Holy Cross Retreat

Letter 348

16th October 2026

Greetings,

Chris is 71 today, Friday October 14th. **Happy Birthday Chris**!

Erick ran as a pacer in last Sunday's Melbourne Marathon. This provided an opportunity for him to support other runners from the Steve Dineen Box Hill Athletic Club. His plan was to pace until 30 kilometres. During the race he determined that one runner in particular needed his presence for longer, so he continued to run and had the satisfaction of seeing this man finish which otherwise seemed unlikely. As a result Erick completed the marathon and did so in 2 hours 47 minutes. The greater achievement was to coax and coach the other man to the finishing line. Unfortunately Erick picked up a fever on Tuesday afternoon and was diagnosed on Thursday with influenza.

It has been a reasonably quiet week with no groups booked into the Centre for the first three days. We are looking forward to some dry weather, because we had the large mower in 'hospital' for just over two weeks and the grass has grown considerably in that time.

Anniversary details

As Tim explained last Sunday at Mass, the annual remembrance of Holy Cross deceased relatives will take place during 10.00am Mass on November 15th this year. We have photos and details of those we have been remembered in past years, but if you want to update the photo, or add a name, please email the details to Tim Horlock: horlocktim1@gmail.com

US execution

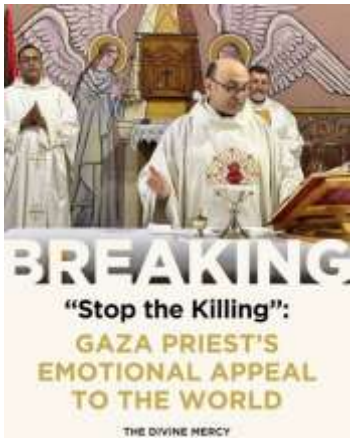
On Oct 10th Pope Leo XIV declared capital punishment ''inadmissible'' as he marked the World Day Against the Death Penalty and his native United States announced plans to livestream an execution by firing squad. In a post on X, the American pope quoted the revised Catholic teaching on capital punishment ushered in by Pope Francis, that the death penalty attacks the inherent dignity of a human being. "The common good can be safeguarded and the requirements of justice can be met without recourse to capital punishment," read the post under Leo's official handle, @Pontifex. "Effective systems of detention have been developed that protect citizens while at the same time do not completely deprive those who are guilty of the possibility of redemption." The post ended with the hashtag #NoDeathPenalty.

Whose Nostra Aetate? The Church, Judaism, Israel and Leo's pontificate

At times, separate events, in unexpected ways, communicate the situation in which a global religious community and the institution governing its faithful find themselves. This happened in just eleven days in S ept. 2026, between Rome and New York. The first moment: On Sept. 16, three Vatican dicasteries—the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue—published the 8,600-word document titled *Note. A Journey of Hope. Sixty Years of Interreligious Dialogue and Fraternity in the Light of the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate"*.

This document is relevant because Leo XIV, as a good American Catholic, has always been clear about the importance of *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II's 1965 declaration on the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions, particularly for its foundational role in opening a new era in relations with the Jews. This new Vatican document gestures toward recognizing the importance of rabbinic Judaism for Jewish-Christian dialogue, not just biblical Judaism as in *Nostra Aetate* paragraph 4.

The document is also notable for what it does *not* say: it does not mention Zionism, the Land, or the State of Israel. Quoting a 1985 document from the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity – Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *A Journey of Hope* states: "Jesus was and always remained a Jew […]. Jesus is fully a man of his time and of his environment: the Jewish Palestinian one of the first century, the anxieties and hopes of which he shared."



This passage, along with the silence on the State of Israel, has sparked public disappointment among Rome's Chief Rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni. Other reactions to this document are to be expected. The second moment: On Sept. 22, around 100 priests (from eight countries and various Italian regions) of the network "Priests Against Genocide," along with bishops, religious sisters, and citizens, marched in a procession through Rome. Some 200 people gathered at the Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, just a few steps from St. Peter's Square. Among them were familiar faces, including Alex Zanotelli, Nandino Capovilla, Tonio Dell'Olio, and Alessandro Santoro. ❝

