

Risen Christ



First Sunday of Lent - Year A

21 & 22 February 2026

The Catholic Communities of Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says:

Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down; for scripture says:

He will put you in his angels' charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'

Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these', he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

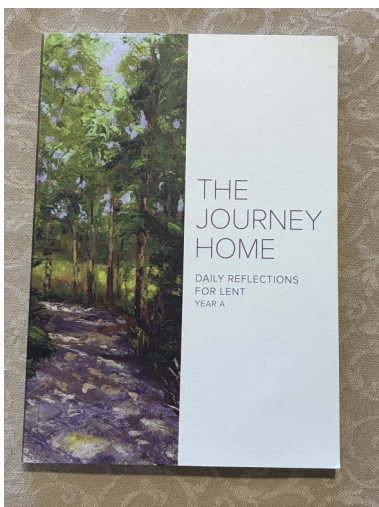
Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

Reflection: Break Open the Word 2026

At his baptism, Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit and receives the blessing of the Father. This event, it seems, formalises Jesus' discernment that he is to undertake the life-changing mission of proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom. Before he begins, the Spirit leads him into the desert for a time of retreat. This period of fasting and listening in prayer helps him to clarify what his mission will involve.

It is presented in the gospels in terms of temptation by the devil. Can he use his divine powers to provide for his own human needs and comfort? Should he use it to provide protection and rescue when needed? Can he use it to rule the world and its peoples? In each case, Jesus says no. He sees his ministry in terms of humble vulnerability and the service of those in need. He will use his God-given power to heal the sick, to reach out to those who have been pushed to the margins.

The vivid narrative exchange between Jesus and the devil offers a reading with drama and movement.



Lenten Reflection Books

are now available.

Please *only* take one if you will use it, as we have limited numbers.

These books are a fabulous resource to help with your Lenten journey.

Project Compassion Donation Boxes

are now available!

Please take one



This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community. We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.



PARISH TEAM & INFORMATION

OUR PEOPLE & OUR CONTACT DETAILS



Parish Priest

Michael Sierakowski - Moderator

Michael.Sierakowski@cam.org.au

Parish Office

all correspondence to:
86 Mayona Road,
Montmorency Vic 3094
9435 4742

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Kate Kogler:

Parish Secretary
Tue-Fri 9am-3pm

Peter Williams:

Safeguarding Officer

RisenChrist.ChildSafety@cam.org.au

Volunteers

Marisa Capuana: Various

Kerry Mash: Wed & Fri 10am-3pm

www.melbcatholic.org/risenchristparish

Facebook: [Risen Christ Parish](https://www.facebook.com/RisenChristParish)

Risen Christ Parish Bulletin items:

RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au

Schools

Holy Trinity Primary School

Principal: Vince Bumpstead: 9431 0888

principal@htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

www.htelthamnth.catholic.edu.au

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School

Principal: Rudy Vail: 9439 7824

school@olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

www.olhceltham.catholic.edu.au

St Francis Xavier Primary School

Principal: Jo Nolen: 9435 8474

principal@sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

www.sfxmontmorency.catholic.edu.au

RECONCILIATION

available half an hour before
any weekday or weekend Parish Mass.

Collections: 2 & 9 Feb 2026

Thanksgiving	Cash	\$2,485.75
	Electronic	\$9,470.00
Presbytery	Cash	\$1,577.80
	Electronic	\$325.00

Thanksgiving Offering

Month	Total
November	\$15,369.89
December	\$18,205.17
January	\$20,972.17

Risen Christ Parish Calendar of Events

Saturday 21

6:00pm Mass

Montmorency

Sunday 22 - First Sunday of Lent

8:30am Mass

Montmorency

10:00am Mass

Eltham

Monday 23

7:30pm RCIA

Eltham

Tuesday 24

9:30am Mass & SFX Yr 3

Montmorency

10:00am Rosary

Montmorency

7:00pm Jordan Small Church Community

Montmorency

Wednesday 25

6:30am Meditation

Montmorency

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion

Eltham

Thursday 26

9:30am Liturgy of the Word with Communion

Montmorency

10:00am Emmaus Small Church Community

Montmorency

10:30am ASRC Food Collection

Montmorency

2:00pm Mass

Calvary Lower Plenty Garden Views

2:30pm Meditation

Eltham

Friday 27

9:30am Mass

Eltham

Saturday 28

12:00pm Baptisms: Siora, London

Montmorency

6:00pm Mass

Montmorency

Sunday 1 March

8:30am Mass

Montmorency

10:00am Mass

Eltham

12:00pm Baptisms: Harvey, Sutton, Ryan,
Emmison, Raffie

Eltham

Monday 2

9:00am Days for Girls

Montmorency

7:30pm RCIA Class

Eltham

Tuesday 3

9:30am Mass & SFX Yr 4

Montmorency

10:00am Rosary

Montmorency

10:00am Craft Group

Montmorency

11:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry

Eltham

2:00pm Bethan Small Church Community

Montmorency

Wednesday 4

6:30am Meditation

Montmorency

Thanksgiving

Dear Parishioners,

Following is a list of ways in which you can give towards the running of our Parish (left to right):

