



The Anglican Parish of
S. STEPHEN

Box 17, Adamstown 2289

Priest: Father Chris Bird

Tel: 4957 1895; Mobile 0413001109

Web: www.sstephens.org.au

Email: frccb@hotmail.com

This Week

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday

Mass at 7.30am;

Wednesday 5.30pm, Saturday 8.00am

Monday 12th

I will praise you, Lord,
for you have rescued me.

Tuesday 13th

The mighty Lord is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

7pm Lenten Study @ the Rectory

Wednesday 14th

The Lord is kind and merciful.

Thursday 15th

Lord, remember us
for the love you bear for your people.

7.30pm Parish Council

Friday 16th

The Lord is near to broken hearts.

6.00pm Holy Hour

Saturday 17th

S. Patrick, Bishop

Lord, my God, I take shelter in you.

Next Sunday 18th March 2018AD

LENT 5

9.00 am Sung Mass followed by

Annual Parish Meeting

5.30 pm Mass



Today- Lent 4

The world often chooses to live in the
darkness of sin and injustice. Jesus
Christ came to give us truth and light,
and to share God's life with us.

Entrance Hymn

**The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never,
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine forever.**

**Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.**

**Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love He sought me,
And on His shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.**

**In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod & staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.**

**Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction grace bestoweth;
And O what transport of delight
From Thy pure chalice floweth!**

**And so thro' all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house forever.**

Entrance: Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who
love her. Be joyful, all who were in
mourning; exult and be satisfied at her
consoling breast.

✙ In the Name of the Father and of the
Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Blessing of the Simnel Cake

Dear friends in Christ, today we recall
with thanks the blessing of motherhood
given to us by God and shown in
Blessed Mary, mother of his Son and
mother of us who are his brothers and
sisters; in our mother the One, Holy,
catholic and Apostolic Church, who
nourishes us and guides us on our
pilgrimage here on earth; and in our
own mothers who have loved and cared
for us from the beginning of our lives.
Let us ask God to bless this Simnel
Cake that we may receive it with
thanksgiving for the many ways in
which he blesses us through the gift
of motherhood.

*Silent prayer and blessing,
after which we all join in saying:*

The Mothers' Union Prayer

**Almighty God, our heavenly
Father, who gave marriage to be
a source of blessing, we thank you
for family life, with all its joys
and sorrows. May we know your
presence and peace in our homes;
fill them with your love and use
them for your glory. Bless all who
are married and every parent
and child. Pour out upon us your
Holy Spirit that we may truly
love and serve you. Bless the
members of the Mothers' Union
throughout the world; unite us in
prayer and worship, in love and
service that strengthened by your
grace we may seek to do your
will; through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.**

Final Hymn

**Ah, holy Jesus, how hast Thou offended,
That man to judge
Thee hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by Thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.
Who was the guilty?
Who brought this upon Thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone Thee.
'Twas I, Lord, Jesus, I it was denied Thee!
I crucified Thee.**

**Lo, the Good Shepherd
for the sheep is offered;
The slave hath sinned,
and the Son hath suffered;
For man's atonement,
while he nothing heedeth,
God intercedeth.**

**For me, kind Jesus, was Thy incarnation
Thy mortal sorrow,
and Thy life's oblation;
Thy death of anguish
and Thy bitter passion,
For my salvation.
Therefore, kind Jesus,
since I cannot pay Thee,
I do adore Thee,
and will ever pray Thee,
Think on Thy pity
and Thy love unswerving,
Not my deserving.**

The Blessing

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Christ our crucified Saviour draw you to
himself, that you may find in Him a sure hope
and the assurance of sins forgiven.
And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, ✙ and the
Holy Spirit, come down on you and
remain with you for ever. **Amen.**
Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

At the Saviour's command and formed by divine teaching we dare to say:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

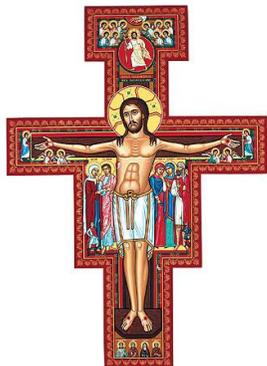
Breaking of Bread

We who are many are one body in Christ
For we all share in the one bread.
Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world: Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world: Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world: Grant us peace.

Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb.

