



NOVEMBER  
2022

# Stella Maris

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS AROUND THE WORLD

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We provide practical and pastoral care to all seafarers, regardless of nationality, belief or race. Our port chaplains and volunteer ship visitors welcome seafarers, offer welfare services and advice, practical help, care and friendship.

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## Sunday at Sea with Fr Colum Kelly

**THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
SUNDAY 6TH NOVEMBER

### GOSPEL LUKE 20:27-38

Some Sadducees – those who say that there is no resurrection – approached Jesus and they put this question to him, 'Master, we have it from Moses in writing, that if a man's married brother dies childless, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Well, then, there were seven brothers. The first, having married a wife, died childless. The second and then the third married the widow. And the same with all seven, they died leaving no children. Finally the woman herself died. Now, at the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife since she had been married to all seven?'

Jesus replied, 'The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection they are sons of God. And Moses himself implies that the dead rise again, in the passage about the bush where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive.'

### THE GOSPEL AND YOU

In today's gospel St Luke introduces us to some of the conflict that existed among the various factions in Jewish belief in Jesus's time. He is challenged by the Sadducees in this their only appearance in Luke's gospel.

So, who were they? The Sadducees were the aristocratic leaders who despised the Pharisees for their "modern" belief and interpretations of the law. They were the ultra conservatives who only accepted the first five books of the bible, the books concerning laws. They did not believe in bodily resurrection and this confrontation with Jesus was an attempt to get him on their side and discredit the pharisees.

The question they put to Jesus is very contrived, intended not to seek clarity but to present a tricky conundrum. It can be very easy for religious people to waste time and energy in irrelevant debates that do nothing to promote the cause of the Gospel nor shed any light on real-life issues.

Like the Sadducees in today's gospel reading, we can easily find ourselves caught up in endless discussions on minor points of liturgy or of Church law, without realising we are wasting precious time and perhaps creating needless division.

The Sadducees poke fun at the very idea of resurrection and in this way avoid listening to the message of Jesus about the reality of the resurrection and how the resurrected state is a new creation where we are share in the divine life of God. It is traditional at this time of year to remember our loved ones who have gone to their rest. Services with great pomp will be held in grand churches and at monuments of commemoration. But maybe in our quiet place or cabin we keep them forever in our mind in our beautiful prayer for the repose of their souls.

Our simple prayer expresses our love for them, a love that lasts a long way after death.

"Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace." We hope one day someone will recite that prayer calling to mind their love for us.



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### THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME SUNDAY 13TH NOVEMBER

#### GOSPEL LUKE 21:5-19

When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, 'All these things you are staring at now – the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed.' And they put to him this question: 'Master,' they said 'when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that this is about to take place?'

'Take care not to be deceived,' he said 'because many will come using my name and saying, "I am he" and, "The time is near at hand." Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen but the end is not so soon.' Then he said to them, 'Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

'But before all this happens, men will seize you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring you before kings and governors because of my name – and that will be your opportunity to bear witness. Keep this carefully in mind: you are not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your endurance will win you your lives.'

#### THE GOSPEL AND YOU

The Gospel we hear today is sometimes referred to as the beginning of the final things. Here we find Jesus teaching in the Temple in what was to be his last appearance there. The disciples marvel at its beauty but Jesus talks about its destruction. In the minds of those listening to Jesus the Temple was a symbol of the power of God. The Temple was indestructible and would only fall at the same time the world would come to an end.

The Temple was many, many times larger than any building in Galilee. It was immense and glorious, a tremendous symbol of national pride.

"When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, 'All these things you are staring at now – the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed.'"

These words throw the disciples into confusion and fear. They want to know when this will happen and what warning they might get. Jesus's answer is not a great help. He promises them war, earthquake, famine, pestilence and persecution, but whereas these can occur in any generation, what really makes them anxious is talk of families betraying families. Family ties would not protect the disciples who would have to carry the cross as Jesus did.

I pray for the people of the sea who try to maintain family ties from a great distance.

When you are thousands of miles from loved ones, even small trivial things can grow out of proportion. A small problem that could be resolved face to face can become a massive difficulty impossible to resolve.

The glory of the Temple is a reminder that many of us live in the midst of beautiful structures. We worship in beautiful churches. Some of our ships are grand and majestic on the seas.

When we come together in prayer, we touch something much more significant than any building or structure.

We celebrate our belief that God is with us on land or at sea and we are in a relationship with him that is beyond destruction.

### OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE SUNDAY 20TH NOVEMBER

#### GOSPEL LUKE 23:35-43

The people stayed there before the cross watching Jesus. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. 'He saved others,' they said 'let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers mocked him too, and when they approached to offer him vinegar they said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' Above him there was an inscription: 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals hanging there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said. 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus,' he said 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.' 'Indeed, I promise you,' he replied 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

**'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.'**



#### THE GOSPEL AND YOU

The feast of Christ the King is a fairly recent one in our church. It was in 1925 that Pope Pius XI introduced it to counteract the abuse of power that was arising in nations and states. Jesus's kingdom in contrast to what was happening in our world would never be about violence and retribution. He is set as our model, a king of peace, in whose kingdom there is no place for envy or a lust for power.

And so we celebrate the feast of Christ the King this Sunday, remembering that our king's life ended on a cross. Today we worship this wounded and resurrected God, who promises us a place in Paradise. Our king was born in a stable among the animals, visited by shepherds. Throughout his life Jesus avoided all shows of earthly power and authority, perhaps best understood in his reply to Pilate's questioning "My kingdom is not of this world"

Today we see Jesus sitting in a most unusual throne – a cross, not making great proclamations or issuing edicts but proclaiming forgiveness and redemption. "Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise".

Unfortunately, whether on land or at sea we are surrounded by people who are obsessed with power and a desire to use that power to make life difficult for all around them.

On ships where there are very distinct levels of command, that need for order can easily be abused. A simple instruction can be interpreted as "do this for the smooth running of the ship" or "do this because I have power over you, and you will do as I say"

But today's feast is not merely about how others might abuse their power, it is a call to each of us to reflect on the power of each of us to influence the world around us. We are called to serve others as Jesus did.

Called to bring healing and forgiveness into the lives of those who are troubled in any way.

Called to encourage to follow the example of Christ OUR King.

Then we too will be rewarded with that special place in paradise.



### THE GOSPEL AND YOU

As we begin the new liturgical year, there is a note of urgency and a call to be alert in our gospel. This might provide with a clue as to the meaning of Advent.

And yet we know Advent tends to be swamped by Christmas music and Christmas noise. It should be a quiet time, when we await the coming of the Lord. It should be a time of trustful waiting and yet in our world party time is calling and the lights are raised to the next level.

Today's gospel consists of parables about the coming of the Son of Man and highlights the unexpectedness of it all. The pictures of the two men in the field and the two women at the millstone emphasise the suddenness of the coming and the urgency of watchfulness while we carry out our everyday duties.

If the central theme of Advent is waiting, then it is a season made for seafarers. For the people of the sea, waiting is a necessary skill at every level of the job.

Waiting at anchor till a berth becomes available.

Waiting for the cargo to be discharged, which may be delayed by lack of port workers or specific machinery.

Waiting at sea for the next instructions. And on it goes, for a crew member, waiting may be a large percentage of voyage time. And so, I think a seafarer uniquely understands the meaning of Advent, it is already a part of their life.

If we can learn, in these weeks of Advent, the importance of patient waiting, we have learned one of the greatest lessons in life. This is hard for us, especially when we live in an instant age – instant food, instant communication, instant everything. The most important things in life cannot be rushed and require patient waiting.

Advent also is a time for listening. If we do not listen to his word then we will never appreciate that the Lord is living amongst us, preparing us for our future with him.

“So too, you must also be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come”

**FIRST SUNDAY  
OF ADVENT**  
SUNDAY 27TH NOVEMBER

### GOSPEL MATTHEW 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

‘So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.’

## Faith and Mental Health

by Fr Billy Swan

Having faith does not immunise us from mental health problems but there is every reason to think that it can help us. The proof of this is found with heroic people of faith who suffered from mental health issues. Here I briefly mention three.

The first is St Louis Martin (1823-1894), the father of St Thérèse of Lisieux. In her autobiography *The Story of a Soul*, St Thérèse wrote affectionately about her father but at one point referred to him drinking “the most bitter and humiliating of all chalices”. This suffering of her father was his committal to a mental institution on the 12th February 1889. Despite this trial, the holiness and faith of Louis Martin was affirmed by Thérèse herself and documented in sixteen letters that he wrote. These were in addition to many more from his wife Zélie that give details about his life of faith and prayer.

St Benedict Joseph Labré (1783-1818) was born in north-eastern France towards the end of the eighteenth century. He tried persistently to become a monk and enter religious life but was refused each time. It is thought that the manifestation of certain psychological or even psychiatric symptoms was the reason why he was deemed unsuitable for the way of life to which he aspired. Despite this, he went to Rome where he spent the last six years of his life on the streets among the poor and homeless. When he died in 1818 aged 35, crowds gathered in the streets and chanted, “È morto il santo...the saint is dead”.

Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ was born in 1844 and died in 1889. This English poet and Jesuit priest is

widely regarded as one of finest poets of his age, whose many works of beauty were at times composed while experiencing long bouts of depression. Many of his sonnets outline his struggle with religious doubt and feelings of estrangement from God. Nevertheless, his works also display a faith that transcended his darkness into hope.

What the lives of Louis Martin, Benedict Labré and Gerard Manley Hopkins demonstrate is that people of faith are not spared from mental health difficulties. While this might initially sound disappointing, what it invites us to consider is how faith helps us deal with mental health challenges – not by-passing them or avoiding them but facing them courageously and navigating our way through them with God's grace. This way, people of faith are in a better position to dialogue compassionately with our brothers and sisters who also suffer in their minds but who have less faith, a different faith or none at all.

Not every mental illness has a spiritual cause, so having weak faith or no faith is not necessarily the cause of poor mental health. It is important to clarify this because although we can demonstrate how faith can benefit mental health, we cannot show that a lack of faith is the cause of problems in this area. This caveat ought to pepper our argument with humility and rid it of any triumphalist tone as if faith were a ready-made set of answers to complex questions.

Religious or spiritual therapy is never a substitute for medical treatment for mental illnesses. Mental health is best served by a holistic care of the person's body, mind and spirit.



## Living the Church's Year

### Waiting for the King: Rediscovering the Meaning of Advent

➤ November this year sees the beginning of Advent. Advent isn't a time for feeling "Christmassy". Yes, it is a time of anticipation for Christmas, but not for sleigh bells, snow and presents – it's anticipation for the birth of the King.

**"But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round... as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys."**  
– A Christmas Carol, Charles Dickens

What does Advent mean to you? For a lot of people, Advent is a time for preparation. So far so good! But preparation for what exactly? That depends entirely on what you think of Christmas. Is Christmas the day for the fat man in the red suit and white beard who comes bearing multitudes of gifts? Or is it for the King born in a manger, who brought with him gifts of an entirely different sort?

#### Feeling "Christmassy"

We live in a culture of instant gratification. We avoid queues at any cost; food that isn't fast isn't worth waiting for; the latest gadget must be bought the day it comes out; and your favourite TV show is best binge-watched. It's fair to say that for most of us, waiting is seen as a waste of our time and energy.

Yet waiting is exactly what we're asked to do during the four weeks of Advent, and the thing about waiting is that what we do while we wait is just as important as what it is we're waiting for. So what are we doing to prepare for Christmas? We might be caught up in preparing the food, preparing our homes for Christmas guests, finishing the Christmas shopping, wrapping the many presents we've bought...

But Advent isn't a time for feeling "Christmassy". It's not about waiting for the Coca Cola advert to tell us that "holidays are coming" so we can start listening to Christmas music and put up our decorations. Yes, Advent is a time of anticipation for Christmas, but not for sleigh bells, snow and presents – it's anticipation for the birth of the King.

#### The joy of the Incarnation vs a universal birthday

To prepare properly during Advent, we need to remember what we're celebrating at Christmas. It's a mystery completely unique to Christianity: the Incarnation of God. Unlike other religions, we believe in a God who humbled himself to become like his creation. As St Paul tells us:

**Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death  
– even death on a cross.  
– Philippians 2:6-8**

The reality of Christmas is far more amazing than the secular notion of Christmas as a sort of "universal birthday". In fact, the powerful testament of a God born

in a manger draws such interest that his story is still being told and sung about over two thousand years later. You don't have to be Christian to sing songs about Jesus's birth, and you don't have to regularly practise any sort of religion to want to go to church on Christmas Day. Even the concept of Santa – that you are rewarded for being good – isn't miles away from Christianity, despite the materialistic form it has taken. In fact, Christmas is the one time of year when it's popular to think of others.

#### How will he find us when he arrives?

So if Advent is a build-up to a celebration of this incredible event, preparing for it should be less about preparing presents and more about preparing our hearts. What are we doing to be ready for the arrival of our King? Will he find us asleep (cf. Matthew 25:1-13) or will he find our hearts open, waiting for him? While Lent is traditionally associated with fasting, Advent too is a good time for performing penance and atoning for our sins. It's also an excellent time to get to Confession, especially if we haven't been in a while. We can also prepare ourselves by praying more fervently. Finally, we should always remember the joy of what it is to come and look towards it with great happiness and anticipation.

