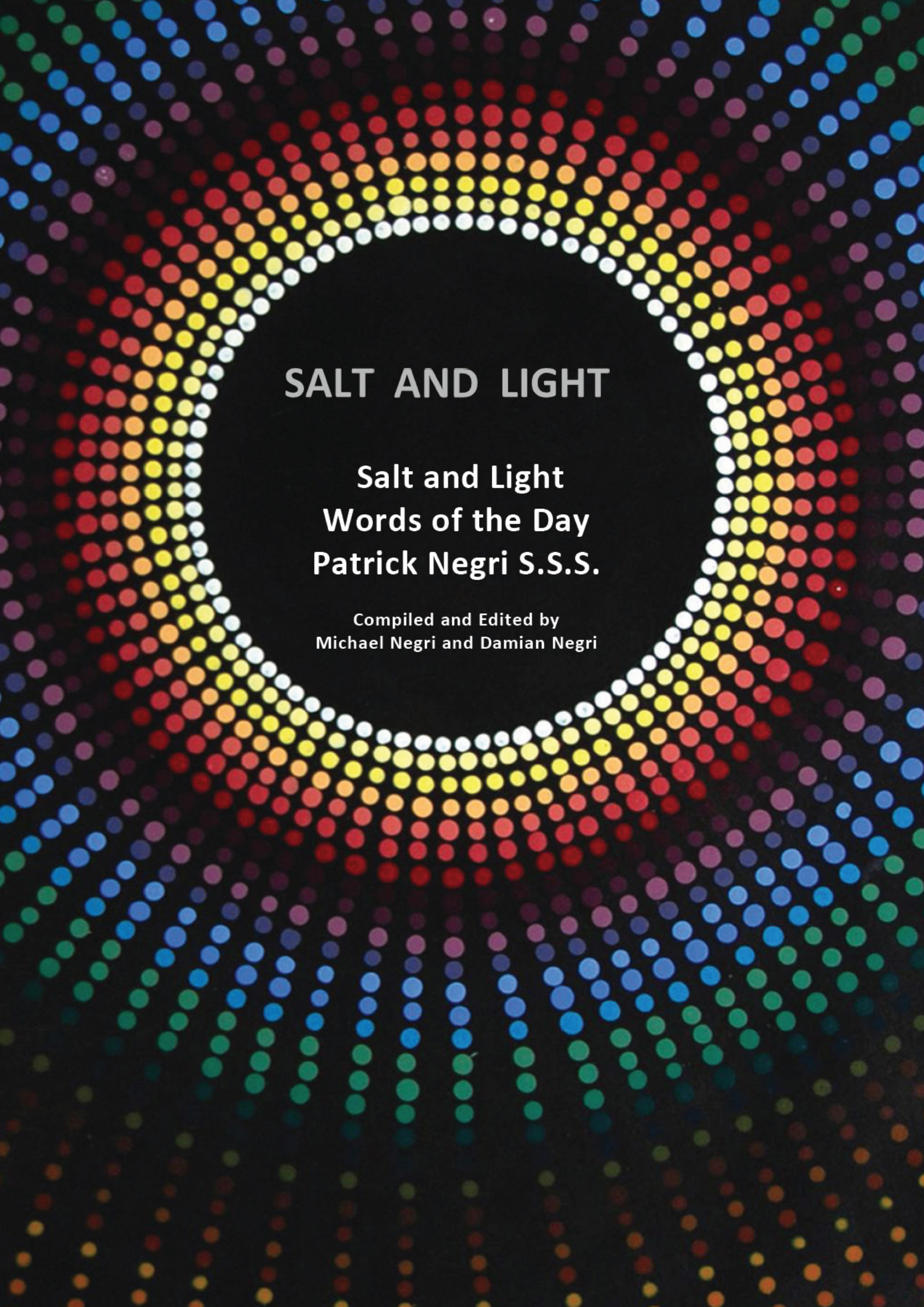
SALT AND LIGHT
Salt and Light
Words of the Day
Patrick Negri S.S.S.
Compiled and Edited by
Michael Negri and Damian Negri

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Patrick Negri SSS

Compiled and Edited by
Michael Negri and Damian Negri

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Foreword

Father Patrick Negri SSS was my identical twin brother who at sixteen years of age decided to enter religious life. This precociousness should have been a signal of the talent he was to display during more than fifty years of priesthood following his ordination in St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne in July 1960.