A) EFTPOS terminals

B) scan the QR code (<https://bit.ly/45ifhRp>) & donate to any Parish finance campaign including Thanksgiving, Presbytery Offerings, baptisms etc

C) cash/coins in the collection baskets at each church

D) thanksgiving envelopes

E) set up payments from credit/debit cards/bank account

Thank you for your generous support,

Michael





*Let us pray for all those who have gone
before us marked with the sign of faith ...*

Montmorency

For those in need of **healing**, remembering especially:

*Nora Edmond, Pat Hosmer, Siobhan Lappin, Alice Ley, Jarrod Mizzi,
Cindy & Ed Morrissey, Regina Roszczenko (mother of Liz Gray),
Phil Rovtar, Jeanne Vanderwert, Brian Witten*

For the recently **deceased**:

Aileen Dixon, Maxine Duke, Wilhelm Senn

For those whose **anniversaries** are at this time:

*Carmelina Alberti, Antonio Chincarini (Snr), Jan Collins, Sheila Lee,
Madge McDonell, Aileen Moylan, Vernon & Ena Rodrigo*

Eltham

For those in need of **healing**, remembering especially:

*Stephen Andrew, Des Arneson, Bill Boyce, Penny Boyce,
Ruth Decker, Mary Luttick, Bernard Murray, Audrey Tunks*

To include an anniversary please contact Parish Office

9435 4742 or RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au.

Daily Readings

are now available on our Parish Website
head to <https://www.melbcatholic.org/s/risenchristparish>
then click on 'Services'
and you will find 'Daily Readings'
on the drop down menu.

The link automatically displays the daily readings
from Universalis based on the liturgical text.

We hope you enjoy this new feature.

Parish Ministry Gatherings - You're invited to join!

Thank you for your patience as the Parish Pastoral Leadership Community has recommenced meetings for 2026 and worked through the responses from our Parish Stewardship Program.

We are blessed to have so many wonderful parishioners willing to serve in ministry. To help us reconnect, welcome new volunteers and strengthen our shared mission, we are holding three ministry gatherings on the dates listed below.

Many of you have indicated your interest in multiple groups and pillars through the Stewardship Renewal Program. We invite you to consider attending one or two of the pillars that you feel most closely aligned to. Emails will also be sent directly to those who indicated interest.

We invite you to join us at 7pm for a cuppa, followed by a 7:30pm meeting start.

Prayer and Worship - Thursday 12 March at OLHC:

RCIA, Communion to the Sick, Welcomers, Commentators and Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, Church Cleaning, Meditation Group, Small Church Communities, Liturgy Committee, Children's Liturgy, Youth Ministry, Faith Development Group and Bereavement Ministry.

Hospitality - Thursday 19 March at OLHC:

Transport to Ministry, After Mass Hospitality - Eltham and Montmorency, Gardening and Funeral Hospitality.

Social Justice - Thursday 19 March at Risen Christ Parish Office:

St Vincent de Paul, Kadasig, Refugee Assistance, Parkview Retirement Village, ASRC Food Collection, Days for Girls and Social Justice Committee.

Everyone is warmly invited to attend, regardless of which community you attend.

We will provide more information on getting involved in the Risen Christ Parish at the meetings. We look forward to coming together as a community in service and mission.

Roster for week ending 22 Feb 2026

Armstrong, Miranda	C10:00
Boyd, Mary	PRYR
Capuana, Marisa	LoW-01 Thu
Donnellan, Denise	E10:00
Drljo, Frank	CLNR
Dunell, Linda	ASE
Dunell, Linda	E10:00
Fitzgerald, Susan	C10:00
Kenny, Michael	W6:00
Kulkens, Mark	W6:00
Love, Kathleen	E10:00
Reardon, Kathy	H10:00
Reardon, Peter	E10:00
Reardon, Peter	H10:00
Scully, Greg	E10:00
Scully, Greg	H10:00
Scully, Helen	H10:00
Skipper, Patsy	CLNR
Sullivan, Frances	W8:30
Williams, Peter	R10:00
Wood, Marie	W8:30
Zavadil Family	PRSE

