

# Star MESSSENGER

Dear Brothers

***“All of humanity’s miseries are derived from not being able to sit alone in a quiet room”.***

This statement was written by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) and published posthumously in his book of reflections, entitled ‘Pensees’.

Pascal was a child prodigy who invented the first mechanical calculator at age 19. His early work and achievements were in Mathematics and Physics. He wasn’t overtly religious, however on 23 November 1654, sometime between 10.30pm and 12.30am he had an intense religious experience. He immediately wrote a brief note to himself which began: *“Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the scholars...”* and concluded by quoting Psalm 119:16: *“I will not forget thy word. Amen.”* He seems to have carefully sewn this document into his coat and always transferred it when he changed clothes; a servant discovered it only by chance after his death. This piece is now known as the *Memorial*.

From this point, Pascal undertook a two-week retreat annually and turned his attention to philosophy and theology. ‘Pensees’, mentioned above, is regarded as his most influential theological work. Not only is it regarded as a brilliant theological reflection, but it’s also viewed as a masterpiece in French prose, described by some as containing the finest pages in the French language. The book wasn’t completed before his death, but colleagues put together the numerous scraps of paper found after he died, and a first edition was published in 1669.

Returning to the opening sentence, Pascal suggests that our inability to find solace in our own company—when we sit alone in a quiet room—leads to misery. In other words, when we avoid introspection, reflection, and contemplation, we become vulnerable to suffering. This may have

been obvious to Pascal in the seventeenth century, but I suspect that it’s truer (if that’s possible) today. In our world of mobile phones, social media, and constant connectivity, we tend to fill our lives with noise, distractions, and external stimuli, leaving little room for quiet self-reflection. The constant buzz of activity can prevent us from truly understanding ourselves and addressing our inner struggles. Pascal’s observation highlights our discomfort with silence and stillness. Instead of embracing moments of solitude, we seek external contacts, entertainment, or busyness. Yet, it is in these quiet moments that we can confront our thoughts, fears, and desires.

Sitting in a quiet room offers many positives to our life. It allows us to observe our thoughts and thinking patterns. It gives us a chance to reflect on our behaviour, and ideas. It allows us to question ourselves, our biases, opinions and motivations. And of course, it allows us just to calm down and be. Conversely, our inability or unwillingness to do this, means we never do any of these things. We can remain ignorant, arrogant and tense.

The quote touches also on life questions. When we avoid facing our inner selves, we avoid the opportunity to consider existential questions: *Who am I? What is the purpose of life? What do I truly value?* These questions, left unanswered, can contribute to our sense of unease. Additionally, by emphasising *“humanity’s problems,”* Pascal suggests that this struggle is universal. It affects us collectively as a species. Our inability to sit alone and confront our inner world reverberates through society, influencing our relationships, decisions, and well-being. In essence, Pascal invites us to embrace solitude, engage in reflection, and find comfort in stillness. He suggests that by doing so, we can alleviate some of the misery that plagues humanity.

Pascal’s reflection holds particular significance for Christians and



Religious. His statement, which encourages introspection and quiet contemplation, aligns with the need for prayer and contemplation. Jesus himself gave us the example of seeking moments of solitude to connect with God. He went into the desert, he took a moment alone and he taught his disciples how to pray. The “quiet room” becomes a sacred space for communion with the Divine. From the earliest Christians times, hermits, monks and nuns have retreated to the “desert”, literal or figurative, for extended periods of solitude. Spiritual seekers intentionally embrace silence to deepen their relationship with God. Pascal’s idea resonates with this tradition.

Pascal’s insight underscores the importance of attentive listening, particularly to the voice of God. Encountering God’s Word requires focused attention and openness to the Holy Spirit’s leading. In the “quiet room”, we can better discern God’s voice. Just as Elijah encountered God in a gentle whisper, we seek divine guidance when we remove the need for external distractions. In our recognition of our human sinfulness and brokenness, sitting alone in a “quiet room” allows us to confront our inner struggles, turmoil and seek forgiveness. It is a space for repentance and spiritual healing.

All of this is probably “preaching to the converted”! However, even if our life is specifically dedicated to “seeking God”, it’s important to have reminders that silence, reflection and prayer are essential if we are to maintain our focus on the truly important. This is of course part of the purpose of Lent. It’s an annual reminder. Pascal’s words resonate with our Lenten journey - the call to seek God more purposefully. The “quiet room” can be anywhere – bedroom, chapel, church, beach, the bush - but it is, above all, a commitment, and a way of life.