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

HOLY COMMUNION



Communion Hymn

For Mary, Mother of our Lord, God's holy Name be praised, Who first the Son of God adored As on her Child she gazed.
The angel Gabriel brought the word She should Christ's mother be; Our Lady, handmaid of the Lord, Made answer willingly.
The heav'nly call she thus obeyed, And so God's will was done; The second Eve love's answer made Which our redemption won.
She gave her body as God's shrine Her heart to piercing pain; She knew the cost of love divine When Jesus Christ was slain.
Dear Mary, from your lowliness And home in Galilee There comes a joy and holiness To every family.
Hail, Mary; you are full of grace, Above all women blest; & blest your Son, Whom your embrace In birth and death confessed.

Communion: Jerusalem is built as a city bonded as one together. It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord.

Prayer: O God, who enlighten everyone who comes into this world, illuminate our hearts, we pray, with the splendour of your grace, that we may always ponder what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty and love you in all sincerity. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Penitential Rite

We open our hearts to receive God's light, truth and forgiveness.

I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do

And, striking our breast, we say:

through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

+ May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

The Kyrie

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Collect

O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Today's Readings

First Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23
Rebuilding the Temple and return from exile is a foretaste of the coming of Christ.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Second Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10

We are God's work of art.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gradual Hymn

Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom, lead Thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead Thou me on! Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see The distant scene; one step enough for me.
I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou shouldst lead me on; I loved to choose and see my path; but now lead Thou me on! I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years! So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still will lead me on. O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone, And with the morn those angel faces smile, which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!
Meantime, along the narrow rugged path, Thyself hast trod, Lead, Saviour, lead me home in childlike faith, home to my God. To rest forever after earthly strife In the calm light of everlasting life.

The Holy Gospel

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to *S. John 3:14-21*

+ Glory to you + Lord Jesus Christ + Christ is the light of the world.

The Gospel of the Lord:

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again 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. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

God is the source of all goodness, light and love, so we turn to him with faith and hope.

For Peter our Bishop, our clergy and people and all the Church: may we faithfully bear witness to the light and love of the Gospel.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for world leaders: may they be enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit to govern wisely and justly.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for the gift of motherhood: for the love, encouragement and support of our earthly mothers and for the prayerful support and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of our Lord and God, Lord, hear us. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those in need of God's healing grace, in body, mind or spirit, especially:

Richard Wrightson, Verity Matzoll, John Russell, Moira Oliver, Rhys Evans, Anabelle Morrow, Jamie Stow, Colin Lee, John & Norma McLeod, Jocelyn Caddies, Stephanie Bower, John & Frances Moules, John & Dorothy Davidson, Joyce Searl, Sheila & Derek Cahoon, Dianne Taylor, Peter Williams, Robyn Roach, Pam Platts, Ruth Jones, Lynda Cox, Linda Frost, Geoff Borham, Tom Blunden, Lani Fear, Bruce George, Alan Joass, Frank Clarke, Robbie Coddington, Barbara Winter, June Wood, Jack Ryan, Nalee Kumpa,
Lord, hear us. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have died, may they share in eternal life with God who is love, especially:

those whose memory we treasure, including: **Marie Sandford, Ken Williams,**
Lord, hear us. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Let us commend ourselves and all people to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, S. Stephen and all the Saints, as we offer our own special needs and thanksgivings,
Lord, hear us. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers, and grant what we ask in faith, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Greeting of Peace

We are the Body of Christ.

His Spirit is with us.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Offertory Hymn

**O holy Father, who in tender love
Didst give Thine only Son for us to die,
The while He pleads at Thy right hand above,
We in one Spirit now with faith draw nigh,
And, as we eat this bread and drink this wine,
Plead His once offered sacrifice divine.
We are not worthy to be called Thy sons,
Nor gather up the fragments of Thy feast;
Yet look on us, Thy sorrowing contrite ones,
On us in Him our Advocate and Priest,
Whose robe is fringed with mercy's golden bells
Whose breastplate fathomless compassion tells.
O hear us, for Thou always hearest Him;
Behold us sprinkled with His precious blood;
And from between the shadowing cherubim
Shine forth, and grant us in this heavenly food
Foretastes of coming glory, and meanwhile
A Father's blessing and a Father's smile.
Nor only, Father, in Thy presence here
Low at Thy footstool for ourselves we pray,
But for the loved ones to our hearts most near
At home or toiling in far lands away;
O guard them, guide them, comfort & befriend,
And keep them Thine unfaltering to the end.
And, Father, ere we leave Thy mercy-throne,
Bound by these sacred pledges, yet most free,
We give our hearts, and not our hearts alone,
But all we are and all we have to Thee;
Glad free-will offerings all our pilgrim days,
Hereafter an eternity of praise**

Prayer over the Gifts

Pray my brothers and sisters that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father.

