

INSIDE:

MercyHK Paradise offers a bridge of love for social integrationP2
Franciscan friar ordained to diaconate.....P3
Gaza Christians mark Palm Sunday with hope amid ongoing hardships.....P4
Vatican condemns slavery, counters 'partial narrative' in UN resolution.....P5

SUNDAY

EXAMINER

Catholic News of the Week

INSIDE:

Archbishop Fulton Sheen to be beatified in September P5
Syro-Malabar community observes Palm Sunday at Trappist MonasteryP6
Oil sticker shock exposes cost of war on Philippine poor..P7
The tomb is empty and that is not nothingP8

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Easter message 2026

For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. [1 Corinthians 5:7b-8]

To all the fellow residents and dwellers of Hong Kong, as I write this Easter Message, the wars and conflicts in the Middle East, with the possibility of spillover to other parts of the world, do not allow us to be optimistic of the conflicts ending soon.

Honestly, I do not know what our world will be like on Easter Sunday. Given the devastating acts of the aggressors and the maddening hate of the one being attacked, to where are they dragging the rest of the world? Not towards a nuclear disaster or a living hell, we hope. Let us earnestly pray for God's deliverance.

Yet, as fellow global citizens, we cannot and should not wait helplessly for these horrific possibilities to become reality. If not, we could be counted among those partly responsible for the disastrous outcome, even if only for a very small part of it. For everyone contributes, positively or negatively, knowingly or unknowingly, to the human consciousness in his or her communities, society, country, or even neighbouring regions. Hence, if many of us feel and act negatively towards our neighbours, how would the chain effects affect the region or even the world in which we reside?

In other words, what can we do to ease the tension in our own communities, which will eventually affect the global sentiment? I think almost all of us would consider ourselves insignificant players with negligible impact in this overwhelmingly hostile world. What good can we do when we are facing immense evil? The sad part is that most of us may feel so helpless that we choose to do nothing constructive but curse the darkness.

But thank God that there is Easter! The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus means that goodness, truth and love will ultimately overcome evil. The fragrance of life will eventually dispel the stench of death. What is pivotal is our conviction in the summative benefits of life and goodness over the extent of damage incurred by death and evil.

Believing in life and goodness means embodying it not only in the head but also in the heart and through one's actions. If we want our world to enjoy a new beginning, we need to stay away from the old yeast of "malice and wickedness." And I would include the old yeast of allowing ourselves to be consumed by hopelessness, or joining the militia of cynical, hateful and destructive criticism. Therefore, we need to halt the spreading of hate and violence, through social media in particular, no matter how desirable it might appear to be.

Again, violence begets violence, never peace. One should wonder whether there can be just wars nowadays when other peace-

ful or less destructive means are available, or whether just have not yet been exhausted.

How about Hong Kong? According to *The Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention* at HKU, in 2024, suicide cases among the 15 to 24 age group, and among young adult males, remained just as high and rising respectively when compared with 2023. But the cases for the rest of Hong Kong decreased in 2024. Recent updates also indicate no increase in suicide cases in these age groups in 2025. This may be due to, but is not confined to, improved awareness and social support in our society. Indeed, Easter exhorts us not to give up hope or succumb to hopelessness. And this is particularly important for our younger generations.

When all seems dark and lost, have faith that light is not far away. We only need to get up and walk, and invite our peers to walk with us. The God of Life and Love, who loves everyone of us, especially our young people, will never forsake us. Angels are reaching out through the good people around us, though we might not recognise them readily. Please know that demons cannot consume us unless we allow them to do so. The life-giving power of the Lord of Easter can protect us whenever we take shelter in him.

Allow me to call on parents and schools to protect our children by not allowing them to go under the life-sapping and blindingly competitive culture, although a relatively small number of students may thrive in it. It will be more helpful if our children and young people are not intently compared with each other but with their own selves. This will need to start with our parents, whose anxiety largely stems from comparing themselves with other parents or comparing their children with the children of other parents, worrying that their children would become less competitive.

Emphasising personal betterment through self-comparison will provide our young people more room to breathe and space to grow, while discovering their own gifts and talents. Chain effects from

such changes will help transform the existing suffocating culture, bringing fresh air for our children and young people to thrive with hope. Let us be free from the worry that our young people may resort to self-harming measures due to the highly demanding culture of schooling in many schools. The law of natural attrition should not be applied to our students, certainly not in education. Every life has its own dignity and value that rise well beyond achievements.

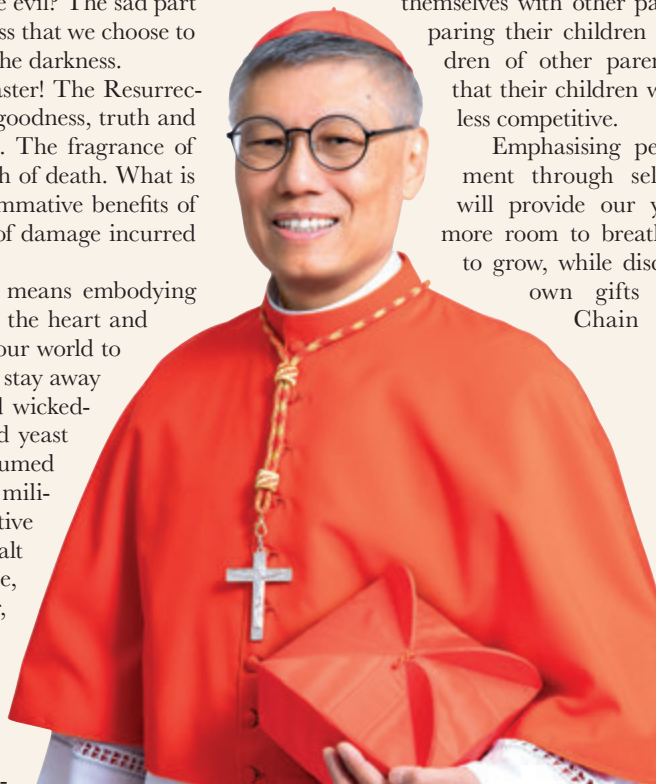
And I call on our leaders in the government to reduce the use of "Key Performance Indicator" [KPI] so as to allow our educators more time and space to better accompany their students. An increase in funding to recruit extra clerical and professional services alone cannot meaningfully ease the burden on our educators. Continuing demands for "value-addedness" are simply exhausting and distracting.

There are important values which are not emphasised with KPIs but are crucial for the healthy development of our young people. For example, their psycho-spiritual well-being and conviction in their ability to shape their own desirable future. I believe we all want to witness the joy of Easter among our students, not constant suffering and hopelessness.

Besides KPIs, I call on our government and civic leaders to give our young people who have been in trouble with the law a second chance to start anew. This will allow them to have the much-needed hope and faith in our society. Investigations put aside in the past couple of years remain threatening to them, which in turn, has taken its toll on their mental health. Criminal records, even relatively minor ones, are crippling barriers to their career pursuits. Can we not identify some legal provisions to help those whose crimes are minor and who have served their sentences to continue pursuing their careers? We can help them regain faith in society and reconstruct hope for their desirable future. Again, Easter joy and hope should not be an unattainable luxury for them.

Before I finish this Easter Message, not knowing what our world will be like when we read or hear about it, please do not let ourselves or our young ones succumb to hopelessness, or worse still, resort to vengeful hate and violence. Have faith in the power of love that should form the basis of hope.

Our Lord is risen indeed! A hope-filled Easter to you all!



+ Stephen Chow, S.J.
+ Stephen Cardinal Chow, S.J.

MercyHK Paradise offers a bridge of love for social integration

HONG KONG (SE): MercyHK Paradise, a development centre for former drug addicts in Sha Tau Kok run by MercyHK, was blessed by diocesan chancellor, Father Lawrence Lee Len, on March 24.

Opened last September, the centre emphasises a holistic approach to recovery, addressing physical, mental, social, spiritual, and vocational needs. It acts as a bridge to social reintegration for men aged 18 to 45 who have been discharged from hospital and have overcome substance addiction.

During the ceremony, Oblate Father John Wotherspoon, founder of MercyHK, expressed his hope that the centre's serene and beautiful environment would positively influence residents' rehabilitation, providing them with a comfortable space to support their ongoing recovery.

The event was attended by Father Rodolfo Jacobe, Father Luc Rene Young Chen Yin, and other Oblate missionaries, as well as representatives from Caritas Lok Heep Club and the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers. Six current residents and four staff members—including a manager, a social worker, and two counsellors—were also present.

In his homily, Father Lee shared two stories: one involved a policeman questioning why a man was sleeping on the streets, highlighting the need for empathy; the other compared the challenges faced by wealthy individuals when renting their apartments to financially struggling families. Through these narra-



Above: Father Wotherspoon, right, Father Lee, second from right, Eddie Chan, third from left, together with others during a cake cutting ceremony.