He proved to be a scholar, pastor, administrator, preacher and painter. His painting became, for him, a satisfying creative outlet whenever he had free time from his priestly duties.

Pat took his duty of presenting an inclusive and cogent liturgy of the Mass for the faithful very seriously. He also insisted, that ideally, a homily should not be any longer than seven minutes. He also felt that the homily should provide the laity with a clear and uplifting message that would enable them to follow Christ in their daily lives.

For this to happen, he determined that his study of the Gospels must be intense, and his knowledge of liturgical practice must be up to date. He also sensed that he must be aware of the signs of the times. This required the study of modern theology and an exploration of the writing of significant modern authors.

During his studies in the United States, Pat became more aware of liturgical scholars such as Walter J Burghardt and Nathan D Mitchell. Walter J Burghardt was managing editor of the influential Jesuit journal Theological Studies and Nathan D Mitchell was the editor of '*Worship*' in which he wrote a popular column entitled '*The Amen Corner*'.

Like Pat, Walter J Burghardt enjoyed more than fifty years as a priest and towards the end of his life he wrote his autobiography, '*Long Have I Loved You: A Theologian Reflects on His Church*'. It was there that he wrote:

> I am convinced that within the Catholic Church preaching remains at a low ebb, is less effective than it should be, primarily because preachers of the Word specifically those ordained to preach, either see the sermon as a product that comes cheap or, recognizing its high cost, are reluctant to pay the price. Effective preaching, preaching that moves hearts and changes minds, is costly because, like grace, it costs me my life. Literally. An outrageous thesis? Hardly. I preach at a great price because preaching costs me my mind, my spirit, my flesh and blood.[1]

Burghardt was writing of his experience in America but I expect many Catholics in Australia, who attend Mass regularly, may also find preaching in the Church at a 'low ebb and less effective than it should be'.

Nathan D Mitchell also had an influence on Pat and he eagerly awaited new editions of the journal '*Worship*'. Perhaps turning first to '*The Amen Corner*'. This influence is reflected in the number of times that he chose to quote him in his own homilies.

This selection of homilies covers the main liturgical seasons over cycles known as Years A, B, and C. In these cycles, the prescribed readings for each Sunday change.

Naturally, there is not a complete selection of homilies covering every Sunday. For example, Pat was usually on holiday during the month of January each year and towards the end of this selection there were times when Pat was not well enough to say Mass. There may have also been times when Pat did not save his homily to his computer.

The selection begins at the 1st Sunday of Advent in year C in 2006 and concludes on the Feast of Christ the King in Year A in 2011. Over this period of almost five years the reader will rarely discover where Pat repeats himself. Occasionally he does repeat a compelling story but to different audiences.

There are common threads. He recognises his own and our human frailty in being able to consistently follow Christ's message to 'love one another'. He shows much sympathy towards the plight of the outcasts of Society and refugees to this country. He speaks out against government failure to welcome all those in need.

1. Walter J Burghardt, cited in *At the Heart of the Liturgy: Conversations with Nathan D Mitchell's 'Amen Corners', 1991–2012*, edited by Maxwell E Johnson, Timothy O'Malley and Demetrio S Yocum (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 62.

My choice for the title of this book came to me as I was reading this collection for the third time. I came across Pat's homily for the 5th Sunday of the Year in ordinary time 2011. This is deep into the collection. It was here however that Christ's words jumped off the page for me—'you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world'. That's it! – I concluded that the title would be 'Salt and Light'.

The homilies are not necessarily, meant to be read sequentially. The reader can turn to any page and read the homily on that page only. To assist the reader, the prescribed readings for that Sunday are detailed under the heading of the page. Any good Sunday missal would allow the reader to reflect upon the prescribed readings and determine whether the homily makes adequate reference to them or not. Some readers may wish to read the homilies sequentially. There are no barriers to that course of action.

Placed in appropriate places throughout this volume are reproductions of some of Pat's paintings. They are all Abstract Expressionist in style. This was the form of painting that Pat preferred even though he could paint subjects in a representational manner very well.

Pat's Doctoral studies were focused upon the religious significance of the New York School of Abstract Expressionists. He researched major painters such as Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. His thesis had the sub title of 'Signs of Being' and Pat spent many hours examining the masterpieces of the abovementioned artists. His conclusion was that these major works were a search for the sublime and many of them had an underlying religious significance.

