

# AVE

ST MARY'S PARISH NEWSLETTER



AUGUST 2021



## WELCOME

It is great to welcome you all to our Parish Newsletter for our Patronal Festival for this year. It is unfortunate that we will not be able to meet together for our Feast Day but at least we can share our thought, stories and lives through this newsletter. Thank you to all who have contributed.

Fr Jan

## Our Lady's Island

As I looked around for another Marian subject for Ave, I remembered that a unique corner of Orthodoxy is reserved to her patronage: the forested peninsula on which Mount Athos rises (2033 m). In European Union terms, it is 'the Monastic State of the Holy Mountain' and is home to some 20 Orthodox monasteries and 1500 monks. But no nuns. Nothing female at all, though there seems to be a loophole for hens and cats.



The 'aetiological legend' is this. When the Beloved Disciple and Mary were at the foot of the Cross, the dying Jesus gave them to each other as Mother and Son: thus far it is simply biblical and a tender moment. There is a strong tradition that they both went to live in Ephesus which at that stage was a seaport. The inlet has now silted up. St John took the Blessed Mary sailing out into the Aegean. Their ship was blown off

course, indeed right across it, and they were forced to anchor off the easternmost peninsular of Chalkidiki, which reaches out from central Macedonia like three fingers, with Mount Athos at the tip. When she landed, Mary was overwhelmed by the wild, natural beauty of the mountain. She asked her Son for her to have it as a garden and his voice from heaven confirmed it. From that moment the mountain was consecrated to the Mother of God and was out of bounds to all other women. The garden is still much as she left it; the monks have harvested its timber for centuries. A raging bushfire in 1990 destroyed about a third of it, with serious implication for the island's economy.

In 1991 I was General Secretary of the Victorian Council of Churches and had already become aware that our Orthodox members were there largely in name only and seemed to hold back from stronger participation. I was also part of the staff which welcomed the World Council of Churches Assembly to Canberra later that year. There, I met a number of Orthodox heads of churches. 'Greek' Orthodoxy, as we call it in Melbourne, belongs to the jurisdiction not of Athens but of Constantinople (now Istanbul). Its head, the Ecumenical Patriarch, is 'first among equals' of all the Eastern Orthodox Churches.<sup>1</sup> I was delighted to be invited to meet him and in September I flew to Istanbul to do so. Well, I didn't quite manage it: he (His All-Holiness Demetrius I) died on the morning I was due for an

<sup>1</sup> There are two main branches of Orthodoxy. They divided at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. over how to describe the relation of divinity and humanity in Second Person of the Trinity. Those who belonged to the Byzantine power accepted a 'Definition'; those that didn't were declared heretics, and oddly, none of them was Byzantine. Those Orthodox Churches are known as the 'Oriental Orthodox'! (i.e., Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Syrian, and Syrian Indian ['Malankara'].) They can all be found in Melbourne.



audience, and I did indeed see him, but in his coffin. This meant I fell into the hands of the man I'd met in Canberra, Bartholomew, Metropolitan of Chalcedon, who was the next most senior prelate. Before the end of 1991, he was elected Patriarch. Orthodoxy is a familial religion, hierarchical, yes, but not in the western pyramidal style (cf the Vatican). I learned, diplomatically, that there's nothing like being welcomed by Father if you want the family to embrace you.

Having visited the Romanians and Bulgarians, who were both throwing out the Communists at the time, I took a train to Thessaloniki. My monastic host soon helped me obtain my visitor's permit, a *diamonitirion*, declaring that I was male, over 18, and had a serious purpose. Only ten non-Orthodox are permitted to visit each day and are limited to four nights' stay. I took a bus to Ouraopoulos and thence by ferry halfway down, to Dafni, and up to Karyes, the capital, where I was admitted. Pilgrim places should be difficult to get to.



I had booked accommodation overnight in four monasteries, Iviron (980 AD, originally Georgian, but now Greek), Stavronikita (1536, the smallest, Greek with Russian support), Vatapedi (972 AD, Greek) and Simonopetra (13<sup>th</sup> C, Greek) The first three are on the east coast, Simonopetra on the west.

Bishop Ezekiel in Melbourne suggested I start with **Iviron**.

The peninsula is heavily wooded and largely without roads. There were few motor-driven vehicles and no bus or taxi,

so I set out on the dirt road into the forest. I began to practice reciting the Jesus Prayer<sup>2</sup>, a syllable per step as I tramped along, but my real petition was soon answered by a farm lorry who offered to drop me off. The guest master greeted me at the gate with a friendly Australian accent: Father Jeremias, ex-Sydney. He showed me to my room; a firm bed, uncertain electricity, no hot water, no shower, a lavatorial hole in the floor. The evening meal was cold fish in chunks, tomato, feta cheese, bread, grapes, and a yellow white wine, and there were to be two meals a day from now on.

I wisely went to bed because a knock on the door at 4.30 a.m. woke me. I found my way upstairs in the dark to a small chapel dedicated to St

<sup>2</sup> The words of the mantra are, in English, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner' or close variation. It is the fundamental personal prayer in Orthodoxy.

Dionysius the Areopagite – it was his feast day – and experienced an unusually intimate celebration of the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, sung by a choir of two melodious priests. I was not expecting to be able to receive communion, but I need to explain Orthodox custom to recount what happened.



