

THE LOVE OF GOD & THE PLEA OF THE CHILDREN OF SYRIA FOR PEACE

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT – 14 MARCH 2021

IRAQ

Thank you to all who prayed for the Pope's visit to Iraq from the 5th – 8th March, and to all who prayed the Novena.

At last Sunday's 9.30am Mass, Iraqi members of our parish community stood and prayed, and then the rest of the parish family turned toward them and prayed over them. Very much a prayerful solidarity.

SYRIA

In 2013, in northern Iraq, I visited a refugee camp for Syrian people. They had very few possessions. They told me through interpreters that they were now safe, and that God was with them. And they were worried about the safety of other family members back home. And grieved for those who had died.

1. Gratitude,
2. God is with them
3. deep concern for family and friends,
4. and grieving

were the **four** major conversations they shared with me.

The camp had one large United Nations tent where the children went to school. Food and water were delivered to the camp, On site were a group of temporary latrines, tents and tarpaulins for shelter. And lighting.

TRAUMA AND PRAYER

Over these three days, Saturday to Monday, we remember the people of Syria, as this Monday, March 15th, 2021 is the tenth anniversary of the ongoing war in Syria. Some churches in the world will be holding prayer Vigils.

During the month of January, the UN tells us

"Hostilities continued in 2021, resulting in the tragic death of at least 22 children in January, from incidents involving explosive weapons and unexploded ordnance in Hama and near Tal Rifaat, in northern rural Aleppo. In addition, many more children have been injured due to 29 security related incidents in Tal Rifaat area alone, during the reporting month."

We remember the Syrians in our parish community and our schools, and how they feel at this time, and their trauma and survival in earlier years of the war.

Sr Rita from South Sudan said yesterday that she will be praying in South Sudan for the people of Syria.

A short document has been prepared in our parish for the anniversary, recalling our prayers over the years, the reception of Syrian Refugees in the Northside of Brisbane, and links to articles in the last few years.

It is found at:

[10th Anniversary of the devastating ongoing war in Syria - 15 March 2011 - 15 March 2021](#)

The dramatic change in Australian Government direction in 2015, to receive 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq, resulted from the world media coverage six years ago, of the Kurdi family from northern Syria.

Brothers Alan and Galip and their mother Rehanna drowned in 2015, while trying to find a new life. Only the father, Abdullah survived.

The photo of Alan's three-year old body, washed up on the Turkish coast, touched hearts around the world.

Last weekend, Pope Francis and Abdullah met in northern Iraq.

THE PLEA OF SYRIAN CHILDREN IN OCTOBER 2016

In ACN News on Friday 7th October 2016, Eva-Maria Kolmann wrote that during that week

"children at more than 2,000 schools all over Syria are drawing and writing messages to the political decision makers of the European Union and United Nations under the motto 'Peace for Children'. More than one million children are also signing a petition."

The main ceremony was on October 7th, 2016. The article continued

'In addition, Syrian schoolchildren – also including many Muslims – are writing messages to the global community on white balloons. These include such messages as "We want peace!", "Give us our childhood!", "We don't want any more war!" and "We want to go to school!"'

By early October 2016, the article states"

"Thousands of children have been killed during the war. ...more than 11,500 children died in the first two years of the conflict alone... Many children are severely traumatized. Children are frequent victims, not only of direct acts of war, but of abductions, torture and sexual exploitation."

LIGHT A CANDLE AND PRAY FOR THE CHILDREN OF SYRIA

This week we are invited to let people know about the plight of Syria.

We are invited to speak up for the children of Syria.

Over these days, all are invited to light a candle online on our parish [**LIGHT-A-CANDLE**](#)

All are invited to pray.

10TH ANNIVERSARY PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN OF SYRIA

We pray to you Jesus,
for the children who have died,
for the children who are traumatised,
for the children in refugee camps outside the country,
for the Syrian families who found a new home in Australia.

We pray to you Jesus,
for an end to war in Syria.
We pray for the gifts of hope and healing
for the children of Syria.
We pray as a family.
Amen.