Abstract art however, is for the un-initiated, difficult to understand and I have noticed that the eyes of some of the people to whom I have shown Pat's works quickly glaze over with a lack of comprehension. His own suggestion for the gaining an appreciation of abstract art was as follows:

> Enjoy the lines, the shapes, the colours. Float around in them. Grow angry, sing with joy, remember lost loves, bask in the warmth of the new and above all, laugh. For the world is a sorry place without a chuckle.

My hope is that the reader will both enjoy this selection of Pat's homilies and the small selection of his works of art.

Michael Negri
Box Hill 2017

Acknowledgements

Recording or publishing an individual homily or even a complete volume of homilies is not a new idea. Examples can be found as far back as the sixth century with the sermons of St Gregory the Great. Then if we take a leap forward to the twelfth century we can find a homily given by Pope Callixtus II on the feast of St James which, although lengthy, has been recorded for posterity. Of course, one could go further back in time and give Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount' as an example.

Throughout the entire history of the church there would be a multiplicity of examples of homilies with intrinsic merit and scholarly works about important matters concerning faith and morals being published for distribution to the faithful.

Blessed Cardinal John Newman published his homilies while he was a member of the 'Oxford Movement' and continued to publish after his conversion to the Church of Rome.

In more modern times, in the United Kingdom, Monsignor Ronald Knox who was renowned for his homilies and often invited by organisations to speak on special occasions and on significant feast days, published a book of pastoral sermons. The renowned American preacher Fr Walter J Burghardt SJ has also published volumes of his own homilies.

So, why not publish a collection of homilies given by an Australian priest who was also an artist?

Combining homilies with a selection of the homilist's art work is also not new. In fact, Pat had collaborated with his cousin, Anne McLeish OAM in self-publishing a small volume entitled 'Love deserves the return of Love' in 2015.

In that booklet, specially selected homilies, relating mainly to social issues, were combined with colour plates of Pat's final group of paintings from a series entitled, 'Abstract Icons'. Also featured were his paintings relating to the 'Liturgical Seasons'.

The 'Liturgical Seasons' and 'Abstract Icons' series also feature in this volume of homilies.

Obviously, I must acknowledge that I am 'standing on the shoulders' of those who have gone before. I also acknowledge that I have received much help in the present time.

The Congregation of The Blessed Sacrament in Australia, which Pat joined at the age of sixteen and died a faithful member of the Order, placed no barrier in my way in the gathering the written material stored on Pat's computer. They also placed no time limits on me. We were both grieving the loss of a brother.

Then into the scene came my youngest son Damian who, with his considerable computer skills, sorted all the homily records into 'print date' order giving us a database of homilies roughly in chronological order. A first print run enabled us to discuss font sizes, formats, use of footnotes and citations and eliminate any obvious duplication. Through all this Damian persisted even when his father insisted on a certain font type and the need to have as many of the homilies as possible restricted to a single A4 page only.

He also participated in the long search for precise publication details of the many quotes Pat uses throughout his homilies. This proved to be a very time-consuming task and was incomplete when I decided to submit our rough first draft to two independent readers.

I chose Fr Graeme Duro SSS, Provincial Treasurer of The Blessed Sacrament Congregation and the historian Damien Cash who is also the Archivist for The Blessed Sacrament Congregation.

I knew that these men were both extremely busy in their professional lives but they both willingly undertook to read the work and provide comments and suggestions for change in the production. Each provided valuable comments and pointed out obvious errors.

Without Damien Cash's forensic evaluation, this volume of homilies would have been a much lesser product.

Whilst the readers were undergoing their work, which at times must have been onerous, our search for publication details of authors' quotes continued and once again help from others came in the form of gentle and helpful librarians in the State Library of Victoria, the Mannix Library, Melbourne and the St Francis' Library, Melbourne. They all managed to reduce the research time we needed to undertake.

Unsolicited help came in the form of an offer to provide good photographic copies of Pat's paintings by Justin Emery and Randall Lindstrom from their publication of *P.Negri – A Retrospective*. This offer was readily accepted.

My son's employer 'Law Image Services' also assisted by facilitating the printing & binding of review copies which included good quality colour plates, including the cover designed by Damian himself.

