

releasing

THE CAPTIVE

REFLECTIONS FOR THE YEAR OF MARK

GEOFFREY PLANT

Published by
John Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave, Vic. 3170
www.johngarratt.com.au

Copyright ©2011 Geoffrey Plant

All rights reserved. Except as provided by the Australian copyright law, no part of this book may be reproduced in any way without permission in writing from the publisher.

Design and typesetting: Lucille Hughes
Text editing: Maryna Mews

Printed Coordinated by Advent Print Management

Cover image: www.thinkstockphotos.com.au/
ISBN: 9781921946134

Cataloguing in Publication information for this title is available from the National Library of Australia.
www.nla.gov.au

*For Ronan Kilgannon, Peter McGrath ofm, Marie Willey,
Val Willsteed, Frank Walter, Craig and Jackie Harrison,
Bénédicte Cruysmans and Fedor Mediansky, Elizabeth
Rieger, Wyn Jones, Greg and Liz Fitzgerald, and Richard
and Annette Dobson, and in memory of Bronwyn Walter
and Jimmy Willsteed*

*How can anyone tell how much he owes to the goodness of
those who love him? If we knew what people in their love
for us do to save us from damnation by the simple fact of
their friendship for us, we would learn some humility.*

Thomas Merton

SAMPLE

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction..... | ix |
| First Sunday of Advent..... | 1 |
| Second Sunday of Advent..... | 7 |
| Third Sunday of Advent..... | 13 |
| Fourth Sunday of Advent..... | 20 |
| Christmas Day..... | 26 |
| Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God..... | 31 |
| Feast of the Holy Family..... | 37 |
| Feast of the Epiphany..... | 42 |
| Ash Wednesday..... | 48 |
| First Sunday of Lent..... | 54 |
| Second Sunday of Lent..... | 61 |
| Third Sunday of Lent..... | 66 |
| Fourth Sunday of Lent..... | 73 |
| Fifth Sunday of Lent..... | 80 |
| Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday)..... | 87 |
| Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)..... | 91 |
| Good Friday..... | 97 |
| Easter Sunday..... | 101 |
| Second Sunday of Easter..... | 106 |
| Third Sunday of Easter..... | 111 |
| Fourth Sunday of Easter..... | 117 |
| Fifth Sunday of Easter..... | 122 |
| Sixth Sunday of Easter..... | 127 |
| Seventh Sunday of Easter..... | 133 |
| The Ascension of the Lord..... | 138 |
| Pentecost Sunday..... | 144 |
| Trinity Sunday..... | 149 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| The Body and Blood of Christ..... | 155 |
| Australia Day..... | 161 |
| The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary..... | 167 |
| Feast of All Saints..... | 172 |
| Feast of All Souls..... | 177 |
| Baptism of the Lord (First Sunday in Ordinary Time)..... | 182 |
| Second Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 189 |
| Third Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 195 |
| Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 202 |
| Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 209 |
| Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 215 |
| Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 222 |
| Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 227 |
| Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 232 |
| Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 239 |
| Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 245 |
| Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 251 |
| Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 257 |
| Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 263 |
| Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 269 |
| Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 275 |
| Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 281 |
| Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 287 |
| Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 294 |
| Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 299 |
| Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 305 |
| Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 310 |
| Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 316 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 322 |
| Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 328 |
| Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 334 |
| Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 339 |
| Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 346 |
| Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 351 |
| Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 356 |
| Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 363 |
| Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 368 |
| Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time..... | 373 |
| Christ the King..... | 378 |
| Bibliography..... | 383 |

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

Releasing the Captive is a collection of reflections for Year B of the liturgical cycle, the year of Mark. It is a companion volume to *Ascending the Mountain* (Year A, the year of Matthew) and *Welcoming the Outsider* (Year C, the year of Luke). I have chosen the titles for these volumes to reflect the distinctive emphasis that each of the evangelists offers us on the life and ministry of Jesus. Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses, while in the material unique to Luke's gospel we meet a Jesus who welcomes outsiders of one kind or another. I believe that an interpretative key to Mark's gospel can be found in the incident that he places at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry: an exorcism in the synagogue at Capernaum. We meet a man with symptoms that a modern reader might identify with epilepsy, and Jesus heals him. He has been set free, released from captivity, and that is what exorcism is all about. Despite supernatural horror movies like *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Rite* (2011),

exorcisms are not part of the world view of people living in the twenty-first century, at least in the Western world. But the reality behind demonic possession is very much with us today because we are held captive by forces over which we have little or no control, forces that rob us of freedom, alienate us from God and others, and stunt our human growth. A contemporary example of 'possession' is our addiction to possessions, described by Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss by the coined word 'affluenza'. Affluenza is the 'bloated, sluggish and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses'.¹ We are confused about what it takes to live a worthwhile life, and part of this confusion 'is a failure to distinguish between what we want and what we need'. For example, only 20 per cent of Americans said a second car was a 'necessity' in 1973; by 1996 that figure had risen to 37 per cent. In Australia, items that were once considered as luxuries have become necessities – items such as plasma-screen TVs, air conditioning, personal computers, second bathrooms and mobile phones, to name but a few.² (Reflection for the Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time).

