

# My Walk With God

## *Life In The Outback*



### Ch XI

We were  
in Western Australia.  
road less traveled is

settling into our life  
They say that the  
the road to Heaven.

How will this road lead us there? Our destination is not determined by destiny, but by our own freedom to choose. I don't like the phrase, "When God is with us, who can be against us!" The phrase makes me think that I am seeking God's company even when I might be seeking my own pleasure. I rather the phrase be, "When we are with God, who can be against us!" That puts God in the driver's seat.

After attending Mass on Sunday, I could see that God was working here too. We might be 250 miles from the next closest town but we had everything we needed to make a comfortable life here; God is good! Our new friends, The Cains, took us to Sunday Mass and shared lunch with us afterwards. They were Civil Service workers from Seattle, and assigned to the base to track shipments from the States. There was an Australian family living next door to us. He was a telephone technician temporarily assigned to the Exmouth Post Office. Everyone knew each other and what their jobs were in support of the town and ultimately the US/AUS Navy Comm. Station.

Our Catholic Priest, Fr. Tobin, was assigned to St. John's Church from the Diocese of Geraldton, Western Australia. Income from the church was insufficient for his, and the parish needs so he had two other jobs in support of the town. He operated the aircraft refueling system at the airport, as well as the drive-in movie theater in town. With no TV or radio reception in the area, the drive-in was our primary entertainment, other than the Officer's Club on the Base. Fr. Tobin, soon wrangled my wife and I into helping him with the parish religious education program. He had an outline of what

was expected in the program but we had to collect any materials and supplies that we thought necessary to provide the instruction. In Australia, at that time, religious instruction was provided in the public schools by teachers provided from the various churches in town. My wife Glenna was assigned Catholics in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades; I had 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades; Fr Tobin, had 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. The Anglicans along with the Base Chaplain and his wife provided for all the Protestant children.

I had seen a Bible for sale at the exchange on the base a few weeks before. It was a very readable copy of the New American Bible, in larger than normal print, that made it easier to read. I later realized that it was the same translation used at Mass those days. The copy of The Good News For Modern Man that I had, was only a New Testament, so I was glad to find a full, New and Old Testament Catholic Bible available in English. I quickly started reading, like before, Luke, The Acts Of the Apostles, and then the Gospel of John. The first chapter of John particularly intrigued me. It was the same language as in The Last Gospel, that we recited at the end of every Mass, before we changed from the Latin Rite, after Vatican II.

Because of the suspicious character of the Australian students for anything labeled as "*American*", I covered my bible in a plain paper cover so the word American was not noticeable to the students. Even though this was the same translation used at Mass in Australia, I removed reference to American from the eyes of the students, thereby making it acceptable in the local culture. I didn't want them to look upon my class as '*the American way*'. But to accept it as from the Church's way. The students were not native to this local part of the Australian Outback. They had come with their families from all parts of the country in order to work in support of the town of Exmouth, or at the joint base Communication Station. This was a new town, built exclusively to support the base and the people were here, mostly under the Australian Government contract for two to six years only, when they would eventually return to their permanent residences in Melbourne, or Sidney in the east, or to the southern part of WA. It was a transient population with no formal record of past religious training. Every subject was addressed as 'NEW', so the basics were always stressed. Because of the grade levels that Glenna was teaching, she also became tasked with 1<sup>st</sup> Communion preparation that was separate from the regular RE Classes.

The US Navy provided for the spiritual growth of their members,

whenever they would seek it out. This came with the assignment of a



Chaplain to all major and remote navy bases throughout the world that were manned by US personnel. In our case at this base in Australia, the position was filled by a Protestant Chaplain. He had a non-denominational Chapel on the base that had a dual use as a Catholic Chapel on Sundays. When Fr. Tobin finished saying

Mass in Exmouth on Sunday, he came to the base to say Mass in the Chapel at 10:30am. Mass on the base was usually attended by those single sailors who lived on base, while most married men and their families who lived off-base, attended St. John's Church in town. In summer months, most of the towns people, who were Catholic attended Mass on base, because there was no air conditioning in the church in town.

First Communion classes were attended by American as well as Australian children, some of whom had no previous religious instructions. Their parents all showed a sincere desire for their children to attend. We even had Greek Orthodox students because they had no church within 400 miles. They sincerely desired their children to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion and recognized His presence in the Catholic Church. Fr. Tobin agreed and it was our understanding that the Bishop in Geraldton agreed also. There were 10 First Communicants that year and with the help of prayer and the Blessed Mother all went well.