The procession also included priests from various orders and congregations—Franciscans, Jesuits, Combonians, and Xaverians—as well as parish priests and assistants from across Italy and from about ten other countries. They carried no flags, though some wore keffiyehs over their habits or clerical collars. Three bishops led the procession: Archbishop Franco Moscone of Manfredonia, Italy; Bishop Christian Carlassare of Bentiu, South Sudan; and retired Italian archbishop Giovanni Ricchiuti, president of Pax ChristiItaly. After a moment of prayer in the church, the procession started, interspersed with hymns, prayers, and biblical readings, as well as texts by Pope Leo XIV, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Kairos Palestine ecumenical movement, and the Israeli historian Omer Bartov. This march took place one year after this network's inception. "Priests Against Genocide" now counts over 2,500 members from 67 countries across all continents, including three cardinals and around thirty bishops.

The third moment: On Sept 24, 2026, during the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, attended the ministerial meeting of the "Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution." In his address, Cardinal Parolin reiterated the Holy See's position: "The two-State solution, based on secure and internationally recognized borders, is the only viable and equitable path toward a just and lasting peace. The Holy See continues to support the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, as well as their legitimate aspiration to live in freedom, security, and dignity within an independent and sovereign State."

Parolin's words echoed what Pope Leo said exactly one year before, in an exchange with journalists outside Castel Gandolfo on Sept. 23, 2025: "The Holy See has supported the two-state solution for many years. […] The Holy See recognized the two-state solution some time ago. That is clear: we must seek a path that respects all peoples." on the part of the other side; dialogue is broken."

Two days later, in his Sept. 26 speech at the opening of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly, Parolin reiterated the Holy See's position on the two-state solution: "The Holy See reiterates its call for an end to the ongoing violence against the Palestinian civilian population in the West Bank, particularly the escalation of hostilities, home demolitions and movement restrictions, which are driving the displacement of Palestinian communities.

On the situation in Gaza, the Holy See remains concerned about the dire humanitarian crisis, the widespread destruction, mass displacement and the severe, persistent shortages. In this regard, the Holy See urges the international community to work toward advancing the two-state solution, with a view to bringing about a just and lasting peace." These three different moments show some of the open issues that the Church now acknowledges when we read today the 1965 conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*. It also shows a new paradigm shift in the relations between the Catholic Church and Judaism in the last few years, made even more evident by the Hamas attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, and Israel's reaction.

At Vatican II in 1965, the Catholic Church officially repudiated antisemitism and the charge of deicide against the Jews. In the post-Vatican II period, papal teaching made clear that the Covenant between the people of Israel and the Lord is irrevocable. In 1993, the "Fundamental Agreement" established official diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel. These steps brought the Church and Judaism closer together in a fundamental way. But in recent years, a new gap has opened up, centreed on Zionism, the Land, and the State of Israel: it cannot be bridged by diplomacy alone, because it is doctrinal and theological.

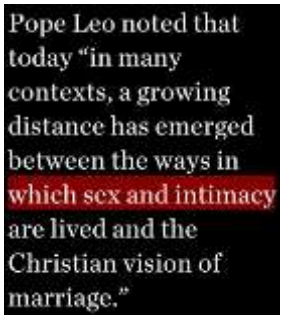
An acknowledgment of Zionism and the State of Israel in doctrinal terms – a Vatican-approved Catholic Zionism – would have immediate consequences at the interreligious, ecumenical, and ecclesial levels – not just in the Middle East but worldwide. The gap between *Nostra Aetate* and the post-Vatican II teaching on one side and the expectations of many Jews on the other side was already evident before Oct.7, 2023. But what has happened since then has made, and continues to make, that gap increasingly difficult to bridge. Moreover, bridging that gap doctrinally would have serious consequences for other bridges that are still under construction. It is also an intra-Catholic debate, with increasingly different sensibilities between Catholics in different parts of the world. Those ten days in September 2026 made clear that this is one of the most sensitive and complex issues facing the Catholic Church today.

Ten years of *Amoris Laetitia*: the bishops go back to Jerusalem

Antonio Sapdaro JS (9th October, 2027)

Ten years after *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Leo XIV opened his meeting with the heads of the Eastern Churches and the presidents of the bishops' conferences in the Paul VI Audience Hall on Oct. 7. To describe the work ahead, he turned to the Acts of the Apostles: Paul and Barnabas, after returning from their mission, gather the Church and relate "all that God had done with them" (Acts 14:27), then report it again in Jerusalem (15:4). The bishops have brought stories of conversion and unexpected fruit, as well as of difficulties and open questions, so that "a shared narrative of these ten years may gradually take shape."