## Congratulations New Brothers

Congratulations to our newest professed Brothers:

**Br Dedimo Soares**  
**Br Edgar da Costa Salgueiro**  
**Br Manecas dos Santos**  
**Br Simon Mendonca Maia**

They, and Novices from the Marist District of Asia, took their **first Vows** last Saturday after completing their two-year Novitiate and being approved and accepted for profession. Br Darren Burge and Br Greg McDonald represented the Province and Darren received their vows.

They are now having a home holiday in Timor Leste and will start the first stage of their Post Novitiate formation at MAPAC in June.



EDGAR, GREG, SIMON, DEDIMO, DARREN & MANECAS



MANECAS, SIMON, EDGAR, DARREN, DEDIMO, GREG & BOMES TUKANA

## Br Gerald Burns

After a recent period of respite at Molloy House, Br Gerald will become a permanent member of the Campbelltown community. He enjoyed his years at Randwick but realises that Molloy House now provides the level of care he requires. Good wishes as you settle into new digs, Gerry!

## Br Zaulino Ruas

Many of you will know Ruas. He spent an extended time in Australia for health reasons that also coincided with the Covid period. He decided not to renew his vows and has returned to his family in the District of Viqueque to further discern his future. I thanked Ruas for his six Marist years, and he expressed his gratitude for all that he has received from us. I wished him well on our behalf.

## 2024 Province Directory

Yesterday, Bianca distributed the updated **2024 Province Directory** to the email addresses of all Brothers in the Province. The annual updating takes considerable time and effort. It's important that any changes in your contact details (phone numbers and email addresses) are notified to her as soon as the change is made. Since she published yesterday, she has received notification of 5 changes. Please check your entry and send her an immediate email to [bianca.buda@marists.org.au](mailto:bianca.buda@marists.org.au) if it isn't accurate.



## 2023 Memorial Cards

In 2023, nine of our Brothers passed away. These have now been listed for your continuing prayers on our annual memorial card. These have been sent to communities in Australia and New Zealand. We will provide others through the Provincial Delegates.

## Welcome to Our Visitors

The Econome-General, Br Jorge Gaio and Br Goyo Linacero from the General House, are currently in Sydney. They are familiarising themselves with the Province and its financial structures and arrangements. Br Chris Wills is acting as host and guide.




## Communications

Last week Darren introduced our new Communications Officer, Gayatri Nair. She is already immersing herself in our Marist tradition and learning much about the Star of the Sea Province. One of her early tasks will be to revise our websites. The Province website hasn't been touched since it was launched. It will cover the entire province. At this stage, Australia and New Zealand will maintain separate web presences; primarily for continuing professional standards' issues.


Br Peter Carroll  
Provincial

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 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/star-of-the-sea-province-marists-of-champagnat>



Scripture Reading: John 10:31-42

<sup>31</sup>The Jews took up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup>Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" <sup>33</sup>The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?" <sup>35</sup>If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—<sup>36</sup>can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? <sup>37</sup>If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. <sup>38</sup>But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." <sup>39</sup>Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. <sup>40</sup>He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. <sup>41</sup>Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." <sup>42</sup>And many believed in him there.

**Reflection:**

In the case of John the Baptist, he is first encountered in the Prologue: 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John' (εγένετο 1:6). His mission was a human mission for as Raymond Brown points out his 'existence is in contrast to the eternal being of the Logos (ἦν 1:1, 2, 4)'. Even though Moses and the prophets in various OT passages show that they are also sent by God to perform a specific task, and God communicates with them (Ex. 3:10-15; Isa. 6:8; Jer. 1:4-10), John the Baptist is never called a prophet. His task, as the Prologue explains, is to give testimony to the light (Jn 1:7; cf. 1:15). He is more than a witness, he gives testimony (μαρτυρεῖν: Jn 1:8, 15, 32, 34:3;26; 5:33) and his words are a testimony (μαρτύρια: Jn 1:7; 19; 5:34, 36). The narrative later tells us that all that John the Baptist has said about Jesus turns out to be true (Jn 10:41), as scripture cannot be nullified (Jn 10:35). In the Synoptics, John the Baptist, has a very different role, as evidenced that in the Synoptics John is seen as the prophet Elijah returned as was expected in Malachi 3:23. As Barrett alludes, it was "natural early Christians should identify John the Baptist with Elijah. The more so, since if the Messiah had appeared, it was necessary to find Elijah somewhere. John the Baptist's behaviour and appearance suggested Elijah redivivus... This identification of John with Elijah was necessary to the apocalyptic framework within which the Synoptics were written and clarifies the issue of the ministry of Jesus". This is further evidenced in the Synoptics, where, except Luke, Jesus is baptised by John. In the Fourth Gospel, the Evangelist rejects this Elijah motif (Jn 1:21-22), as John does not have Jesus baptised by John the