Roster for week ending 1 Mar 2026

Capuana, Marisa	LoW-01 Thu
Cotter, Anne	CLNR
Cotter, Anne	W8:30
Cseh, Ferenc	E10:00
Davidson, John	PRYR
Davidson, John	W8:30
Dopheide, Marlis	R10:00
Dunell, Linda	ASE
Furtado, Lorraine	C10:00
Iliffe, Yvonne	E10:00
Liss, Judy	H10:00
Maloney, Jo	W6:00
Maynes, Phil	W6:00
Northrop, Greg	E10:00
Reardon, Kathy	E10:00
Reardon, Peter	E10:00
Volunteer please	H10:00
Volunteer please	H10:00
Volunteer please	H10:00
Wood, Gerard	CLNR
Zavadil Family	PRSE

ASE = Altar Society @ Eltham;

C = Commentator;

CLKR = PowerPoint Clicker @ SFX;

CLNR = Cleaner @ SFX; **R** = Reader;

E = Eucharistic Minister;

H = Hospitality;

LoW-01 = Liturgy of the Word with
Communion @ SFX;

PRSE = Pilgrim Rosary Statue @ Eltham;

M = Music; **W** = Minister of the Word

There is no evidence that the pattern of steady decline in Mass attendance since it was first counted nearly 70 years ago is being interrupted. Yet there are dramatic increases in the numbers of people being received into the Catholic Church, and the energy that young converts are bringing is potentially transformative. What's happening - and why? / **By Aili Winstanley Channer**

A counter-cultural revival

On a dark January evening, a room in the Oratory House in York is packed with upwards of thirty new faces, who have come together to discuss why God made us. It's the first of a new series of adult catechism classes that the York Oratory is running. The Oratorians are known for their personalised, one-on-one approach to preparing adults for the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. But this year, for the first time, there are simply too many converts for it to be possible to instruct each of them individually. Almost every day a new email lands in the parish inbox from someone interested in exploring the Catholic faith.

There are one or two grey heads in the room, but by far the majority are in their twenties and thirties. "We've been witnessing a search for meaning among young people," reflects Fr Daniel Seward, the parish priest. The sense that young people are returning to church, and often to the Catholic Church, has been floating around in recent years, and a Bible Society report published last spring seemed to confirm it. *The Quiet Revival* found that the number of 18- to 34-year-olds (Gen Z and younger millennials) in the UK who are regular churchgoing Christians more than tripled between 2018 and 2024, and that this surge was led by young men, who are drawn to more "hardcore" kinds of Christianity such as Catholicism and Pentecostalism.

The findings of the survey have been contested, argued over and widely misunderstood. The narrative of a religious revival among young people is regularly rehearsed in the media, in homilies, and in political speeches, even though sceptics were quick to point out that the Bible Society's polling did not quite stack up with other data. The Catholic Church in England and Wales records the number of people attending Mass and receiving the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. Its data reveals that Sunday Mass attendance is still well below the numbers seen before the pandemic hit. There is no evidence that the pattern of steady decline in Mass attendance since it was first counted nearly 70 years ago

is being interrupted.

But something interesting is happening. The fall in Mass attendance is primarily because older churchgoers - who make up the majority of those in the pews - die or become too ill to go to church. The numbers are compounded, of course, by those who stop going to church for other reasons. However, the Catholic Church's data on adult baptisms tells a more complicated story: 5,432 baptisms of people aged over seven were recorded in England and Wales in 2024, the highest number in over a decade, a 21 per cent rise from the previous year, and the highest number - by quite a considerable margin - in the 11-year period for which data is available. And in the same 12-month period there was an unprecedented 30 per cent increase in the number of people baptised in other denominations being received into full communion with the Catholic Church, from 2,334 to 3,024. I was one of them.

These increases are dramatic, but the numbers are tiny in proportion to the 62 million people who live in England and Wales, and are very modest even as a proportion of the 575,453 who attend Sunday Mass each week. This means that if you interview people on the street, you might not be any more likely to find a practising Christian than you were in the past. However, within the Church, the energy that young converts are bringing is undeniable, and even transformative. Particularly near universities and in urban, middle-class parishes, priests report not only an explosion of interest, with Rite of Catholic Initiation for Adults (RCIA) groups swelling, but also a distinctly new flavour to the enquiries.

