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Introduction

You are the future of Australia. You will be the poets and plumbers, the doctors and decorators, the scientists and salespeople of tomorrow, all of whom will contribute to a society that we believe is based on justice, equity and that most prized of all Australian attributes, the *fair go*.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus of Nazareth was the man of the *fair go* in a time of oppression and marginalisation for many in his society. Now, as

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young people who follow the Catholic faith tradition, you are called to follow him. You are called to think about who you are in *faith* and *life* and to examine how your emerging identity is being formed. During these teenage years, as you individualise in the normal progress of adolescent maturation and follow the things that interest you, you are also finding out about what you stand for. You are finding out who you are at heart.

Now is the time to look at the Gospel message—the good news of Jesus Christ—to see how it resonates in your life: in your life as a student, friend, sibling, child, team mate, member of the local community, as a young Australian and as a global citizen. In coming to an understanding of yourself, you come to an understanding of your place in the world and what you can do to make it a better place for all.

You are the future of the Church and it's important that you come to an appreciation of the primacy of prayer in the life of the spirit. Prayer feeds the soul. It connects you with God and makes you look inside yourself. It helps to develop a thoughtful and reflective capacity, much needed in a world where busyness and immediacy lead us toward the superficial and shallow. It is about surrendering time; it is about going in, soul-searching and not being afraid to seek what it is you need from God, and from yourself. With prayer your life in the spirit grows.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2559) prayer is the '...raising of one's heart and mind to God'. In this encounter, one enters a personal relationship with God and joins

with all those past and present, the communion of saints, who have prayed with similar fidelity in the Catholic community. Prayer can be liturgical, personal and communal. In order to pray properly one must approach the act of praying with the right disposition: a readiness and receptivity, a deliberately formed intention to enter into a prayerful state with the whole of one's heart and mind. Less than full attention undermines the efficacy of prayer, although it is true that distractions can occur. If your mind wanders, sometimes this may be a fruitful diversion during the prayer experience, but it is important to get back on track. To commence prayer properly it is important to get into the zone of stillness and surrender. Prayer is never random, although it may be spontaneous. It is '...a grasp of the spiritual realities one experiences'. (CCC 2651) Prayer is our resting in God and letting him into the secrets of our successes and sorrows, our doubts and delights; letting him in, unconditionally, no ifs or buts or maybes.

Prayer is finding the solace of shelter with the God who loves us.

The essential forms of Christian prayer are blessing and adoration, petition and intercession, thanksgiving and praise. The Eucharist contains and expresses all forms of prayer (CCC 2643). As a student in a Catholic school you will have many opportunities to pray: in homeroom, during your RE lessons, at Mass, on retreat or during reflection days. During these times you will be carrying on the enduring tradition of prayer in the Church.

The wellsprings of prayer can come from the sacred scriptures, the liturgy of the Church, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity and everyday situations. In responding more immediately to the everyday situations of your life—placed into the larger context of the liturgical year—it is hoped that your prayer life will flower and that the universal call to holiness which is your baptismal legacy will unfold in you.

This prayer journal follows the liturgical year and also the year as it unfolds for you as an Australian. It asks that you look at the blessings of your everyday lives, most of which is spent in ordinary time, and use them as a conduit to prayer. Through journal writing you will be able to respond to some of the

Australia Sea Lions,
Kangaroo Island

ideas shared here; to look at them in the light of your own life and faith experience. It aims for you to look at your life with gratitude. It also aims for you to express honestly the concerns you may have as you confront changes and look ahead to life beyond school. It may well help clarify who and how you want to be, and will bring to light the values and the common ground shared as Australians in a multicultural society.

As young Australian Catholics you are building a Church that has its own distinctive voice, unified with the voice of the Church all over the world, but with our own adaptations for time and place. Prayer is an act of faith, the voice of the living Church, your contribution to salvation history. Your voice is alive and jubilant and ready to be heard. This journal aims to reflect that voice while building your confidence in the power of prayer and your ability to pray comfortably and to know that you are heard.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples '...a parable about their need to pray always and never lose heart.' (Luke 18:1–8) We have always needed to pray, to put our hope in the Lord. In the 21st century, in a world saturated by the addictions of the marketplace and the competing demands of secular culture, it is hoped that the daily practice of prayer will become for you a sacred, nourishing and life-long conversation with God.

With prayer, you will never lose heart.

What is Prayer?

Prayer, put simply, is talking to God.

It is a conversation based on trust; it is where you can place all your cares and concerns with God because he is friend and confidante. In prayer, you step out of the worldly and take a step towards the transcendent.

The beauty and simplicity of saying a prayer is that anyone can do it, anytime, anywhere. One does not have to be especially holy or eloquent to have a quiet word with God. Beginning to pray—even if you think it is a stumbling and clumsy attempt—is a start. The intention in the heart always comes before the articulation of the words.