May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his holy Church.

We place before you with joy these offerings, which bring eternal remedy, O Lord, praying that we may both faithfully revere them and present them to you, as is fitting, for the salvation of all the world.

Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

The Preface is sung, after which all sing

**Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God of hosts,
Heaven and earth are
full of your glory.
Hosanna in the Highest.
Blest is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the Highest.**

The Eucharistic prayer continues

The mystery of faith:
**Save us, Saviour of the world,
for by your Cross
and Resurrection
you have set us free**

The Prayer concludes:
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Via Crucis, Via Lucis

The way of the Cross is the way of light

If we are inclined to feel demoralised at this point in our Lenten journey, we are invited by today's readings to find again the source of new energy and encouragement.

In the midst of the deepest darkness the true Light shines! Old Israel finds that God's designs will not be frustrated by their foolishness and selfishness - the conqueror of the Babylonians sends them back to rebuild the temple. Paul announces to those who are in danger of losing their way the astounding truth at the centre of our faith - God's free gift to lost world of new life in Christ: our redeemed humanity is God's **'work of art'**, we each have our part to play in the realisation of God's great designs.

But it is especially in climax of today's readings, the words spoken to Nichodemus, by Jesus - the Light of the World - that all our darkness is dispelled! These words are perhaps the most quoted of the Gospels. Let us not take them for granted, but take them to heart and rejoice in the new life they bring: **'God loved the world so much that he gave his own Son, so that everyone who believes in him ... may have eternal life'**.

A world weighed down by the darkness of failure and selfishness must know, Jesus says, that he came from the Father, not 'to condemn' but to bring reconciliation and life.

As we take our bearings in the middle of a long journey, we often find new purpose and energy. Reflecting at this point in our journey of Lent, on the burdens we carry, can bring us to find again, in a more personal way, the essential truth of our Christian faith, the great truth we are celebrate at the end of our journey.

Mothering Sunday

Today is known as Mothering Sunday and in other parts of the Church as Refreshment or "Laetere" (Rejoice) Sunday, from the first word of the entrance antiphon. The Church invites us to refresh ourselves with joy in the midst of our Lenten discipline as we look forward to the happiness of Easter; we can assess how our Lenten observance has been going and plan the rest of our preparation accordingly. On this the original "Mothers' Day", we are also asked to pray for work of the Mothers' Union, as we recall the formative influence of motherhood in our lives - through Holy Mother Church, nurturing us in the faith and supplying God's grace from the moment of our Baptism; through our earthly mother from whom we received life, training and care; through our Blessed Lady, Mary, Virgin Mother of our Lord, from whom the Christian concept of motherhood has come. Our thanks to the members of Mother's Union for assisting in our worship; and for those who have prepared the Simnel Cake, which we have to share.

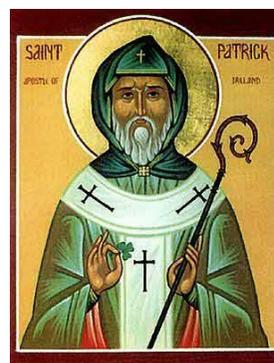
Reflection

*Salvation, not being lost,
and having eternal life
are ideas which belong together.
They are part of the way
that our Christian tradition
has tried to explain
a fundamental insight into
human nature, namely,
that even before we commit individual
acts of wrongdoing,
by our very nature as human beings,
we are in need of a saviour.
This need has been
recognised by God and
He has acted accordingly.*

This Weeks Holy Days

March 17

S.Patrick 415-493



Legends about Patrick abound; but truth is best served by our seeing two solid qualities in him: He was humble and he was courageous. The determination to accept suffering and success with

equal indifference guided the life of God's instrument for winning most of Ireland for Christ.

Details of his life are uncertain. Current research places his birth and death a little later than earlier accounts. Patrick may have been born in Dunbarton, Scotland, Cumberland, England, or in northern Wales. He called himself both a Roman and a Briton. At 16, he and a large number of his father's slaves and workers were captured by Irish raiders and sold as slaves in Ireland. He was forced to work as a shepherd and suffered greatly.