At Southampton University, the "CathSoc" has tripled in size, from 60 people two years ago to 180 this academic year, with unprecedented numbers of students preparing to be confirmed at the Easter Vigil. Adrian, a student on the society's committee, noticed that after the conclave that elected Pope Leo XIV in May 2025, "suddenly, Catholicism was on everyone's radar". York University's society, which boasts the catchier name "CaSSoc", has also more than

doubled its numbers in the past two years. University is a place where young people are forging their identity and experimenting with new ideas - whether it's going vegan, joining the Communist Party, or becoming Catholic (or maybe all of the above). There are probably still more students who stop practising the faith they grew up with after flying the nest than the reverse, but for those who grew up in non-religious families, university is now sometimes their first proper encounter with religion. As Fr Seward puts it, they're "freer to make decisions, to step out of the norms". Sometimes, meeting Catholic students can be the starting point for the spiritually curious. Izy, now 23, studying biology in London, was encouraged by Catholic friends to go with them to Newman House, the chaplaincy in Bloomsbury. After a series of difficult family events, she experienced "a special moment with God", which prompted her to buy a rosary and ask her friend how to pray it. "I asked for help to understand the more politically sensitive areas that had posed a barrier to me before, and I was discovering so many beautiful, rich, and diverse ways of praying. God's timing for certain conversations and life experiences was perfect."

Charlie, now a 26-year-old para-legal, studied at Nottingham University just before the pandemic. He had grown up in a non-practising Christian family and at that point considered himself an atheist. "I started university with the idea that I would define who I was by being there," he explains. "I was the first generation in my family to go, so it was very meaningful to me." It was also the height of the "culture war" and he started going to political and debating societies, not quite sure what his views were. He felt a severe knockback when he didn't do well in his first-year exams, lost a few friends and became "quite directionless".

Eventually, like Izy, Charlie made some friends who would become very important in his life: one was a cradle Catholic and the other had been recently baptised. "Between the three of us, we started talking first

about philosophy and then theology,” he remembers. “We had amazing conversations - not always sober, of course.” When one Sunday he went with them to Mass celebrated in the Dominican rite at Holy Cross Priory in Leicester, “something clicked”; “I became quite emotional, even though I didn’t know everything that was going on ... this was the emotional side to what had until this point been a very intellectual search.”

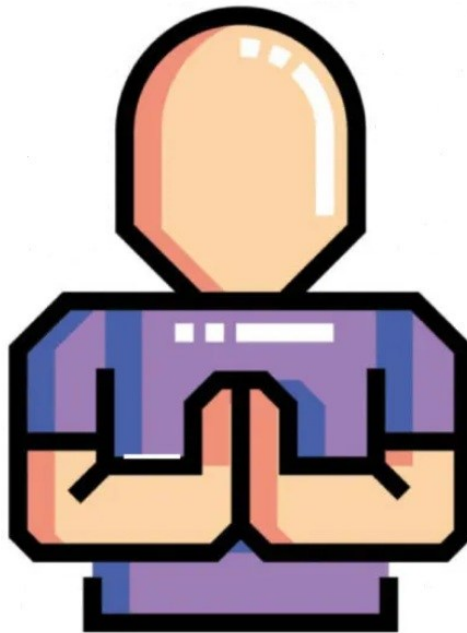
Though it’s often said that the revival is being led by young men, women continue to marginally outnumber men among adults becoming Catholics. However, the internet and YouTube videos seem to feature much more prominently in young men’s conversion stories than in women’s. Charlie tells me that for many young men, the “pipeline” to the faith through social media often leads from Jordan Peterson to the US Catholic mass evangelisers Bishop Robert Barron and Fr Mike Schmitz. John, who works for a bank in Edinburgh and is in the process of becoming Catholic in his early thirties, tells me - slightly sheepishly - that Peterson, “a rather controversial figure”, had been “a gateway drug”. Peterson is not himself a practising Christian, and is sharply at odds with the Church on issues such as environmental stewardship, but, as John explains, “if you’re a young lad looking for meaning on YouTube, [Peterson] pops up a lot and gives a lot of advice”.

Fr Stephen Langridge, parish priest of St Elizabeth of Portugal Church in Richmond-upon-Thames, where a third of the congregation are aged between 18 and 30, told a conference organised by the *Church Times* last month that he also notices “Gen Z are digital natives, from a fragmented and lonely culture. They turn up with biblical language and moral claims, not because they encountered them in church, but because they found them online, whether on YouTube or podcasts like ‘Pints with Aquinas’ or ‘Crash Course Catholicism’”. They often come formed, but not yet rooted; believing, but not yet belonging. They are looking for a community shaped by beauty, truth, goodness, and love; and they find that quietly compelling.”