*A Greek communion loaf. The stamped pattern also indicates where the cube of bread will be cut for the eucharist.*

Orthodox worshippers bring loaves of bread baked and stamped in the traditional style and hand it in at a door in the icon-screen. The deacon or priest inside selects the loaf from which he will cut the cube of bread to be crumbed and later put in the chalice, for Orthodox receive communion in both bread and wine from a spoon. Much bread is left over, and this is also cut up and placed in a basket which at one point is passed over the altar and put aside. The liturgy proceeds

and the faithful receive communion from that first chosen loaf. As they move away from the altar, they are offered the basket of 'blessed bread' which they may use simply to make sure they have swallowed all the eucharistic elements; but they may take some home to family who could not be present. That bread is called *antidoron*, which means 'instead of the gifts.' In Melbourne and most Orthodox churches in the west, it might also be offered as a token to any non-Orthodox present.

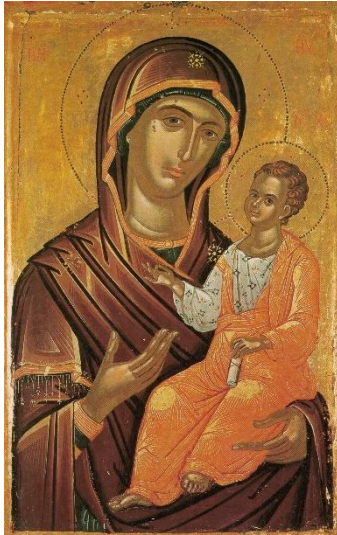
That was my ecumenically innocent expectation, so I joined the post-communion line only for Fr Jeremiah to stop and whisper, 'We do not give *antidoron* to non-Orthodox'. I was embarrassed for a moment and even angry (recalling '*Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table*', Matt. 15:27), but then: this is their table. And *our* church practice frequently shocks them. It is also true that when Orthodox do offer guests that blessed bread, it *is* a kind of gift, an anticipation of the day when all Christians can break the same loaf together.<sup>3</sup>

I had been reading the *Odyssey* on this journey, so now 'dawn had touched the sky with her rose-red fingers', and I broke my fast (baked beans, greens, wine, a sugared fig and a spoonful of sweetmeats – sugar, nuts, sultanas), packed and departed. I was joined on my walk to my next monastery by George, a devout young Greek from Sydney, who showed me his 'rope of beads' which he used to count his Jesus Prayers.<sup>4</sup> My learning was proceeding.

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<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps worth remembering that until the 1960s, Anglican altars were closed to non-Anglicans; and also, in the same way, for most Australian Lutherans. Roman Catholic canons also forbid giving communion to non-Catholics, whatever a particular priest might choose to do.

<sup>4</sup> These ropes are often knotted by monks or other dexterous persons but are also commercially available; they may have 33, or 50, or 100 knots.



*Ikon of the Theotokos by Theophan of Crete (1546) held at the monastery of Stavronikita.*

Our goal was **Stavronikita**, further down the coast, whose principal church was dedicated to Mary and contains a 13<sup>th</sup> C mosaic ikon of her, but also a whole series of painted ikons by St Theophan of Crete (1546). George received the eucharist, a high moment for him, but I was asked to stand outside the nave in the appropriate dark! Later I had an audience with the abbot (*hegumen*) Tikhon: he had written a book pointing out the errors of both Rome and Protestants. Ecumenism is a 'pan-heresy', a view commonly held on Athos, where they believe that the west has abandoned and distorted the faith handed down to the Apostles which they have faithfully kept. They regard Protestants as a watered-down version of Roman errors. However, it was a letter from the Ecumenical Patriarchate 'Unto

*the Churches of Christ Everywhere*' in 1920 which was an important summons to Christian unity at the beginning of that century.



*Some of the buildings in the courtyard of Vatopedi monastery.*

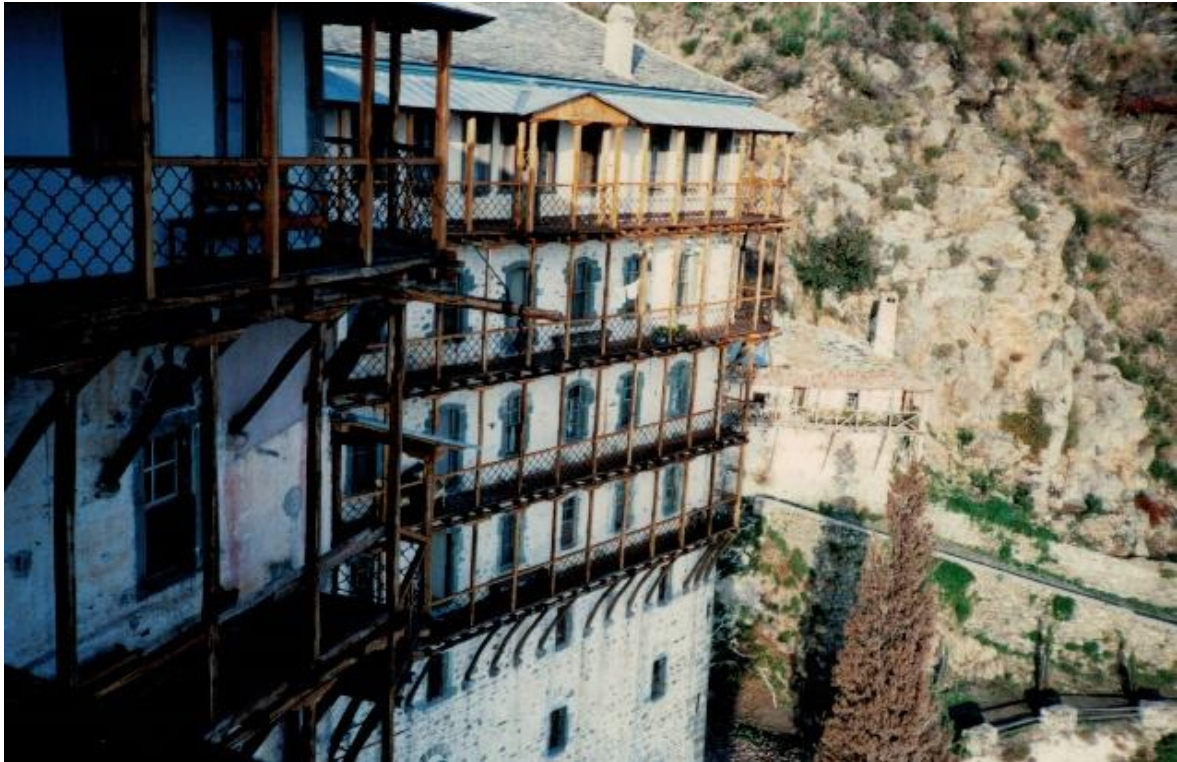
At **Vatapedi** (972 AD), the guest master was the brother of the Greek priest at Doncaster. They have a huge library of ancient texts. After a glorious choral Liturgy, I was invited to a common room for a drop of raki before breakfast on squid and beans. At each place I was shown the relics they held – e.g., here, St Mary's girdle, woven by herself from camel

