



Blessed Be

September 2017

Welcome to this Spring edition of *Blessed Be*. As always, you make this publication possible. Thank you! We invite your contributions at any time. So please contact us at helenmacauley@gmail.com.

*Our first contribution today is a piece written by **Tricia Gemmell** reflecting on Ember Days, one of which we've just passed:*

Ember Days

If you have a Columban Calendar on the wall, as I do, then you may have noticed that the 3rd March this year was Ember Day. So was the 1st September. Those of you with long memories may recall that Ember Days were once observed on a Wednesday, Friday and Saturday around the beginning of each season, as days of fast and abstinence. After Vatican II it became the task of bishops to determine how Ember Days were to be celebrated in their local dioceses. In 2008 the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference decided that the Australian Church should observe Ember Days on the first Fridays of Autumn and Spring each year.

What does this mean? According to a press release at the time, the bishops saw in them an opportunity to 'focus on the environment, climate change, and the responsibility of our stewardship of the world's resources'. This makes sense given that Ember Days came into being as an alternative to pagan harvest festivals, and surely had a focus, at least in early times, on our dependence on creation for our food and livelihood. In a society that has lost touch with the rhythms of nature, Ember Days seem like a good way to remind us of our dependence on the earth.

The Liturgy Office of the Sydney Archdiocese offers this on its website: 'Ember Days will focus on the environment and the responsibility of our stewardship of the world's resources. They will help us connect our intercession for favourable conditions with a conversion of heart in relation to our care of the earth. For this reason, the bishops requested that emphasis be placed on doing penance, on fasting and abstaining in connection with these Ember Days. Fasting and abstaining from meat will encourage us to restraint in our exploitation of natural resources.

A day of penance will express our solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, especially those who suffer through famine and the inequitable distribution of the world's goods'.

Since these words were written, we have more reason than ever to want to celebrate Ember Days. What an opportunity for Australian Catholics to deepen their commitment to care for our common home. But no one seems to know anything about it. Is this something we could fruitfully take up in our parish communities?

*From **Consulata (Consy) Sakaria** we have this poem:*

Invisible life that sustains ALL,
I awaken to live everything in every waft of air.
The air is life, greening and blossoming.
The waters flow with life.
The moon, when waning is again
Rekindled by the sun,
Waxing with life once more.
The stars shine, radiating with life-light.
All creation is gifted
With the ecstasy of God'

***Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen**, trans. Gabriele Uhlein.*

***Sheila Hawthorn** has contributed a poem, **The Journey** by Mary Oliver:*

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice -
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
'Mend my life!'
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But, little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,

determined to do
the only thing you could do -
determined to save
the only life that you could save.

I, Helen, recently came across this poem that I thought you might like to read:

We are one.
We are completely one within life energy.
Our love will continue.
Our creation will also continue.
Our lives will be eternal together with eternal life energy.
The hope you have been seeking is breathing in your life.
Make your life and the world beautiful by colouring them with that life energy.
That is the living Tao.

*From **Living Tao** by Ilchi Lee*

*Finally, we have a reflection by **Elizabeth Lee** on her journey to becoming a spiritual director. As it is a long piece, I have decided to serialise it. Here then is the first part:*

Stepping Out, Stepping In; Stepping In, Stepping Out: A four-year labyrinth Walk as I trained as a spiritual director.

Each year my Spiritual Director asks me to identify a theme for the year. Back in 2013, when I commenced the 'Listen into Life' Training Program in Spiritual Direction my selected theme was 'Take nothing for the journey' and in many ways it encapsulates the invitation that was offered as I embarked on my journey of transformation.

Last July, I reflected upon how my own journey of faith had deepened over the past four years. I chose to go to Canisius Centre for Ignatian Spirituality, knowing that I could use the labyrinths to aid my reflection. Over that week I was also preparing my own labyrinth mandala – a symbolic representation of my sacred journey. The labyrinth mandala was a delightful way in which to order the chaos, offer a path of prayer, seek refuge, heal wounds, conceive dreams, nourish insights, cultivate deep longings, transform consciousness and allow the wandering soul to centre, to find a home. And so I offer my faith journey of the past four years- the Labyrinth Mandala: Stepping Out, Stepping In; Stepping In, Stepping Out.

Four years ago, I entered this labyrinth in springtime; new life abounded. It was as if I was being given the opportunity to see and hear the world, and particularly the people I encounter in the world, with new eyes and new ears. Life was a gift and entrusted to me, to be mind-fully observed and savoured, without thinking or judgment.

As I reflected on the Gospel of Matthew during a solitary retreat in May 2013, my reading of the Gospel drew me to a new place of intimacy with Jesus. It was as if the words of the Gospel were not just read, not just proclaimed but experienced such that they transformed

my heart and offered me the courage to continue the journey of life, knowing that I am the beloved in union with the Beloved. In this spring time, I was coming to a deeper understanding of compassion, presence and forgiveness, as well as discovering my place in the world as an interpathic listener. Part of this deepening involves being drawn into deeper union with the Divine that permeates all of creation and dissolves boundaries between self and other. I am connected to the pain and joy of the other. Their pain is my pain; their joy is my joy. Separateness and exclusion were being seen as illusions. The universal call is to wholeness.

There was a profound shift in my understanding of the post-resurrection invitation from Jesus: 'Whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven'. I can choose to forgive those who have hurt me and through such choices, not only set the perpetrator free but also set free myself, or rather allow God to free me.

As I meandered along the labyrinth I experienced the springtime flourishing into the abundance of summer as new relationships formed. The spiritual direction community developed into a highly significant, warmly welcoming, secure home. Over the four years I was cared for, carried, embraced, nurtured and loved by the community that gathers in the tranquil and idyllic surrounds of the St Joseph's Spirituality Centre at Kincumber.

*Alison Healey sends some **wisdom on war and peace**:*

'Peace, if it ever exists, will not be based on the fear of war, but on the love of peace. It will not be the abstaining from an act, but the coming of a state of mind.'

Herman Wouk. Foreword to Winds of War.

'Science has brought forth this danger (nuclear destruction), but the real problem is in human minds and hearts. We will not change the hearts of others by mechanisms, but by changing our hearts and speaking bravely. We must realise we cannot simultaneously plan for war and peace.'

Albert Einstein, New York Times Magazine. June 23, 1946.

'Now, unless all of us live with and for one another, we shall all be destroyed together. This new situation demands a corresponding answer. It is not enough to find new institutions; we must change ourselves, our characters, our moral political wills.'

Karl Jaspers, German philosopher. The Future of Mankind

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