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1st Sunday of Advent 2006

Year C Jeremiah 33:14.16
The first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2
Gospel according to Luke 21:25–28, 34-36

Advent is a time of promise. God promises salvation—again and again, no matter what we have done.

For most human beings the profoundest experience of promise is in the marriage vows. A young couple with shining eyes, beating hearts and longing bodies, promise to be true to each other until death—no matter what. It is a promise akin to God's. That's why it is wrapped in religious ceremony. But human beings are weak and sometimes their promises are not kept. Those who do keep their promises—in the face of all kinds of difficulty—find happiness.

God, however, never fails to keep his promise. His love is everlasting and the kingdom of peace and justice which he intends to establish will come to be. Luke, the storyteller, uses apocalyptic language to express that, but prior to this passage he has told the very human story of Jesus, the man who always kept his promises; Jesus, the man who makes the journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem where he meets his fate; Jesus, the man who welcomes sinners and eats with them; Jesus the man who comforts widows and widowers; Jesus the man who identifies with the poor and heals the sick; Jesus the man who forgives those who fail to keep their promises, the adulterers; Jesus the man who is about to give his life for us. The apocalyptic language, therefore, is meant to be a shout of joyful accomplishment—much like Paul Collingwood's shout when he achieved his double century in Adelaide yesterday.[1]

Advent, then, is a time of joy, not a time of sadness. It is a time when we realise the magnitude of God's love in sending his son to us. It is a time when we realise God has come unexpectedly in the middle of the world's night to give us peace.

May we who struggle to find meaning in world events have a sense of God's presence over these days—even in the midst of turmoil and confusion. May the texts of hope written long ago engender hope and make us shout with joy at the coming of the Lord.

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

1. Paul Collingwood an English Cricketer, 2nd Test, Adelaide, 2 December 2006 in 2006 – 07 Ashes Series.

2nd Sunday of Advent 2006

Year C Baruch 5:1-9
The letter of St Paul to the Philippians 1:3–6, 8–11
Gospel according to Luke 3:1–6

As a born and bred Australian I fear the desert. Like most of the population, I have lived most of my adult life close to the sea. So, what images come to me as I reflect on the desert where God's word is proclaimed?

The first image that comes to me is the product of watching television. I see heavily-armoured khaki tanks spewing fuel and churning up clouds of dust as they manoeuvre their way across Middle-Eastern sands—the very deserts referred to in today's text. The second is an image of Aboriginal people sitting on the red earth of Australia, living in conditions I would never tolerate as I maintain my high standard of living close to the sea. The third is the chilling one of our detention camps where, as one resident wrote 'we have forgotten what happiness and laughter means'.

All these images are disturbing and could easily become the subject of nightmares. But it is the second Sunday of Advent and I am called to repentance. The call of God in the desert today is to fill up the valleys of injustice and to level the hills of selfishness so that's God's kingdom of peace may be established and that I may wait in good conscience for the coming of the Lord.

But there is another desert, isn't there? It is the desert of my indifference. How come, for example, has it taken five years for there to be any marked protest about David Hicks' imprisonment in solitary confinement in Guantanamo without charge? What political chicanery has convinced me that a case of a presumed terrorist needs to be exempted from the due process of law? As Robert Fisk has remarked:

> 'Terrorism' is a word that has become a plague on our vocabulary, the excuse and reason and moral permit for state—sponsored violence—*our* violence—which is now used on the innocent in the Middle East ever more outrageously and promiscuously.[1]

However, for all the darkness around me, I am assured today that God's word is proclaimed in my desert. It is a call to renewal and refreshment. It is a call to allow myself to be an instrument of peace and not destruction. It is a call to make clear in the desert a highway for my God.

1. Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 464.

A New Day



A New Day, 2006, acrylic on canvas, S.S.S. (Aust.)

