



Priestly Fraternity of St Peter Newsletter

District of Oceania – Christmas 2022

From the District Superior...



*O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi
prodiisti, attingens a fine usque ad
finem, fortiter suaviterque disponens
omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam
prudentiae.*

**O Wisdom, That proceeds from the
mouth of the Most High, Reaching
from end to end mightily, And
disposing all things sweetly, Come
and teach us the way of Prudence.**

The words above are those of the first of the seven Great O Antiphons, O Sapientia! Each antiphon is sung in turn at Vespers during the seven days before Christmas. This is one of the ways that the Church, as Advent reaches its climax, intensifies her prayers in preparation for the great Feast of Christmas. It is no accident that at the beginning of this last week of Advent, for the first Great O Antiphon, from all his possible titles, the Church addresses Our Lord as Wisdom.

Wisdom is that Gift of the Holy Ghost, by which we are able to judge all things as they relate to their highest and ultimate clause, namely God himself. Wisdom gives us a 'God's eye view' as it were of the created order. Since the created order (ourselves included) runs according to God's Divine Plan, made visible in the person of Our Lord who comes among us as a man, then we should have confidence in His goodness to us. Since God is in charge, then all things will work together for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Caesar certainly did not have in mind a newly married couple in a remote part of his empire expecting their first child when he ordered the census, yet that was part of Wisdom's plan. The innkeeper did not

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Building up Christendom in Western Sydney

Throughout the Bible, mountains are places where God encountered His people, where significant religious events took place, or where the prophets went for spiritual retreats. We can think of Noah on Mt Ararat, Moses on Mt Sinai, Elijah on Mt Carmel, our Lord's frequent retreats into the mountains to pray, and finally His Transfiguration on Mt Tabor and Passion on Mt Calvary.

It was quite fitting, then, that the Fraternity of St Peter began its own mission in Sydney in a slightly biblical manner: in 2001 our community was invited by the bishop of Parramatta Diocese to take over as chaplains for the Sunday Traditional Latin Mass at Our Lady of the Nativity Catholic Church, Lawson, in the Blue Mountains.

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From the District Superior

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realise who he was turning away from his door when all he could offer that some young couple was a stable, yet that was part of Wisdom's plan as well. With his almighty power, God disposes all things for our good, if we but trust Him.

The second point to take note of in O Sapientia! is that of all the virtues that we might ask for at this time, it is Prudence that the Church asks her founder to grant her.

Prudence is the virtue which enables us know how to do what should be done. It comes to us from God and gives us the ability to fulfil his will in the manner and at the time that is most pleasing to Him. Trusting in Him and his goodness, gives us the ability to navigate our sinful world, in its complexity and challenges, with Charity and Truth. Since He has created it, and since He has redeemed it, we should be confident in His Providence. Let us pray then for Prudence, so that we may be able to imitate Our Blessed Mother, knowing when (and how!) to speak, and when to stay silent, praying and pondering God's plan in our hearts.

May the coming of the Christ Child this Christmas bring you and your families rest, peace and joy.

Thank you for your support and prayers during 2022. You and your families will be remembered at our Midnight Masses this Christmas.

God Bless,

Fr. McCaffrey FSSP

Building up Christendom

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Peter Monaghan, a layman and business owner in western Sydney, heard of our need for a house in which to live and offer daily Mass, and kindly allowed us to use three houses in Girraween. There, in a modest chapel, the first FSSP priest in NSW, Fr John Rizzo, offered his daily private Masses. Word spread amongst pious lay faithful living nearby, and soon a number of people were attending the daily Masses.

A few months later, George Cardinal Pell invited the FSSP to take over the chaplaincy of the Maternal Heart Latin Mass community, and an additional Sunday Mass was later started at the Coptic Catholic Community's small house chapel in nearby Prospect.

The year 2021 marked 20 years since the FSSP first began its mission in Parramatta, and we are still in the same houses in Girraween (albeit with a larger house chapel than the original room), and we still share the Coptic community's facilities (albeit now a full-sized parish church). We are immensely grateful to Peter for allowing us to stay in his properties for so many years. He was called to the Lord on December 8, 2020. *Requiescat in pace.*

Since 2001 our community has steadily grown, but with a noticeable uptick in the past few years. Many new families in Western Sydney have started attending our Masses at Prospect, Lawson, and at our newest Mass location, the Croatian Catholic Community in Blacktown. Today we number around 350 faithful on Sundays with many young families and children.

The time has arrived, and the need is now pressing, for us to have our own church and facilities where we can grow into a thriving community for Catholic families in western Sydney. To that end, Fr Paul Leung launched a fundraising campaign four years ago. In mid-2020, Fr Damonn Sypher took over as chaplain and has continued with that project.