hair. Orthodoxy has never had a Reformation.

My final sojourn was at **Simonopetra** (13<sup>th</sup> C), which hangs off a rock halfway up a mountain. The climb took 45 minutes, at which point I reached the bottom of its eight floors, the guesthouse being at the top.<sup>5</sup> There, scarlet-faced and out of breath, I was rewarded with a plate of *loukoumi* ('Turkish Delight') and a serious shot of raki, which the guest master clearly thought would have medicinal value. The other

<sup>5</sup> The monks reverse our counting of levels: the top is the first floor!





*The spectacular setting of Simonapetra.*

arrangements were equally beneficial, a lovely light room, with facilities which allowed me to take a real shower, shave and do my laundry. At dinner, I had a chair instead of a bench, and plums. A final Liturgy, and at breakfast I watched the sun rise over Mount Athos. Then, carefully, all the way down to the ferry for Dafni and Ouranopoulos, and back to Thessaloniki.

Learning is not always pleasant; these four days both deeply moved and challenged me. It was rather fun being regarded as a damp Catholic, and there was little point in dialogue: Athos is not the place for that. It was rewarding to try praying in a different way, a permitted, even encouraged exercise, but I missed receiving the eucharist especially as I became more at home in the flow of the liturgy. I will never forget the ikons, not all as well-cared for as they should be. There were things I wasn't allowed to do, although the hospitality was faultless. Here is a form of the Faith which is both stripped down, in fasting and poverty, and lavish, in liturgy. Isolated, but guardians of a culture, a tradition and of great Christian learning. Orthodoxy in general knows that Athos represents both the best and the worst of 'conservatism'; the mountain is a kind of anchor when we are 'tossed about by the waves and whirled around by every fresh gust of teaching' (Eph. 4:14, REB). I am grateful in a world of change for such rocks in the swirling waters.

Robert Gribben





## **Ideas for what to do during the Lockdown**

Now that you are spending more time at home it's the perfect opportunity to try out some new recipes. Cooking, preserving and baking are challenging and most satisfying ways of spending one's time. And, you will get joy from sharing what you've made and making others happy. Here are some tried and true recipes I've recently had a go at. Try making this delicious Passionfruit Cake for afternoon tea. I made it last week using our own Panama Gold passionfruit now ripening in the garden. Then I dropped it around to a friend for his birthday. He was over the moon about it! Best cake he'd had for years.

For a tasty vegetarian dinner (or lunch) dish the Tagiatelle is perfect. Then I've included a couple of recipes given me by friends for preserves that you might like to make now for our Christmas Stall in late November. Keep some for yourself too. Both these home-mades taste considerably better than those available commercially.

### **PASSIONFRUIT CAKE**

125 g softened butter

3/4 cup castor sugar

2 eggs

2 cups S.R. flour

1/2 cup milk

pulp of 3 passionfruit

whipped cream

passion fruit icing

Pre-heat oven to 180 deg C. Grease a 20 cm. cake tin.

Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Stir in sifted flour alternately with milk. Stir in passion fruit pulp.

Fill mixture into prepared tin. Bake for 50 minutes.

When cold cake can be split and filled with whipped cream. Ice with passion fruit icing.

### **PASSIONFRUIT ICING**

1 tbs softened butter

¼ cup passion fruit pulp

2 cups icing sugar

Combine butter and passion fruit. Gradually add the sifted icing sugar, stirring until you achieve a spreadable consistency.

### **SPINACH & RICOTTA AGNOLOTTI**

#### **WITH ROASTED PUMPKIN, WALNUTS AND SAGE**

55 g butternut pumpkin, peeled and cut into 2cm cubes

1 tsp chilli flakes

½ tsp dried coriander, ground

1 tbsp olive oil

375g pkt Spinach and Ricotta Agnolotti

90g butter, chopped

½ cup sage leaves

½ cup walnuts, toasted, chopped

½ cup shaved parmesan

Pre-heat oven to 200 deg. C.