Baptist but John the Baptist acts as testimony to Jesus being baptized directly by the Spirit (Jn 1:32-33). Accordingly, in the Fourth Gospel John's baptising is only mentioned in passing (Jn 1:25, 26; 28, 31, 33; 3;23, 26) as his objective 'is that Jesus be revealed to Israel' (Jn 1:31). Again, John the Baptist's role is part of the Evangelist's overall plan that Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT prophecies about the coming of the Messiah (Jn 1:23).

In this reflection by John, the Jews hit a blank wall as regards Jesus' existence. How could a human being make himself out to be God? All of us have to ponder the same reality – God and man in one person! They needed to learn, and so do we, how to be open to divine grace. However, they were blocked by the limited knowledge that they had, but we, too, might be are blocked by our adherence to the truth and validity of science and forgetting that faith has a strong element of trust in human testimony to the lived human experience of God. Maybe, like the Jews in this passage we have lost the sense of wonder at the works that God does through the gift of others.

The miracles that Jesus was working showed that there was something special about him. They were a part of what the Father had given him to do. They were an indication of a mysterious relationship that existed between the Father and the Son. The Father is in him and he is in the Father. This knowledge calls for a renewed sense of wonder and astonishment. The challenge is to all readers of this passage: are we all too quick to reject and slow to learn about the possibility of God's presence in the unexpected?

Palm Sunday | 24 March 2024

**Scripture passage: B Mark 14:1-15, 47**

*We have entered Holy Week. Jesus takes the cross, that is, he assumes the weight of the evil that this reality implies, the physical evil, the psychological evil and above all the spiritual evil. And we? What should we do? It is shown to us by the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who is also his first disciple. She followed her son. She assumed her own share of suffering, darkness, confusion, and walked the path of passion, keeping the lamp of faith lit in her heart. With God's grace, we too can do this journey. And, along the daily way of the cross, we meet the faces of so many brothers and sisters in difficulty: let us not pass by, let our hearts be moved with compassion and let us draw closer. At this moment, like the Cyrenean, we can think: "Why me?" But then we will discover the gift that, without deserving it, has been given to us. Pope Francis*

**THE SUPREME GESTURE**

Jesus counted on the possibility of a violent end. He wasn't naïve. He knows to what he exposed himself if he keeps insisting on the project of God's reign. It's impossible to seek so radically a worthy life for the poor and the sinners, without provoking the reaction of those who aren't interested in any change. Certainly Jesus isn't suicidal. He's not seeking crucifixion. He never wanted suffering either for others or for himself. All his life was dedicated to combat it wherever he found it: in sickness, in injustice, in sin or in hopelessness. That's why he's not now running after death, but neither does he have second thoughts.

He will keep welcoming sinners and the excluded, though his action irritates in the Temple. If they end up condemning him, he also will die as a delinquent and excluded, but his death will confirm what his whole life has been about: complete trust in a God who doesn't exclude anyone from God's forgiveness.

He will keep announcing the love of God for the least, identifying himself with those who are the poorest and most despised of the Empire, however much it causes problems in the surroundings of the

Roman governor. If one day they execute him in the punishment of the cross, reserved for slaves, he too will die as a despised slave, but his death will seal for ever his faithfulness to the God who defends victims.

Full of God's love, he will keep offering salvation to those who suffer evil and illness: he will give welcome to those who are excluded by society and religion; he will gift God's forgiveness freely to sinners and lost people, who are incapable of returning his friendship. This saving attitude, that inspires his whole life, will also inspire his death.

That's why for Christians the cross attracts us so much. We kiss the face of the Crucified One, raising our eyes toward him, listening to his last words... because in his crucifixion we see the final service of Jesus to the Father's project, and the supreme gesture of God handing over God's Son out of love for all humanity.

For Jesus' followers, to celebrate the Lord's passion and death is a moving gratitude, a joyful adoration to the incredible love of God and to the call to live as Jesus did, in solidarity with those who are crucified.