On November 5th this year we held a well-attended fundraising dinner, with a special emphasis on encouraging people to become regular donors. The building project will take many years to complete, so it will be vital for us to ensure a substantial steady income to satisfy the requirements of a bank when the time comes for us to take out a fairly sizable mortgage.

The theme for the dinner was 'Building up Christendom for Australia'. The idea behind the theme was that Christendom is a concept that unites all Catholics regardless of where they attend Mass. If people support our building project, it is not simply our church that they are supporting, but they are contributing to the building up of the Kingdom of Christ here on earth, since every church that is built is an extension of Christ's Dominion upon earth.

For more information on our project & to support us, please visit: www.fssp-parra.org/building-project.

by Fr Roger Gilbride, FSSP

Upcoming EVENTS

Priestly Ordination

Rev. Mr Nathan Pospichil FSSP will be ordained to the priesthood on Saturday June 24th at 10.15am in St Mary's Cathedral.

Vocations Retreat

One-day retreat for men discerning the priesthood & religious life.

Saturday March 18th, Maternal Heart of Mary, Lewisham. Contact Fr Wong: sydney@fssp.net

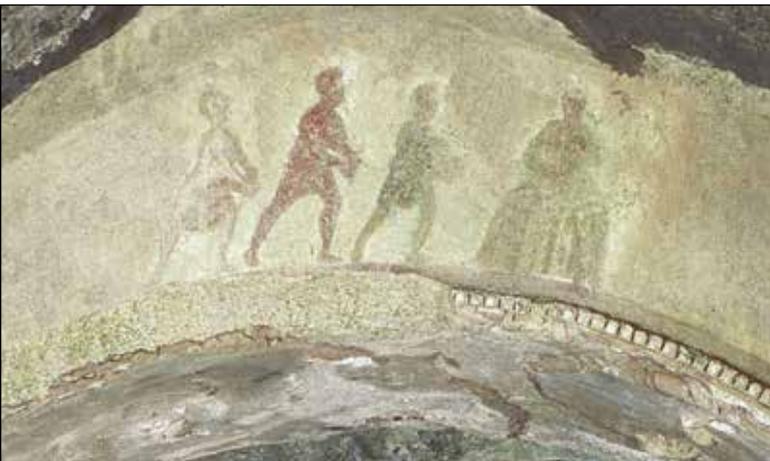
Women's Retreat

A 5-day retreat for women on the spirituality of St Catherine of Siena.

March 6th - 9th, Hartzer Park, Bowral NSW. Contact Fr Wee: theoudoulos@gmail.com

Faith in Stone: Christian Themes in Early Christmas Art

My personal piety has lately shifted towards what I might call “historical piety”: searching into the art, archaeology, and literature of the early Church not primarily for scholarly motives, but for devotional motives. I’m filled with wonder when I search into the artifacts of the early Church because I see clearly that our ancestors in the Faith held the same creed that we do. Further, I’m spurred on to holiness to know that they lived so fervently in a world which openly persecuted the Faith.



Example 1: Adoration of Magi in the Catacomb of Priscilla, mid 200s. [Album/Alamy stock photo].

I have gathered four examples of early Christian art which beautifully illustrate the Nativity and the Epiphany. A full historical examination into these is beyond my qualifications, but their pious aspects are accessible to all. In examining this artwork I was filled with awe at the unity of our Faith throughout the centuries: many peoples, many centuries, one Faith.

Example 1 is the earliest known representation of the Adoration of the Magi and is found in the ancient Roman Catacomb of Priscilla. This fresco is found on an arch in the Capella Greca (Greek Chapel) of that Catacomb and is dated to the mid-200s. In this primitive image, we see three men moving in stride and carrying gifts. They seem to be wearing Phrygian caps, headwear associated in ancient times with people from the east. They are approaching our Lord seated on the lap of His Blessed Mother. Depictions of the Adoration of the Magi are surprisingly more popular in ancient art than the Nativity. This may be because the Epiphany is the gentiles’ discovery of Christ, a theme that would be dear to gentile countries which embraced the Faith.

Example 2 is the Severa Tombstone, dated from the late 200s through the early 300s. It is a small slab that possibly covered the tomb of a child named Severa in the catacomb of Priscilla. The inscription says: “Severa, may you live in God.” On the left is

Example 2: Severa Tombstone, late 200s - early 300s. [© Giovanni Dall’Orto, Wikimedia Commons].



Severa holding a scroll, and in the middle is a vivid scene of the Magi striding in the wind towards Jesus in the arms of Mary. Again, the Magi wear caps associated with peoples of the east, and their short tunics are of eastern origin. The man standing behind our Lady and pointing at the star is likely the prophet Balaam (though it is not impossible that he is St Joseph). Why Balaam? Because he prophesied Christ’s birth and related it to the image of a star (think of the Magi following a star): “A star shall rise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel” (Numbers 24:17).