In a medium sized bowl add the pumpkin, chilli, coriander and olive oil. Toss to combine.

Place the pumpkin onto a large baking tray lined with baking paper, and roast in the oven for 20-25 minutes or until the pumpkin becomes tender and golden.

Cook the pasta according to packet instructions. Drain into a colander, reserving  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cooking water.

Melt the butter into a large, deep-sided fry pan over a medium heat.

When the butter begins to foam, add the sage, pumpkin, walnuts and reserved cooking water. Season with salt and pepper.

Reduce the heat to low and toss gently to coat.

Serve the pasta topped with shaved parmesan.

### **Susie's TOMATO RELISH**

3 kgs tomatoes, skinned and cut into pieces

1 kg. sliced onions

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup salt

Combine all and cover with water. Leave to stand overnight.

Next morning pour off all the brine and almost cover the pulp with vinegar. Bring to the boil. Add 750 gr sugar, stirring well.

Mix 2 tablespoons curry powder with 1 tbs mustard powder and 3 tbs cornflour, and mix to a smooth paste with some cold vinegar. Stir into the tomato mixture till it thickens. Boil gently, stirring, for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour.



Add 1 teaspoon each of mace, pepper, cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon and ground ginger. Stir in well and bottle. Sterilize bottles for 10 minutes.

### **Richard's MINT JELLY**

1.5 kgs. cooking apples

1 1/2 cups water

1 bunch fresh mint

2 1/2 cups white vinegar

Later—3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint leaves

Chop apples. Add water and mint and simmer till soft and pulpy. Add vinegar. Bring to the boil, and simmer for 5 minutes. Put into a jelly bag, and leave to hang. (Don't squeeze.)

Measure juice and add 2 cups sugar to every 2 1/2 cups juice. Boil to dissolve and cook fast till it jells. (Test on a saucer in the freezer.) Skim off scum. Add chopped mint leaves. After 5 minutes stir and bottle in sterilized jars.

Good Luck!

*Marion Poynter*

# Mary Mary

*Mary Mary, quite contrary,  
How does your garden grow?  
With silver bells and cockle shells  
And pretty maids all in a row.*

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### Sainte Marie of Queensberry:

North Melbourne loves passing your garden,  
Whilst taking the air and strolling the square  
Of Howard and Chetwynd and Arden.

*Silvery bells accompany smells –  
They tell of our ritual leaning;  
Distractions to some, anathema even:  
To us they all add to the meaning.*

Were the cockles acquired - with the mussels required -  
From sweet Dublin Molly's wheel-barrow?  
(from the other Marie – the Star of the Sea,  
Wheeled over through streets broad and narrow?)

*Or imagine a midden, forgotten and hidden,  
Of cockle shells, left for remembrance  
By those who passed here, for thousands of years.  
Can we honour connection with reverence?*

So tell us dear Mary, why they call you contrary?  
Is it rhyme that's just prompting the word?  
In your church, what you do  
is to nourish us crew  
Whilst your soul's magnifying the Lord.



Saint Mary's acknowledges  
the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulin Nation,  
the Traditional Custodians of the land  
on which we gather.

## Pretty Maids All in a Row



*The Gardening group, and the vicar Fr Jan, lovingly tend the garden through winter, preparing for spring blossoming to come.*

*Rhondda's primulas in the Mary Garden patiently await her return from rehab, as do we.*



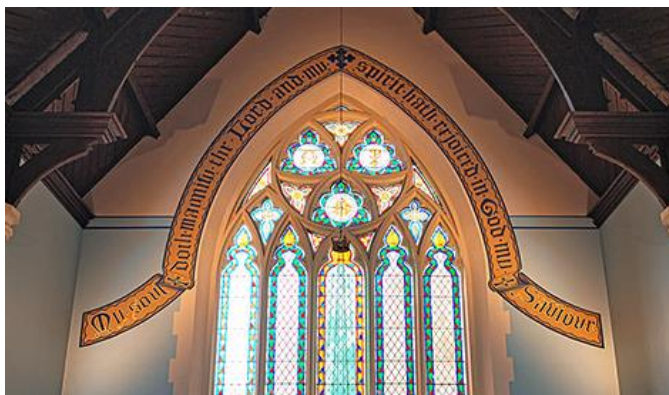
Taking the air around Queensberry, Howard, Arden and Chetwynd Streets, passers-by can drop in – to enjoy the sunshine or to sit in the shade of the Moreton Bay Fig tree, depending upon the season.

*Queensberry Street corner  
(The vicar's splendid vicarage garden lies beyond, along Howard Street.)*



*The church of St Mary Star of the Sea, West Melbourne, (the other St Mary's) is the Roman Catholic gothic-revival church on the corner of Victoria and Howard Streets. It must be two or three times our size in each dimension (length, breadth, height).*

*Occasionally wedding guests arrive panting at Queensberry St only to find that they are at the wrong St Mary's. (It is just 500m away from us on foot – an easy wheel-barrow push for Molly Malone).*