JOHN 3:14-21

The Gospel today tells us why God sent Jesus into the world.
Let us reflect on the Gospel now.

Who was Nicodemus? Why did he seek Jesus?

The Gospel tells us:

*“Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.
He came to Jesus by night and said to him,
‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God;
for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’”*

A dialogue develops between Jesus and Nicodemus.

A dialogue that helps us to understand our faith.

Jesus teaches Nicodemus:

*“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God
without being born of water and Spirit.”*

THE HOLY SPIRIT

As we came into the church today, we saw photos above us
and ribbons blowing in the breeze.

These are photos of our children as they prepare for the *Sacrament of Confirmation*
in late April and early May.

Yesterday at the conclusion of Year Four Mass,
children with big smiles on their faces,
were looking up at their photos before leaving the church.

Last weekend and this weekend, we have commitment liturgies for parents
as they present their children for the sacramental journey
of *Confirmation, Reconciliation* and *First Eucharist* during the year.

In *Baptism*, it is the Spirit who moves us.

And in *Confirmation* we celebration the gifts and fullness of the Spirit.



[click image for printable version](#)

The Holy Spirit invites us to trust in God,
and to travel with God on the journey of life.
The Spirit will lead us. We don't know our future direction.
The Spirit will lead us.

We don't tell the Holy Spirit what to do.
This can be particularly difficult for us when we try to control everything and everyone in our
lives.
'Letting go' can be difficult. We need to ask God for help.

As Jesus says in the Gospel:

***"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it,
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.
So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."***

GOD'S MOTIVATION IS LOVE

This passage from John gives us one of the most well-known sayings of Jesus:

***"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.'"***

Why does God go to such incredible efforts?

It is because God so loves the world.

On a bad day we can feel down, particularly if we think that the world revolves around us,
around me.

But it is not all about us.

It is about God, and God's love for us.

God, in love, gives us ways of shining a light on our own lives,
to see who we really are, our giftedness, our joys, our failings, our sins, our secrets.
We need to be open to that light in our lives. Not hiding in darkness.

The gospel passage contrasts evil and darkness with truth and light.

***"For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light,
so that their deeds may not be exposed.
But those who do what is true come to the light,
so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'"***

An essential part of our Christian lives is our openness to the light of the Spirit.

Exposing our goodness and exposing our sinfulness.

The light of the Spirit shines within us

that we may truly see who we are

and to what extent we are open to where the Spirit leads us.

Lent is one of the special times to review the light of Spirit within our deepest selves.

Next weekend we celebrate the *'Feast of St Joseph'*, one of our two parish patron saints.

St Joseph's School have a special day on March 19th, the actual Feast Day of St Joseph. And we prepare spiritually for our Parish Feast of St Joseph.

May the love of God give us strength and courage to speak up for the children of Syria.
May the light of God expose the vested interests and corruption within Syria.
May the peace of God inspire us to work for peace.
May the mercy of God uplift all who work for the healing of the people of Syria.

We conclude with our 2018 parish prayer for the Children of Syria. Let us pray.

'O GOD, HEAR THE PRAYER OF CHILDREN FOR PEACE'

'We thank you, loving God, for the beauty you gave:
The beauty of music, of silence, of a stream running,
Of a bird nesting, of children laughing.
And we ask why do adults take such beauty away?
Why replace such wonder with fear and bombs and bullets.
We so much need you, O God, to inspire Peace again.
We join with the children of Syria to pray for peace.
Across many faiths we pray for peace:
For the children of Syria and with the children of Syria.
We pray for Peace.
Hear the plea of children of Syria and of the world praying together,
For beauty and peace and laughter once more.
Help our adults to work for Peace.

O God, hear the prayer of children for peace.
Amen.'

Fr Gerry

readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/031421.cfm>



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*For God so loved
the world that he gave
his only Son,
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not perish but may
have eternal life.*

GOSPEL OF JOHN 3:14-21

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@stjosephandstanthony