During our time in Australia, Glenna was hospitalized and needed surgery in Perth. My daughter and I drove her the 850 miles to Perth for her surgery. When we returned to Perth about 6 weeks later for a followup appointment with her doctor, we took the time to do a little shopping. A particular religious goods store was recommended to us by a neighbor in Exmouth. That is where she found a record album that interested her. It was 'The Purple Puzzle Tree', from Concordia Publishing Co., It is a six album set of records, including picture books for children, containing some of the most significant stories and events in the Bible, both Old and New Testament. The stories are read as a theatrical production from the included story books, beginning with the story of Creation. After 66 separate productions, punctuated by musical interludes, the listener arrives at the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter. The production was geared to

children and young teenagers, but will capture the attention of adults with the clever means of making the stories relevant to their daily lives. We have used this presentation many times over, to support many years of Catholic religious education programs that we had become involved in.

This was but one effect of Jesus gaining a foothold into our lives. For God to gain that foothold, we need to cooperate fully and knowingly in His plan. It is not necessary to understand the plan, but our willingness to proceed daily within the plan is essential. Prayer and openness to His will in following the Beatitudes will always steer us in the correct direction. Through our friendship with the other Christian communities in Exmouth we came into contact with an Aboriginal Mission for children in Canarvon, run by “The Church Of Christ” organization. We contacted the Mission and inquired about the possibility of hosting children during school holidays at our home in Exmouth..



Faith,. Hope, and Love but the greatest of these is LOVE. *Note: 1 Cor 13:12-13* Love, being a conscious decision, encourages us to live by The Beatitudes. This will always encourage us to do all we can to make life better for, all those we encounter, and to help them seek for God in their lives. When we look at the plight of Australian Aboriginal children in the '70's, considerable help in all aspects of their lives became necessarily important to us. At first, only one child came to visit from the Mission during school break. The time spent with her was so successful that on the next school holiday there were two children who came. Later there was a whole cottage of children and their house mother, who was a Church of Christ volunteer missionary, who came for a week.

The children were from very dis-functional family situations. Their parents were mostly alcoholics who gathered their children once a month for an appearance at the local welfare office in Canarvon. Once they received their welfare money, the children were left on the street to fend for themselves, while their parents drank up all their funds. The Missionaries would then collect the children from the streets and take them back to the mission until the next month came. At the time, Gail, the young missionary lady who we had befriended, was a housemother at the mission and had nine children in her care, with very few modern conveniences. The children all displayed some emotional and developmental difficulties but as

a whole, seemed very happy go-lucky.

It is in this environment of “Christian Peoples” that Glenna and I found ourselves in the remote outback of Western Australia. We came into contact with many views of the Christian Faith that we were previously unaware were so central to the variety of Protestant views of the faith. Once saved, Always saved, was held by some, but not all members of the Missionary sect of the Church of Christ that provided great help to the Aboriginal Children. Even in those who held this doctrine, there were many that also believed in personal responsibility throughout their life after being saved. I found that the Anglicans did believe in the resurrection of the body as we proclaim in the Apostles Creed, but not all. I saw infant Baptism as another contradiction. I suppose that was only because they didn't recognize the spiritual dimension of the Sacrament and how it relates to Original Sin. But of course, if you didn't believe in Original Sin, what did it matter? Marriage and divorce, birth control, The Holy Eucharist, The Holy Spirit, and even the Trinity itself were all up for grabs in the theoretical Christianity outside of the Catholic Church.

The once saved-always saved people really stressed a personal relationship in Jesus Christ. In doing so however, they seemed free to decide which of His teachings they might ignore. The adult only Baptism people had difficulty with the Trinity and Original Sin. Some people even claimed that Jesus was not God. What to believe?? There were even the Scientologists and the Mormons, who all seemed to be very socially humanistic in their approach.

All of these groups claimed to be 'Biblically Centered'. If so, why were there so many diverse opinions, that they couldn't even discuss with one another?