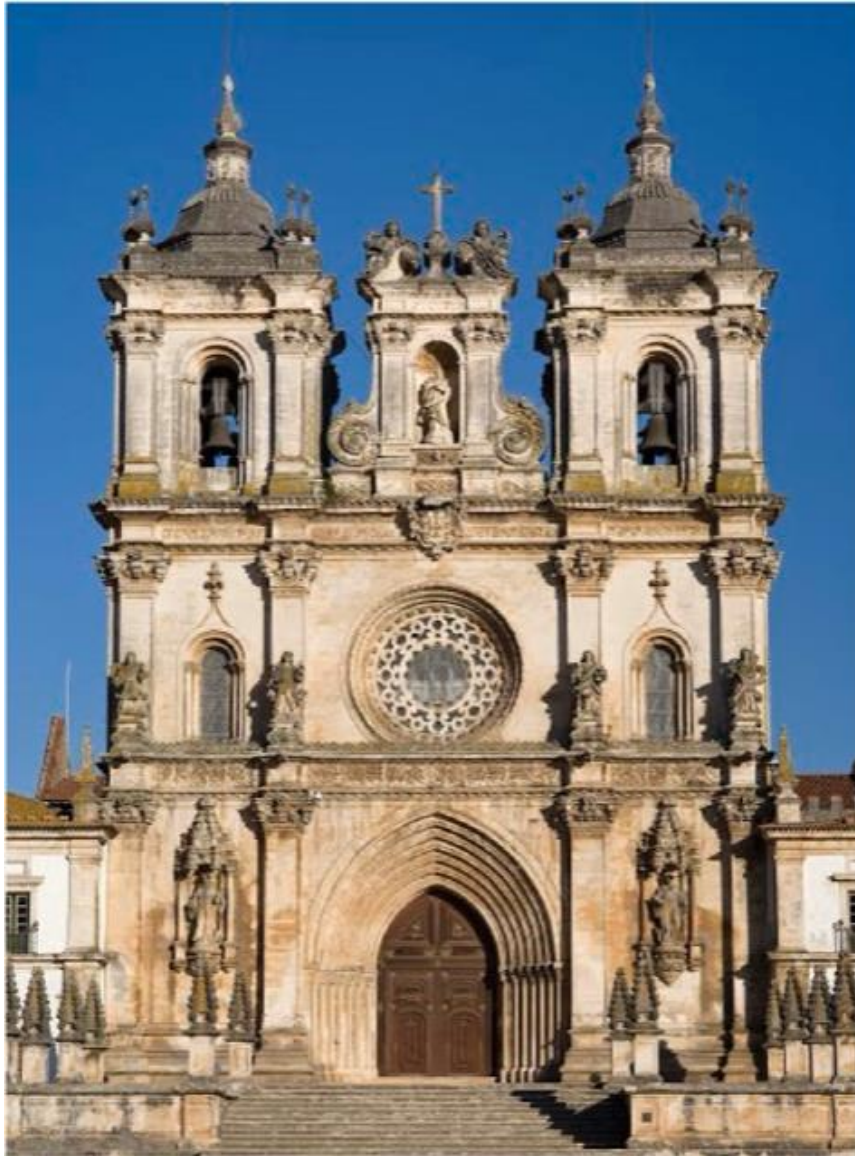
Arching over our east window are the first lines of the Magnificat of Saint Mary, our patron saint.

*My Soul doth magnify the Lord and my Spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour*

*The banner was painted over in the 1960s. Some fifty years later it was beautifully restored, in the time of our previous vicar Fr Craig, during some church refurbishment.*

David Keuneman





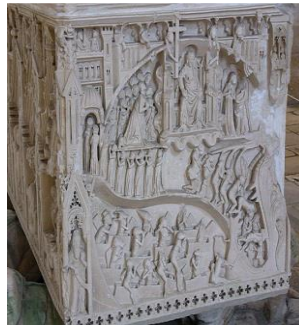
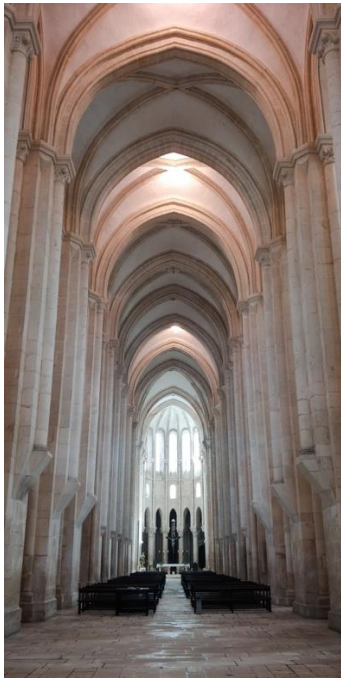
**The Church and Monastery of St Mary, Alcobaca:  
*a symbol of politics, love and endurance***

**Christine Storey**

Alcobaca today is a small town with a population of around 18,000, located 120 kilometres north of Lisbon. Elsdon and I had the privilege of visiting Alcobaca in 2018, during our exploration of ancient churches and monasteries of western Spain and Portugal. This town was once a seat of great power and influence in Portugal and within it may be found an enduring church, established in the monastic tradition. It was originally built as a political statement by the first King of Portugal, Dom Afonso Henriques, to demonstrate “Reconquista Crista”, after he had conquered the Moorish invaders in this region. Don Afonso initially established a Cistercian monastery on this site in 1153. Construction of St



Mary's Church began in 1178 and was completed in 1252, and is the earliest example of Portuguese Gothic, although designed by architects who were likely to be of French origin. The church and monastery were also one of the earliest buildings in Portugal to be associated with the Cistercian order. The church's interior remains intact, with its soaring, unadorned columns and walls, floodlit by glorious gothic windows. It remains the largest church in Portugal and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The baroque "modernisation" of the church's façade is a reminder that it is a blessing that no attempts were made to "modernise" the magnificent interior!



