



St Anthony's Parish

67-75 EXFORD ROAD, MELTON SOUTH, 3338.
P.O BOX 2152 MELTON SOUTH 3338
TEL: 9747 9692



St Bernard's Parish

61 LERDERBERG STREET, BACCHUS MARSH 3340
TEL: 5367 2069
OUR LADY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, KOROBET
309 MYRNIONG-KOROBET ROAD 3341

7th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-YEAR A

19th February 2023

PARISH PRIEST: Fr Fabian Smith
ASSISTANT PRIESTS: Fr Lucas Kyaw Myint and Fr Samuel Kapani

ST ANTHONY'S PARISH

Parish Secretary: Lesley Morffew

Admin Assistant: Judy Johnson

Parish Office Hours: Mon 9.00am-12.00noon

Tue 9.00-4.00pm Wed 9.00-5.30pm

Thu/Fri 9.00-4.00pm

Email: parishsecretary83@gmail.com

Website: www.stanthonyofpadua.com.au

St Anthony's School **Principal:** Damien Schuster

Wilson Road, Melton South 3338

Phone: 8099 7800

Email: principal@sameltonsth.catholic.edu.au

Website: www.sameltonsth.catholic.edu.au

St Lawrence of Brindisi School **Principal:** Bill Hill

31 Waterway Boulevard, Weir Views, 3338

Phone: 8099 6699

Email: principal@slweirviews.catholic.edu.au

Website: www.slweirviews.catholic.edu.au

ST BERNARD'S PARISH

Parish Secretary: Dolores Turcsan

Admin Assistant: Judy Johnson

Sacramental Coordinator/ Bookkeeper: Naim Chdid

Parish Office Hours:

Tue 9.00am-11.30am Wed & Thu 9.00am-1.00pm

Email: bacchusmarsh@cam.org.au

Website: www.stbernardsbacchusmarsh.com.au

Facebook link:

<https://www.facebook.com/stbernardsbacchusmarsh>

St Bernard's School **Principal:** Sr Mary Sarah Galbraith

19a Gisborne Rd, Bacchus Marsh VIC 3340

Phone: (03) 5366 5800

Email: principal@sbbacchusmarsh.catholic.edu.au

Website: www.sbbacchusmarsh.catholic.edu.au

St Francis Catholic College- Melton (Years 7-12)

Principal: Marlene Jorgensen **Phone:** 8099 6000

109-141 Bulmans Rd, West Melton, 3337 **Website:** www.crcmelton.com.au

If you need a Priest in the case of a genuine emergency please call 0403 435 471

ST ANTHONY'S PASTORAL COUNCIL

Naim Chid	0437 004 790
Lillian Christian - Vice Chair	0400 441 257
Stephen Fernandes	0439 743 533
Amy Honrade	0457 042 695
Natalie Howard - Chair	0492 947 201
Rose Ma'ae	0460 672 571

EX-OFFICIO: Fr Fabian Smith PP, Fr Lucas Kyaw Myint,
Fr Samuel Kapani, Damien Schuster and Bill Hill
Council Secretary: Judy Johnson

ST BERNARD'S PASTORAL COUNCIL

Shane Cook -School Advisory Board	0419 999 052
Peter Farren	0418 594 501
Peter Kennedy - Secretary	0407 778 119
Moir Ross	0400 675 056
Aaron Russell - Chair	0401 927 502

EX-OFFICIO:

Fr Fabian Smith PP, Fr Lucas Kyaw Myint and Fr Samuel Kapani
Sr Mary Sarah Galbraith

SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE OFFICERS

Coordinator/Officer: Godwin Barton (0425 734 449) **Officers:** St Anthony's - Lorraine Tellis 0437 658 423 & Geetha Vincent 0478 112 996
St Bernard's - Margaret Love (0437 247 779) Evana Miesen & Ron Geurts

Items for the newsletter must be submitted by Tuesday 6.00pm. Please email judyparishnews@gmail.com or call 0414 007 009

Judy Johnson's office hours: Mon-Wed 9am-1pm

MASS AND DEVOTIONS

ST ANTHONY'S MELTON SOUTH 20/2/2023-26/2/2023

MASS TIMES:

Monday 20/2	6.30pm
Tuesday 21/2	9.30am & 6.30pm
Wednesday 22/2	
Ash Wednesday	7.30am
School students attending	9.30am
	7.30pm
Thursday 23/2	9.30am
Friday 24/2	9.30am

Rosary at 9.00am before 9.30am morning masses



Sunday Masses

Saturday 25/2	5.00pm
Sunday 26/2	8.30am & 10.30am

Confession available 30 minutes prior to each Mass.
No Confession on Monday.

