

Star MESSSENGER

Dear Brothers

Greetings from Auckland, New Zealand where I've been attending meetings of the Trust Board and enjoying the hospitality of the Marcellin-Royal Oak Community: Denis Turner, Peter Horide, Don Teixeira and Tim Leen. Kevin Wanden and Damien Shutt, both in transit, have also been staying there. I've also had the opportunity to visit Richard Dunleavy in his new home at Little Sisters of the Poor, Herne Bay, and Joe McCarthy, in his temporary home at Elizabeth Knox Rest Home. Both have settled and are in fine spirits.

2024 is well underway and the following are some dates to keep in mind for the months ahead.

Provincial Council

This year we have increased our face-to-face, extended meetings to four. The dates and locations, where relevant are:

21-24 February:	Lomeri, Fiji
22 March:	via Zoom
26 April:	via Zoom
23-25 May:	Laumanasa House, Tenaru, SI
27 June:	via Zoom
26 July:	via Zoom
21-24 August:	Apia, Samoa
27 September:	via Zoom
25 October:	via Zoom
19-23 November:	Baucau, Timor Leste.

Province Forums

There are two online Forums scheduled for this year. The first will be **Friday 17 or Saturday 18 May**, to allow for various time zones and commitments. The second will be **Friday November 8 or Saturday November 9**.

Province Jubilee Celebrations

New Zealand: Sunday, 8 September in Auckland.

Australia: Sunday 15 September in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne

Communities are encouraged to have their own local celebrations, especially if Brothers are unable to attend the larger celebrations.

Community Leaders' Meetings

Two are scheduled: **Wednesday 17 April** and **Wednesday 14 August**.

Other Dates to Note

First Professions:

Saturday 16 March at the International Novitiate, Tudella, Sri Lanka.

25th Anniversary of the canonisation of St Marcellin: 18th April.

Religious Brothers Day: 1 May.

Mittagong Brothers Retreat: 22 - 28 Saturday.

Br Kevin Wanden

I mentioned earlier that Kevin was recently staying at Marcellin Royal Oak. This was after his return from the *International Mission Commission Meeting* in Rome (see photo below). He arrived in Australia today and is now settling into Daceyville, where he is to be Community Leader. He will start his new role as Province Secretary on Monday, his first day of work at Mascot. Good wishes to Kevin for these significant changes and new challenges!



International Formation Colloquium

Seven of our Formators have recently attended a meeting at MAPAC. The purpose was for those directly involved in formation across the four different Administrative Units in Asia-Oceania to meet, discuss ideas and share insights. One particular task was to align the programmes so that when Novices or Scholastics come together at the International Centres, they aren't repeating material they have covered earlier. Our Province Co-Director of Initial Formation, John Hazelman, led the contingent. Reports are that it was a helpful, enjoyable and fraternal gathering!



SOTS Brothers
pictured here:
John Hazelman
Matthew Green
Tony Caddy
Rod Thomson
Ray Arthur
Greg McDonald
Jone Seduadua

Day of Remembrance

You might remember from last year that the Province has set aside the first Friday of Lent as a **Day of Remembrance and Prayer** for those who have suffered childhood abuse. This year, the date is **16 February**. Peter Rodney and Peter Horide are preparing material for our commemoration.

Prayers

- Fr Kevin Bates SM, recently deceased.
- Br Ralph Arnell
- Br Joe McCarthy

Br Peter Carroll
Provincial

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:22-40

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” ³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Reflection:

The feast of the Presentation of Jesus is presented in the context of the Jewish requirements at that time for the mother to undergo a ritual of purification after giving birth due to the belief that menstrual blood made the woman unclean. This story is unique to Luke, yet it enables Luke to clearly give supporting evidence that even before the Christian mission started in Jerusalem, Jesus himself was dedicated at the very site of the Temple that had been destroyed. Jerusalem, in Luke, is a central motif for the emerging Christian story. The introduction to the story has pointed out two aspects that need to be considered: Joseph and Mary had gone to Bethlehem for a census, and according to Jewish custom Jesus had just been circumcised on the eighth day (2:21). It would make sense that being in Bethlehem, Luke has Joseph and Mary make the pilgrimage to the Temple for the purification before returning to Nazareth. In dedicating Jesus as the first male son, with a pair of turtledoves or pigeons, Luke is showing clearly that from the beginning Jesus’ life was lived in accordance to the law of Moses (cf. Ex 13:2; Lev 12:8). Considering the arising of the Christian rite of baptism as a sign of welcome into the emerging community, Luke is aware that this ritual was not present for Jesus, so Luke had to immerse Jesus’ welcome into the Jewish community in line with the rituals that were in place at the time. It is a reminder that in our own baptism, we were bought to God by our own parents, and raised within our own traditions.