Right: Father Lee blesses a bedroom at the centre.

tives, he called for greater compassion and awareness of the plight of others.

Eddie Chan Chi-kong, director of MercyHK, explained that the centre is called "Paradise" to create a welcoming environment that fosters recovery, in contrast to traditional, strict, and confining centres. "We focus on establishing connections and helping residents feel loved, which we see as the core motivation for self-transformation," he said.

Faith-based interventions are a distinctive feature of the centre.



In collaboration with the Diocesan Catechism Centre, a three-month Alpha Course has been introduced to help individuals learn more about God and reflect on life, addressing topics such as family and death.

Recognising that high relapse rates often stem from a lack of post-rehabilitation support, the centre's model focuses on a year-long holistic residential programme. The programme covers fitness training, psychological support, pet therapy, gardening, volunteering, and job training. "This approach aims to equip residents with essential life skills, sound financial habits, and a healthy mindset to break the cycle of relapse," Chan explained.

The programme is supported by a network of professional volunteers, including those offering fitness coaching, spiritual guidance, gardening, nursing care,

and accounting expertise.

According to Chan, the programme incorporates structured fitness training and cardiovascular exercises, helping residents set health goals and improve their overall wellbeing. The centre also enables residents to re-establish a regular exercise routine by providing gym equipment and encouraging outdoor activities.

Regarding psychological support, staff members initially engage with residents daily to build rapport, eventually involving counsellors and psychologists for more complex issues. The focus is on healing from trauma and restructuring value systems, assisting residents to navigate their past experiences and reinforcing their sense of self-worth.

Residents are also encouraged to participate in community activities, such as beach clean-ups and volunteer cooking, to fos-

'We focus on establishing connections and helping residents feel loved, which we see as the core motivation for self-transformation'

ter a sense of social responsibility and gratitude.

The programme also helps residents become self-sufficient by exploring their career aspirations and assisting in preparation for employment and various job-related certifications.

In addition to job skills, the centre focuses on reshaping identity by developing personal interests, encouraging healthy leisure activities, and rebuilding relationships with family. Residents may take holidays to visit their families after the first three months, provided they demonstrate discipline.

As the centre can accommodate only nine residents, admission is based on motivation and genuine commitment to recovery. To ensure residents are mentally prepared before leaving the programme, those wishing to exit must observe a seven-day "cooling-off" period to prevent impulsive decisions.

To promote future savings, the centre retains the residents' government allowance—HK\$2,520 per month—and returns the full amount upon completion of the programme. In other words, residents can save over HK\$20,000 after one year to support their housing and employment upon reintegration into society. However, to encourage completion of the programme, allowances for early leavers are not refunded.

The first three months of the programme involve more regulations, with increased autonomy granted in subsequent months to promote family interactions and job searches.

Chan said that in its initial stage of operation, the centre is still learning and exploring the most effective practices.

MercyHK's anti-drug services, with ongoing efforts to expand and develop, are supported by the government's Beat Drugs Fund, in collaboration with the Keswick Foundation and through public donations.

**Hong Kong Catholic Church
Sunday Mass Schedule**
You can obtain the Mass times and whereabouts of churches from the Hong Kong Catholic Church's website
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Franciscan friar ordained to diaconate

HONG KONG (SE): Francesco Li Ho-long of the Order of Friars Minor [OFM] was ordained deacon during a ceremony officiated by Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., at St Bonaventure Church, Tsz Wan Shan, on March 28.

The ceremony was attended by Friar Bonaventura Lin, provincial minister of the Blessed Virgin Mary Queen of China Province, as well as over 30 priests and brothers, including his formators, foundation president, Brother William Ng; Father Henry Woo; and Father Carlo Queruli from Taiwan.

During the ceremony, Brother Li was recommended to the cardinal by Friar Lin. In front of the cardinal, Li vowed to commit himself for life to the Franciscan way of poverty, chastity, and obedience, serving God and the community.

After the ordination, Deacon Li acknowledged that the call to ministry goes beyond personal accomplishment, referencing

Psalm 127, which emphasises that without God's guidance, all efforts are in vain. He said that the ordination marks the beginning of a shared journey focused on mission and expressed gratitude to the cardinal, his formators, family, and other supporters who have been part of this journey.

Deacon Li made it clear that he sees himself as a servant rather than a figure of authority or leadership, inviting everyone to continue offering constructive feedback and correction. He emphasised the importance of accountability and expressed a desire to avoid complacency, in order to ensure that his future service remains aligned with the needs of both God and the community.

The ceremony concluded with a blessing and commissioning from Cardinal Stephen who highlighted that the mission of the new deacon is to serve the less fortunate, bear witness to the



Left: Deacon Li with Cardinal Stephen, his formators and other Franciscan brothers as well as concelebrants.



Below left: Deacon Li with his family.

Photos: Joseph Lam

While studying at Immaculate Heart of Mary College, he joined the Franciscan Youth, where he felt increasingly drawn to the gospel-centred life of St. Francis of Assisi.

Following a period of discernment, he entered the Order of Friars Minor and made his first profession in 2021. He then pursued theological studies at Holy Spirit Seminary and has served in parish ministry and outreach initiatives in both Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Deacon Li professed his perpetual vows as a member of the OFM at St. Bonaventure Church on 18 July 2024.

gospel, and act as a peacemaker in society.

Born into a Catholic family, Deacon Li was baptised as a

child and grew up in St. Benedict's Parish, Sha Tin, where he was actively involved in liturgical ministries and sacred music.

Chancery Notice

I. APPOINTMENTS AND TRANSFERS

Cardinal Stephen CHOW, S.J., has approved the following appointments and transfers—

Rev. Deacon Francesco LI, OFM, is to assist in the pastoral services of St. Bonaventure Parish, Tsz Wan Shan, Kowloon, effective 29 March 2026.

Rev. Joachim PHAM Thanh Diep ceases to be Assistant Parish Priest in St. Francis Parish, Ma On Shan, New Territories, effective 12 April 2026; he will return to his home country and will be given a new assignment by his own Diocesan Bishop.

Rev. Franco BELLATI, PIME, is to be appointed Parochial Administrator of St. Patrick's Parish, Wang Tau Hom, Kowloon, during the vacation leave (3 June to 4 September 2026) of Rev. Fabio FAVATA, PIME, PP.

Rev. Joseph CHAN Wing-chiu, VG, is to be additionally appointed as Parochial Administrator of Christ the Worker Parish, Ngau Tau Kok, Kowloon, during the vacation leave (20 July to 20 September 2026) of Rev. Mechelle T. REGINIO, CICM, PP.

II. MONTHLY RETREAT FOR CLERGY

Date : Wednesday, 22 April 2026
 Tim : 10:00 am – 12:30 pm
 Theme : *Faith kindles hope. Pass on God's love and mercy!*
 Director : *Sr. Anne Pauline NGUYEN, SPC*



Given at the Chancery Office,
30 March 2026.

Lawrence Lee
 Rev. Lawrence LEE
 Chancellor

Shifting public sentiment can turn from praise to harm cardinal warns

TOKYO (LICAS NEWS): Isao Cardinal Kikuchi, the archbishop of Tokyo, Japan, warned that mass enthusiasm, when shaped by unchecked desires, can quickly turn destructive, pointing to the gospel account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and its stark reversal days later.

Cardinal Kikuchi said the same crowd that welcomed Jesus with fervour soon called for his death, stressing that "the crowds that welcomed Jesus with such enthusiasm transformed a few days later into a crowd demanding that he be crucified and killed," adding that "enthusiasm is fleeting."

He said the crowd's expectations of a political liberator clouded their understanding of Jesus' mission, with "their hearts... dominated by their own selfish desires," leaving them unable to recognise the deeper meaning of Christ's humility.

Cardinal Kikuchi drew a parallel with contemporary society, warning that the rapid spread of information can generate similar waves of collective emotion.

He said that "the spread of information via the Internet sometimes possesses the power to engulf the world with the same kind of frenzy that captivated the crowds welcoming Jesus into



The Palm Sunday celebration outside a church in Tokyo.

Photo credit: LiCAS News/Archdiocese of Tokyo

Jerusalem," a dynamic that can lead people toward "simplified judgments" that distort reality.

He said that this sort of "frenzy," he said, does not only obscure truth but can also erase recognition of human dignity, as "the eyes of our minds, dominated by these images, become blind to the existence of real human beings—beings loved by God who live the gift of life."

The cardinal warned that unchecked fervor can escalate into harm, noting that "sometimes, fervour can generate violent, negative forces," and that "the violence that fervor produces can turn against our very lives."

He urged the faithful to resist emotionally driven reactions and instead seek clarity through reflection, saying, "What we need is to distance ourselves from the fervor born of our own desires, calm our minds, and look for signs of the times in reality."

Cardinal Kikuchi echoed a Lenten appeal from the late Pope Francis, who called for greater restraint in speech and a shift in how people communicate.