World poverty is also an evil that holds millions of people in bondage. For that reason the work of people like David Bussau, founder of Opportunity International (Reflection for the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time), and Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank (Reflection for the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time) could be described as exorcism because they are liberating people in Third

1 Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, *Affluenza*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2005, p. 3.

2 Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, *Affluenza* p. 7.

World countries from poverty. But, sadly, we can resist the gracious invitation offered to us. The rich young man (Reflection for the Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time) who approached Jesus with the question ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’ is sincere in his quest. Jesus, we are told, ‘looked steadily at him and loved him’. But he is beset with fear. Who would he be without his wealth? What friends would he have were he to give away all his possessions? It was a threshold he could not cross. Sadly, this man’s many possessions held him captive.

We can also be held captive by our busyness, and this is a recurring theme in several of these homilies. The social commentator Hugh Mackay argues that we have become obsessed by the need to appear busy (Reflection for the First Sunday of Lent). ‘Busy-busy’ has become a kind of mantra in our lives.³ And keeping busy is one sure way to avoid listening. Frantic busyness can be a wonderful hiding place. If you stay busy for long enough, you might never have time to listen, you might never have time ‘to take a closer look at the things and people one would rather not see, to face situations one would rather avoid, to answer questions one would rather forget’.⁴ Henri Nouwen writes that ‘one of the most obvious characteristics of our daily lives is that we are busy. We experience our days as filled with things to do, people to meet, projects to finish, letters to write, calls to make, and appointments to keep. Our lives often seem like

3 Hugh Mackay, ‘Flat out, but are we really doing anything?’, *The Australian*, 1 April 1996.

4 Alessandro Pronzato, quoted in John Moses, *The Desert: An Anthology for Lent*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 1977, p. 57.

over-packed suitcases bursting at the seams⁵ (Reflection for Ash Wednesday). Jesus invites us into the desert to confront the truth about our own lives and the choices we make, to make a personal stocktake.

An earlier version of some of these reflections appeared in the Australasian Catholic Record, and I am grateful to Fr Gerard Kelly for permission to reproduce them here. Once again I would like to express my gratitude to the parishioners of St Luke's, Revesby, who have sat through these when I gave them as homilies. Their encouragement and support has been a blessing over the years.

5. Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, Doubleday, New York, 1981, p. 23.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(YEAR B)

And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake! (Mk 1:37)

The Second Coming may occur sooner than we think, if genetic technology continues to progress by leaps and bounds. In February 1997, scientists working at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland, created world news headlines by successfully creating a cloned sheep, subsequently named Dolly. This means that Dolly's genetic make-up is identical to the adult sheep from which it was cloned. Scientists are now suggesting that it won't be long before we have the expertise to clone extinct animals. The director of the Australian Museum, Dr Mike Archer, says that it's time to bring the Tasmanian tiger back to life. The last tiger died in Hobart Zoo in 1936, but the museum has the remains of a very young tiger, collected in 1866 and perfectly preserved since then in a bottle of alcohol.⁶ Scientists would first have to harvest the tiger's DNA, its genetic blueprint, from the preserved specimen. The tiger's DNA would then be inserted into the egg of a host animal, making sure that all genetic material had been removed from the unfertilised

⁶ James Woodford, 'Baby tiger has power to revive species', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May 1999, p. 3.

egg.⁷ But the Tasmanian tiger isn't the only extinct animal that may walk the earth yet again. Scientists are now attempting to clone a 20,000-year-old giant woolly mammoth excavated from permafrost in Siberia. The mammoth's DNA is to be inserted into the egg of an Asian elephant, an animal with greater biological similarities to the mammoth than to African elephants.⁸

But that isn't as easy as it sounds. We all start out as a fertilised egg, a zygote, which is a single cell. But when the embryo grows to eight or sixteen cells, the cells begin to differentiate. That is, they begin to take on specific roles; they become brain cells, liver cells, nerve cells, and so on. Each of the cells has the same DNA, but they activate different genes. DNA is like a piano with 100,000 keys, and each key represents a particular genetic trait. Once a cell has differentiated into, say a hair cell, only the keys controlling hair still work in that cell. The other keys no longer work. Once the DNA expresses a particular gene, there's no going back. Once a cell has become a hair cell, it can't become a blood cell.⁹ The key to successful cloning lies in reversing the process of differentiation. Dolly was cloned from mammary cells of the parent sheep. Scientists had to break the genetic locks on the mammary cells to allow all the

7 Professor Ian Wilmut, creator of 'Dolly' believes that it would be virtually impossible to recreate the extinct Tasmanian tiger by cloning the thylacine pup preserved in alcohol since 1866. 'It's extraordinarily unlikely that the genetic information in that (preserved pup) is usable,' Professor Wilmut said in a recent interview. *The Age*, 28 September 1999.