Acts 15 recounts the Council of Jerusalem, which Francis invoked in *Amoris Laetitia*, calling the Church's path since then "the way of mercy and reinstatement" (AL 296). Leo places the exhortation within a long history that begins with *Gaudium et spes* and extends through the 1980 Synod and *Familiaris consortio*. On divorced and civilly remarried Catholics and access to the sacraments, that history holds together: John Paul II asked pastors to "exercise careful discernment of situations" (FC 84); Benedict XVI spoke of encouraging a path; and Francis of a dynamic discernment, "open to new stages of growth" (AL 303).



The questions Leo raised today reveal where the stakes lie. One is "a growing distance" between "the ways in which sex and intimacy are lived" and "the Christian vision of marriage." Young people long for love and fidelity, yet many find it hard "to believe that a lifelong commitment is the condition for achieving what they desire," while economic insecurity, migration, violence, and loneliness narrow the future they can imagine. Another is the pastoral language itself: Leo asks where it opens a path and where it fails "to touch people's hearts."

The most demanding passage addresses fragility. Leo carries it beyond the so-called irregular situations: fragility "belongs to our common human condition and therefore also to the life of the Church," because "we all know the gap between the good we desire and what we are able to live." Fidelity becomes "a grace to be received and a path to be gradually renewed." Hence the question that runs through the meeting: "What kind of Church do people encounter precisely when they are most fragile?"

Leo offers no conclusions in advance. He asks the bishops to let these realities

"question us," to speak with the evangelical freedom of Acts, and to maintain the confidentiality discernment requires. In May 2025, he wrote that demanding questions call for closeness and listening more than hurried answers. Today's meeting applies that criterion to the whole episcopate.

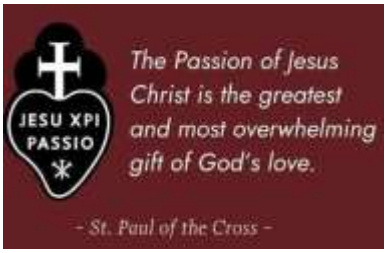
Paul of the Cross feast – Passionist founder: October 19th

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Paul's call was his urging to his brothers "to exhaust every means possible" in bringing the message of God's love to people. Most founders identify a particular work for their Congregation. Instead of 'works', Paul had a clear message that he wanted preached, and he urged that this should happen wherever and however it was possible.

As far as we know, Paul is the only founder who wrote a rule of life before he had any Companions to live that life! From the very beginning he was totally clear about what he wanted, and terms like "the Passion," solitude," "mercy," and "companions" were integral to how he evangelised. In the opening chapter of his rule, he devoted a

section to the geographical location of the 'retreats' (*retiro*) where his religious would live. He did not establish monasteries, but retreats – places to retire in order to pray and regain energy. He did this in imitation of Jesus' command to his disciples to "come away" for a while after their demanding mission (Mark 6:31-32). Passionists were not to retire alone, but in solitude together! Paul wrote in that same introduction to his Rule of Life, "The religious assigned to ministry after having worked for souls, can, in these houses of solitude regain that fervour which is sometimes diminished by works of charity".

For Paul, there could be no evangelizing without prayer and study. He praised his bother and co-founder, John Baptist, because "he never stopped studying". For Paul, this enabled a missioner to engage in solid preparation. Paul set out clearly that each religious' had a simple room which was to be a place of "imminent activity". Here a man would read, study and pray so that once he left the retreat he could devote his full energy to his mission, which Paul explained in many beautiful terms. He frequently claimed, "the Passion of Jesus is the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love". He urged that missioners words should fall "like gentle rain on hardened hearts". His message was simple: "Here learn the science of the saints; all is to be found in the Passion of Jesus".



Paul urged: “Abandon yourself into the hands of God, like a ship with neither oars nor sails, letting go of yourself totally”. What was Paul’s call? Late in life he declared, “If I could have my life over, and preach just one sermon, I would speak about the total mercy of God”.