"Let us refrain from using words that attack and hurt our neighbors," the pope said, urging the faithful to "replace words of hatred with words of hope and peace."



Father Romanelli, parish priest of Gaza City's Holy Family Parish, celebrates Palm Sunday Mass on March 29. Photo: OSV News/Dawoud Abu Alkas, Reuters

Gaza Christians mark Palm Sunday with hope amid ongoing hardships

(OSV NEWS): In an unexpected sign of hope in the Holy Land, Gaza City Christians of Holy Family Parish were able to celebrate Mass on Palm Sunday, March 29, with the blessing of palms and a procession.

The event garnered an unexpectedly large turnout, despite rain and nearby gunfire.

"We had a very beautiful celebration," said parish priest, Father Gabriel Romanelli, in a video update posted on YouTube, noting that earlier concerns about safety and mobility nearly disrupted the day.

"At one point we thought ... many would not be able to participate or that they would also be afraid," he said.

He said fears were mounting "not only ... because we are close to the famous yellow line, but also because it is very difficult to find vehicles to move around," mentioning the Israeli yellow line, which serves as a boundary in the Gaza Strip created as an effect of the October 2025 ceasefire.

The line splits the territory into two parts: one controlled by Palestinians and the other by

'At one point we thought ... many would not be able to participate or that they would also be afraid'

Israel. It has forced most Palestinians to move to the western side, and the line has been gradually pushed farther into Gaza by Israel.

The Palm Sunday difficulties were also compounded by conditions on the ground. "There was a lot of rain ... and there was a lot of shooting. Both things at the same time," Father Romanelli said in the update.

Five months after the ceasefire was announced in Gaza, the humanitarian situation remains dire in the enclave, and airstrikes still cause civilian deaths, with shelling and gunfire experienced daily.

Despite this, attendance exceeded expectations for the Palm Sunday procession. "Against all forecasts many people came, and Christians here in general in the Middle East love this celebration very much," Father

Romanelli said.

The Palm Sunday celebration extended beyond worship, with aid distributed to those in need.

"We shared a coffee with sweets, and aid was distributed to the families of the refugees ... some flashlights and a bag of food," he said.

The priest described the gesture as modest but meaningful amid shortages.

The priest framed the observance within the broader suffering in Gaza and the region, calling for peace as Holy Week begins.

"Let us offer our sufferings, each in our own way, for the glory of God, for the salvation of souls, for the forgiveness of our sins and so that the Lord may grant the world and this part of the world—which is the Holy Land—peace, his peace, and a just and lasting peace for everyone," asking "that we may come to see a new period that gives true hope of life to people to live in a humane way."

The Palm Sunday celebration in Gaza happened while, in Jerusalem, the Palm Sunday procession was cancelled, and the patriarch of the Holy Land, along with the custos, were stopped from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre [see page 12].

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said March 30 that an agreement has been reached with Israeli authorities to allow Holy Week and Easter celebrations to take place undisturbed.

EDITORIAL

SUNDAY EXAMINER

5 APRIL 2026

The empty Tomb in a wounded world

THIS EASTER, AS the Church proclaims that Christ is risen, the world around us is burdened by a darkness that feels all too familiar. From West Asia to Ukraine and beyond, violence continues to scar humanity. It is as if the world remains suspended in Good Friday, uncertain whether the dawn of resurrection has truly come.

In recent days, the Holy See's secretary of state, Pietro Cardinal Parolin, issued a stark appeal: "Leave Lebanon in peace." The widening conflict stretching from Iran to the Mediterranean is no longer merely regional; it is systemic, drawing in nations and factions while leaving civilians trapped in fear and uncertainty. For the Church, this crisis is not simply geopolitical, but also human, moral, and spiritual.

Pope Leo XIV has persistently called for a "disarmed and disarming peace," reminding the world that true peace cannot be built on weapons or threats, but only through dialogue, trust, and a shared commitment to the common good.

From Jerusalem, Pierbattista Cardinal Pizzaballa has challenged the rhetoric of those invoking God to justify violence, saying it is among the gravest distortions of faith. "There are no new crusades," he warns. If God is present amid conflict, it is not in the exercise of power, but in the suffering of the victims—the wounded, the displaced, the dead.

This suffering is most visible in Gaza, where millions are displaced, infrastructure is destroyed, and essentials are limited. Each statistic hides a personal story: families broken apart, children raised in fear, communities fighting just to survive. The political deadlock persists, and ordinary people pay the price.

Equally concerning is the subtle decline of Christian communities in the region. Organizations like Aid to the Church in Need have warned that a presence with two thousand years of history is at risk of disappearing as migration caused by insecurity leaves these historic lands devoid of their faithful. The focus is no longer just on how wars will conclude, but on what will be left behind afterwards.

In such a world, we may well ask: has the stone truly been rolled away?

Easter does not ignore this question. When the risen Christ appeared to his disciples, he did not erase his wounds. He showed them. The marks of suffering remained, but they were transformed. This is the heart of the Easter message: not that suffering is denied, but that it does not have the final word.

The empty tomb stands not apart from the world's pain, but at its very centre. It proclaims that life can emerge even from death, that hope can take root even in despair. It challenges us to reject the logic of violence and to become, instead, witnesses of peace—through dialogue, compassion, and the quiet courage to choose reconciliation over division.

To live as Easter people is to believe that God is at work, not in the machinery of war, but in every act of mercy, every gesture of solidarity, every effort to build peace. Christ is risen, Alleluia. *jose, CMF*

SUNDAY EXAMINER

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Vatican condemns slavery, counters 'partial narrative' in UN resolution

(OSV NEWS): Archbishop Gabriele G. Caccia, the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations, condemned modern and historical slavery—while also countering what he called a “partial narrative” in a newly adopted UN resolution denouncing the transatlantic slave trade as “the gravest crime against humanity.”

Archbishop Caccia made his remarks in a statement on March 25—the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Inaugurated in 2008, the commemoration marks the date in 1807 when the United Kingdom legally abolished the slave trade, which saw some 12 million to 20 million Africans enslaved in various Western nations over a period of four centuries.

This year, the international observance saw the passage of a resolution led by Ghana—one of several modern African nations from which millions of enslaved people were transited—declaring “the enslavement of Africans as the gravest crime against humanity.”

In particular, the resolution cited the slave trade’s “definitive break in world history,” along with its “scale, duration, systemic nature, brutality and enduring consequences that continue to structure the lives of all people through racialised regimes of labour, property and capital.”

The resolution passed with 123 votes in favour and three nations—Argentina, Israel and the US—voting against it. Another 52 member states, including the United Kingdom and the nations of the European Union, abstained.

“The Holy See unequivocally condemns slavery, including in its modern forms,” said Archbishop Caccia, in his address. “The call for remembrance today is a reminder to all states of their duty to uphold historical truth and ensure legal accountability.”

He quoted Pope Leo XIV’s apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, saying, “Since apostolic times, the Church has seen the liberation of the oppressed as a sign of the Kingdom of God,” with the Church continuing its “mission of liberation” through “concrete actions” across the centuries, “especially when the tragedy of slavery and imprisonment has marked entire societies.”

Archbishop Caccia, whom



Shackles that were used during the slave trade on display at the Cape Coast Castle Museum in Cape Coast, Ghana. Established as a fortress for the trade of gold and other valuable resources, the castle was later used as a dungeon for holding slaves before their transfer to the Americas.

Photo: OSV News/Nancy Wiechec

Therefore, the Holy See reaffirms that no one should be held in slavery...

Pope Leo recently appointed the next papal ambassador to the US, also noted that the UN resolution “contains a partial narrative,” one that “regrettably, does not serve the cause of truth.”

Specifically, the resolution text stated that papal bulls such as “Dum Diversas” in 1452 and “Romanus Pontifex” in 1455 had “authorised the reduction of African persons to ‘perpetual slavery’”—part of a “progressive codification of the racialised chattel enslavement of Africans across the world.”

However, in a March 2023 statement, the Vatican formally distanced itself from those two bulls, as well as the 1493 “Inter Caetera,” in its official repudiation of the so-called “Doctrine of Discovery.”

The legal and political doctrine had historically been invoked by European colonial powers and North American governments to seize lands from indigenous peoples.

That statement, jointly issued by the dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development, stressed that “historical research clearly demonstrates” the bulls, “written in a specific historical period and linked to political questions, have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith.”

Moreover, it said the dicasteries, “the Church acknowledges

that these papal bulls did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of indigenous peoples,” with the documents’ contents “manipulated for political purposes by competing colonial powers in order to justify immoral acts against indigenous peoples that were carried out, at times, without opposition from ecclesiastical authorities.”

In his address, Archbishop Caccia said the Church’s opposition to slavery had been articulated “in numerous papal documents.”

He cited Pope Eugene IV, who in a 1435 apostolic letter “condemned the enslavement of the inhabitants of the Canary Islands and excommunicated those who refused to free them.”

