of Prayer movement is **Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action**. Through our participation in the World Day of Prayer, we affirm that prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence on the world.

The World Day of Prayer is an ecumenical prayer movement developed from a Christian women's perspective as a creative response to issues of concern around the world.

The prayer this year has been prepared by **women of Palestine** – so this is a special opportunity to join with them in prayer and in praying for peace in their country. This program calls us to **bear with each other in love, despite all difficulties and oppression**. The program was written by a group of ecumenical Christian Palestinian women in response to the passage from Ephesians 4:1-7.

This year's World Day of Prayer will be held **in our Parish Church of Saint Michael, at 10:30 on Friday, 1 March** – all are welcome and encouraged to attend. **Refreshments will be provided afterwards. Please come along.**



THE CATECHISM IN A YEAR

This year, Ascension Press will also again run the Catechism in a Year podcast which will slowly and prayerfully read through and break open the Catechism over 365 days. It's not too late to catch up, and the daily podcasts can be listened to at your own pace. It is available at! www.ascensionpress.com/ciy

RESTORE PALLIATIVE CARE FUNDING

In the last NSW State budget, \$150 million was slashed from palliative care, having a direct effect on how people die in NSW. It flies in the face of guarantees made at the time of the passing of new laws for Euthanasia, ensuring that everyone in NSW would have true choice as to how they died. No one should be pushed into euthanasia because of funding issues. People of faith need to urgently stand up for the sanctity of human life by objecting to these cuts. Please urgently sign this petition and invite friends and family to do the same: <https://bit.ly/restorethefunding>



Second Sunday of Lent 24 and 25 February



Ronita is 22. She lives with her husband and two children in a barangay (local district) in Quezon City, which is situated in Metro Manila in the Philippines.

Ronita left school when she became pregnant as a teenager. This could have had a life-long impact on her ability to find work and provide for her family but, thankfully, she heard about the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program run by the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ), Caritas Australia's local partners in the Philippines.

Through the FCJ, Ronita was able to re-enrol in her studies and continue learning in a safe and flexible environment – even with the arrival of her second child.

After completing her ALS classes, Ronita went on to earn her Grade 12 Senior High School Diploma. With her new diploma, Ronita has now secured a job at a call centre and is looking to a brighter future for her whole family.

Please donate to Project Compassion.

Together, we can help vulnerable communities face their challenges today and build a better tomorrow **for all future generations**.

You can donate through Project Compassion donation boxes and envelopes available from your parish, by visiting caritas.org.au/project-compassion or by calling **1800 024 413**.

Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia



Scan this with your phone to donate to Project Compassion

SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

Sundays Year B • Weekdays Year II

Monday	26 Feb	Monday of the 2 nd Week of Lent	Daniel 9:4-10	Luke 6:36-38
Tuesday	27 Feb	Tuesday of the 2 nd Week of Lent	Isaiah 1:10,16-20	Matthew 23:1-12
Wednesday	28 Feb	Wednesday of the 2 nd Week of Lent	Jeremiah 18:18-20	Matthew 20:17-28
Thursday	29 Feb	Thursday of the 2 nd Week of Lent	Jeremiah 17:5-10	Luke 16:19-31
Friday	1 Mar	Friday of the 2 nd Week of Lent	Genesis 37:3-4,12-13,17-28	Matthew 21:33-43,45-46
Saturday	2 Mar	Saturday of the 2 nd Week of Lent	Micah 7:14-15,18-20	Luke 15:1-3,11-32
Sunday	3 Mar	SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT • YEAR B – <i>Scripture Readings are listed below.</i>		



FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

✦ Thursday, 29 February	19:15	Baptism Preparation Meeting for Easter and April
✦ Friday, 1 March	09:30	Anointing of the Sick during Mass
	10:30	WORLD DAY OF PRAYER at St Michael Church, Thirroul
✦ Saturday, 9 March	18:30	Dinner at Club Thirroul after the 17:30 Mass
✦ Weekend, 9/10 March		Blessing of March Wedding Anniversaries and Birthdays
✦ Tuesday, 19 March	19:30	Reconciliation Rite II for Lent
✦ Tuesday, 26 March	19:00	Chrism Mass at the Cathedral
✦ Thursday, 28 March	19:30	Holy Thursday – Mass of the Lord’s Supper
✦ Friday, 29 March	10:30	Good Friday – Way of the Cross
	15:00	Good Friday – Liturgy of the Passion
✦ Saturday, 30 March	19:00	Easter Vigil
✦ Sunday, 31 March	08:00	Easter Sunday – Mass of the Resurrection with Baptism

TOUCHED BY ABORTION? NEED HEALING?

Rachel’s Vineyard next retreat 1 to 3 March 2024 at Mount Carmel Retreat Centre, Varroville. Cost is negotiable. Part /full scholarships available. To book or further information, phone 0400 092 555 or 0407 626 079.

SPIRITUALITY ON THE SOFA – 19:30 TO 21:00, WEDNESDAY, 6 MARCH

The topic for the next Spirituality on the Sofa is “Let’s talk about the Power of Leadership”. The leaders in conversation will be Ms Paulina Skerman (principal of Santa Sabina College, Sydney) and Bishop Michael Morrissey (Bishop of Geraldton, Western Australia) who will share with us some of their innovative life stories about how they continue to share their wonderful gifts of leadership with members of their respective communities – making such a difference. You can join by **Zoom** <https://catalystforrenewal.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=359ebaf88e3056e765efb6011&id=a59691c4058e-b06e41d5f0>

CATHOLIC CARE COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKERS

CatholicCare are currently looking for Community Support Workers. Becoming a CatholicCare Community Support Worker will give you a career that you love, whilst providing a valuable connection to people living with a disability or the aged in our Diocese. If you want to find out more about becoming a Community Support Worker go to <https://www.catholiccare.dow.org.au/get-involved/careers/> or call 4227 1122.

PLEASE BRING IN ... ANY NON-PERISHABLE ITEMS EACH WEEK TO HELP THE NEEDY IN THE LOCAL ILLAWARRA AREA.

THIS Sunday’s Readings – on website	NEXT Sunday’s Readings – on website	SUNDAY
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT • YEAR B	THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT • YEAR B	MASS TIMES
1 st Reading Genesis 22:1-2,9-13,15-18	1 st Reading Exodus 20:1-17	Saturday 17:30
2 nd Reading Romans 8:31-34	2 nd Reading 1 Corinthians 1:22-25	Sunday 08:00
Gospel Mark 9:2-10	Gospel John 2:13-25	☞ Saturday Mass is recorded.
Parish of St Michael – Thirroul <i>One of the four Northern Illawarra Parishes</i> <i>Moving forward as a Parish Family</i> Patrick Vaughan • <i>Parish Priest</i> Andrew Granc ofm, Ken Cafe ofm • <i>Assisting</i> Kerry Fabon • Parish Secretary Tues, Wed 09:00–15:00; Fri 08:30–15:00	🌐 www.thirroulcatholic.org.au 📍 325 Lawrence Hargrave Drive 📧 PO Box 44 • Thirroul 2515 ☎ 4268 1910 📠 4268 1976 📧 thirroul@dow.org.au Parish School of St Michael ☎ 4267 2560	USUAL WEEKDAY MASSES Monday _____ Tuesday 17:30 Wednesday 09:00 Thursday 09:00 Friday 09:30 <i>Anointing of the Sick 1st Friday</i>