Paul was driven by a desire for people to know and experience God’s love as he had come to know it. He believed the best way to experience this love was to encounter in prayer the total self-giving of Jesus in his Passion and death. Because he held this conviction, Paul was able to write, “If God should send a plague, I would willingly be the first to leave my solitude and go to the assistance of the plague-stricken. I would willingly remain at their sides until their last breath, even though it meant the sacrifice of my own life.”

It seems that Jesus began ministry as a disciple of John the Baptist, and after John was arrested and killed, Jesus took up John’s movement. However, as he toured the villages of Galilee, he experienced profound poverty and oppression from both the Romans and the religious leaders. Jesus set aside John’s demanding call to repentance and put his primary emphasis on inviting people to ‘Come follow me’. He promised that in this way, people would experience God’s profound friendship and the truth that all people are sisters and brothers bound together by God’s overwhelming love.

It seems that it was Jesus’ encounter with everyday people that opened his mind and heart to the call God had for him. In the same way, Paul of the Cross became increasingly convinced that God’s mercy was lavishly offered to the poor and sinners. He directed his followers to work in the regions where others would not go for fear of contracting malaria. Paul’s call was to preach this message of God’s mercy, and while he saw parish missions as an obvious opportunity to share this “Good News”, his spiritual guidance, shared in thousands of letters, was an evangelizing opportunity to which he was equally devoted. While Paul hoped for a community of preachers, he recognised that not all of his men had the ability for this work. This enabled him to encourage them not to focus on what they did, but what they must proclaim. If they could experience in their own hearts, the total self-giving of Jesus, then they could in a myriad of ways proclaim to others as he did, that “the Passion of Jesus is the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s love”

Where is it?

Would you know what intersection this is in the photo above?

Roses

Joseph spent several hours last Saturday weeding two of the gardens around the back. The roses there are starting to look beautiful, as they are out the front, where Peter Norman cares for them (see here). There is a beautiful perfume from them of an evening.

Senta Bilong Helpim

Joseph spoke very nicely at Mass last Sunday about the Senta in Vanimo, PNG and the fundraising that us under way. This is part of what he shared.

“In Vanimo, Papua New Guinea, children with disabilities have long been pushed to the edges — hidden away, denied medical care, denied education, and denied the basic human compassion that every child deserves. But in 1994, St Gemma’s Senta Bilong Helpim began to change that story. It became a place where children who were once rejected, found care, therapy, education, and love. Some have gone on to live full, productive lives. Some have received life-changing surgery through the generosity of volunteer Australian surgeons. Hundreds of children have discovered dignity because someone opened a door for them.

But the need is growing. The current facilities can no longer meet the needs of the children who rely on the Senta. And so a decision has been made to raise $300,000 to build a new home — a place where children with physical and intellectual disabilities can access facilities, receive safe accommodation, therapy, medical support, and the chance to learn, participate, and belong.

This project is not simply a building. It is a place of hope — a home where children know they belong, where they are loved, and where their lives are cherished. When you give, when you support, when you help build this new Senta, you are saying to these children: *“You belong at the table. You are part of the feast. You are not forgotten.”*

Your generosity, big or small, will go a long way for hundreds of children. It will shape their future, restore their dignity and open doors that have been closed for too long. It is a sign of hearts willing to help transform the lives of others. So please give with confidence — trusting that God’s Kingdom is open to everyone, and knowing that through your hands, children in Vanimo will find a place where they can learn, participate, and belong”.

gofundme

Donations can be made by scanning the QR code or visit: gofund.me/8efeb9045

All donations are tax deductible

Thank you

Humour

It's not always as complex as it's made to sound!

Several centuries ago it was agreed that a bishop and a rabbi would engage in a religious debate. The Jewish people met and picked an aged and wise rabbi to represent them in the debate. However, as the rabbi spoke no Italian, and the bishop spoke no Yiddish, they agreed that it would be a "silent" debate.

On the chosen day the bishop and rabbi sat opposite each other. The bishop raised his hand and showed three fingers. The rabbi looked back and raised one finger. Next, the bishop waved his finger around his head. The rabbi pointed to the ground where he sat. The bishop brought out a communion wafer and a chalice of wine. The rabbi pulled out an apple. With that, the bishop stood up and declared himself beaten and said that the rabbi was too clever. The Jews had won.