Pope Leo XIII, writing in 1888, quoted St. Augustine, who said that man, made in God’s image, should rule “only over the brute creature” and not over fellow humans.

Archbishop Caccia affirmed that “under international law, modern slavery constitutes a crime against humanity, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.”

He added, “Therefore, the Holy See reaffirms that no one should be held in slavery or servitude, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

The archbishop concluded his message by quoting a second passage from *Dilexi Te*, saying that “the freedom that Christ gave us is not only interior: it manifests itself in history as love that cares for and frees us from every bond of slavery.”

Archbishop Fulton Sheen to be beatified in September

VATICAN CITY (OSV NEWS): Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen will be beatified on September 24 in St. Louis, Missouri, the United States, the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints announced on March 25.

Luis Cardinal Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect for the Dicastery for Evangelisation, will preside.

In a statement on March 25, Bishop Louis Tylka of Peoria, Illinois, said the beatification will take place at 2.00pm Central Time at The Dome at America’s Center in St. Louis.

“With anticipation of a great number of people wanting to participate, we chose this location because of availability, being indoors, and the close proximity to the Diocese of Peoria,” Bishop Tylka said.

The bishop added that a “number of events in Peoria” will be held “to celebrate this wonderful occasion.”

“This is a moment of immense grace for the Church—especially for us in the Diocese of Peoria, where Archbishop Sheen was born, ordained, and first served as a priest,” he added. “His life and ministry continue to inspire countless people to know and love Jesus Christ more deeply.”

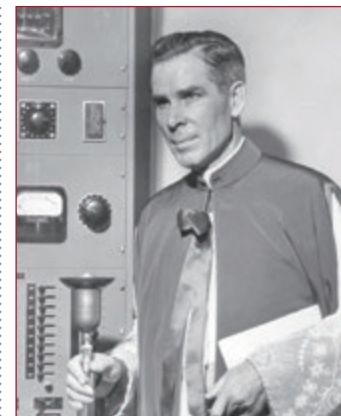
He said, “The Beatification Mass will be a profound moment of prayer and celebration for the faithful near and far. I invite all who have been touched by Archbishop Sheen’s life and legacy to join us in spirit or in person for this historic event.”

Monsignor Roger Landry, national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies USA, received the news of the beatification date with “indescribable joy” and said he was “thrilled” Cardinal Tagle has been chosen “to be the papal legate, celebrant and preacher of the beatification Mass.”

Archbishop Sheen—who himself was national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies [1950-66]—“is an inspiration not only to all of us who continue his work of prayer and support for the Church’s missionary work across the globe but for all those whose faith has been strengthened by his preaching, broadcasting, writing, and holy Catholic life,” Monsignor Landry said in a March 25 statement.

“Cardinal Tagle, like Sheen,” he added, is “an incredibly gifted preacher, but he will no doubt be able to emphasize the contributions that soon to be Blessed Fulton Sheen made and in many ways continues to make to the Church’s mission work.”

In February, Bishop Tylka



Archbishop Sheen remembered as one of the most influential and innovative evangelists in American history. File photo: OSV News

called Archbishop Sheen “one of the greatest voices of evangelization in the Church and the world in the 20th century.”

‘Archbishop Sheen spent his life continuing the work of the Archangel Gabriel, calling us to rejoice because the Lord is with us...’

The bishop said, “I have long admired his lifelong commitment to serve the Church as a priest, rooted in his deep devotion to the Blessed Mother and the Eucharist. As he journeyed through the different stages of his life, his ability to share the gospel and truly relate to people drew countless souls into an encounter with Jesus—one that transformed not only his life, but more importantly, the lives of those he touched.”

Archbishop Sheen is remembered as one of the most influential and innovative evangelists in American history. Once dubbed “God’s microphone,” the archbishop announced God’s truth in a nonconfrontational, yet no less life-giving, manner to untold millions through radio, print and television.

Monsignor Landry said in his statement, “Archbishop Sheen spent his life continuing the work of the Archangel Gabriel, calling us to rejoice because the Lord is with us, and imitating the response of Mary in placing himself as a servant of the Lord, allowing his whole life to develop according to the Lord’s word.”

Syro-Malabar community observes Palm Sunday at Trappist Monastery

HONG KONG (SE): The Syro-Malabar Catholic community in Hong Kong gathered in prayerful unity for a deeply spiritual beginning to Holy Week, marking the occasion with the traditional Way of the Cross and the solemn blessing of palms and procession on the eve of Palm Sunday. The liturgical celebrations took place on March 29 at Our Lady of Joy Abbey—the Trappist Monastery on Lantau Island, offering a contemplative setting that drew the faithful into the mystery of Christ's passion.

The Syro-Malabar Church, one of the 23 Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with Rome, traces its origins to the apostolic mission of St. Thomas the Apostle in Kerala, India. Known for its rich liturgical heritage rooted in the Eastern Syrian tradition, the Church continues to serve its diaspora communities worldwide, including a growing presence in Hong Kong.



This year's celebration was officiated by Father Jijo Kandamkulathy, delegate superior of the Claretians in the East Asia Delegation, who travelled from Macau to preside over the liturgy. The gathering reflected the faith and vibrancy of the Syro-Malabar faithful in the region.

During the service, Claretian Father Josekutty Mathew shared a reflection on the readings for Holy Week, emphasising that the liturgies of these sacred days are not merely commemorative but transformative, inviting the faith-

ful to grow in the virtue of humility.

"Palm Sunday reminds us of the Lord Jesus entering Jerusalem humbly on a donkey," he said. "On Holy Thursday, we encounter him kneeling before his disciples to wash their feet. And on Good Friday, we contemplate him remaining silent like a lamb led to the slaughter. Each moment calls us to imitate his humility and self-giving love."

The faithful participated in the Way of the Cross, meditating on Christ's journey to Calvary, before joining in the blessing of palms and the solemn procession that re-enacted Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. In recent years, participation in these liturgies at the Trappist monastery, coordinated by the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, has steadily grown, with more families and young people taking part.

Following the Eucharistic celebration and the breaking of the Bread at the Lord's table, participants gathered for a simple meal, sharing home-prepared dishes that fostered fellowship and a sense of belonging. The meal, though modest, reflected the warmth and cultural richness of the South Indian community, echoing the spirit of communion that defines the Eucharistic celebration itself.

As Holy Week begins, the Syro-Malabar faithful in Hong Kong carry with them not only the spirit of Christ's passion but also a renewed call to live out the humility, service and love that lie at the heart of the gospel.

War shakes Gulf confidence in US-backed security as regional order falters

(LICAS NEWS): Trust in long-standing security guarantees in the Gulf is collapsing as the war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has exposed vulnerabilities and forced a reassessment of regional geopolitics.

Bishop Aldo Berardi, apostolic vicar of Northern Arabia, said Gulf populations "are wondering why, despite the money spent on protection, bases, and weapons, we have been attacked so harshly," warning this will lead to a "review of the geopolitics of this region" where "trust has collapsed," according to *AsiaNews*.

Bishop Berardi pointed to the timing of the attacks, saying the United States and Israel launched military action "while talks were underway; first they said they wanted to reach agreements, then they targeted bombing and killing the political and religious leader [Ali Khamenei]."

In this context, he added, "people understand that [Tehran] is now trying to defend itself."

The bishop described the conflict as "based on revenge" and "different from the 'traditional' wars as we have known them until now," marked by "a verbal escalation, followed by a material response."

The fallout is already disrupt-



Bahrain's prime minister, Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, meets Bishop Aldo Berardi and clergy at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Arabia.

Photo credit: LiCAS News/Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia

ing daily life across the Gulf. Air travel has been severely restricted, forcing longer overland routes, while economic uncertainty is growing as "the refineries are 'almost all closed,' the oil wells 'cannot produce,' and 'the closure of the Strait of Hormuz' is freezing traffic and trade," creating "a distressing situation."

Migrant workers, many from South and Southeast Asia, are among the most affected. "Some have lost their jobs or aren't being paid, others are waiting for the end of hostilities," Bishop Berardi said, noting "an increase in poverty and a demand for [econom-

ic] assistance."

Fear is rising, especially among vulnerable groups, "especially the sick, women and children, and families," the bishop said, as uncertainty grows over whether banks, factories, and refineries will continue operating.

At the same time, the conflict is casting doubt on regional alignments and "has thrown everything into question," he noted, referring to the Abraham Accords and broader cooperation in the Gulf, as governments face mounting pressure to reassess their security and diplomatic strategies.

Philippine bishops renew nationwide Divine Mercy consecration amid crises

MANILA (SE): Amid persistent national and international challenges, the Catholic Church in the Philippines will once again consecrate the nation to Jesus through the Divine Mercy devotion amid ongoing national and global crises, *CBCP News* reported on March 27.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines [CBCP] endorsed the initiative at a recent assembly, building on a practice introduced nationwide the previous year.

Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa, president of the CBCP, stated that the renewal comes in response to ongoing difficulties, encouraging Catholics to seek hope in their faith.

"In the face of our current national and global crises, this renewal of consecration would be a beautiful and fitting response of hope in the Lord's Mercy," Archbishop Garcera wrote in a letter addressed to dioceses across the Philippines.

He characterised the act as a "profound expression of trust" in Divine Mercy, referring to it as humanity's refuge in moments of uncertainty and hardship.

Drawing from the diary of the visionary St Faustina Kowalska, Archbishop Garcera underscored the importance of the devotion, noting Christ offered His mercy as "the last hope of salvation" for humankind.

As part of the observance, the consecration prayer will take the place of the general intercessions at all Masses throughout the country on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 12.

The CBCP is calling for full participation from dioceses, parishes, religious communities and Catholic institutions in what it describes as a significant spiritual initiative.

"Together, let us entrust ourselves, our Church and our nation to the boundless mercy of God, confident that in His mercy we will find the healing, renewal and hope we so deeply need," Archbishop Garcera said.

According to *EWTN News*, the Philippines became the first nation to consecrate itself to the Divine Mercy in 2025.

Oil sticker shock exposes cost of war on Philippine poor

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): The National Council of Churches in the Philippines [NCCP] called on the government to abolish oil taxes and regulate fuel prices, warning that conflict-driven price hikes are worsening the burden on poor and vulnerable communities.

On March 26 the Protestant group called for “genuine and sincere measures to control prices and minimise the effect” of the ongoing conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran on the Philippine economy.

This appeal coincided with a nationwide transport strike from March 26 to 27, which drew widespread support from civil society groups.

The NCCP highlighted that “instantaneous oil price hikes as a consequence of the US-Israel instigated war” have “hit the people hard,” pushing many Filipinos into daily hardship amid a deepening economic crisis.

The council noted that Filipinos were already grappling with rising costs and unemployment, citing “massive price increases of basic commodities” even before the recent escalation of tensions in West Asia.

Church leaders described the government response as inadequate, saying current measures “are merely palliative, if not performative”, with subsidies that “are insufficient and may not even last a few days”.

The group urged authorities to remove excise tax and value-added tax on oil products and repeal the Oil Deregulation Law, arguing that “high, excessive, and overlapping taxes imposed on the majority of poor Filipinos do not serve the common good.”

They added that it is “deeply appalling” for oil taxes to remain “high, excessive, and redundant” amid corruption scandals and worsening economic conditions.

The NCCP called on Churches to show “compassion and solidarity” with those most affected—including jeepney drivers, workers, and producers—and to pursue “acts of justice”.

The Council for People’s Development and Governance warned that the projected rise in diesel prices to 120 pesos per litre amounts to “economic violence,” driven by policies that “disproportionately take wealth from the poor”.

For many drivers, “every litre of fuel consumed is a meal snatched from their families,” underscoring how rising costs



Jeepney drivers and advocates join a two-day protest over rising fuel prices and their impact on drivers’ livelihoods and public transport fares.

Photo by LiCAS News/Mark Saludes

are eroding already fragile livelihoods.

The Centre for Women’s Resources [CWR] reported that women and low-income households are bearing the brunt of the crisis, with inflation forcing families into painful trade-offs.

Cham Perez, executive director of CWR, said the situation as “the daily reality of women absorbing the impact of inflation”, noting that “each price hike multiplies the burden on women managing households on near-zero budgets.”

For families reliant on transport income, the effects are immediate. Marissa Figueroa of PISTON Women shared that before the price hikes, her husband earned 700–800 pesos daily as a jeepney driver. With fuel prices soaring, his income has dropped to 200–300 pesos, sometimes leaving the family with nothing but rice and bagoong [shrimp paste] or forced to sleep hungry.

Environmental advocates also called for deeper reforms, insisting the government’s energy emergency declaration must go beyond short-term relief.

Greenpeace criticised the government response as “lackadaisical”, citing “constant denials that we are in a crisis” and the absence of long-term direction as climate impacts worsen.

Climate campaigner, Jefferson Chua, argued that Executive Order 110 must provide immediate support but also “pave the way for structural reforms” to address systemic problems that “put the burden of economic shocks on ordinary Filipinos”.

He recommended suspending value-added tax, regulating prices, and shifting away from fossil fuels, warning that “the cur-

rent tax system puts the burden on ordinary Filipinos who are already shouldering rising costs.”

Chua added that the crisis should be a catalyst to move beyond “business as usual” and “build a fair, resilient future for all Filipinos.”

Groups from various sectors warned that without decisive action, the cost of global conflict will continue to fall on those least able to bear it

Groups from various sectors warned that without decisive action, the cost of global conflict will continue to fall on those least able to bear it.

The country’s president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., declared a state of national energy emergency on March 24 through Executive Order No. 110, as global supply disruptions linked to the Middle East conflict threaten fuel stability.

The Department of Budget

and Management has allocated 20 billion pesos for the Department of Energy’s Emergency Energy Security Programme, which includes procuring up to two million barrels of fuel to boost local supply.

Funds will be channelled to the Philippine National Oil Company and its exploration arm to purchase refined petroleum products, augment LPG supply, and build reserves.

The Department of Energy said this move “demonstrates the administration’s resolve to protect the Filipino people from external supply shocks” and will help “preserve market stability” and support critical sectors.

Energy secretary, Sharon Garin, described the allocation as “a strong intervention... to strengthen the country’s fuel security amid global oil market disruptions”, adding that the government is taking “concrete and proactive steps to secure fuel supply” and protect consumers.

Indonesian becomes 57th official language of Vatican News

VATICAN (SE): Indonesian became the 57th language of Vatican News, it was announced on March 25. It will allow Indonesians to access information about the pope, the Vatican, and Church news from around the world in their own mother tongue, *Vatican News* reported on 25 March.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on March 25 at the headquarters of Vatican News and Vatican Radio in Rome, witnessed by delegations representing the Holy See’s Dicastery for Communication, the Commission for Social Communications of the Bishops’ Conference of Indonesia, and the ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the Holy See.

Bishop Agustinus Tri Budi Utomo, chairperson of the Commission for Social Communications of the Bishops’ Conference of Indonesia, attended the event and described it as “a celebration of an enduring friendship, a recognition of our national identity, and a strengthening of the bridge of faith between Indonesia and the heart of the universal Church.”

The bishop added that it represents a modern form of “Good News” for Indonesian Catholics,



Bishop Agustinus Tri Budi Utomo, left, with Paolo Ruffini, right. Photo: Vatican News

establishing “a direct pathway to universal Church information for the Indonesian people”. He remarked, “Catholics in Indonesia and Malaysia can now hear the voice of the Holy Father and the message of the universal Church in their own mother tongue.”

Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Dicastery for Communication; editorial director, Andrea Tornielli; and Massimiliano Menichetti, deputy editorial director and head of Vatican Radio–Vatican News; noted at the signing that the agreement will help “promote inclusivity, strengthen pastoral communication, and foster a deeper sense of connection

between the Vatican and local faithful.”

According to *Vatican News*, they also observed that the local Church will find it a valuable resource in their efforts, and that it will ensure important universal messages of peace and fraternity are clearly presented and shared within the Indonesian cultural context.

Also present at the signing was the Indonesian ambassador to the Holy See, Michael Trias Kuncahyono, who expressed his delight at the fruition of this accord, noting that the occasion marks “a historic moment for Indonesia” and “especially for Catholics” of the nation.

The tomb is empty and that is not nothing

by John Singarayar SVD

My grandfather kept a small wooden cross above his bed his entire adult life. When he died, we found a note tucked behind it that none of us had ever seen — just a few lines, in his handwriting, that said he was not sure what he believed anymore but that he kept coming back to Easter because he could not explain it away. He was eighty-one when he wrote it.

I think about that note more than I probably should.

There is something almost absurd about building a faith on absence. No relic, no inscription, no remains. Just a hollow space where a body should have been. And yet here we are, two thousand years later, still arguing about it — in seminaries and hospital corridors and the quiet of minds that cannot quite let the question go. My grandfather was not a theologian. He was a farmer who went to Mass every Sunday and doubted every Monday. And he kept showing up anyway. That feels more like resurrection faith to me than most of what I have read about it.

The gospel accounts of Easter morning are not triumphant.

The resurrection is not primarily a position to defend. It is a practice. It becomes real—or it stays theoretical—in very ordinary moments. In whether you offer the forgiveness that would cost you something ...

They are disorienting. The women arrive at dawn and find nothing. Peter runs to check and goes home confused. Faith does not spring up clean and confident from the empty tomb—it stumbles into the light, blinking. That detail matters, and we tend to skip past it. Doubt is not the enemy of resurrection faith. For most of the people who have ever held it, doubt has been its closest companion.

The comfortable tomb

Here is something nobody says out loud in most churches: faith can become furniture. Familiar, unremarkable, easy to stop seeing. You keep it around because



Photo: OSV News/Crosiers

it has always been there, because getting rid of it would feel like a statement, because Sunday mornings have a shape, and the shape is comfortable.