FRIDAY GOSPEL REFLECTION FOR COMMUNITY PRAYER

The story then introduces us to two figures found nowhere else in the Gospel tradition: Simeon and Anna. Luke uses these two figures to provide the reader with a 'prophetic' overview of Jesus' life and mission. Simeon's encounter has two aspects. First, Jesus is the promised Messiah that would be the source of salvation for all peoples. Second, Jesus' status as Messiah is not what is to be expected: it would be a Messiah that would be opposed and rejected, one whose ultimate death will be a sword that will pierce Mary's soul. As such, the presentation of the Lord reminds us of the challenge that people collectively, and individually, encounter when they are confronted with Jesus' story. Why would God's own Son be sent to earth simply to be rejected and convicted of being a blasphemer and rebel, a threat to not only the established religion but also to the values of the society at that time, where everything had a place within the social order that needed to be maintained and protected. Simeon's insight challenges us to reflect on how we see Jesus: do we truly see him as someone who has come to offer the voice of salvation to a world that is in crisis? Can we like Simeon say that in our encounter with the person of Jesus that we have found that peace that enables to see our own life in its full perspective? That is, have our lives been a light to our friends and family such that they too have come to encounter a glimpse of God's love for humanity in action?

Finally, the Evangelist introduces the figure of Anna. Here, once again, we are introduced to Luke's world where at the centre is a theme of justice. Simeon's role is balanced by that of Anna, who, herself,

is a model of piety, having lived a long life as a widow in the service of God's plan for her life. She, too, recognises the presence of God in the birth of Jesus, something that was not plainly visible at that time but could only be understood with the gift of hindsight. It is a reminder to believers that we are called to live a life of faithful service, no matter our circumstance, and that rather than being bitter or short-sighted one needs to be open to the possibility of the presence of God.

As we contemplate this story, let us be reminded of our own faith journey, one that began with our own birth, our own baptism, and our own prophets who have been our own source of inspiration. Let us be grateful for those people who have seen in us the great things we do in our ordinary life that have brought joy, love, peace, hope, and justice to our own world. Let us also be grateful for those who have guided us on our own journey of faith and keep open for us new and revelatory ways that God continues to work in our lives and in our world.

5th Sunday of Ordinary Time | 4 February 2024

Scripture passage: B Mark 1:29-39

Jesus, who came into the world to announce and bring about the salvation of the whole person and of all men, shows a particular predilection for those who are wounded in body and spirit: the poor, the sinners, the demon-possessed, the sick, the outcasts. Thus, He reveals Himself as a doctor of both souls and bodies, a good Samaritan of man. He is the true Saviour: Jesus saves, Jesus heals, Jesus heals.

“You will always have the poor and the sick with you,” Jesus warns (cf. Mt 26:11), and the Church continually encounters them on her path, considering sick people a privileged way to encounter Christ, welcome him and serve him. Healing a sick person, welcoming him, serving him, is serving Christ: the sick is the flesh of Christ.
Pope Francis

PASSION FOR LIFE

Wherever Jesus is, there is life. This is what one joyfully discovers who turns to the dear pages of the Gospel writer Mark and finds oneself with that Jesus who cures the sick, welcomes the needy, heals the alienated and forgives sinners.

Where Jesus is, there is love for life, interest in those who suffer, passion for the liberation of every evil. We should never forget that the first image that the Gospel stories offer us is that of a healing Jesus. A man who spreads life and restores what is infirm.

That's why we always find around him the suffering of humanity: the possessed, the sick, the paralysed, the lepers, the blind, the deaf. People who lack life; those who are in the shadows, as Bertolt Brecht said.

Jesus' healings have resolved almost nothing in the sad history of people. His saving presence hasn't resolved their problems. They need to keep fighting against evil. But we have discovered something decisive and hope-giving. God is a friend of life, and passionately loves happiness, health, joy and fullness for God's sons and daughters.

It's concerning to see how easily we've gotten accustomed to death: the death of nature, the destruction by industrial pollution, the death on our roads, the death through violence, the

death of those who don't make it to birth, the death of our souls.

It's unbearable to observe how indifferently we hear the horrible statistics that tell us of the death of millions of hungry in the world, and how passively we contemplate the silent but efficient and constant violence of unjust structures that drown the weak in their marginalisation.

The pains and sufferings of others concern us little. Each one seems interested only in their own problems, their welfare, or their personal security. Apathy overtakes many. More and more each day we run the risk of making ourselves incapable of loving life and of sympathising with those who can't live happily.

We believers mustn't forget that Christian love is always interested in life, in the passionate seeking of happiness for our brother and sister. Christian love is the attitude that is born in whoever has discovered that God so passionately loves our life that God has been capable of suffering our death, in order to open for us the gates of an eternal life where we forever share in God's love.