Fr Seward observes: “There’s a tendency for some to think that the Church is an ideology they can latch on to - one has to wean them off that.” He adds: “I was talking to two of our converts the other day and realised that one had just been to the Green Party Conference and the other to Reform. We must be doing something right if we can get these two people in the same place talking

to each other.” John agrees: “The Church needs to be for everyone, of all political persuasions.”

Marian, a 23-year-old science executive who grew up in a Catholic family and rediscovered her faith while at Durham University, says young people’s disillusionment with secularism can be “like a game of pinball. The ball shoots up under pressure and lands in another hole:



for some boys, it lands in the dangerous ‘red-pill’ movement of misogynistic figures like Andrew Tate; for others, it lands in the Catholic Church.” The Church’s fundamental teaching is to love your neighbour, she says. “You can’t be true to the Catholic faith while writing angry and hateful stuff on social media.”

Another pattern I notice among young male converts is that they have sometimes been nurtured in the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England before deciding something didn’t feel right and making the leap to Rome. When Cameron, 26, started training for the priesthood in the Church of England he found that it forced him out of his Anglo-Catholic bubble and made him realise how out of place he felt. “It was like a corporate HR process,” he recalled. “It made me wonder if they really had any sacramental conception of the priesthood at all.”

Maedoc, 27, grew up in a non-religious family but found spiritual support after a bereavement in an Anglican parish. He was also discerning Holy Orders when he went on a retreat at a Catholic Benedictine monastery. He felt the monks gave their lives to God in a way that he had never seen in the Church of England, and it made him want to share their fullness of faith. Both Cameron and

Maedoc were received into full communion with Rome through the Ordinariate, which was established in 2011 to enable former Anglicans to join the Catholic Church while retaining ties with the Anglo-Catholic liturgical and spiritual patrimony.

Another side of the story is that the revival is also a fruit of a multicultural Britain, which brings together people from historically Catholic cultures with people who might not have encountered Christianity before. In an RCIA group in a major city you’re likely to meet at least one person whose main exposure to Catholicism is from dating or marrying someone from India, Brazil or the Philippines.

Tanya, a fashion model from Singapore, grew up in a non-religious but culturally Buddhist family and first encountered Catholicism via a Polish boyfriend after moving to the UK. The relationship didn’t last, but her interest in the faith did. She was initially baptised as an Anglican in 2022 and was attracted to charismatic evangelical Protestantism. She discovered the Rosary through the prayer app *Hallow*, and a personal experience of the Real Presence in Eucharistic Adoration led her towards Catholicism, which she describes as feeling like “coming home”.

Nara, a 32-year-old lawyer, is from a Romanian and Mongolian background and grew up in many different countries before moving to the UK. On a lifelong “quest for meaning”, she was encouraged to develop her prayer life by a Muslim friend, and ended up meeting some Franciscan friars at a friend’s Catholic wedding in South Africa. She was surprised to discover how much their values resonated with her, which led her to start attending Farm Street Church. She found it inclusive and welcoming, which she says was “crucial” in making her feel accepted. A teacher at a girls’ secondary school in Southampton tells me pupils from Catholic backgrounds become more interested in attending Mass when their Muslim friends ask them: “We practise our faith, why don’t you practise yours?”

A recurrent theme among the fellow converts I spoke to is disillusionment with moral relativism and a search for a stronger sense of moral values. Fr Seward says that when he first became a priest 20 years ago, the moral teachings of the Church used to be an obstacle for converts; this does not tend to be the case any more, because the people coming want something “radically different” and have “already rejected moral relativism”.

Charlie moved beyond his teenage nihilism when he realised that there is a shared understanding of good and evil all over the world, a standard of behaviour that everyone recognises, and this sowed the seed of his belief in God. Maria rediscovered the faith when she felt for herself how “sad and hollow” the typical university experience of partying, drinking, and trying to get likes on social media was. Bartek, 26, who grew up in a non-religious family, became a Catholic after reading Thomas Aquinas as a teenager and now works for a think-tank in Westminster, tells me: “People feel really dissatisfied by postmodernism: the absence of values, always prioritising yourself, with no objective morality or authority and no objective meaning.”

For some, Catholic teaching on sex and gender is appealing, for others it is an obstacle. Tanya says that being able to understand “what is a man and what is a woman” was a relief after all the “confusion” in the secular world, and that she enjoys being able to “embrace her femininity” by wearing a veil at Mass. Nara, on the other hand, remembers that as a child she was put off Christianity by the idea that Eve was created from Adam’s rib, which seemed to imply that women were inferior. When she eventually converted, a friend said to her: “Good luck joining the patriarchy club.” She still disagrees with the Vatican’s position on women’s ordination and thinks there should be more roles for women in the Church. Maria says the one thing she most wishes that people outside the Church understood about it is that it isn’t “anti-woman”.