**Left:** The stunning interior of St Mary's Church. **Above:** Shows the exquisite marble carving on the tomb of Dona Ines de Castro showing Christ presiding over the Last Judgement.

Over time the monks, under the direction of successive Abbots, developed vast agricultural holdings, established a nationally significant library containing stunningly beautiful, illuminated manuscripts, and a public school. A vast expanse of buildings, making up the monastery which housed the monks who undertook all these activities, comprised a large dormitory, refectory and kitchen, Chapter House, and Cloister. In medieval times almost a thousand monks were accommodated within this monastery, and masses were held literally "around the clock" by the monks in shifts! The monastery was also one of the richest and most powerful in Portugal, and many members of the Portuguese royal family and nobility are buried within this church. The most enduring and oft told story (albeit somewhat gruesome) associated with these royal burials is celebrated to this day in the town as a triumph of love. In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, Pedro, the son of the king, Don Afonso IV, fell in love with his wife's lady in waiting - a Galician woman, Dona Ines de Castro - and had several children with her. Yet even after Pedro's legitimate wife's death, his father forbade him to marry Ines, as he feared the resulting inevitable rise in Spanish political influence as a result of such a partnership. Meanwhile Pedro and Ines had married in secret, but their nuptial bliss was to be short-lived as once this was discovered, Don Afonso was pressured politically by Portuguese nobles to have Ines murdered. Two years later, when Pedro succeeded his father to the throne, he had Ines exhumed and placed in a beautiful and elaborately carved marble tomb in the south transept of the church, in anticipation that following his own death, his tomb would be placed in the north transept, so that they might always face each

other. Pedro also executed all those nobles who were responsible for his beloved Ines's murder.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the monks had developed a shamefully decadent lifestyle. In 1810 during the Peninsular War, the French destroyed many of the magnificent illuminated manuscripts and other artworks within the monastery. The monastic tradition within this magnificent church and monastery finally came to an end in 1834 when the Portuguese Government closed all the monasteries nationally, preserving their structures as national monuments.

Today this charming historical town remains proud of its history, yet it does not seem to mourn its loss of political power; rather it celebrates the enduring love of King Pedro and his ill-fated second wife, Ines, whom he adored until his own death in 1367 aged 46 years.



## **Anniversaries and Memories**

### **John Poynter**

Modern media have a habit of making much of anniversaries of past events, partly perhaps to compensate for their now-limited capacity to explain the present or predict the future. Much attention was recently given to a coincidence half a century past, when President Nixon of the United States and newly-elected Australian Prime Minister Whitlam unexpectedly and separately established a formal relationship with mainland China. Those pages prompted personal memories, not certifiably accurate, of some consequent minor events in the 1970s.

When that decade began, I found myself increasingly involved in administrative rather than scholarly pursuits in the University of Melbourne. One of my new responsibilities was to welcome official visits from overseas universities—not, then, with the now-predominant purpose of commercial gain, but to explore possibilities of developing new scholarly relationships. Unexpected formal notice of an unprecedented visit by a group of Chinese officials and scholars prompted some careful preparation, including recruitment of an interpreter from the Department of Asian Studies. He proved redundant: on arrival the visitors insisted that only their own interpreter translate my words of welcome, and every subsequent statement from either side. Most of the proceedings were formal and protracted, if potentially constructive.

A second visit a year later proved even less relaxed. At home, in China, the Cultural Revolution, by then dominated by the Gang of Four, was coming to crisis, and the handful of officials leading the party insisted that none of the academics they accompanied understood English, and would make only occasional contributions in Chinese to topics under discussion. Nevertheless, all went smoothly, though slowly, until the day when, as a cultural diversion, we took the party to Ballarat, to visit Sovereign Hill, the splendid but then relatively simple reproduction of a gold-rush settlement. By special arrangement, a horse-drawn coach came down to the car park to take the party up the historic street. Our Chinese visitors were impressed, especially one obviously delighted lady. 'Ah! Mr Pickwick!' she shouted, blowing her cover. We later learned she was a former Professor of English, and hoped she was not punished for the misdemeanor of revealing she knew the language.

The next visit was different. The Gang of Four were under arrest, and the Cultural Revolution unravelling. The academics in the party were free to talk, even chatter, in English as well as Chinese, lamenting their periods of intellectual exile and physical labour under the demanding regimen of recent years. Some boasted politely of the scholarly treasures they had managed to save or salvage. Discussion foreshadowed the direct relationships between Chinese and Australian universities that were to follow. The party enjoyed Sovereign Hill, proving remarkably successful at the site where gold dust could be washed from a small stream.

Recalling that visit reminded me of more recent scholarship, some actively pursued at Sovereign Hill, exploring European-Chinese relationships on the gold fields. Part of the European resentment against the Chinese, amounting on occasion to violence and prompting legal discrimination, was that simple racial prejudice to which the White Australia Policy can be traced. Much, perhaps more, was provoked by their superior efficiency in gold-mining. Arriving in groups—many perforce via South Australia—working as teams, and maintaining genuine communities, they outshone most of the rest. Certainly, those happy-go-unlucky adventurers who strode along the road past the foundations of St Mary's (and the scores of pubs which surrounded it), on their way to Ballarat or Bendigo, only to trudge back exhausted and disappointed. A cartoon in *Australian Punch* in 1856 showed a tattered English gentleman kneeling in the street to blacken the shoes of a condescending prosperous Oriental. It is entitled *Gold the Leveller*.