The world had so many expectations from the Messiah, and two thousand years later we are still piling up these expectations. But what about what he can expect from us? We ask so much of him, but what can we give him in return? What we can give him – what he wants most – is ourselves. Our hearts, holy and full of love for him, are the best gift we could ever give him.

**"What can I give him  
Poor as I am?"  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man  
I would do my part;  
Yet what I can, I give him –  
Give my heart"  
– In the Bleak Midwinter, Christina Rossetti**



# Should death scare us?

by Fr Stephen Wang

➤ **The idea of being judged when we die can seem terrifying. Yet Catholic Church teaching about death and judgement is not intended to scare us, but rather to empower us to live this life for the next world. When we recall the loving mercy of God, we can greet death not with fear but with hope.**

If you go to the British Museum in London you can visit the Egyptian Galleries and see the famous mummies. The smaller cabinets contain some of the other objects that were found in the Egyptian graves.

There are some beautiful model boats, with wooden figures rowing their long oars. They symbolise the passage of the souls of the dead to the afterlife, represented as a boat journey across the River Nile. It's very clear that the Egyptians believed in some kind of life after death.

There seems to be a kind of instinct in the human heart to look beyond our earthly life, to believe that death is not the final end. There is a longing for eternal life. From the beginning of human history, we have had the unusual habit of burying our dead, as if to give them special honour, and also to put "grave goods" next to the bodies, as if they would help the deceased reach their spiritual destination.

In the Christian understanding, human beings are a unity of body and soul, of matter and spirit. We are created in the image and likeness of God, and we are made for eternal life with him. Deep down we sense that our true homeland is in heaven.

When we die, our bodies will lie corrupt, but our souls will live on and come into the presence of God. The truth of our lives will be laid before us, and there will be a moment of judgement.

On its own, this can be a terrifying thought. But God is full of mercy and compassion, and Jesus Christ has opened the gate of heaven for us through his death and Resurrection.

Christians believe that those who are close to Jesus, through a living faith, will be welcomed into heaven. Some of them, the saints, will go straight to heaven. But some of them will need to go through a spiritual purification before they enter heaven; we call this the experience of purgatory.

What about those who have not come to know Jesus? Christians believe that Jesus reaches out to those who do not know him, even in ways we cannot understand. He longs for all people to be saved, and he would never condemn someone who had had no chance to know him.

But we also know that it's possible to turn away from his love and mercy, and even to reject the salvation he offers. This is the tragedy of hell, to cut yourself off for ever from the merciful love of God.

At the end of time, at the Second Coming, Jesus Christ will come back to earth in glory, and bring everything to its fulfilment. There will be a Final Judgement, a vindication of God's plans, a fulfilment of all his promises. The souls of the dead will be united with their resurrected bodies. Those who are saved will share in the glory of the Resurrection. They will live in the presence of God for all eternity.



Probably the most famous painting of the Last Judgement is the one by Michelangelo above the altar in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. But in the churches of the Middle Ages it was more common to have an image of the Final Judgement on the back wall, above the main door, so it was the last thing you saw as you left the church. It reminded you of the seriousness of death, but also of the hope of heaven.

That's the reason for this Christian teaching about death. Not to frighten us, but to make us wake up and take things a bit more seriously. We know that death will come to us all, and that we will have to give an account of all that we have done. This gives us a sense of purpose, and a motivation to use the time well. We should have a healthy "FOMO" – a healthy "fear of missing out" on heaven.

This knowledge makes us want to prepare for our own death. If anything is unresolved in my life, I can try to put it right. If I have any serious sins on my conscience, I can seek God's forgiveness in confession. If I am very sick or near to death, I can be anointed in the sacrament of the sick.

Above all, this teaching gives us hope. We know that death is not the end. We know that Christ has already triumphed, and that he is coming back, at some point in the future. He has not forgotten us. The hope of heaven helps us to live through the sufferings of this life, and gives us a reason to stay close to Christ in faith and love.

## Questions for reflection

- If someone invented a pill that meant you would never die, would you take it?
- How do you think we deal with death in our society today?
- What customs or traditions do you associate with dying and death in your culture?
- What difference does it make to know that we face God's judgement after death? What difference does it make to know that we have the hope of eternal life?



## PRAYER FOR THE DEAD

*In the Month of November we remember the Dead*

Eternal rest, grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.



Stella Maris is the largest ship-visiting network in the world. We improve the lives of seafarers and fishers through our network of local chaplains and seafarer centres, expert information, advocacy and spiritual support.



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