ST BERNARD'S BACCHUS MARSH 20/2/2023-26/2/2023

MASS TIMES:

Monday 20/2	No Mass
Tuesday 21/2	7.30am
No Holy Hour	
Wednesday 22/2	
Ash Wednesday	School students attending 9.30am
Providence	11.00am
	6.30pm
Thursday 23/2	7.30am
Friday 24/2	7.30am
Saturday 25/2	9.00am

Sunday Masses

Saturday 25/2	St Bernard's School Eucharist Commitment Mass	5.00pm
Sunday 26/2		8.30am & 10.30am
(Rosary in the Chapel 10.00am on Sundays)		
Confession available 30 minutes prior to each Mass.		

OUR LADY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

KOROBET

MASS TIMES

VIGIL	25/2	6.30pm
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PARISHIONER'S FIRST COLLECTION/SECOND COLLECTION

Parishioners who normally give cash each weekend for the collections,
if they wish to donate, are now able to go to the link below and make their payments online.

The link to the St Anthony's Parish is: <https://bit.ly/CDFpayMeltonSouth>

The link to the St Bernard's Parish is: <https://bit.ly/CDFpayBacchusMarsh>

Please put your name and thanksgiving number if you know it as a reference. Thank you.

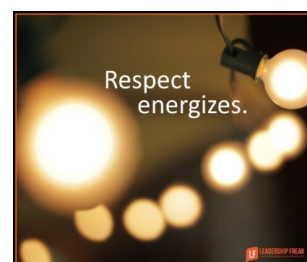
REFLECTION 7th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – Sr Mary Fermio rsj

People travelling overseas often visit famous Cathedrals, temples, mosques, shrines and holy places where God is worshipped and where prayer and spiritual rituals take place. These places are treated with great respect, in some, requiring ritual washing and removal of footwear.

Paul reminds us we are God's temple and the temple of God is sacred – to be treated with respect. Jesus tells us that others are to be treated with love and respect, even if they strike us. We don't seek vengeance, pay-back, tit for tat, we are even to love our enemies. We might say: "Jesus, that seems a bit over the top. Love my ENEMIES!"

This love is to be like God's love – you are seeking good for them, wishing them no harm, praying for them.
We don't necessarily have to LIKE them, but we must LOVE them.

So who are my enemies? Sometimes my greatest enemy is myself.
So how do I respect myself? Love myself? Care for myself? Feed myself?
Nourish my spiritual and mental health? Use this week to do a self-check-up and to pray for myself.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown

PARISH & EVENTS NOTICES

NEWS FROM THE PARISH OFFICES

FAITH FORMATION

Our Faith Formation sessions begin at 7.00pm every Tuesday at St Anthony's Church of Padua, 67-75 Exford Road, Melton South (Age 16+) Faith Formation topic this week: What is the Mass.

PASTORAL CARE APPEAL 2023

Last weekend we held a special collection for the Pastoral Care Appeal. St Anthony's collected \$756.00 and St Bernard's collected \$355.00. Thank you for your generosity.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

World Day of Prayer 2023 Service will be held at St Anthony's Church, Friday 3rd March at 10:30am. Friendly cuppa and light luncheon provided after the Service. ALL WELCOME.

LENTEN PROGRAM-NO GREATER LOVE: A BIBLICAL WALK THROUGH CHRIST PASSION

Experience a deeper understanding and appreciation of God's immeasurable and unconditional love for you. We will walk over five sessions with Jesus step by step from the garden of Gethsemane to Mount Calvary as we reflect on the Old Testament prophecies, messianic expectations, biblical symbolism and historical context to shed light on the Mystery of Christ suffering and death. Sessions held at St Anthony's.

Sessions will be held on Fridays after Stations of the Cross

Session One Friday 24th February: The prayer of the Agony: Jesus in Gethsemane.

ST ANTHONY'S

ASH WEDNESDAY MASSES- 22nd February will be held at St Anthony's on Wednesday 22nd February at 7.30am, 9.30am & 7.30pm.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER Dear Parish Family,

As World Day of Prayer 2023 is soon approaching, we will be having a leaving collection to raise money for our sisters and brothers in Taiwan, next weekend 25/26 February. The money raised will go towards supporting and educating marriages of mixed cultures, strengthening their faith and family unit. I trust you will give as generously as you have in past years. Marian Muller

PRIME TIMERS Our February lunch will be Tuesday 28th to Stoneys Hotel, 59 Grant St. Bacchus Marsh. Start at 12 o'clock. Looking forward to seeing you there. Enquiries contact Ineke 0400 120 401 or ineke49@yahoo.com. RSVP to confirm numbers by Friday 24th.