Which reminds me of that cliché about a level playing field. But enough remembered . . .

### **Season of Creation: *A Home for All? Renewing the Oikos of God.***

Through liturgy, teaching, preaching and various events and resources, every September many churches around the world celebrate the *Season of Creation*: God's good gift of creation. The ecumenical steering committee from the World Council of Churches has provided this year's theme: ***A Home for All? Renewing the Oikos of God.***

Motivated by the initiative and energy of our parish's Climate Action Group, this year St Mary's is joining in this ecumenical call to focus on God's creation, and the privileges and responsibilities that are incumbent in our human vocation to till and keep God's garden.

*From the WCC Season of Creation Steering Committee* "The Psalmist proclaims "the Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." There are two statements of faith at the heart of this song. The first is that every creature belongs to the Earth community. The second is that the entire community belongs to the Creator. A Greek word for this Earth community is *oikos*. *Oikos* is the root of the word *oikoumene*, or ecumenical, which describes our 'common home', as Pope Francis calls it in *Laudato Si'*. Our common home, the Earth belongs to God, and each beloved creature belongs to this common *oikos*.

The *oikos* is a home for all but it is now in danger because of greed, exploitation, disrespect, disconnection and systematic degradation. The whole creation is still crying out. Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution the geography where we recognize God's creative power has continued to shrink. Today only scraps of the human consciousness recognize God acting to restore and heal the Earth. We have forgotten that we live in the household of God, the *oikos*, the Beloved Community. Our fundamental interconnectedness has been at best forgotten, at worst deliberately denied.

Sustaining just ecological, social, economic and political relationships requires our *faith, reason* and *wisdom*. By *faith*, we join the Psalmist in remembering that we are not stewards of an inanimate creation, but caretakers within a dynamic and living community of creation. The Earth and all that is, is not a given, but a gift, held in trust. We are called not to dominate,



but to safeguard. Faith gives us trust that God's Spirit is constantly renewing the face of the Earth. By *reason*, we discern how best to safeguard conditions for life, and create economic, technological and political architectures that are rooted in the ecological limits of our common home. Reason tells us that in this anthropocene age, ecological and social disintegration and exclusion cause the current climate crisis and accelerate ecological instability. Through *wisdom* we pay careful attention to natural systems and processes, to inherited and indigenous traditions, and to God's revelation in word and Spirit. Wisdom equips us to find the answers, and pathways to build green economies of life and just political systems that would sustain life for the planet and people.

During this liturgical Season of Creation, the ecumenical Christian family calls every household and society to repent and reshape our political, social and economic systems towards just, sustainable economies of life, which respect the life-giving ecological limits of our common home.

We hope that this Season of Creation renews our ecumenical unity, in our baptismal call to care and sustain an ecological turning that will ensure all creatures can find their home to flourish, and participate in renewing the oikos of God."

*St Mary's Vicar and Clergy*

## A Distant World

*July 13<sup>th</sup> – the Lectionary drew us to remember Sydney James Kirkby, pioneer of outback ministry and the Bush Church Aid Society. Triggered for me were memories of "outback ministry".*

Atherton Tablelands Parish meeting, 2015 –several voices: "What can we do about those out west struggling in the drought and with those erratic cattle export embargoes?"

Thus began our connection with Croydon, in far north west Queensland. Four hundred and sixty ks from Atherton – a five hour drive along the Savannah Way, over the very dry Einasleigh and Gilbert rivers; past Ravenshoe, Mt Garnet, Mt Surprise, Georgetown. On the other side of Croydon, 150ks to Normanton, and 220ks to Kurumba, on the Gulf. No clergy of any sort past Ravenshoe. For me, city born and bred, the distance seemed like fantasy-land; for the hardy folk out there, it was a stroll to the shops.



Why Croydon? In all, some family connections, but otherwise, pretty much a random choice. The town is typical of many in way-out or outback areas: a primary school, two service

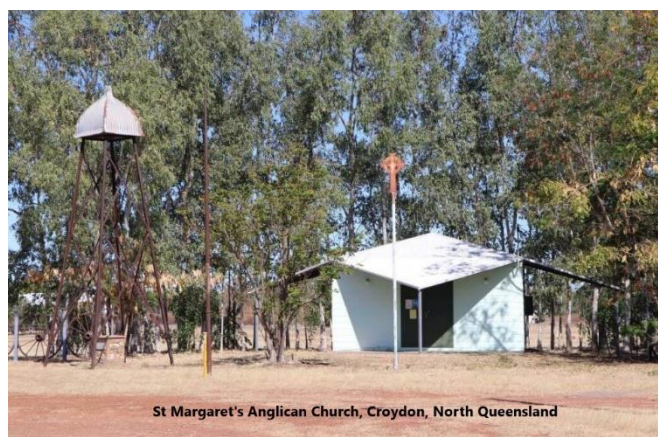
stations/general stores, a pub, local shire office, a police outpost, a historic centre, a nurse-run health centre, the Gulflander railway station, and not much else. Population of around 300 in the town and surrounding areas; main industry - cattle. In the winter months, there's a steady stream of tourists – not enough for a major tourist economy, but good for the local facilities.

All of this is a far cry from its gold rush days of the 1880s and 90s, when it was said to be the third largest town in north Queensland, with a population of around 7,000; four general stores, a bakery, a dozen hotels, a post office, bank, two newspapers as well as a school. The mining in the area at that time quickly drove out the Tagalaka people indigenous to this land. Today, about 17% of the population are indigenous.