Many find a sense of connection with history. Wendy, 27, who grew up in Canada in a non-religious Chinese family, initially joined a Reformed Baptist church when she was at university. When she came to the UK, however, she saw with her own eyes “how real history is”. She recalls: “There were thousands of

years of Christianity before me: so why is their Christianity different from mine? I realised, for example, that up until a few hundred years ago everyone believed that the Eucharist was the real Body and Blood of Christ.”

She says she wished more people realised that although young people coming to the Church might be “a trend in the literal sense”, “we’re not doing it because it’s trendy, we’re doing it because we’re looking for truth and care about truth.” John also says: “The fullness of the tradition in Catholicism was very appealing. Modern life is so flimsy, there’s nothing to ground you. I was looking for rootedness in history, something to root my life in. When thinking about starting my own family, I wanted to be able to give my kids more meaning and community than I’d grown up with.”

The neoliberal dream of limitless material progress, which had currency in the 1990s and 2000s, rings hollow to Gen Z and younger millennials. Today’s young adults have been nicknamed “generation rent” because they face a housing crisis, along with a dire job market that would have been unimaginable a generation ago. Concerned about the state of the world and the breakdown of trust and social cohesion, and disillusioned with consumerism and the shallowness of social media, many of my peers have deleted their Instagram and Snapchat accounts.

Bartek finds that some of them “see religion as something that brings them back into community”. Nara says that “everyone needs to feel like they belong” and laments that “there’s so much division in the world”. When becoming a Catholic, it was very important for her to emphasise that the faith wouldn’t be something that would add to that division: “It’s not about ticking boxes, signing a sheet or joining a club. I don’t have to agree with everyone: we’re all there for our own reasons and on our own journey. For

each of us, it’s about our own relationship with God.”

A smile lights up Maedoc’s whole countenance when I ask him about his experience of being baptised. Recalling his, Charlie says, “It was just heavenly. Absolutely incredible. As an adult, you remember every moment.” Fr Seward says that the young converts understand that “you have to be on fire, or you won’t be able to sustain faith in a world that’s hostile to it”. There is certainly a hunger for the transcendent. Bartek finds that, even among non-Christians, young people are once again “astounded by the beauty of churches, the mystery of ceremony, the mystery of the sacraments” and they now “cringe” at atheist arguments and even find them “uncool”.

He says: “The Church should avoid leaning into the zeitgeist of the 2000s - there’s a lot of managerialism, formalism, committee meetings in rooms with white walls. When people are attracted to the Church, it’s because of the mystique, the grandeur, the thousands of years of community.” Some young converts, like Charlie and Maria, attend Mass in the pre-Vatican II rite and find, as Maria puts it, that it “offers the biggest contrast with the noisiness of the world, with its emphasis on reverence”. But both feel that liturgy shouldn’t be a source of division in the Church and that the focus should be on building bridges and celebrating the diversity of the Church’s traditions.

Every story I heard from a young convert was different, and although none of them exactly matched my own, many themes resonated with me: a fascination for the history and diversity of expressions of faith in the Catholic tradition, a longing for spiritual depth and community, a realisation of the power of the sacraments. There is one thing they all have in common. When they talk about their unique personal encounter with the divine, they glow.

HOW ABRHAM and BEZAR are TRAVELLING

On Wednesday Bezar underwent her now weekly “drainage” procedure. She was very unwell on her return home and has clearly deteriorated. We have a zoom meeting next Tuesday with hospital staff to iron out some concerns the couple have about information sharing and protocols. At this meeting we will also be clarifying her treatment plan and services available as she moves closer to her final days.

Abrham had applied to sponsor his mother to come from Ethiopia on a 3 month visitor visa, but Immigration believe she will seek asylum whilst here and have declined her application!!! With the help of our brilliant immigration lawyer we have found another way to apply for a different visa; that will allow her to spend 3 years in Australia, and we are currently working on this application.

On Thursday, when we visited, Abrham looked exhausted and defeated. He is buoyed by the prayers you are all praying and extremely grateful for your financial assistance. The new visa application is not without expense, and funerals, even with the “cheapest options”; are not cheap.

If you would still like to contribute toward Bezar’s “farewell” and now the visa application, banking details are:

BSB = 633000. Acc# = 210647517. Acc NAME = Miranda Armstrong

God Bless. *Miranda and Marlis*

In the first of a Lent series, a novelist and grandmother reflects that as you move into your eighties possibilities narrow, but God gets closer / **By Lucy Beckett**

Granny, have you got your stick?