LENTEN PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

A Lenten program for children of the parish will be running during lent after the Sunday 10:30 Mass for 5 weeks, starting on the 26th February. The program will follow a Montessori model, which uses hands on materials to guide reflection on the deeper spiritual meaning. Children from ages 6-12 years old are invited to attend. Please add your child's details to the clipboard in the Church foyer.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH 2022 On behalf of my family, I would like to thank each and every one of you who helped in any way make 23 people happy to be among others rather than being on their own on Christmas day. God bless you all, I pray that the next one will be just as successful or better. Elizabeth Underwood

ORDINATION TO THE 'PERMANENT DIACONATE' OF STEPHEN FERNANDES AT ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, ON SATURDAY, THE 11TH OF MARCH, 2023 AT 10.00 AM

I, Stephen Fernandes along with my family, cordially invite the parishioners of St Anthony's Parish to join us in the Eucharistic celebration to give thanks to God, as I exercise my formal participation in the Ministry of Diaconate for the first time, on Saturday, the 11th of March, 2023 at 5.00 pm.

Your prayers and presence will be appreciated. (Refreshments will be served after Mass in the Church Hall). Please add your name to the clip-board provided in the foyer for catering purposes by Sunday, the 5th of March.

You are also invited to attend my 'Ordination to the Permanent Diaconate' at St Patrick's Cathedral

ST BERNARD'S

ASH WEDNESDAY MASSES- 22nd February

Ash Wednesday Masses will be held at St Bernard's on Wednesday 22nd February at 9.30am and 6.30pm. Providence 11.00am.

ST. BERNARD'S SOCIAL EVENT!

Come and join us as we celebrate Shrove Tuesday with Pancakes (a variety of toppings available) and a cuppa in the Parish centre, followed by a short Lenten talk.

When? Tuesday 21st February

Time? 6.00pm

Cost? Gold coin donation

For catering purposes, please fill in the attendance form in the foyer. Hope to see you there!



Project Compassion Sunday 18 & 19 February

Please take home a Project Compassion box or a set of donation envelopes to support Caritas Australia this Lenten season and help support vulnerable people around the world, now and **For All Future Generations**.

With your support, Caritas Australia has been able to support vulnerable communities around the world to tackle poverty, food security, education, water and sanitation and disaster risk reduction to build a better future for all.

Together, we can help vulnerable communities face their challenges today and build a better tomorrow

For All Future Generations.



WORSHIP NEWS

ALL VOLUNTEERS IN OUR PARISH MUST HAVE A CURRENT VALID WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK AND A CODE OF CONDUCT FORM SIGNED.

ST ANTHONY'S MINISTRIES

NEXT WEEKEND ROSTER: 25th & 26th February

Please present yourself to the Mass Coordinator

15 minutes before the scheduled Mass time or a replacement will be found. Thank you.

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

5.00pm: Aloysious Dacunha

8.30am: Amy Honrade

10.30am: Anastasia Mavaega

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS

5.00pm: Gavin Pereira

8.30am: Ron Howard

10.30am: Doris Bonello

If you are unavailable for these dates please contact Lesley at the Parish Office Thank you

MASS COORDINATORS

5.00pm: Natalie & Ron

8.30am: Jun Viray & Godwin

10.30am: Lillian & Godwin

ST BERNARD'S MINISTRIES

MINISTERS OF THE WORD : THIS WEEKEND

5.00pm: John Thorne

8.30am: Nathan Costin

10.30am: Chloe Lindorff

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS

5.00pm: Colin Remedios

MINISTERS OF THE WORD: 25th & 26th February

5.00pm: Vikki Benson

8.30am: Moira Ross

10.30am: Dominic Van Der Linden

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS

5.00pm: Mary Beaton

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

February: Sr Mary Fermio

ST ANTHONY'S PASTORAL CARE

We pray for the recently deceased:

John Khazaal

We pray for those whose death anniversaries occur at this time:

Francisca Emilia Barton

Please pray for the Sick:

Hazel Michael, Nickolia & Klara Butkovic, Maria Caruana, Mary Caruana, Christabelle, Lydia De Vega, Melanie Fue, Bruce Hynes, Kotinis Cornelia Kani, Judy Layton, Peter Manicaro, Reg Marslen, Lisa Melia, Damien Michael, Tony Michael, Veronica Michael, Nickol, Caleb O'Brien, John Osborne, Vaivasa Ruth Perez, Catherine Roberts, Peter Roberts, Pat Roberts, Anna Samy, Samantha Smith, Charlie Spiteri, Janko Stojanovic, Christina Tuigamala, Uatoa Tuigamala, Clint Abela Wadge, Wai Walsh and all those who have requested our prayers. **PLEASE LET US KNOW WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE IS NO LONGER REQUIRED ON THIS LIST.**

PRAYER FOR THE SICK

Father we lift up all those who are facing illness. We ask that You bring healing, comfort and peace to their bodies. Calm their fears and let them experience the healing power of your love. Amen



ST BERNARD'S PASTORAL CARE

We pray for those whose death anniversaries occur at this time:

Freddie Borg, Veronica Butler, Rini Dominquez, Emmanuel (Lily) Freeman, Chris Heslington, Stanley McGonegal Carmela Pinti & Peter Skinner.

Please pray for the Sick:

Patricia Allison, Susan Alvarez, Noah Barlow, Chaiel Balcombe, Michael Barrett, Peter Bennett, Carmel Berry, Steven Braszel, Tina Bower, Fred Capuano, Gary Ching, Chris, Josephine Cilia, Robyn Cola, Ted Cooling, Lindsay & Kathleen Dally, Judy Delahey, Theresa Dockter, Allison Evans, Helen Evans, George Farrell, Justin Fernandez, Pasquale Gagliardi, Mario Galea, Cynthia Goodyear, Gwen Green, Joe Gristi, Adam Hillier, Leonie Kervin, Elle Hillman, Kiahni Holamotutama, Alicia Holborn, Chaiel Jackson, Matthew Jansen, David Kasprzak, Michael Larkin, Marie Maloney, Patricia Marechal, Brian Marshall, Debbie Marshall, Jordanis Mary Pauline McDonald, Ian McKechnie, Marcus Meno, Paul Mullin, Arthur Pape, Michael Paterson, Georgia Peacock, Mitchell Prendergast, Peter Roberts, Ken Shaw, Terry Sims, Marian Smith, Elizabeth Stehmann, Colin Taffe, Catherine Time, Susan Trist, Stephen Van Eede, John Van Orsouw, Angela Vicum, Louis Vogels, Barry Walsh, Cath Wheelahan, Jayne Wilkins, Patricia Yazbek, Betty Young and all those who have requested our prayers.

PLEASE LET US KNOW WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE IS NO LONGER REQUIRED ON THIS LIST.

SERVICE / COMMUNITY

ALL VOLUNTEERS IN OUR PARISH MUST HAVE A CURRENT VALID WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK AND A CODE OF CONDUCT FORM SIGNED.

ST ANTHONY'S

WEEKEND VOLUNTEERS: 25th & 26th February

PIETY STALL VOLUNTEERS

5.00pm Vigil: Liza Fernandes
8.30am: Mercy Seufatu
10.30am: Elizabeth Underwood

CUPPA VOLUNTEERS

5.00pm:
8.30am: To be advised
10.30am:



CHURCH FLOWERS

February: No Flowers-Lent

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

Welfare Number: 1800 305 330
The Melton South Conference meet every 3rd Tuesday morning in the Meeting Room 10.30am.
New members most welcome, training provided.
Non perishable items within the use by date can be left in the 'drop box' in the Church foyer.
We cannot accept re-packaged food.

COMBINED CHURCHES CARING MELTON INC

We're here to support City of Melton residents get ahead through access to our foodbank and other community programs. It's never just about the food or the budget help, it's about recognising the beauty that is in the person and bringing it out so they can be their best.
Address: 100 Coburn Road Melton South 9747 6811

God, strengthen and sustain all those who volunteer in our Churches; that with patience and understanding they may love and care for your people; and grant that together they may follow with Jesus Christ offering to you their gifts and talents.



ST BERNARD'S

WEEKEND VOLUNTEERS : 25th & 26th February

PIETY STALL VOLUNTEERS

Saturday: 5.00pm Jan Farmelo
Sunday: 8.30am Jan & Colm

CHURCH FLOWERS

February: No Flowers-Lent



PRESBYTERY & CHURCH GROUNDS-MOWING

February: Stuart Robertson & Sean Giani

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY:

Welfare Number is 1800 305 330.
The Vinnies Store is now located at Shop 19, The Village, 164-190 Main Street Bacchus Marsh
The store is open 7 days a week. If you are able to volunteer and would like some more information, please contact the Store Manager on 8199 4205.

