

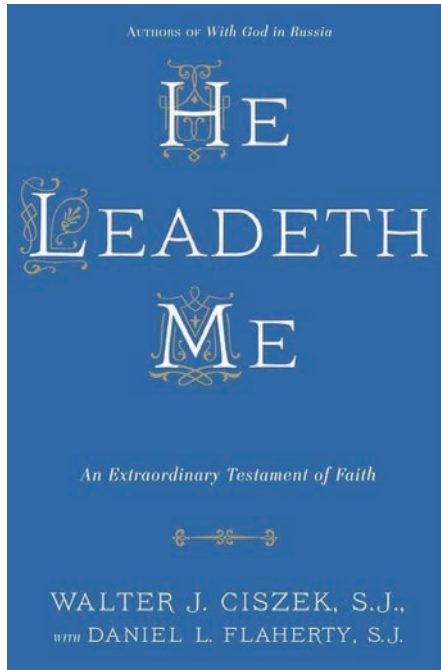
# St Joseph's Catholic Parish

Fifth Sunday of Lent  
Year B, 17 March, 2024

Embracing the communities of  
Cherbourg, Goomeri, Murgon,  
Proston and Wondai



*Unity in diversity ... being one in Christ through Baptism!*



Cover of 'He Leadeth Me' by Jesuit Father Walter Ciszek (photo: EWTN Religious Catalogue)

## 'He Leadeth Me':

Nine things to know about  
Father Walter Ciszek, a  
20th-Century Catholic hero

His last written words were:

*"I have given all for you, my Lord."*

Jim Graves Features March 2, 2024

Jesuit Father Walter Ciszek (1904-84) was an American priest who travelled to the Soviet Union as a missionary, was arrested and imprisoned for 15 years in solitary confinement and labor camps, and spent another eight years there with restricted freedom.

He experienced the harsh conditions of Siberia and the brutality of prison life, including the constant threat of starvation.

He was returned to the United States in 1963 as part of a prisoner exchange and wrote two books about his experiences, 'With God in Russia' and 'He Leadeth Me'.

'With God in Russia' was the book of his experiences he wrote in 1964 at the request of his superiors; 'He Leadeth Me' was his book of spiritual insights from his time in Russia that he wrote and released on his own initiative in 1973. A third book, 'With God in America', was published posthumously in 2016 and includes a collection of the Jesuit's previously unpublished writings after his return from the Soviet Union. The book's foreword is by New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, and its compilers are John Dejak and Jesuit Father Marc Lindeijer.

Father Ciszek's cause for canonisation has been submitted to Rome, and his books remain popular after his death. The following are nine things to know about him, with comments provided by Dejak.

### 1. Father Ciszek was a 'tough kid' from the coal-mining town of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania.

Walter Ciszek was the seventh of 13 children and believed he had to "make his mark" in the world. He saw himself as a scrawny boy who had to prove his toughness. As a youngster, he led a street gang, was a fighter and excelled in sports. In his writings later in life, he expressed regret at his youthful indiscretions.

However, it was this pugnacious attitude that made him the rare individual who could survive the harsh conditions of the gulag. One can see that this was God's unique plan for him, that it was God's way of saying, "You need me." Father Ciszek learned to rely on God, and it gave him the ability to withstand many things and develop a winnowed sense of self, opening him up to deep spiritual insights.

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## Sunday Mass Times

### Murgon

WEEK	DAY	TIME
every	Sunday	8.00am

### Wondai

WEEK	DAY	TIME
every	Saturday	5.00pm

### Proston

every	Saturday	9.00am
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### Goomeri

WEEK	DAY	TIME
every	Sunday (except 5th Sunday)	6.00pm

### Gayndah

WEEK	DAY	TIME
every	1st, 3rd, 5th	10.30am
every	2nd, 4th	9.00am

### Cherbourg

WEEK	DAY	TIME
5	Sunday	4.30pm

## Weekday Mass Times

12 noon, Wednesday, Gayndah
5.00pm, Wednesday, Wondai
9.00am, Thursday, Murgon
9.00am, Friday, Castra

## Eucharistic Adoration for Peace

Wondai, 4.00pm to 5.00pm,  
every Wednesday,  
before Mass

**El Shaddi Fellowship**, Murgon  
Parish Hall, 23 March, 11.00am

## Today's readings

Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Hebrews 5: 7-9;  
John 12: 20-30

*Response:*

Create a clean heart in me, O God.