Later some cardinals met with the bishop and asked him what had happened. The bishop said "First I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity. The rabbi responded by holding up a single finger to remind me there is still only one God, common to both our beliefs. Then, I waved my finger around my head to show him that God was all around us. The rabbi responded by pointing to the ground to show that God was also right here with us. I pulled out the wine and wafer to show that God absolves us of all our sins, and the rabbi pulled out an apple to remind me of the original sin. He bested me at every move and I could not continue."

Meanwhile, the Jewish community gathered to ask the rabbi how he'd won. "I haven't a clue," said the rabbi. "First, he told me that he was going to beat me in three rounds, so I gave him the finger. Then he told me that I was beating around the bush and I told him to get straight to the point." "And then what?" asked a woman. "Who knows?" said the rabbi. "He took out his lunch so I took out mine."

An elderly priest, speaking to the younger priest, said. "Your idea to replace the first four pews with plush bucket theatre seats worked brilliantly. Now, the front seats are always full. As well as that, the Rock 'n Roll Gospel Choir has brought a lot of young people back to church, and the church is packed. These have been great ideas, but the drive-through Confessional is taking things too far".

"But Father" the young interrupted. "Confessions and donations have nearly doubled since that began!"

"Yes." Replied the elderly priest. "I appreciate that. But the flashing neon sign, 'Toot 'n Tell' or 'Go to Hell' cannot stay on the church roof!"

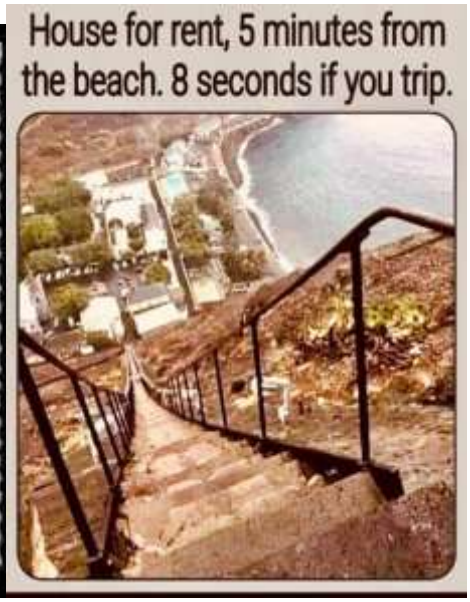
A pirate walked into a bar .and the bartender says, "Hey, I haven't seen you in a while. What happened, you look terrible!" "Arrh – Not at all." the pirate replies, "I be fine." The bartender says, "But what about that wooden leg? You didn't have that before." "Arrh!," says the pirate, "We were in a battle at sea and a cannon ball hit me leg. But the surgeon fixed me up, and I be fine, really."

"Yeah," says the bartender, "But what about that hook? Last time I saw you, you had both hands."

"Aye," says the pirate, "We were in another battle and we boarded the enemy ship. I was in a sword fight and me hand was cut off. But the surgeon fixed me up with this hook, and I be feeling great, really." "Oh," says the bartender, "What about that eye patch? Last time you were in here you had both eyes."

"Arrh," says the pirate, "One day when I was swabbing me deck, some gulls were flying over the ship. I looked up, and one of them--arrgh, he, pooped--in me eye.""So?" replied the bartender, "what happened? You couldn't have lost an eye just from that!"

"Well," says the pirate, "'Twas me first day with the hook."



Prayers

We remember that those who have died recently and whose anniversaries occur at this time, especially Mary Corcoran.

We pray also for members of our Holy Cross family who are coping with illness including many not listed here, and all who care for them: We remember…

Dawn Heffernan, Kathy Shady, Nada Atme, Marie Spowart, Paul Fitzgerald, Pam Storey, Stephen Cougle, Joan O'Callaghan, Christine Storey Teresa Lim, Peter Heffernan, Carol Battistella, Bernadette Owen, George Hall, Graham Burke, George Ryan, David Chai, Lucia Isgro, Fr. Brendan Lane, Beth Scott, Max McMahon, Edward Atme, Rod Gorfine, Maureen Barns, Kate Lenic, Nina Conti, Luke Norden, Peter Barry, Doris Castro, Alexander Lim, Anne Woon, Denise Egan, Marilyn Cilmi, Julia Cantone, Pam Gartland, Anne Jenkins and Helen McLean.

Chris will send the link for this Sunday's Mass on Saturday afternoon.

Brian