THE NEIGHBOURS PLACE

The Neighbours' Place is a Christian not-for-profit organisation whose aim is to serve people of the **Moorabool Shire**, west of Melbourne Australia, who are disadvantaged, at risk or temporarily unable to feed themselves or their family and who are in need of emergency food relief.

NILS is a **No Interest Loans Scheme** for assistance of up \$1500 for things like white goods, furniture and minor car repairs to keep life going.

We are located at [77 Main Street, Bacchus Marsh](#)
Phone: 03 5367 6222
Email: neighbourspl@iinet.net.au
Hours of Operation: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9.30am-12.30pm. Closed on public holidays.

SOUL FOOD

Soul Food provides a free community meal each Wednesday (excluding school holidays), in the Uniting Church Hall, Gisborne Rd, Bacchus Marsh. Meals are served up at 12noon. All are welcome and this is a free event. No need to book, just come along.

PARISH CENTRE BOOKING

Tel: 5367 3427 Mon—Fri 9.00am to 6.00pm
Hall Managers: Marie & Terry Casey

FAITH FORMATION

ST ANTHONY'S AND ST BERNARD'S

BAPTISM PREPARATION PROGRAM– ST ANTHONY'S AND ST BERNARD'S

Dear Parishioners, the Parishes of St Anthony's and St Bernard's have updated their Baptism Preparation Program.

Baptisms will be held at St Anthony's on the 1st & 3rd Saturdays of the month at 11.00am and Baptisms will be held at St Bernard's on the 2nd & 4th Saturdays of the month at 11.00am.

Please go to [St Anthony of Padua Catholic Parish | Melton South](#) click on 'Faith Formation' and then 'Baptism of Infants' for all the information and the application form.

Please contact the Parish Offices if you need any assistance. Thank you.



ADULT PREPARATION Adult preparation for the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist or Confirmation are through the R.C.I.A Program. Please see Fr Fabian, Fr Samuel or Fr Lucas .

FATIMA STATUE—ST ANTHONY'S

These families are praying together for the mission of the Parish:

Group 1:	Darian & Hoan Pertzell	0431 961 958
Group 2:	Kathleen McCurry	0429 685 180
Group 3:	Aubrey & Doreen Smith	0433 003 322

DIVINE MERCY NOVENA

1st Sunday of the Month-3.00pm



PRAYER TO ST MICHAEL

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil; may God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.



NEO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

[bow during the next line]

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen



Lord, we ask you to continue
to be with us as we
' TAKE THE WAY OF THE GOSPEL '
together in prayer.
May we open ourselves to you
with a new depth of trust and conviction
in your guiding hand,
so that we may discern our journey
with compassionate and humble hearts
and come to know your Holy Spirit
Moving within and amongst us,
And so be transformed Amen.



LITURGY OF THE WORD

ENTRANCE PROCESSION

O Lord, I trust in your merciful love.
My heart will rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord who has been bountiful with me.

FIRST READING Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

The Lord spoke to Moses; he said: 'Speak to the whole community of the sons of Israel and say to them: "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy."

"You must not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. You must openly tell him, your neighbour, of his offence; this way you will not take a sin upon yourself. You must not exact vengeance, nor must you bear a grudge against the children of your people. You must love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.'

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: 102

Commentator: The Lord is kind and merciful.

All: The Lord is kind and merciful.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord,
all my being, bless his holy name.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord
and never forget all his blessings.

It is he who forgives all your guilt,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with love and compassion.

The Lord is compassion and love,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.
He does not treat us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our faults.

As far as the east is from the west
so far does he remove our sins.
As a father has compassion on his sons,
the Lord has pity on those who fear him.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

NEXT WEEKEND'S READINGS

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT-YEAR A

First Reading: Gen 2:7-9,3:1-7;

Second Reading: Rom 5:12-19;

Gospel: Mt 4:1-11



SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Didn't you realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy him, because the temple of God is sacred; and you are that temple. Make no mistake about it; if any one of you thinks of himself as wise, in the ordinary sense of the word, then he must learn to be a fool before he really can be wise. Why? Because the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As scripture says: The Lord knows wise men's thoughts: he knows how useless they are; or again: God is not convinced by the arguments of the wise. So there is nothing to boast about in anything human: Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life and death, the present and the future, are all your servants; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

Whoever keeps the word of Christ,
grows perfect in the love of God.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away. 'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

I will recount all your wonders,
I will rejoice in you and be glad,
and sing psalms to your name, O Most High.