Example 3 depicts the Adoration of the Shepherds. It is on the upper left face of the Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus, which contains many Biblical scenes and is dated from 330-350. The shepherd is in a sort of repose as he gazes upon the face of the God-Man. Notice also the presence of the beasts. None of the Gospels explicitly mention the presence of animals at the Nativity, but traditionally they are considered to be the ox and the donkey. This is due to the words of Isaiah the prophet: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib” (Isaias 1:3). Another endearing depiction of the Nativity even portrays the animals munching at the manger on which Christ lay, and a few centuries later, licking or nibbling on the Holy Infant.

Example 4 is a mosaic taken from the wonderful Triumphal Arch of the Basilica of St Mary Major in Rome. A whole book could be written about the mosaics on the arch of this ancient and most venerable Marian church. The church was consecrated in 434 by Pope St Sixtus III in honor of the Blessed Virgin after the Council of Ephesus (431), which affirmed her already existing title, Mother of God.

Of the many scenes in this mosaic, the image shown depicts the Adoration of the Magi. The Magi come from the city to the right (not shown here), wearing their Phrygian caps and carrying their gifts. Two are on Jesus’ left, one is on His right. St Joseph, perhaps, is on the far left of the image. The child Jesus sits not in a manger but on a jeweled throne in front of four angels, and under him is a footstool (signifying dominance) which his feet can’t reach! Further, although He is a child, He sits as a fully grown man. These details emphasize Christ’s divinity (a doctrine that had been lately attacked by Christological heresies).

The most mysterious part of this scene, however, concerns the two women sitting on each side of Christ. Who

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Faith in Stone: Christian Themes in Early Christmas Art

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are they? Both are seated on platforms and seem to rest their feet on footstools. The woman on Christ's right, dressed in white and bejeweled like a Roman noblewoman is the Virgin Mary, and this is known because she is dressed the same as in the Annunciation scene directly above (not shown here). The woman on Christ's left,



Example 3: Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus, 330-350. [CC BY-SA 3.0, Dick Stracke, Wikimedia Commons].

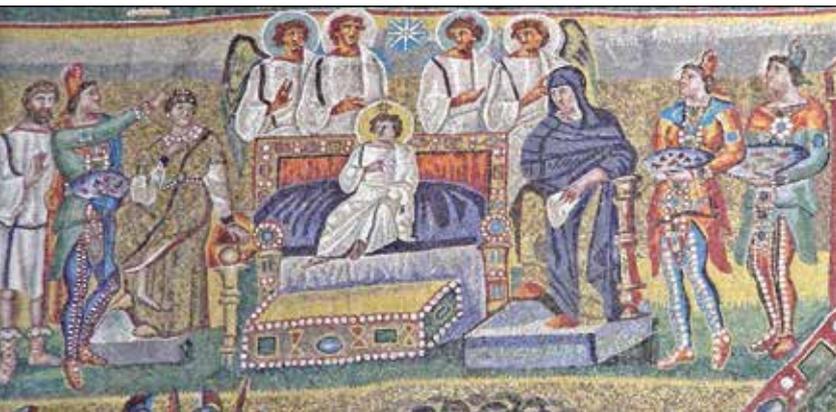
covered by a blue maphorion (a mantle worn by married women in public) is more mysterious and no one knows for certain who she is. It has been suggested that she is St Anne. It is possible, however, that she too is the Virgin Mary but depicted as Mother of God. In other words, perhaps this duplication

of Mary is meant to express the Catholic belief that she is ever Virgin (on Christ's right) and a true mother, the Mother of God (on Christ's left).

After examining these examples, a few points come to mind. Firstly, our Catholic Faith is the same throughout the centuries; this is a mark of its divine origin. Secondly, early Christians were well acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ because these are shown in early Christian art. Finally, early Christian art shows an ever-growing devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In our first two examples she is depicted as if she is a throne, a seat of wisdom, on whom Christ sits. May our desire for holiness be enkindled by these ancient and vivid artifacts of Church history!

by Fr Richard Wallace FSSP

Example 4: Scene from Triumphal Arch Mosaic in St Mary Major, 432-400. [CC BY-SA 3.0, MM, Wikimedia Commons].



Fundraising **DINNER**

On Saturday, November 5th, the FSSP Parramatta apostolate hosted a successful fundraising dinner. Donations on the evening and immediately prior the dinner raised \$115,000, with many pledges for ongoing donations. The community hopes to purchase a plot of land in western Sydney some time next year on which a future church and facilities will be built. If you would like to contribute please visit: <https://fssp-parra.org/building-project/>