It's odd, and probably not often noticed, that most of the ways in which we use the word "growing" suggest improvement, or at least something positive rather than negative. "Growing up"; "growing out of" something well left behind; "growing" sweet peas or parsnips; "growing into" a better version of oneself, or a job one is learning how to do properly; "growing in" confidence, stature, significance; and so on. We don't say someone is growing ill or growing angry or growing sad: we say "becoming" or "getting" instead.

So are we, in the everyday phrase we use, assuming that growing old must have something valuable about it? Perhaps. And this is worth bearing in mind when it definitely seems to have more to do with narrowing and loss than with anything good, let alone expanding.

Narrowing is inevitable: we can't do many things we used to do without thinking, and we're never going to do many things we thought for years we would manage, one day, to achieve. Even if one is lucky enough to be ordinarily well into one's eighties, infirmity is bound to have arrived. Somebody said: "If you wake up in the morning when you're over 70 and nothing hurts, you're probably dead." Not actually the case, but the experience that bits of the body don't work as they used to must be more or less universal. The familiar walk through the village to the letter box, or through the local town from the car park to the shops, you never gave a moment's thought to. Now you find that the village, the town, are on hills that must have been there all along but which you never noticed until they made you out of breath going up them, and, going down them, nervous of falling. "Granny, have you got your stick?" You drop things, break things, in a way you never used to. You can't drive at night, though there is nothing the matter with your eyesight, because your confidence has somehow drained away.

As for what you always hoped to do when you had more time, more money, fewer commitments - sailing up the Nile, having a look at India, staying in the Hebrides for a few weeks in May and June to be sure of

some beautiful weather, learning to play the piano properly while living where no one would be driven mad by the practising - what happened to them? They slipped, without you noticing, beyond possibility.

Growing? Dwindling, more like. On the other hand, in all this constriction there is much good to be found. It is simpler to cope with the fewer options of every day, to re-discover the calm of a routine in which there are many decisions you don't have to make; and neither you yourself nor anyone else minds what you look like or whether you have bought any new clothes for years. Meanwhile, the mind, liberated from competition and ambition, can take a longer, a kinder, view of your own life: it doesn't matter any more that you didn't get a first at Cambridge, that you couldn't get more than a fifth of the way through Proust, that you never learned how to make Yorkshire pudding.

If you have had the great good fortune, or, more exactly, been granted the wholly undeserved grace, of being able to live as a faithful Catholic, by no means without sins, greater and lesser, but faithful, you may, now that you are within sight of your death, be able, sometimes, to see "a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower", or all of God's Creation as "a little thing the size of a hazelnut". Not because you are a visionary like Blake or Julian of Norwich, but partly because they were visionaries and their words describe something you recognise; and partly because, when you are old, time and space do contract. If the future is obviously shorter, so is the past. Each day, week, month becomes shorter in your perception because each is a smaller proportion of your life both ahead and behind you. As you look back, you find the major sins of your life, committed perhaps decades ago, look larger and see nearer as you age. Confessed and forgiven though long ago they were, you find yourself facing them all over again, and will surely carry them with you into Purgatory. At the same time, God is somehow also closer because the space, the immense space between you and God, narrows. Which is perhaps only a way of saying

that it is easier to pray when you have given up worrying about whether you're doing prayer right, or whether those moments of connection, of wonder, of losing worry in a kind of resignation to the goodness of God, count as prayer.

As for the outside world, while your own horizon is shrinking along with the scope of every day, you may well be increasingly anxious about the future you won't be there to see. Your children may be living not all that differently from how you have lived, but your grandchildren are going to have to find ways of being positive, being themselves, in more and more difficult circumstances: climate change, artificial intelligence, the dreadful polarisation and oversimplification of every human challenge. How fortunate to be old enough to be able to choose not to have a smartphone, not to know anything at all about social media, to read a newspaper made of paper, and with luck to be dead before these options close. But hope is a virtue as well as a gift, and those who have truly grown old should trust that this particularly menacing patch of history will pass, people will realise they need each other more than they need tech, and, when Trump and Putin and Netanyahu are no more, common sense in all its meanings, and even responsibility in all of its layers of meaning, may return to guide the powerful.

Lucy Beckett is a novelist, historian and literary critic.



POPE CALLS FOR 'COUNTERCULTURAL' REPENTANCE



Pope Leo XIV led a solemn penitential procession to Rome's oldest extant basilica, marking the first Ash Wednesday of his pontificate with a call for "countercultural" repentance for sins from individuals, institutions and the Church itself. Source: OSV News.