After six years, Patrick escaped, probably to France, and later returned to Britain at the age of 22. His captivity had meant spiritual conversion. He may have studied at Lerins, off the French coast; he spent years at Auxerre, France, and was consecrated bishop at the age of 43. His great desire was to proclaim the Good News to the Irish.

In a dream it seemed "*all the children of Ireland from their mothers' wombs were stretching out their hands*" to him. He understood the vision to be a call to do mission work in pagan Ireland.

Despite opposition from those who felt his education had been defective, he was sent to carry out the task. He went to the west and north, where the faith had never been

preached, obtained the protection of local kings and made numerous converts.

He ordained many priests, divided the country into dioceses, held Church councils, founded several monasteries and continually urged his people to greater holiness in Christ. He suffered much opposition from pagan druids, and was criticized in both England and Ireland for the way he conducted his mission.

In a relatively short time Ireland experienced deeply the Christian spirit, and sent out missionaries for Christianising Europe.

Patrick was a man of action, with little inclination toward learning. He had a rocklike belief in his vocation, in the cause he had espoused.

One of the few certainly authentic writings is his Confession, above all an act of homage to God for having called Patrick, unworthy sinner, to the apostolate.

There is hope rather than irony in the fact that his burial place is in Ulster, in County Down, in the Anglican Cathedral.

What distinguishes Patrick is the durability of his efforts. When one considers the state of Ireland when he began his mission work, the vast extent of his labours (all of Ireland) and how the seeds he planted continued to grow and flourish, one can only admire the kind of man Patrick must have been. The holiness of a person is known only by the fruits of their work.

Today's passage from John's Gospel contains one of the most well know sentences of all scripture, the one which declares that God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son. So, in human terms, God's motive for sending Jesus among us is love. In other words, all God's actions towards us and his dealings with us are inspired by love. This is good news and if we didn't know it before now, now is the time to take this insight on board and to let it begin to change us.

Via Crucis, Via Lucis

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If we are inclined to feel demoralised at this point in our Lenten journey, we are invited by today's readings to find again the source of new energy and encouragement. In the midst of the deepest darkness the true Light shines! Old Israel finds that God's designs will not be frustrated by their foolishness and selfishness - the conqueror of the Babylonians sends them back to rebuild the temple. Paul announces to those who are in danger of losing their way the astounding truth at the centre of our faith - God's free gift to lost world of new life in Christ: our redeemed humanity is God's **'work of art'**, we each have our part to play in the realisation of God's great designs.

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Entrance Hymn - NEH 457

The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never,
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine forever.
Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.
Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love He sought me,
And on His shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.
In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod & staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.
Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction grace bestoweth;
And O what transport of delight
From Thy pure chalice floweth!
And so thro' all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house forever.

Gradual Hymn – NEH 392

Lead, kindly Light,
amid th'encircling gloom,
lead Thou me on!
The night is dark,
and I am far from home;
lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet;
I do not ask to see
The distant scene;
one step enough for me.
I was not ever thus,
nor prayed that Thou
shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose
and see my path; but now
lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day,
and, spite of fears
Pride ruled my will.
Remember not past years!
So long Thy power
hath blest me, sure it still
will lead me on.
O'er moor and fen,
o'er crag and torrent,
till the night is gone,
And with the morn
those angel faces smile,
which I have loved long since,
and lost awhile!
Meantime, along
the narrow rugged path,
Thyself hast trod,
Lead, Saviour, lead
me home in childlike faith,
home to my God.
To rest forever
after earthly strife
In the calm light
of everlasting life.

Offertory Hymn -

Tune – NEH 273 Unde Et Memores

O holy Father, who in tender love
Didst give Thine only Son for us to die,
The while He pleads at Thy right hand above,
We in one Spirit now with faith draw nigh,
And, as we eat this bread and drink this wine,
Plead His once offered sacrifice divine.
We are not worthy to be called Thy sons,
Nor gather up the fragments of Thy feast;
Yet look on us, Thy sorrowing contrite ones,
On us in Him our Advocate and Priest,
Whose robe is fringed with mercy's golden bells
Whose breastplate fathomless compassion tells.
O hear us, for Thou always hearest Him;
Behold us sprinkled with His precious blood;
And from between the shadowing cherubim
Shine forth, and grant us in this heavenly food
Foretastes of coming glory, and meanwhile
A Father's blessing and a Father's smile.
Nor only, Father, in Thy presence here
Low at Thy footstool for ourselves we pray,
But for the loved ones to our hearts most near
At home or toiling in far lands away;
O guard them, guide them, comfort & befriend,
And keep them Thine unfaltering to the end.
And, Father, ere we leave Thy mercy-throne,
Bound by these sacred pledges, yet most free,
We give our hearts, and not our hearts alone,
But all we are and all we have to Thee;
Glad free-will offerings all our pilgrim days,
Hereafter an eternity of praise