The empty tomb is genuinely bad news for that kind of religion. It resists domestication. If Christ is actually risen—not as a metaphor, not as spiritual consolation, but actually, bodily, historically risen—then the Church is not a heritage organisation preserving sacred memories. It is something far more disruptive and far more demanding.

The last decade has made this painfully clear. Abuse scandals, institutional cover-ups, the spec-

tle of religious leaders wielding power with none of the accountability they preach. None of this is new, exactly. But the scale of the reckoning has been. And what strikes me—what should strike any honest believer—is that the empty tomb does not excuse any of it. It indicts it. A community that proclaims new life and simultaneously protects structures that crush people is not just failing morally. It is contradicting its own central claim. The resurrection is the worst possible alibi for institutional cowardice.

Hope that has actually suffered something

I used to be suspicious of religious hope. It seemed to me—in my twenties, when I was certain about several things I am no longer certain about—that hope was what people reached for when they could not bear reality. A kind of dignified denial.

I am less sure of that now.

Not because the world got better. It did not, particularly. But because I came to understand that Easter hope was never born from easy circumstances. It emerged from a crucifixion — state violence, public humiliation, the particular despair of watching someone you loved die while you stood at a distance and did nothing. The disciples knew what failure felt like before they knew what resurrection felt like. The empty tomb stands on the far side of that darkness. Not around it. Not instead of it. Through it.

That distinction changes what religious communities are actually called to do. Not to offer cheerful reassurance to people in pain. Not to perform optimism in a burning world. But to stay in the room with the suffering—honestly, without platitudes—and then to demonstrate, in small and costly ways, that fear does not have to set the agenda. That reconciliation is possible even when it hurts. That the story is not over.

I have seen communities do

this. Not many. But I have seen it, and it is not nothing.

The freedom nobody talks about

There is a quiet corruption spreading through a lot of contemporary religious life, and almost nobody names it directly. It is the slow surrender to the same metrics that drive everything else: attendance, growth, visibility, and applause. When a congregation starts measuring its spiritual health by how many people show up—or how many follow them online—something essential has already been lost. Usually long before anyone notices.

The resurrection story begins in total apparent failure. The one convicted as a criminal is revealed as Lord. That inversion cuts against every institutional instinct. The empty tomb, if you take it seriously, frees communities from needing to win in worldly terms. Faithfulness can look like smallness. Integrity can cost you the room. Serving the forgotten does not trend.

That freedom matters to individual believers too—perhaps most of all. A lot of people carry a low-grade spiritual guilt they never quite shake. The sense that their faith is thinner than it should be, their doubts too loud, their prayer life a mess. I know that feeling personally. But the first witnesses at the tomb were not models of composure. They were frightened and confused and running. The resurrection met them there, in the middle of their failure to understand. It did not wait for them to be ready. That is probably the most important thing about it.

The part you actually live

The resurrection is not primarily a position to defend. It is a practice. It becomes real—or it stays theoretical—in very ordinary moments. In whether you offer the forgiveness that would cost you something. In whether you tell the truth when silence would be safer. In whether your community actually shows up for people nobody else is showing up for.

I keep coming back to my grandfather's note. He was not sure what he believed. He kept coming back anyway. And maybe that is closer to the truth of it than any of the confident proclamations. The empty tomb does not demand certainty. It demands a decision — made again, quietly, every day — about whether to live as if the grave is not the final word.

He kept the cross above his bed until the day he died. That was his answer. It is not a bad one.

Pope Leo XIV names new prefect of Dicastery for Legislative Texts

VATICAN (OSV NEWS): Pope Leo XIV has named Australian Archbishop Anthony Randazzo as prefect of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, the Vatican body responsible for interpreting the Catholic Church's canon law.

The pope's latest appointment on March 25 fills a post in the Roman Curia that had been vacant since September. Archbishop Randazzo succeeds Archbishop Filippo Iannone, whom Pope Leo named prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops in September.

Archbishop Randazzo, 59, is the bishop of Broken Bay in Australia and the president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania. In conjunction with the appointment, the pope granted him the personal title of archbishop.

The Dicastery for Legislative Texts, formerly known as the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, serves as the Roman Curia's authority on the interpretation of existing canon law. It works closely with the Church's tribunals, but does not hold independent law-making authority.

Archbishop Randazzo was



Bishop Anthony Randazzo. Photo: CNS/Justin McLellan

ordained a priest in Brisbane in 1991 and later pursued studies in canon law at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He brings direct curial experience to the role, having worked for five years in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith beginning in 2004, a role that would have provided him with experience in the Vatican's disciplinary section handling abuse cases.

Pope Francis appointed him as an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Sydney in 2016 before he was later named bishop

of Broken Bay in 2019.

Australia's ambassador to the Holy See, Keith Pitt, welcomed the appointment, calling it “a proud moment for Australia and the Pacific as we remain hopeful for a Papal visit to our region in 2028.”

Archbishop Randazzo will remain in Broken Bay for three months as apostolic administrator before relocating to Rome to assume his new duties. In a statement on social media, he said he was “deeply grateful to Pope Leo for the trust he has placed in me.”

As the stone rolled back...

In dawn's embrace, the sky aglow,
The echo of hope begins to flow.
A stone rolled back, the grave laid bare,
In victory's light, we find our prayer.

With hearts unveiled and spirits bright,
The promise of grace dispels the night.
For death defeated, the meek arise,
In joyful whispers, our faith complies.

The resurrection sings through every soul,
A testament of love that makes us whole.
Eternal life, a gift bestowed,
In Christ's embrace, our burdens erode.

With every hymn and joyous cheer,
We celebrate the Savior near.
In every gathering, the warmth we share,
Reflects the joy of love laid bare.

God's mercy flows like rivers wide,
In hope anew, we'll abide.
From ashes raised, like flowers we bloom,
In the garden of grace, dispelling gloom.

The joy of Easter, a radiant light,
In unity, we stand, hearts take flight.
For promise eternal, we lift our praise,
In the love of Christ, all life displays.

For every sorrow, there's a dawn,
In Christ's love, we carry on.
The road ahead, though sometimes steep,
In His promise, we find our peace.

Easter's grace, a gentle embrace,
Renewing hope, as we run the race.
Beyond the shadows, our spirits soar,
In the promise of life, forevermore.



Florence Empasis

White Lilies on the altar

After a period of Lent filled with spiritual preparation, the arrival of Easter symbolizes hope and renewal. Brightly blossomed flowers, especially fragrant lilies, serve as reminders of purity and new beginnings as we experience the grace that this special day brings. Their elegant white petals symbolise the resurrection and the promise of eternal life, representing the joy and hope that Easter embodies.

The sight and scent of these lilies lift our spirits, inviting us to reflect on the transformative power of faith. As we place them in our homes and churches, they become a visual prayer, connecting us to the divine and to one another. Their beauty enhances our celebrations, reminding us of the light that breaks through the darkness.

As the hymn "He is Risen!" echoes, it embraces the essence of Easter. Communion, shared with bread and wine, fosters a sense of unity and spiritual connection. As we celebrate, our hearts are filled with gratitude, and we rejoice in the light that Easter brings—our eternal life.

Through Jesus' death on the Cross, we have been granted a second chance. We are reminded to leave our old lives behind and focus on the new day, with all its potential for joy and choices that honour God.

Beverly Marzan



Notice Board



My journey to faith and renewal

At this point in my life, I am very happy serving God and others. Walking with God isn't easy—we must take up our cross each day. I have faced strong storms that God allowed to shape me and guide me into his will. Those trials became one of the most beautiful parts of my life because they gave me the chance to love God through hardship and to be an instrument of his love to others. I pray that I remain faithful to our Almighty God and that I may do his will for his greatest glory. — **Nelma Cabrera**



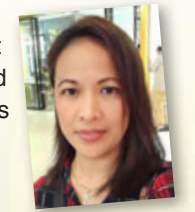
At 44, I describe my journey with God as amazing—full of ups and downs that have drawn me closer to him. My relationship with God is the most important part of my life. I have faced many problems and trials, yet I remain confident that he will never abandon me, even when I fail and drift away. These experiences have shown me that faith truly matters. With strong spiritual support and the encouragement of wonderful people—especially my best friend—I've stayed on the right path. I pray each day for help to become a better person and will continue to follow God, serve him, and serve others in whatever mission he gives me. Without him, my life would be meaningless. I am grateful to be his child, and nothing can snatch me from his hand. — **Melinda Esmalla**

I am grateful to God for his many blessings. As an OFW in Hong Kong, my spiritual life grew through the Apostleship of Prayer at St. Joseph's Church. Daily prayer and fellowship strengthened my faith, taught me humility, and helped me forgive in difficult times. I now entrust my burdens to God, trusting that he guides and protects every step of my journey. — **Evangeline Reyes**