8 Penny Fannin, 'Bid to clone woolly mammoth', *The Age*, 22 October, 1999.

9 Information on cell differentiation comes from John Case, *The Genesis Code*, Arrow Books, London, 1997, pp. 450-3.

genes to become functional. In other words, the entire genetic code had to be unlocked to create a cloned sheep. All the 'keys' on the genetic keyboard had to be activated. Despite technical difficulties and legal and ethical dilemmas, scientists have already commenced work on cloning human beings, a possibility anticipated years ago by science fiction writers. Ira Levin's 1976 novel *The Boys from Brazil*, subsequently made into a movie starring Gregory Peck and Laurence Olivier, tells the chilling story of Hitler clones created by Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele in an attempt to produce a new *führer*.

'The evil that men do lives after them,' Shakespeare tells us, 'The good is oft interred with their bones'¹⁰ ... until now! What if it were possible to clone heroic figures from the past? What if scientists could resurrect the Messiah? Improbable as it might sound, that is the theme of two recent novels, *Honk if You Are Jesus*, by Peter Goldsworthy,¹¹ and *The Genesis Code*, by John Case. In each of these novels the DNA necessary for cloning is obtained from authenticated relics – unspecified relics of likely provenance in one story, and a crucifixion nail in the other. In both cases unsuspecting women are the recipients of a fertilised messianic ovum. And so it comes to pass, in Case's novel, that Marie gives birth to Jesse, while protected by Joe from villains attempting to destroy the unborn child. Sound vaguely familiar?

What would happen if scientists created a Jesus clone? Would the Messiah fare any better at his second coming? A prosperous farmer

10 *Julius Caesar*, 3, i, 76-7.

11 Peter Goldsworthy, *Honk if You Are Jesus*, Flamingo, London, 1992.

rushed into his house and cried out to his wife in an anguished voice, 'Rebecca, I have just heard a terrible rumour that is spreading through town like wildfire – the Messiah has come!' After thinking about what her husband had just said, Rebecca replied, 'What is so terrible about that? Why are you so upset?'

'I'm upset because after years of sweat and toil we have finally found prosperity. We have a thousand head of cattle, our barns are full to overflowing, and all our trees are heavily laden with fruit. What if the Messiah tells us to give it all away and follow him?'

'Calm down. We Jews have endured great suffering and hardship down through the ages. We have been enslaved by Egyptians, exiled by the Babylonians, slaughtered by the Romans, herded into ghettos by Christians. We have endured the Holocaust and the vengeance of the Arab world, and yet we have survived. Just have faith, my dear husband. When the Messiah comes, we will find a way to deal with him!'¹²

In Dostoyevsky's nineteenth-century novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Lord 'passes once more among men in that same human form in which for three years He walked among men 15 centuries earlier.'¹³ He comes to Seville, just a day after one hundred heretics had been burnt all in one go, 'ad majorem gloriam Dei', to the greater glory of God. The 'sun of love burns in his heart' as he passes among people with 'a quiet smile of infinite compassion'. Everyone

12 Adapted from Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog*, vol. 1, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, India, 1989, p. 71.

13 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Penguin Classics, London, 1993, pp. 286ff.

recognises him; they weep and kiss the ground on which He walks. 'The children throw flowers in his path, singing and crying to Him: "Hosannah!"'

Jesus passes by the cathedral just as the coffin of a seventeen-year-old girl is borne inside. The mother of the dead girl throws herself at the feet of Jesus and beseeches him, 'If it is You, then raise up my child!' He gazes at the lifeless body with compassion, and softly pronounces the words 'Talitha cumi'. The girl rises in her coffin 'with astonished, wide-open eyes', a bouquet of white roses in her arms. Just at that moment the Cardinal Grand Inquisitor passes by the cathedral. 'He is an old man of almost ninety, tall and straight, with a withered face and sunken eyes, in which, however, there is still a fiery, spark-like gleam.' He wears only an 'old, coarse monkish cassock', not the resplendent cardinal's attire he had worn the day before when 'the enemies of the Roman faith were being burned.'

The Grand Inquisitor has witnessed the dead girl being raised to life, and he orders the guard to arrest Jesus. Later that night he confronts his prisoner, the two men standing alone together in a cell. The old Grand Inquisitor studies the face of Jesus for a long time, and says to him, "Is it you? You?" Receiving no answer, however, he quickly adds: "No, do not reply, keep silent. And in any case, what could you possibly say? I know only too well what you would say. And you have no right to add anything to what was said by you in former times. Why have you come to get in our way? For you have come to get in our way, and you yourself know it..." The inquisitor speaks at length to his prisoner, threatening to burn him at the stake

‘as the most wicked of heretics’. He is uneasy because ‘the Prisoner has listened to him all this time with quiet emotion, gazing straight into his eyes and evidently not wishing to raise any objection. The old man would like the Other to say something, even if it is bitter, terrible. But He suddenly draws near to the old man without saying anything and quietly kisses him on his bloodless, ninety-year-old lips. That is His only response. The old man shudders. Something has stirred at the corners of his mouth; he goes to the door, opens it and says to Him: “Go and do not come back ... do not come back at all ... ever ... ever!”

During this holy season of Advent, we await the coming of Our Saviour. When he comes, will he find us awake, ready to receive him with welcome hearts? Or out of fear that he may force us to confront our own inner darkness, will we command him to depart: ‘Go and do not come back ... do not come back at all ... ever ... ever!’?