<https://cathnews.com/2026/02/19/pope-calls-for-countercultural-repentance/>

POLITICIANS URGED TO SUPPORT REPATRIATION OF RELATIVES OF ISIS FIGHTERS



Catholic Social Services Australia has expressed concern over Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's announcement that his government will not support the repatriation of a group of Australian relatives of ISIS fighters trying to return home from Syria.

<https://cathnews.com/2026/02/19/politicians-urged-to-support-repatriation-of-relatives-of-isis-fighters/>

ROYAL COMMISSION TO HOLD FIRST PUBLIC HEARING NEXT WEEK



The Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion will hold its first public hearing next week. Source: News.com.au.

<https://cathnews.com/2026/02/19/royal-commission-to-hold-first-public-hearing-next-week/>

HOW TO RETURN HOME FROM A SPIRITUAL WILDERNESS



Brisbane priest Fr Michael My Van Tran says everyone - priests included - can feel like they are sometimes lost in a spiritual wilderness.

Source: The Catholic Leader.

<https://cathnews.com/2026/02/19/how-to-return-home-from-a-spiritual-wilderness/>

RETIRED TEACHER ACCEPTS CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFER 'IN A HEARTBEAT'



When Terry McCarthy was asked if he would come out of retirement and step into the role of Interim Executive Director of Catholic Education Tasmania, his initial thought was that he would be there "in a heartbeat".

Source: Hobart Archdiocese.

<https://cathnews.com/2026/02/19/retired-teacher-accepts-catholic-education-offer-in-a-heartbeat/>

NEW DEACON SHOWS DEVOTION TO OUR LADY WITH FLOWERS ON VALENTINE'S DAY



On Valentine's Day, Lawrence Zimbe offered a bouquet not to a sweetheart, but to Our Lady represented by her statue, following his ordination to the diaconate by Sydney Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Meagher. Source: The Catholic Weekly.

<https://cathnews.com/2026/02/19/new-deacon-shows-devotion-to-our-lady-with-flowers-on-valentines-day/>

The common good in common hands Bonds of belonging

Compassion is a force that draws us out of our comfort zones and into the orbit of those we might not already know. It connects us to the struggles of our neighbours, breaking down indifference and tribalism, and slowly repairing the fraying bonds of belonging and community.



On this year's World Day of the Sick (feast of Our Lady of Lourdes), Pope Leo encourages us to reflect on the example of the Good Samaritan - someone whose courageous compassion and accompaniment are reflected in the contributions of the

Mercy Palliative Care volunteers who, every day, quietly offer the gift of their unhurried presence to the dying and their loved ones in Melbourne's west.

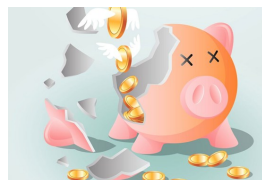
<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/palliative-care-volunteers-offer-gift-of-unhurried-presence-in-melbournes-west>



Ahead of the Thomas More Centre's summer conference on Christianity and the Common Good, centre director Anna Krohn reflects on how communities come together in a crisis, and on how everyday virtues and the compassion of ordinary people are the

keys to rebuilding communities, repairing trust and serving the common good.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/the-common-good-in-common-hands-how-everyday-virtue-repairs-the-bonds-of-belonging>



And in the first of two social justice statements to be released this year, the Australian Catholic bishops are urging all Australians to show courage and tenderness in addressing the nation's cost of living crisis and accompanying those who struggle under the weight of

financial pressures.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/bishops-seek-focus-on-cost-of-living-crisis>

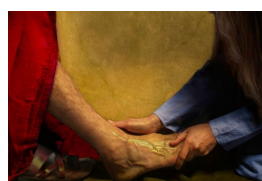


Parishioners credit faith and can-do attitude for Australia Day honours

In the 2026 Australia Day Honours, several dedicated individuals from Victoria's Catholic parishes were recognised with Order of Australia Medals (OAMs) for their outstanding

service, embodying the national values of 'service, community, kindness, curiosity, tenacity, and care', as noted by Governor-General Sam Mostyn AC.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/parishioners-credit-faith-and-can-do-attitude-for-australia-day-honours>



Are you serious? Why we should hold nothing back in Lent Despite our culture's obsession with life hacks, we should resist the temptation to think of Lent as just another shortcut to a better life. Rather than chasing a better version of ourselves, Lent is a time to

get serious about drawing close to Christ, and Mary of Bethany is the perfect Lenten guide.

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/are-you-serious-embracing-the-true-spirit-of-lent>

<https://melbournecatholic.org/events>

For more information: www.melbournecatholic.org or www.facebook.com/CatholicArchdioceseofMelbourne