*Gospel Acclamation:*

Glory to you, Word of God, Lord Jesus Christ! If you serve me, follow me, says the Lord; and where I am, my servant will also be. Glory to you, Word of God, Lord Jesus Christ!

Next Sunday: John 12: 12-16

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**2. He believed God had a unique plan for each person.**

Father Cizek was someone whose focus was discerning the will of God for each human being. He believed that the persons, places and things God puts in front of us each day have a purpose and are there for our spiritual growth. He speaks about this in 'He Leadeth Me': "God has a special purpose, a special love, a special providence for all those He created. God cares for each of us. The circumstances of each day of our lives, of every moment of every day, are provided for us by Him. ... But maybe we are all just a little afraid to accept (this truth) in all its shattering simplicity, for its consequences in our lives are both terrible and wonderful".

**3. His rigorous seminary training also helped him survive the gulag.**

Father Cizek's temperament led him to ask his superiors to give him the hardest assignment possible: being a missionary in the Soviet Union. He entered the Soviet Union under an assumed identity in 1940, just before it began its life-or-death struggle with Nazi Germany. He was arrested in 1941 and was sent to the notorious Lubyanka prison in Moscow. This began a period of pronounced suffering in his life, but it was also a "second seminary" through which he was able to develop his profound spiritual insights.

Among his worst experiences was solitary confinement for five years in Lubyanka, being placed on starvation rations combined with the psychological torture of being alone for long periods of time. He ordered his day as he did in the seminary, with prayer and work, such as polishing the floor. He also recited poetry.

He was beaten by the guards there and repeatedly interrogated. He

was then sent to Siberia, where he had to endure bitter cold, slave labour and physical exhaustion. After five years of no activity, he was forced to do back-breaking labour; every sinew of his body was wracked with pain day after day.

**4. He learned to be a good priest while in prison.**

In 'He Leadeth Me', he offers his reflections on the priesthood. His experiences helped him come to view the priest as a witness and martyr and all that comes with it: The priest must sacrifice his desires to meet the needs of the people and to make himself fully available to them. Father Cizek came to see everyone who came to him as Christ, the Jesuit had the gift of making himself totally present to those who visited him.

**5. Father Cizek was well educated.**

He benefited from a traditional Jesuit formation. He studied philosophy and theology in Rome, as well as liturgy and Russian history. He had a knack for languages and was fluent in many. He grew up speaking both English and Polish.

He had little opportunity to read during his time in the gulag, however, and did not keep up on theological trends and did not participate in the great theological debates of the 1960s. He did object, however, when fundamental Catholic teachings were called into question after the Second Vatican Council and believed those who justified such heterodoxy were misinterpreting the teachings of the Council. The increasing laxity and loss of the sense of the sacred that he witnessed were also a concern for him.

**6. After his return from the Soviet Union, he'd take every meal with a piece of bread as a remembrance of his time imprisoned.**

It was his practice of giving God thanks for seeing him through prison life and in memory of all the times when he had no bread.



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Parish website:  
[murgon.brisbanecatholic.org.au](http://murgon.brisbanecatholic.org.au)

**7. He refused to hate his persecutors.**

Father Cizek loved the Russian people, even his captors. He strived to see people as God sees them. He realised that even those who mistreated him were part of an unjust system and often didn't think clearly. He could be harsh with those who knew better, but was very understanding to the 'Regular Joe' he encountered.

**8. He was known for his pithy sayings.**

His most commonly cited advice was "Give God your lousy best." He also liked to joke that he was an "old milk cow" and that everyone who came to him wanted "a full bucket."

**9. He died peacefully, rosary in hand.**

On the night of 7 December, 1984, Father Cizek spoke with his sister and a religious sister friend, Mother Marija. They enjoyed a positive conversation, although his breathing was greatly labored. They described him as someone ready to walk off into eternity.

He was found dead the next day, sitting in his pajamas in his chair, rosary in hand. (His years working in Russian mines had given him emphysema, and he often found it easier to sleep sitting up in a chair).

The rosary was reflective of his love for the Blessed Mother; in his diary, his last written words were: "I have given all for you, my Lord."