Communion Hymn – NEH 161

Tune – NEH 385 St Botolph

For Mary, Mother of our Lord,
God's holy Name be praised,
Who first the Son of God adored
As on her Child she gazed.
The angel Gabriel brought the word
She should Christ's mother be;
Our Lady, handmaid of the Lord,
Made answer willingly.
The heav'nly call she thus obeyed,
And so God's will was done;
The second Eve love's answer made
Which our redemption won.
She gave her body as God's shrine
Her heart to piercing pain;
She knew the cost of love divine
When Jesus Christ was slain.
Dear Mary, from your lowliness
And home in Galilee
There comes a joy and holiness
To every family.
Hail, Mary; you are full of grace,
Above all women blest;
& blest your Son, Whom your
embrace
In birth and death confessed.

Final Hymn – NEH 62

Tune – NEH 149 ii Christe Sanctorum

**Ah, holy Jesus,
how hast Thou offended,
That man to judge
Thee hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided,
by Thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.**

**Who was the guilty?
Who brought this upon Thee?
Alas, my treason,
Jesus, hath undone Thee.
'Twas I, Lord, Jesus,
I it was denied Thee!
I crucified Thee.**

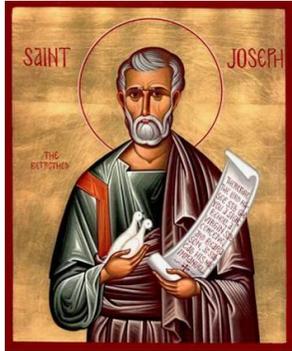
**Lo, the Good Shepherd
for the sheep is offered;
The slave hath sinned,
and the Son hath suffered;
For man's atonement,
while he nothing heedeth,
God intercedeth.**

**For me, kind Jesus,
was Thy incarnation,
Thy mortal sorrow,
and Thy life's oblation;
Thy death of anguish
and Thy bitter passion,
For my salvation.**

**Therefore, kind Jesus,
since I cannot pay Thee,
I do adore Thee,
and will ever pray Thee,
Think on Thy pity
and Thy love unswerving,
Not my deserving.**

March 19

S. Joseph



The Bible pays Joseph the highest compliment: he was a “just” man. The quality meant a lot more than faithfulness in paying debts. When the Bible speaks

of God “justifying” someone, it means that God, the all-holy or “righteous” One, so transforms a person that the individual shares somehow in God’s own holiness, and hence it is really “right” for God to love him or her. In other words, God is not playing games, acting as if we were lovable when we are not.

By saying Joseph was “just,” the Bible means that he was one who was completely open to all that God wanted to do for him. He became holy by opening himself totally to God.

The rest we can easily surmise. Think of the kind of love with which he wooed and won Mary, and the depth of the love they shared during their marriage.

It is no contradiction of Joseph’s manly holiness that he decided to divorce Mary when she was found to be with child. The important words of the Bible are that he planned to do this “quietly” because he was “a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame” (Matthew 1:19).

The just man was simply, joyfully, wholeheartedly obedient to God—in marrying Mary, in naming Jesus, in shepherding the precious pair to Egypt, in bringing them to Nazareth, in the undetermined number of years of quiet faith and courage.

The Bible tells us nothing of Joseph in the years after the return to Nazareth except the incident of finding Jesus in the Temple (see Luke 2:41–51). Perhaps this can be taken to mean that God wants us to realize that the holiest family was like every other family, that the circumstances of life for the holiest family were like those of every family, so that when Jesus’ mysterious nature began to appear, people couldn’t believe that he came from such humble beginnings: “Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary...?” (Matthew 13:55a). It was almost as indignant as “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46b).