On this season of Lent, I would describe my journey with God as a path of repentance. Acts 3:19 states, "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away." By God's grace, I believe he will wipe away my sins. I seek his forgiveness and how to forgive myself and others by acknowledging my mistakes. Additionally, I practice Church teachings, prayers, observing fasting, and giving alms. — **Carolyn Tapel**

My journey with God has been a wonderful gift and the truest guide to who I am and why I'm here. Though life's distractions and trials once left a void in my heart, God has been molding me. As I seek him earnestly, I find truth, wisdom, peace, and lasting joy. — **Elisa Tinell**



My journey with God is neither smooth nor satisfactory, but rather challenging. Looking back, the road was full of hurdles, rugged and winding, sometimes wide and sometimes narrow with life's troubles and tribulations. Yet I am grateful that by the grace of God, the storms of life serve as my stepping stones to rise higher from every fall, stand stronger, walk taller toward building a deeper relationship with God. Faith characterised by total trust in God is the compass in my continuous journey. No matter how rough the journey, I know God is my destination and he is with me along the way. — **Mary Joy Manwong**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

—2 Corinthians 5:17



YOUR DAILY MASS GUIDE

APRIL 5 – EASTER SUNDAY

Mass of Easter, *Gloria*, sequence (optional all week), *Credo*, Easter preface and prayers (white). Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9.

APRIL 6 – MONDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

Mass of the day, *Gloria*, Easter preface (white). Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Matthew 28:8-15.

APRIL 7 – TUESDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

Mass of the day, *Gloria*, Easter preface (white). Readings: Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18.

APRIL 8 – WEDNESDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

Mass of the day, *Gloria*, Easter preface (white). Readings: Acts 3:1-10; Luke 24:13-35.

APRIL 9 – THURSDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

Mass of the day, *Gloria*, Easter preface (white). Readings: Acts 3:11-26; Luke 24:35-48.

APRIL 10 – FRIDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

Mass of the day, *Gloria*, Easter preface (white). Readings: Acts 4:1-12; John 21:1-14.

APRIL 11 – SATURDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

Mass of the day, *Gloria*, Easter preface (white). Readings: Acts 4:13-21; Mark 16:9-15.



Apostleship of Prayer

Themes for April 2026

For priests in crisis

Let us pray for priests going through moments of crisis in their vocation, that they may find the accompaniment they need and that communities may support them with understanding and prayers

Easter Sunday

The Easter event unfolds while it is still dark (John 20:1), and we are told that Mary of Magdala and other women approached the tomb. However, in Mark's Gospel, this visit happens "very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen." John's Gospel uses the words "dark" and "darkness" several times to speak of spiritual darkness. Mary, Peter and the 'beloved disciple' are all in the darkness of their lack of understanding.

But with Mary's arrival at the empty tomb, the scene shifts dramatically from the gloomy silence of death and darkness to a chain reaction of explosion of life, with a

lot of running, and jubilation. The disciples are shaken from their slumber and begin to run! "Mary runs to Simon Peter, and he rushes out with the other disciple ... They run together, but the other disciple outruns him ..." (Vv. 2-4). Gradually, the message gets registered in them: Their Master's body is missing.

The tomb is empty. But "Who took the Master's body?" Mary



Resurrection: journey from darkness to light

was right – somebody took the corpse from the tomb! Peter saw the empty tomb. But the Beloved disciple did something more: he saw and believed! He believed that it was not an act of someone removing his Master's body, but he had moved out on his own.

But who was this "other disciple" or the "disciple whom Jesus loved?" He represents the ideal disciple who loves and believes in Jesus. He was there at the foot of the Cross and at the tomb during the burial of Jesus. Now he is back at the tomb. He was the only one who saw the tomb before and after the resurrection and he knew the difference. It did not take much time for him to believe. He has no name because we are invited to name ourselves in his slot.

The reality of the resurrection

Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

is the heart of our faith. The Lord's Resurrection changed the world. Death, pain sufferings and even sin are no longer able to defeat us because Jesus has defeated all of them for us. The Risen Lord returns to his disciples to comfort and encourage them.

Throughout his gospel, John frequently uses a lack of understanding by those who encountered Jesus as a means of offering a further explanation of his identity. The story of Nicodemus, the man born blind, and even Martha and Mary were all examples of moving from a lack of understanding to the conviction. Mary's lack of understanding at the tomb is also a way to conviction in Jesus' resurrection.

Our Easter needs to become a journey from our unbelief to faith, from darkness to light, from ignorance to wisdom and from death to life.

● Father Josekutty Mathew CMF



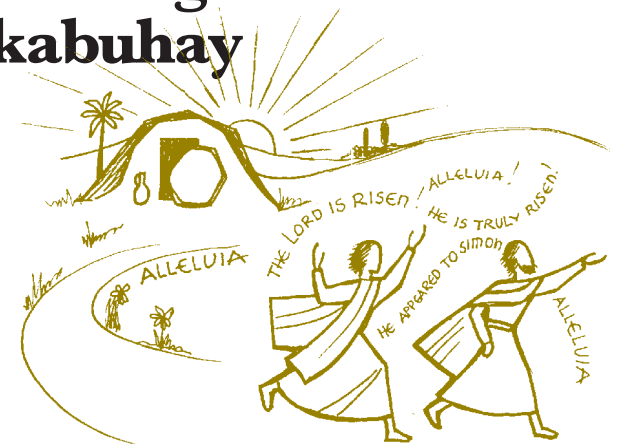
Araw ng Pasko ng Muling Pagkabuhay

Alaluya! Alaluya!
Si Kristo'y inihain na
pamaskong maamong tupa.
Magsalo tayo sa kanya!
Alaluya! Alaluya!

Si Hesus ay nabuhay muli. Wala na ang kanyang katawan sa kweba o libingan. Nagulat si Magdalena. Sino kaya ang kumuha ng bangkay? Tumakbo sila Pedro at kasamang alagad para siyasatin. Wala nga ang katawan ni Hesus. Wala na sya sa lugar ng mga patay. Dahil si Hesus ay nabuhay. Jesus is risen. Tapos na ang Byernes Santo. Ginanap na ni Hesus ang sakripisyo sa Krus. At siya ay nabuhay na muli. Purihin ang

Diyos. Salamat sa Diyos. Ganap at buo ang pagmamahal ng Diyos dahil sa alay ng kanyang Bugtong na Anak.

Alaluya, Alaluya, Si Kristo ay nabuhay, Sya ang ating kaligtasan. Inako nya ang lahat para sa atin. Si Hesus ay Buhay at sya ay nananahan sa atin. Magalak tayo, magpuri at magpasalamat. Alaluya. Alaluya. Salamat sa Diyos. Salamat Poong Hesus sa iyong pagliligtas sa amin.



● Father Arnold Abelardo CMF

On Good Friday, the Church holds a solemn liturgy centred around Scripture readings, particularly the Passion narrative, along with petitions and the veneration of the cross instead of the celebration of the Eucharist. This practice has roots dating back to the third century, emphasising the day's significance as one of mourning, representing the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

What makes Good Friday so meaningful? The Gospel of John provides an important perspective, especially through Christ's last words to his beloved disciple: "Behold, your mother." This moment signifies the profound connection between Mary and the Church, embodying the love and redemption offered by Jesus to all humanity.

Mary's presence at the foot of the cross is pivotal; she symbolises the role of motherhood in understanding Christ's sacrificial love. Early Church writings highlight that to fully grasp the message of Jesus, one must also embrace Mary as a mother figure who guides believers closer to her Son.

During the Good Friday liturgy, congregants participate in the veneration of the cross, which emphasises the necessity of approaching and embracing Jesus in his suffering. This act of devotion serves to restore divine friendship, enabling believers to participate in Christ's redemptive work. Whenever Christians gather to honour the cross, they are reminded of the healing power it represents.

Reaching out from the Cross

FAITH ALIVE!



experiences. The power of his sacrifice is believed to touch lives everywhere, inviting them to share in grace.

Christ's victory extends beyond mere suffering; it symbolises a transformative act that invites believers into a new creation filled with hope and love. Through faith, individuals are continually reminded of the healing power of Christ from the cross, which addresses the depths of human struggle and sin. The invitation is heartfelt: to draw near to him, especially when burdened.

As you reflect on Good Friday, consider the abundant virtues present in Christ's Passion. The obedience of Jesus can heal arrogance, while his humility offers solace to those grappling with self-seeking behaviors. The final invitation is quite clear: come to him in your burdens and find true rest and peace.

Good Friday invites everyone to gain a deeper understanding of divine love through the cross, encouraging a relationship that nurtures both healing and restoration. Accept this invitation and experience the grace offered through Christ, who reaches out lovingly from the cross. Understand that this day serves as a profound reminder of the transformative power of love, urging us to carry this message of hope into our daily lives.