I had always had a desire to sing God's praises. That is, music with a Catholic flavor would attract me since I attended St. Mary's in Pawtucket. With few distractions in my free time outside my family here in Exmouth, this would be a good time to learn more about music. There was a piano for sale at the store on base that had belonged to a previous American family who could not take it with them, due to weight restrictions, when they were reassigned to the States. It was a great deal, so I purchased it. With the little knowledge I had gained from grade school, and music taught by the sisters at St. Mary's School, I introduced the piano to my daughter who was

then 7 years old. She was most interested in guitar, so I purchased an inexpensive children's guitar from the Sears & Roebuck catalog. We had no availability for published music in our remote location, so I tried to recall my favorite hymns from childhood. After writing out the works to "Oh Lord I Am Not Worthy", "Come Holy Ghost", "Holy God We Praise Thy Name", "Hail Holy Queen", & "Immaculate Mary", I fumbled with various chords in order to recall the melodies that went with these hymns. 'C', 'D', 'F', & 'G', this was the beginning of a music ministry that we carried on for a number of years.

I had always been comfortable with trying to sing my praises to God. There was musical accompaniment at St. John's, led by Fr. Tobun during Mass with organ accompaniment. It seemed a bit awkward, with interruptions in the flow of the Liturgy. At the base Chapel, there was no music at all. As I struggled to retrieve music from my memory, we met another Navy Officer who was not only a woman but played and had her own guitar, as well as being a Mass attending Catholic. What a gift from God when she volunteered to help provide musical accompaniment to our musical support to the Mass on the Base. Fr. Tobin gave his full support, and so, we began. It was good to see the congregation joining happily with us, in song at Mass.

During our time in Exmouth, we met people from many places in the world. Malta, Mauritius, England, Canada, and many places in Australia as well as The US. Of all these people, there was but one family who refused to attend Mass, even though they were 'Catholic'. When I inquired of them, one day, about their absence from Mass, their comment was related to Mass in the vernacular. They expressed a concern that God did not want all these languages for the liturgy and women should keep their heads covered in church. They felt that they could not accept the revised liturgy. I felt sorry for them and asked them to consider that God, in His infinite nature, understood and might be pleased to see so many cultures joining into His worship in the new liturgy. This, of course was not received well.

One Australian couple that we met was from Melbourne, and had immigrated from Malta. They were a few years older than us and worked for the Australian Navy as a civilian contract manager. After their time in Exmouth, they returned to Melbourne and his work in the Navy Yard there. They were both teenagers during WWII in Europe and had a very rough time during the war years. With God's help, they met and were able to emigrate to Australia after the war. On our way back to San Diego following our

time in Exmouth we visited them in Melbourne where they introduced us to many other Catholic friends and family. It was nice to see that the civilian urban culture in Australia was so much like home. One friend was from the American Embassy in Canberra and he invited us to the Embassy for dinner if we ever were in Canberra. We made it a point to visit Canberra after that, on our way home. We met our new friend, and after dinner, he invited us to attend a 'Catholic Pentecostal Prayer Service' in the local Australian community. We know this type of gathering as, the "Life In The Spirit Seminar" in the United States. It was a new experience in Spirituality for us. We had felt the presence of The Holy Spirit in our lives but this was a method of prayer that, as presented, I was not sure I could be comfortable with. People were speaking in tongues with no communal center. Everyone was doing his or her own thing. There was an attempt following prayer to interpret what was said, but how could there be an interpretation of such a noise? At the close of the service we thanked our host and returned to our hotel with many questions. The people may have been sincere but, in this case, there appeared to be a purposely forced utterance among some of the attendees, and not a spontaneous manifestation of the mind of the Holy Spirit. Note, that I cannot know what that might be like.



We were on our way home when we got the news that Glenna's mother was suffering from lung cancer and a brain tumor. Our stay in Hawaii was cut short and we arrived in San Diego on the Monday before Thanksgiving.

## NOTES

*from the past*

*Glenna's father had passed away the year before, in 1974, after a long illness. We were able to return home for the funeral by the US Air Force MATS flight. In amazement, Glenna's mother asked our advise about the burial of her husband to insure that it would be in conformity of Catholic teaching. Her family had been attendees of their local Methodist Church and were very Leary of Glenna marrying a Catholic. I saw her inquiring about my the position of catholic teaching, as a softening of her opinion of the Catholic Church after noticing the effect of Jesus in the life of Glenna, her daughter. When we returned home, she asked our opinion a couple of times concerning matters of faith as it might pertain to some of the things she had read in the local news. Even though she never expressed a desire to convert of the Catholic Church, prior to her death she had expressed a renewed interest in Jesus, whom she was seeking in her own way. This gave us renewed comfort in the Salvation of Jesus Christ.*