The Psalms XVII

Psalm 121 (120) Israel's guard

This Psalm is one of the “songs of ascents” that accompanied the pilgrimage to the encounter with the Lord in the Temple of Zion. It is a Psalm of trust, for the Hebrew verb *shamar*, “to safeguard, to protect”, is repeated in it six times. God, whose name is frequently invoked, emerges as the ever vigilant, attentive and concerned “guardian”, the “sentinel” who keeps watch over his people to protect them from every hazard and danger.

The song begins with the Psalmist raising his eyes “to the mountains”, that is, to the hills crowned by Jerusalem: from up there comes help, for there, in his temple, the Lord dwells (vv.1-2).

However, the word “mountains” can also conjure up images of idolatrous shrines in the so-called “high places”, which are frequently condemned in the Old Testament (cf. I Kings 3:2; II Kings 18:4). In this case, there would have been a contrast: while the pilgrim was advancing towards Zion, his eyes would have lit on pagan temples that were a great temptation to him. But his faith was steadfast and he was certain of one thing alone: “My help shall come from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2).

There are also similar things in our pilgrimage through life. We see the high places that spread out before us as a promise of life: wealth, power, prestige, the easy life. These high places are temptations, for they truly seem like the promise of life. But with our faith, we realise that this is not true and that these high places are not life. True life, true help, comes from the Lord. And we turn our gaze, therefore, to the true high places, to the true mountain: Christ.

This trust is illustrated in the Psalm through the image of the guardian and sentinel, who watch and protect. There is also an allusion to the foot that does not stumble (v.3) on the way through life, and perhaps to the shepherd who, stopping for the night, watches over his flock without falling asleep or dozing (v.4). The divine Pastor knows no rest in the task of caring for his people, for all of us.

Another symbol is then introduced into the Psalm: “shade”, which implies that the journey is resumed during the heat of the day (v.5). Let us remember the historic march through the desert of Sinai where the Lord preceded Israel “in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to show them the way” (Exodus 13:21).

Many prayers in the Psalter say: “Hide me in the shadow of your wings” (Psalm 17:8; P 91:1).

Here too, there is an aspect that relates to our lives. Our lives move beneath a merciless sun; the Lord is the shade that protects and helps us.

After the vigil and the shade, there is the third symbol, that of the Lord who is “at the right side” of his faithful (Psalm 121:5). This is the position of defence, both in military and court contexts: it is the certainty of never being abandoned in a time of trial, in an assault by evil or by persecution. At this point, the Psalmist returns to the idea of a journey on a scorching hot day on which God protects us from the fierce heat of the sun.

But night follows day. In ancient times it was also thought that moonbeams were harmful and caused fever or blindness, or even madness; thus, the Lord also protects us at night time (v.6), in the nights of our lives.

The Psalm now draws to a close with a concise declaration of trust: God will protect us with love at every moment, guarding our lives from every evil (v.7). All our activities, summed up in two opposite verbs, “going” and “coming”, always take place under the vigilant gaze of the Lord, as do all our acts and all our time, “both now and for ever” (v.8).

Let us comment on this final declaration of trust with a spiritual testimony of the ancient Christian tradition. In the *Epistolarium* of Barsanuphius of Gaza (who died in the mid-sixth century), a widely renowned aesthete sought out by monks, clerics and lay people for the wisdom of his discernment, we find several references to the verse of our Psalm: “The Lord will guard you from evil, he will guard your soul”. With this Psalm, with this verse, Barsanuphius wanted to comfort all those who came to him with their toils, life's trials, dangers and misfortunes.

Once asked by a monk to pray for him and his companions, Barsanuphius responded as follows: “My beloved sons, I embrace you in the Lord, entreating him *to protect you from all evil*, and to support you as he did Job, to give you grace as he gave to Joseph, gentleness as to Moses and valour in battle as to Joshua, the son of Nun, mastery of thought as to the judges, victory over enemies as to King David and King Solomon, fertile land as to the Israelites.

“... May he grant you forgiveness of your sins with the healing of the body as he did to the paralytic. May he save you from the waters as he did Peter and snatch you from troubles as he did Paul and the other Apostles. *May he protect you from every evil*, as his true children, and grant you your heart's desire, for the advantage of your soul and your body, in his name. Amen”.