● Father Romanus Cessario OSV News (Abridged by SE)



Archbishop Balestrero. Photo: OSV News/Alessia Giuliani, CPP

Vatican diplomat decries 'eugenic' termination of Down syndrome pregnancies

(CNS/VATICAN NEWS): "Persons with Down syndrome are more than a diagnosis, more than a condition, and certainly more than the limits others may imagine. All of them, like all of us, possess the same inherent dignity and sacred value, intentionally and lovingly imprinted by the Creator from the very first moment of conception," said Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, apostolic nuncio and permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva.

"Discriminatory and eugenic practices linked to prenatal screening and the selective termination of pregnancies targeting babies diagnosed with Down syndrome," he said, "must be firmly rejected."

Archbishop Balestrero gave this reminder at a side event hosted by the Jérôme Lejeune Foundation on the Thursday before World Down Syndrome Day 2026, observed on March 21.

In his remarks, Archbishop Balestrero stressed that people with Down syndrome, "like everyone else, hold the same fundamental rights."

The theme for this year's World Down Syndrome Day was "From Loneliness to Inclusion: Valuing Human Genetic Diversity to Enable the Effective Realisation of Rights for Persons with Down Syndrome."

The apostolic nuncio called on people "to promote and defend the inherent dignity, fundamental rights, and transcendent value of all persons at every stage of life," as he renewed an impassioned appeal.

Inclusion, he explained, is

'Discriminatory and eugenic practices linked to prenatal screening and the selective termination of pregnancies targeting babies diagnosed with Down syndrome'

not "merely a matter of providing services or accommodations," but a matter of "recognising persons with Down syndrome as full members of our communities."

Archbishop Balestrero also acknowledged and thanked the many professionals and institutions around the world that are committed to the continuing care for persons with Down syndrome and their families.

With this sentiment, the archbishop reaffirmed the importance of love, humanity, and heartfelt concern.

"A system of care and support may be operationally perfect, but if it is heartless, it becomes cold and impersonal," he said, emphasising that the value of a person's life should not be measured by utility or performance, but by the simple and profound fact of being human.

"May our collective efforts continue to build a culture of life and humanity where every person with Down syndrome is recognised as unique and unrepeatable, and welcomed with equal dignity and respect," he said.

Philippine energy emergency failing to curb prices, groups warn

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): The IBON Foundation policy group observed in late March that a Philippine government-declared energy emergency would do little to curb rising fuel and food prices, as the country grapples with a deep dependence on imported fossil fuels amid global conflict.

On March 24, the president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., signed Executive Order No. 110, declaring a state of national energy emergency as supply risks linked to the ongoing conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran threaten fuel availability and price stability.

The order adopts the Unified Package for Livelihoods, Industry, Food, and Transport [UPLIFT], a coordinated response framework involving key economic and social agencies.

However, Sonny Africa, executive director of IBON, said the order is unlikely to shield consumers from the immediate impact of rising prices.

Africa said that "the declaration won't do much to rein in rising prices not just of oil products but of basic goods and services," warning that "inflation will still double or triple in the coming months."

He said the executive order [EO] leaves key mechanisms unclear, noting that while the Price Act "is presumably triggered and will freeze prices," it was not explicitly cited in the measure, raising questions about whether price ceilings will be implemented.

"Soaring domestic oil prices charged by the oil firms are the main channel of shock transmission—but the EO doesn't say anything about public and transparent determination of these prices," Africa said.

He added that the policy effectively "protects the profits of every oil, electricity and other companies with the presumption that their market-determined prices enabling profits as usual are 'reasonable'."

At the same time, Africa said the order lacks clear commitments to support vulnerable sectors.

"The EO is unable to be explicit that the livelihoods of transport workers, fisherfolk, farmers, and other small producers will be protected," he said, adding that it also "avoids saying how many need help, how much help will be given, and for how long."

He pointed to funding con-



Photo: Engin Akyurt

'The [Executive Order] is unable to be explicit that the livelihoods of transport workers, fisherfolk, farmers, and other small producers will be protected'

straints, noting that assistance will rely on existing budgets, as the order states that financing "shall be sourced from existing appropriations."

Africa said, "In short, there's an emergency, but not that bad because the budget planned before the crisis is apparently enough," raising concerns that millions could remain underserved.

He added that "the EO's message is clear: the Marcos Jr. administration wants the burden of adjusting to the oil shock to be borne by poor and ordinary Filipinos, while the profits of corporations and the wealth of billionaires are protected."

Structural weaknesses exposed

The Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities [ICSC] said the crisis reflects deeper structural vulnerabilities rooted in the country's dependence on imported fossil fuels.

ICSC executive director, Angelo Kairos dela Cruz, said the declaration "just proves how resilience is not a trade-off to development, but in fact, it must be our main anchor towards a better development pathway for the country."

He warned that "Filipinos will still bear the brunt of the impact: fuel prices will continue

to increase, detrimentally affecting the lives and livelihoods of people," pointing to how global disruptions quickly translate into domestic price shocks.

Dela Cruz said this reflects "a deeper structural issue, that an import-dependent energy system leaves countries like ours exposed to volatility, while private gains persist during crises."

He urged a shift toward domestic and renewable energy, saying "prioritising renewable energy and effectively moving away from our overreliance on fossil fuels will make us independent from international shocks" and help stabilise power costs.

The group also highlighted the role of local governments in building resilience, noting that "we also have to recognise the crucial role of local government units, who have a better understanding of their communities' actual situation."

Dela Cruz said existing local initiatives show that "we do not need to start from scratch: practical and efficient solutions already exist."

Push for long-term transition

ICSC said addressing the energy crisis requires a coordinated, long-term approach that integrates energy security, transport reform and climate action.

"All things considered: renewable energy advancement, multimodal public transportation, active transport and energy security must all be part of a combined, resilient system," dela Cruz said.

He added that "true climate action must be centred on the actual needs of people and local communities," warning that delays in addressing structural issues will deepen future crises.

Israeli government U-turns after outrage over blocking of holy site access in Jerusalem



Photo: OSV News/Ammar Awad, Reuters

(OSV NEWS): Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, quickly reversed a controversial police action on March 29, Palm Sunday, announcing on X [formerly Twitter], “I have instructed the relevant authorities that Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch, be granted full and immediate access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.”

The move came after Israeli police prevented Cardinal Pizzaballa and Franciscan Father Francesco Ielpo, custos of the Holy Land, from entering the church to celebrate Palm Sunday Mass.

The incident, according to the Latin Patriarchate, marked the first time in centuries that the heads of the Church were barred from Palm Sunday services at the historic site. The patriarchate called the event “a grave precedent, disregarding the sensibilities of billions of people who, during this week, look to Jerusalem.”

It denounced the decision as “hasty and fundamentally flawed.”

The police action took place amid heightened security in Jerusalem’s Old City. Since February, several holy sites—including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Western Wall, and the Temple Mount—have been closed following a joint Israeli-US attack against Iran.

Israeli president, Isaac Herzog, explained on March 30 that the incident arose from “security concerns over ongoing missile threats from Iran,” citing recent missile strikes in the Old City area.

Despite official explanations, the decision triggered swift international condemnation.

Palestinian authorities called the move “a crime and an illegal military measure” and “a flagrant violation of the basic rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them freedom of worship.”

Italy’s prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, expressed solidari-

ty with Cardinal Pizzaballa and Father Ielpo, emphasising that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is “a sacred place of Christianity” that “must be preserved and protected for the celebration of sacred rites,” *La Repubblica* reported.

Meloni added the move “constitutes an offence not only to believers, but to every community that recognises religious freedom.”

US ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, called the action “difficult to understand or justify.”

European Union foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, posted on X that barring the clerics was “a violation of religious freedom and long-standing protections governing holy sites,” urging that “freedom of worship in Jerusalem must be fully guaranteed, without exception, for all faiths.”

Polish president, Karol Nawrocki, also writing on X objected, saying, “Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, and Christians are preparing for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” He added, “The actions of the Israeli police, which I condemn, are an expression of disrespect for Christian tradition and culture.”

Pope Leo XIV, before the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square on Palm Sunday, offered prayers for Christians in the Middle East “who are suffering the consequences of a brutal conflict and, in many cases, are unable to observe fully the liturgies of these holy days.”

The pope stressed, “Jesus is the King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them.”

Herzog reaffirmed Israel’s “unwavering commitment to freedom of religion for all faiths and to upholding the status quo at Jerusalem’s holy sites.” The Latin Patriarchate expressed gratitude to Herzog “for his prompt attention and valued intervention.”



The Resurrection by 19th century painter, Johann Friedrich Overbeck. Photo: CNS/Bridgeman ImagesC

I know that you are seeking
Jesus the crucified.
He is not here, for he has
been raised just as he said.
Come and see the place where he lay.
Then go quickly and
tell his disciples,
‘He has been raised from the dead,
and he is going before
you to Galilee;
there you will see him.’

— Matthew 28:5-7 —