Christmas 2006

Year C Isaiah 52:7–10
The letter to the Hebrews 1:1–6
Gospel according to John 1:1–18

I read the most extraordinary statement in a book by Eduardo Galeano just the other day:

> The gospel according to Saint Matthew says Jesus had forty-six ancestors; forty-one men and five women.
>
> One of the five women, everyone knows, conceived without sin, But the others in his lineage were: Tamar, who dressed up as a prostitute so she could have a child with her father-in-law; Rahab, who plied the oldest trade in the city of Jericho; Bathsheba, who was married to another when she begat Solomon in King David's bed; and Ruth, who was not of the chosen people and was thus not deemed worthy of the faith of Israel.
>
> Three sinners and one scorned. The damned of the earth were the grandmothers of the son of Heaven.[1]

Galeano's understanding of the Immaculate Conception is defective, but the fact that he sees the damned of the earth as the grandmothers of the Son of Heaven is not far from the mark. John, in his gospel today says that 'the Word became flesh' and by that he means that the Word entered fully into our human condition. That means that from now on we can meet God only in and through other human beings. As Nathan Mitchell puts it, 'From now on, God can be known only *in* and *as* one's neighbour, only *in* and *as* the leper's sores, the widow's grief, the victim's rage, the prisoner's despair, the child's disconsolate tears'.[2] So, as we gather today for our Christmas dinner, let's have patience with each other. We are all sinful human beings in need of love and affection. The reaching out in friendship across the table groaning with the weight of the good things of the earth which God has provided is our way of saying we are truly glad God has entered our human history. May his enduring love for each of us bring us to a better frame of mind and so bring peace to a grieving world.

1. Eduardo Galeano, *Voices of Time* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 289.
2. Nathan D Mitchell, *Eucharist as a Sacrament of Initiation* (Chicago Ill., Liturgy Training Publications in cooperation with the Northern American Forum on the Catechumenate – series 4, no. 2, 1994), 86–87.

Feast of the Holy Family 2006

Year C The first book of Samuel 1:20–22, 24–28
The first letter of John 3:1–2, 21–24
Gospel according to Luke 2:41–52

The Sunday within the octave of Christmas is dedicated to the Holy Family and we are called to think about the values of family life.

The question 'What are our values?' has become a political rallying point, of course and we sometimes have an unrealistic view of what families are all about. Christmas time, for many families, is not a time of peace and love, but a time of conflict. The ever-increasing road toll during the holiday season also means that Christmas time is a time of great sorrow for many. On the whole, however, the view that all Australian families are places of love, companionship and communication is obviously flawed. John Brack's famous painting *The Car* makes this point. He depicts the 'typical' Australian family: mother, father and their two children—a boy and a girl. They are going for a drive to experience the Australian bush. They never get out of the car. They merely *look* at the landscape. What is particularly striking is that none of the characters communicates with the others. They are all looking in different directions. In the Heritage Exhibition at the National Gallery of Canberra, this painting was presented as one of the ways we view ourselves as Australians.

In our day, as well, we must acknowledge that the very concept of what constitutes a family has changed. The nuclear family is not the only gathering of human beings where fulfilment can be found.

What does the Holy Family have to say to all of us? First, the scriptures make it clear that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were not free of suffering. They experienced homelessness, persecution and severe poverty. They were asylum seekers in fact.

This means that God has entered the very fabric of our human existence and we can find him wherever we happen to be and in whatever community of like-minded individuals we have discovered along the way. As Kim Beazley put it as he retired from office, 'Family is everything!'[1]

May the New Year find us at peace with ourselves and those with whom we live!

1. Kim Beazley cited by Staff Reporters of theage.com.au, on being defeated by Kevin Rudd as federal leader of the Australian Labour Party, *The Age*, 4 December 2006. Source website: http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/rudd-oustsbeazley/2006/12/04/1165080846679.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap1 [accessed: 13 January 2018], paragraph 2.

Feast of the Epiphany 2007

Year C Isaiah 60:1–6
The letter of St Paul to the Ephesians 3:2–3, 5–6
Gospel according to Matthew 2:1–12

The magi came from Persia – the present-day Iran. They were astrologers. The appearance of a new star in the heavens had great significance for them and so they travelled to Palestine to pay homage to a new born king.

It is a charming story. The crib we put up at Christmas time would be incomplete without the magi. But beneath the charm there is a vein of horror. Herod, the king of Judaea, anxious to remain in power, resolved to massacre all the male babies born from the moment of the star's appearance. The blood of babies on Middle-Eastern sands is therefore an inescapable accompaniment to our worship of the Baby of Bethlehem. That is a present-day reality, isn't it? But, as Robert Fisk points out: astonished Christians soon discover that 'Loving Jesus doesn't help to make sense of the Arab-Israeli conflict'.[1]

In fact, our Christian faith is often astonished by the tensions between races and nations. War, the grab for power and land are all foreign to the message the new-born king came to bring. 'Peace on earth. Goodwill to all peoples', the angels sang!