“He was chosen by the eternal Father as the trustworthy guardian and protector of his greatest treasures, namely, his divine Son and Mary, Joseph’s wife. He carried out this vocation with complete fidelity until at last God called him, saying: ‘Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord’” (S. Bernardine of Siena).

The difference that Jesus makes

The man who came by night. 'Nikodemos' (just like Nicholas & Cleopas), is a common Greek name with a great meaning attached to it. It means 'conqueror (nicao) of people (demos)'. - (Nicholas means also conqueror (nicao) of people (laos) and Cleopas means 'Child of a famous father': and its feminine is 'Cleopatra'. At the time of Jesus, the name 'Nikodemos' was common; it was hebricized as 'Nakdimon' and shortened as 'Naqai'. In fact, a well known personality who lived in Jerusalem around the time of Jesus was 'Nakdimon Ben Gurion'. Nicodemus is mentioned on three occasions, and only in John's Gospel. Here, Nicodemus (it means 'Conqueror of people') is portrayed as a prominent Pharisee, a member of the ruling class in Judaea, a member of the Sanhedrin or Jewish Council, a wealthy man and an outstanding teacher in Israel. All seems to suggest that he was a prominent Jewish politician under the Roman Empire.

First he appears in today's story (Jn 3,1-21) when he comes by night to engage Jesus on important topics and Jesus confronts him with the absolute necessity 'to be born again' and accept the consequences of that experience. Next (in Jn 7,50), he appears in a failed attempt to arrest Jesus, six months before He was crucified: while Chief-Priests and Pharisees have decided to arrest Jesus as a deceiver, Nicodemus argues that the Law (the Torah) cannot condemn anyone, until a fair hearing is conducted (7,51) and in response he himself is accused of being a follower of the Galilean. Finally, he appears after the death of Jesus, bringing a large quantity of spices to anoint the body of Jesus (19, 38-42). Each time he is presented a 'the man who went to see Jesus by night', as if afraid to be seen with Jesus in public.

'Nicodemus' in our life. Today's Gospel invites us to address the mistrusting, hurting, misunderstanding, dark, destructive and manipulative side of our life: we fool ourselves to think we are not included in the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus on the sad realization that we human beings prefer darkness to light (Jn 3,19). It can be argued that Nicodemus was quite courageous: he came by night, not out of fear to be seen with Jesus, but to avoid the pressing crowds and thus have a chance of a long interview with Our Lord. Notice how cunning he was when the Jewish Council had decided to arrest Jesus: he was bold indeed in calculating how to bring out the evil of their lawless act, by matching it against the ridicule they had for the lawless behaviour of the 'crowds' (Jn 7,49-51). And he stood courageously at the scene of the cross, while all his disciples abandoned Jesus and fled for their lives. Nicodemus stands for us when we choose to move from darkness into the light of faith, while tragically Judas stands for those who go from light into darkness, betrayal and utter self-destruction (Jn 13,30). Nicodemus is the one who brought costly ointments for

the burial of Jesus: he expressed love, while honouring -in death- the One who was executed as 'King of the Jews'. He remained puzzled as to how God's plan for our salvation was realized, just as we continue to be amazed today. Nicodemus stands for each of us as we face day-by-day doubt and unbelief, and yet are inspired by 'the signs and miracles' that the Lord performs. So, let the sad reality with which Jesus confronted Nicodemus be a lesson for us: 'the Light has come into the world, and yet people prefer Darkness to Light' (Jn 3.19). And let the educated people of all time be challenged by Nicodemus: learned, rich, ruler, teacher and Pharisee, he had the best that Judaism could offer: yet none of it was adequate for the difference that Jesus can make in our life.

The Son of Man must be lifted up, so that we may have eternal life in him

There is often a time in a long journey when we find the going hard. The enthusiasm with which we set out has faded, and there is still a long way to go. At this stage in our Lenten journey we may be inclined to identify with Nicodemus of today's gospel – not daring, as a well known Pharisee, to consult Jesus openly, he came 'by night', weighed down in his heart, no doubt, by an interior darkness of confusion and embarrassment.

In our disappointment with our lives, the darkness seems so real and overwhelming. The first reading, telling the story of old Israel – a story of unfaithfulness, stubborn selfishness, destruction and exile – reminds us how often human history has been filled with darkness, right down to our own day. In the second reading from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul confidently confronts this darkness: for him reliance upon false and selfish securities is to embrace 'death'.