We pray at different times, for different reasons, in the different seasons of our lives. Sometimes we want to thank God exuberantly for the abundance of gifts we enjoy; at other times we want to honour him in adoration or make supplication for the things that aren't as we would wish them to be. God always answers us, but it may not be the

answer to our prayers that we are quite expecting. The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning reminds us:

*God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,
And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face,
A gauntlet with a gift in't.*

There are many different ways to pray and some may suit you better than others, depending on time and place and personal preference.

We can recite the traditional prayers we know and love, such as the 'Our Father'. We can pray as we work, study and walk—small spontaneous chats in the daily round. We can pray in silence or whilst listening to the sound of nature: the orchestra of creation humming its hymn of joy. When we sing we pray and God does not worry if we are slightly off key as long as our voices are lifted in praise. Prayer can be part of a pilgrimage or long walk or negotiating a labyrinth to an inner point of truth. Icons can be used to focus prayer and sometimes great works of art lead us to prayerful devotion. Prayer can be found in the repetition of a mantra or the surrender to stillness of meditation. We can pray when we read the scriptures, the Word of God. We can pray when we record our thoughts and tremblings in a journal. Whatever way we pray, Teresa of Avila tells us, prayer is '...taking time to be alone with him who we know loves us.'

Our prayer-life is a spiritual outpouring that we co-create with God. It is a soothing of the soul done together, whether formed as a special intention, a quiet intercession, through a nine day novena or a sudden urgent need.

Let your prayers—short or long, traditional or spontaneous, at home or at school—come from the truth of who you are.

They are, as Padre Pio wrote, '...the oxygen of the soul.'

Advent

Staying Awake!

Waiting and Preparing

John the Baptist

The Light of the World

Sunrise over Refuge Cove,
Wilson's Promontory, Victoria

Staying Awake!

Scripture: Matthew 24:42–44

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Prayer:

*Lord, keep us alert, not alarmed, ready for you,
in the fullness of time, at the end of time,
for all time.
Keep us awake to all that you promise,
to be ready for the unexpected hour that you
break into our lives.*

*Remind us that good things come to those
who wait.
Let us stay awake as the shepherds did on
that first night long ago.
We ask this through Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.*

Reflection:

Advent is the beginning of the Church’s liturgical year. It reminds us too of the end that is to come; ‘As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.’

In the Christian tradition the capacity to wait has been inherited from the Hebrew story. The Jewish people are still waiting for the Messiah to come and this ancient longing is part of their identity as a people of faith. In the Christian story we are waiting for the second coming of Christ, our Messiah, at the end of time. We do not know when this will happen so we need to be in a constant state of readiness.

We need to learn to wait well.

In the playgrounds of our schools and in our classrooms, in our backyards and our boardrooms, in our chapels and our cathedrals, in our homes and in our hearts; we need to be ready for what is to come.

We need to stay awake!

Stimulus:

*Who do you hope to become ... next year, in five years’ time, in twenty years’ time?
Are you ready for the unexpected hour?*



Ordinary Time

Happy New Year

The Feast of the Epiphany

Summer

Australia Day

Valentine's Day

Saint Patrick

Saint Joseph

You've Got a Friend

Sydney
Harbour Bridge,
New South Wales

Ordinary
Time

Happy New Year

Scripture: Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me..

Prayer:

Lord of the New Year,
Bless the year that is to come and awaken
us to its promises and possibilities.
We give thanks for the life lessons learnt last
year and offer our clean hearts to you.

We thank you for another year in which to
grow in goodness and in God.
Amen.

Reflection:

Most of us make New Year resolutions. In the first flush of enthusiasm we write up the list of changes we hope to make: a healthier diet, more application to study, helping mum do the dishes once in a while, refraining from teasing our siblings. We are pretty good at keeping these resolutions till at least the end of January. Then the full realisation that school is about to start again for another year hits us and the same old daily routine is resumed.

But more than external changes need to be made if the year ahead is going to be truly life-changing.

Through Psalm 51 we ask the Lord for a clean heart. A clean heart is the best possible start for the year ahead. We need to pump out the bad blood, the arteries clogged with envy, the venal valves that lead to an atrophy of spirit. We need a change of heart, a cleansed, renewed, recharged heart to kindle kindness, to heart-warm those around us.

We need to trade-in last year's heart, be it broken, hard or half-hearted.

Who knows what possibilities will open to the clean heart because it is receptive and generous and no longer harbours the small and sullyng resentments of the past?

We need to open our hearts wide to the world.

New Year is just the right time to set our cleaned-up hearts on hope, to be renewed with the Spirit for the 365 day adventure ahead of us.

Stimulus:

Have you kept your New Year's resolutions? How clean is your heart?