

# Star MESSENGER

Dear Brothers

## Lent

Lent is here again! Having lived through so many, we know much about the Season: its length and structure, its origins and history, its symbols and liturgical celebrations, its discipline and laws, its meaning and intent. But for us and all Christians, it's not knowledge that's most important, but it can help. What's most essential for a meaningful commemoration of Lent is our personal commitment. Lent will only be relevant if we make it so in our own lives; if we consciously decide to commit to it. How people do this will vary. Much will depend on age, culture, capacities and our own spiritual needs. So the question – **how will you/I make Lent relevant and meaningful this year?**

Garratt Publishing has produced a 2024 Lenten programme and among the contributors is our own Paul Creevey. Some copies will be delivered to Communities in the near future, and you could always purchase more if required. You might like to use the programme for community prayer and reflection.

## Scholastic Brothers

There are a significant number of temporary professed Brothers commencing or continuing professional studies this month at a number of Universities and Colleges around the region.

**Divine Word University, Madang:** Carlvin and Fereole will resume studies in third year, and in the second semester, Cyril will begin the last 18 months of his degree in Religious and Social Studies.

**ICFP Baucau:** Jacinto will be beginning his fourth and final year of teacher training. Isac, Adelino and Gaspar start third year, and Julio, Ronaldo, Dionisio, Filomeno, Salvador, Juvencio and Clementino will commence their programme of study.

**Notre Dame of Dadiangas University, General Santos:** Steve Vaea will finish his studies at the end of the first semester.

**Notre Dame de Marbel University, South Cotabato:** Petero Navuku commences his final full year of studies.

**Solomon Islands National University:** Epalle is ready to commence the fourth year in his education degree.

**Corpus Christi College, Suva:** Anitelea is beginning his teacher studies.

**University of the South Pacific, Suva:** Karalo Ratuyada is undertaking some preliminary studies.

Other Brothers in various parts of the Province are also pursuing further or higher studies. We wish well all of our student Brothers!

## Provincial Council Meeting

Next week is the first of our 2024 extended, face-to-face meetings. This is to be held in Fiji at Lomeri, from 21-24 February. Unfortunately, Peter Horide is still suffering for a persistent case of flu and will need to join us by Zoom. Arrangements will give us the opportunity to meet with the local Brothers, visit the Suva schools, hear of plans for the Eco-Spirituality Centre at Lomeri and enjoy the tropical environment. Kees van der Weert and John Hazelman are covering all aspects of the Council's visit. Thanks to them! If you wish to raise any matters for consideration, then please email Kevin Wanden, me or one of the Councillors.



**Br Peter Carroll**  
Provincial

**Scripture Reading: Matt 9:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

**Reflection:**

The context for this reading is that having just begun the season of Lent with a requirement to a consideration for fasting, the church puts before us this conversation, recorded in Matthew, between Jesus and John the Baptist’s disciples regarding fasting. The suggestion is that whereas John the Baptist’s followers are fasting, Jesus’ disciples do not take the action of fasting seriously enough. The disciples of John the Baptist, like good Jews, placed a high value on fasting – as a means of humbling oneself before God and a bemoaning of one’s situation (and as a means for deepening prayer and for promoting almsgiving). However, Jesus’ response is aimed toward clarity around the purpose of fasting. Fasting, in Lent, should not be a self-centred attitude that is simply for show or a time for mourning or self-aggrandisement, but should reflect a preparation for the upcoming feast of Easter, when Jesus’ death takes him back to his Father.

Jesus is reminding John the Baptist’s disciples that there will come a time when the bridegroom is gone, taken away, and that is the appropriate time for mourning and fasting. Jesus is pointing to the forthcoming time when he himself will be taken away. When that happens there will be a time of true mourning and fasting. However, if one encounters the bridegroom as truly present then there is a new offer of an intimate relationship with God. When one experiences the presence of God then a season of festival has begun – just

like a wedding feast. And in such a situation, the old emphasis on fasting is now somewhat out of place – a new joyousness is all around, and old conventions were no longer able to ‘take’ it.

Jesus introduces the listener to a radically new way of seeing him that is beyond normal expectations and reaches beyond all our hopes and dreams. Jesus is saying that by experiencing his presence then we are drawn into an intimacy with God that is imaged as that between a bridegroom and their bride. The environment that Jesus is promoting is of a relationship with God that reflects the love of a bride and groom. In this image one finds that one should cultivate a sense of joy and thanksgiving. It points out that as human beings we are made for joy and intimacy. However, the reality is that because of our mortality there will be a time for mourning and fasting in recognition that what we once had can be easily lost. Yet, in that loss there is still, after the time of mourning and fasting, a time for celebration and great joy. Lent leads us to Easter, it prepares us for Jesus’ death, but also recognises that at the end of that death there awaits a great hope: a return to the loving embrace of the God who made us.

7th Sunday of Ordinary Time | 18 February 2024

**Scripture passage: Mark 1:12-15**

*In the season of Lent, the Holy Spirit also pushes us, like Jesus, to enter the desert. It is not a physical place, but an existential dimension in which we can be silent and listen to the word of God, "so that true conversion may be accomplished in us." Do not be afraid of the desert, look for more moments of prayer, of silence, to enter into ourselves. Do not be afraid. We are called to walk in the paths of God, renewing the promises of our baptism: to renounce Satan, all his works and all his seductions. The enemy is there, lurking, be careful. But never dialogue with him. We entrust ourselves to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary. Pope Francis*

**Listen to the Call for Conversion**

"Repent, because the kingdom of God is close at hand". What could these words mean to a man or woman of our day? No one wants to hear a call for conversion. We think right away about something costly and barely agreeable: a rupture that would bring us to a life hardly attractive and desirable, full only of sacrifices and renunciation. Is it really like that?

To begin with, the Greek word that is translated as *repent* really signifies *get thinking, change the focus of our life, readjust the perspective*. Jesus' words could be heard this way: "Look to see if you don't need to revise and readjust something in your way of thinking and of acting, in order to fulfill within yourself God's project of a more human life".

If that's the way it is, the first thing we need to revise is whatever blocks our life. Changing ourselves is freeing life by eliminating fears, selfishness, tensions and slaveries that keep us from growing healthy and in harmony. A conversion that doesn't produce peace and joy isn't authentic. It's not drawing us near to God's reign.

We must then check to take care of the roots. Great decisions are no good if we don't nourish their sources. We aren't being asked for a sublime faith or a perfect life; we're only being asked to live by trusting in the love that God has for us. To change ourselves isn't to push ourselves to be saints, but to learn to live by welcoming God's reign and justice. Only then can a true transformation begin within us.

Life is never complete or completely successful. We need to accept what's unfinished, what humbles us, what we don't get right in correcting. What's important is to maintain the desire, to not give into discouragement. To change ourselves isn't to live without sin, but to learn to live from forgiveness, without pride or sadness, without feeding the dissatisfaction about what we ought to be and aren't. Thus does our Lord say in the book of Isaiah: "*By conversion and tranquility you will be freed*" (30,15).