First up in our Croydon connection, we raised \$3,000 to go to Croydon via Aussie Helpers. But fundraising lacks personal connection. What we wanted to do was to give encouragement to people who had been doing it tough– but we didn't want to go with the old imperialist notions of 'we have the goodies which we believe these poor people want and need' – No way! Our planning started with a long lead time of making connections via phone and email with local Croydon people plus an exploratory trip. We wanted to offer *ourselves* –and in consultation with them - bring something different to spark up everyday life. That could mean coming with some of the regular activities that we enjoy doing as church in connection with our local community – like our Mainly Music kid's program and our Messy Church. More than that, however, we were wanting to learn from the people living in Croydon and to find ways of establishing lasting connection. In terms of "outreach" or "mission", this wasn't an "evangelistic" trip; this was mutual encouragement. These were our thoughts:- *"My definition of mission is to see what God is doing in the world, then roll up your sleeves and join in! Let us catch up with the Holy Spirit who is already showing us in the world the many different ways there are to be human."* [UK Bishop Stephen Cottrell]

Still, a 10 hour round trip was not something we could manage regularly. In discussion with those in Croydon with whom we forged connections – church folk, Shire officials, the school principal, and other individuals, we settled on twice a year, roughly April and August/September – avoiding the wet. Between 6 and 12 parishioners volunteered to form a team. This was a great response – our parish lived on a very tight budget, so it meant each of us paying for our accommodation at the caravan park.

The pattern for the next few years became: three to four days in Croydon, commissioned out of the early Sunday Atherton Eucharist, then starting our Croydon time on arrival in the late afternoon with a Eucharist at the tiny church there. Early Morning Prayer at the church or out at Lake Belmore, followed by mornings at the school with our Mainly Music program adapted for different age groups; afternoons at the



St Margaret's Anglican Church, Croydon, North Queensland

well attended after-school centre, with games and a “Power Craft” program – craft activities based around a Bible story. (Parents and school had no problems with the gentle bits of religious input that came with these programs).



Our evenings were a mix of a community barbeque or pub meal, and joining in a community bible study which was held weekly at the school by one of the town dwellers. In addition, we had a “Just Us Girls” time– simply getting together with the womenfolk from the area, sharing our various life stories. The blokes got together with the blokes at cattle stations out of town. Yes – quite gender separate, but this was fitting for far north-west

Queensland, especially for the women, who did not have many opportunities for such get togethers. Sometimes we all visited a more remote property. One time we coincided our whole visit with the annual Croydon “Poddy Dodgers” – something like a rodeo carnival.

And we listened, observed and learned. Economy-wise, droughts severely impact cattle stations. Feed needs to be found; if not available naturally, must be bought; water becomes scarce. Costs increase; the health and condition of the livestock potentially decreases. The price of cattle can drop, as numbers need to be reduced. Toss in a trade embargo, when the cattle market then spins chaotically downward, it’s a time of great trial and for our farmers.

Everyday living can be complicated. Nurses (very competent ones!) handle day to day medical needs. The Flying Doctors come in for a weekly clinic. If you need surgery or ongoing serious



treatment, Atherton has the nearest hospital, but you’d probably need to move yourself into Cairns for anything not simple. Veterinary services aren’t local and come every few weeks for clinics. With no high schools within easy reach – and then those ones, at Georgetown and Normanton, only to year 10 – families send their children off to boarding school at year 7: Herberton, Charters Towers, Cairns, Townsville. Thankfully government subsidies helped cover costs for remote dwellers. Employment opportunities are limited, so after their high schooling, young people

often don't or can't return home to work. Trades people like plumbers and electricians aren't on tap – whilst they might do monthly runs to remote towns, anything urgent is a fix it yourself job. A big supermarket shop means an online pre-order to Atherton, with pick up arranged. Church services are irregular – the little Anglican church is the only one in town, also used by the RCs. We noticed that our services twice a year were the only Anglican ones there since 2016; and the RC's visited one to two months apart.

We learned about perseverance and resilience in the face of hardship. We saw the Spirit at work: the kindness and generosity of local folk; the joy of locals worshipping together; the fun and delight in community events like Poddy Dodgers that drew everyone in.

A personal learning note: for a naïve city goof like me, I asked the kids at the school: "Who lives on a farm?" Blank faces and shrugs. I was puzzled, knowing that only a few lived in town – until a teacher spoke up, "Who lives on properties or stations?" Lots of hands went up! As for what a mechanical bull was, I found out at Poddy Dodgers, much to my discomfort.

For those of us whose lives are lived in the city, this is a distant world; but a very real one. It's a world very much dependent on climate conditions, and on the politics of world trade. We have it very easy in our cities. We don't really have to think about where our food comes from, and we grumble about rising costs of food and waiting for doctor's appointments. In lockdown, we've had a bit of a sense about what it's like to not have a choice about going to church, but it's still a distant step away from really being on your own in the faith.

Spare a thought or two, and a prayer, for our remote brothers and sisters in their distant world.

*Rev'd Robyn Boyd (originally from Sydney, ordained in Melbourne in 2006), moved to Atherton from Melbourne in 2014, spending nearly 6 years there as Rector of the Tableland Anglicans Parish (covering the towns of Atherton, Yungaburra, Herberton and Malanda). Now retired from full-time active ministry, she is resident in North Melbourne.*