

*St John the Baptist Catholic Church, Ferntree Gully,
Melbourne*

*Reflection for the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B,
September 5th 2021 and Father's Day*

Happy Father's Day!

My goodness where has this year gone! Yes this weekend we again celebrate Father's Day when of course we especially remember our fathers, those living and those now in eternal life. We also remember today our important father figures, those whose paternal love and support we hold dear to our hearts.

We also offer prayer, and seek God's consolation, where there have been struggles and challenges in that relationship, we are reminded that in this life, relationships don't always travel in a trajectory that we might have wished. I acknowledge the real pain for many in what should be the most precious of relationships. Yet with trust in God's love for us, we can still give thanks for those we love and those who love us, unconditionally and pray healing for others.

As we are well aware there are many restraints upon us as we seek to recognise celebratory times and events during a worldwide pandemic. Life in 'lock-down' takes on a certain abnormal routine and life in lockdown has been difficult, even life changing for many. I, like you, have been cut-off from normal routines and the seeing of friends and family as I would in 'normal times'. During these trying times I have tried my best to remain close to God and closer to those that I love in the best way I can and in the circumstances I find myself. I've have been

perhaps more sincere in my devotional time, more earnest in my more limited means of contact with people and finding small things to be grateful for every day. Part of my routine has been to read and consume media that is supportive and uplifting. I thought today to share with you a movie I watched recently called “Soul.” It is an animated film by the Pixar Company and tells the story of a musician called Joe who unexpectedly dies. His soul enters the “Great Beyond”, at least that’s what it’s called in the movie, now Joe is certainly not ready to die and the story flows from this point of unpreparedness to a point of readiness. Now the plot is primarily directed towards children and has to be said is lacking a certain biblical perspective and aspects of the Catholic tradition that you and I might hold dear. However it is, I think, a modern parable about life that can be appreciated by children and adults alike. We are reminded what it is to slow down and enjoy the simple blessings of life, be content and appreciate more the people we love and those that are perhaps a bit more difficult to love. I think that in this imaginative journey we can catch a glimpse of the fundamental foundations of our tradition, that aspect which holds that every person is unique and special. I also think it is a useful pointer to God’s purpose for life and very much lends itself to this week’s liturgy of the Word as various characters in the movie seek their own personal healing and those for whom they care.

All our texts this week point to healing, early Christianity saw our passage from Isaiah as a prediction of Jesus’s healings. Our Psalm sings praise for the healing power of God. Our passage from the letter of James situates this truth of the Gospel with that of God’s preferential option for the sick, the disadvantaged, the poor, and the persecuted, and therefore we learn that all

Christians are charged with the healing of these primary concerns. Now taking these points and turning to an interpretative breaking open of our Gospel passage, Saint Mark gives fresh meaning to the story by directing us to a deeper understanding of the Christian journey. The surface story of miraculous healing gives way to an important understanding of what is happening to those following Jesus and their own personal growth in relationship. What has happened is that they have been on a journey of the soul, the soul... that immaterial aspect or essence of a human being, that aspect which in concert with our unique genetic code, nurturing and life experience, confers individuality and humanity, that part of us that partakes of the divine and that which we trust and hope will survive the death of our bodies.

I was very much reminded of these mysterious aspects of our existence on recently being at the bedside of my sister in law Christiane on the day of her death. As she struggled to breathe we prayed in trust and the hope towards that which she had fundamentally trusted in all her long life. And now, despite the struggle for her soul to break free, she was at peace, ready and prepared. Over the last two years of her illness all she ever asked for was our prayers and even when she could no longer speak she clasped her hands together and offered them up to us. I remember many years ago she had shared with us how her faith had grown over time, it was never a 'struck down on the road to Damascus' experience but more like God calling her at a particular point of readiness for further growth in holiness. Now her years of preparation found her ready to take this next step in trust and hope.

Like the stated proposition in that great Australian song 'We are one, but we are many'... the idea and hope that despite difference and diversity, there is in our world a deeper unity that we all share. Despite cultural differences and historical gaps people are people everywhere, we are one, and as Catholic Christians we would hold that this is because we are all created in God's image and that we all share in the Body of Christ. Life is a journey of the soul and our gospel story today symbolises a somewhat similar journey in faith as of my sister in law, Christiane, except this is happening to Jesus's disciples some thousands of years ago. They have been initially somewhat deaf to Jesus's Word and earlier in the gospel were as yet unable to fully express their faith in Jesus. However eventually at *Caesarea Philippi* it begins to dawn on them who this Jesus really is, you may recall that this was when Saint Peter makes his great confession of faith; and so they too will reach the point where finally their ears will be opened, their tongues will be released, and they will speak plainly in truth and trust, but even at this time, and just like our own lives, they are not fixed and perfected human beings, there will be ups and downs in their continued growth in relationship with God.

Returning to the question of the journey of the soul, I hope, like me, you trust that we all have within us a great soul. In saying this I am always cautious of claiming some unique understanding of the immaterial, however I live with the hope that when we let our souls grow we can become different people altogether, people that God, always the ultimate respecter of freedom, created us to be. We are relating to others out of our soul at those moments when our lives are governed by compassion, when everyone is our brother or sister, when we

want to give of ourselves without concern of cost, when we are able to carry the tensions and challenges of life in balance with the good, and if need be where we would willingly die for another, that is the time when our arms and our hearts would want nothing other than to stretch out from the cross to embrace the whole world and everyone in it, just like the one we claim to follow along the Way. I know that for many these remain peak moments however this is my journey and it is yours, it may not always provide happiness but it will provide a sense of purpose, and in trust, ultimate meaning. God bless you and today especially God bless our Fathers.

Saint Joseph, patron saint of fathers, pray for us.