What can you and I do about it? There is an Israeli journalist called Amira Hass who tells the story of her mother, Hannah. In 1944, Hannah was being marched from a cattle train to the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. She and the other women with her had been ten days on the train. They were sick, and many were dying by the roadside. Hannah noticed that some German women were standing there just looking at them. This 'looking from the side' without trying to help in any way is what the world often does, what the church often does, when faced by human tragedy. Amira decided she couldn't act like that when confronted by the injustices done to the Palestinians. So, she moved to Gaza and now lives there so that she can report objectively on the suffering of a dispossessed people.

It is an example worth thinking about. The magi went home by a different route on discovering Herod's intent. We, too, could resolve to seek a new way of acting in 2007.

1. Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 576.

5th Sunday of the Year 2007

Year C Isaiah 6:1–8
The first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians 15:1–11
Gospel according to Luke 5:1–11

They made their living fishing. You don't give that up too easily, do you? Yet, under the influence of Jesus, they abandon their boats, their partners and their families to wander around the country preaching.

Had they taken leave of their senses? Simon, the only disciple who speaks in this episode, doesn't *appear* to have gone mad. When asked to put the boats out again he reminds Jesus that there's not much point since they had toiled all night long and caught nothing. But, once again under the influence of Jesus, he agrees to the request. Then there is that extraordinary catch of fish—unexpected, overabundant.

What message is there for you and me?

I think it is this: God calls us and transforms us in the ordinariness of life. He comes to us when we get up early to go to the office; when we wash our dishes or change nappies; when we prepare the meals, and go shopping; when we do the ploughing, or mow the lawns; when we teach our children or study for exams; when we go to the beach or play cricket; when we watch television; or listen to music; when we go the theatre; or read a novel. God is present in all these things because in the person of Jesus he has entered our world and transformed it.

That's the point of the enormous catch of fish. An ordinary, run of the mill experience becomes miraculous when the disciples realise that God is there in the ordinariness, calling them to renewed life.

Hugh Prather in his *Notes to Myself* writes:

> If I had only . . .
> forgotten future greatness
> and looked at the green things and the buildings
> and reached out to those around me
> and smelled the air
> and ignored the forms and self-styled obligations
> and heard the rain on the roof
> and put my arms around my wife
> . . . and it's not too late.[1]

1. Hugh Prather, *Notes to Myself* (Utah: Real People Press, 1970) first page of 150 unnumbered pages.

6th Sunday of the Year 2007

Year C Jeremiah 17:5–8
The first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians 15:12, 16–20
Gospel according to Luke 6:17, 20–26

I was at the cricket the other day and watched as thousands of people disobeyed the ruling on the Mexican wave. Even a few people in the members where I happened to be seated lifted their arms in solidarity with the crowd. I thought it could possibly have been a crowd like this that Jesus addressed his words: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.' In fact, this crowd of ordinary folk having fun, trying, in other words, to discover some meaning in life, is very like the church. I was seated there in a position of privilege as a clergyman and the thousands who disobeyed the ruling are like those millions around the world who say to those in authority, 'We will obey the rules provided they make sense.'

Then I thought of other crowds: the screaming crowds in Iraq as another bomb explodes; the sprawling Masses of impoverished individuals in Africa who plead with the Western world for food and medicine. I thought of the crowds of workers marching up New York's Fifth Avenue on Labor Day, past the Cardinal Archbishop—vested in scarlet—who paid little heed until the Mayor came along. I thought of the march of people that went on for several hours some years later as people protested their support for Israel. And I thought of the millions and millions who are victims of war, racial prejudice and injustice. All these are part of the world which Jesus saw when he said: 'Blessed are you, who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'

What does all this say for my worship today? It says, I think, that I must learn to see the good in human beings. The words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are full of love. Even those to whom he addresses the words 'Woe to you . . .' are loved—in the hope they will see the error of their ways and be converted.

'Blessed are you . . . blessed are you . . . you. . .' wonderful people. You are the object of God's universal love and for you I lay down my life – is basically what he said as he broke bread and shared a cup of wine at the last meal of his life.

This is what we proclaim as we break bread and drink from the cup in his memory.