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Friday 4th December, 2020



The Catholic universe



FREE inside - Catholic TIMES



Pope Francis greets his predecessor in Benedict's private chapel

Popes meet to share in new cardinals' celebrations

Popes past and present were on hand to make sure that the consistory for 13 new cardinals was a joyful occasion, after a personal appearance at Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's private residence in the Vatican was the new red hats' first official engagements.

The creation of 11 new cardinals – two were prevented from attending the consistory by Covid-19 restrictions – was described as a moving, heartfelt event, with just 100 people in attendance for the ceremony in the cavernous space of St Peter's Basilica.

• Full story on cardinals' consistory: see pg 12-13

Hark, the herald angels can sing!

Christmas bubbles of joy as families can join together for Mass – and go carol singing

Nick Benson

The Government has confirmed that its new Covid-19 guidelines for England will allow family members to attend Mass together for a short period over Christmas.

The *Guidance for the Christmas Period*, published on Sunday 29th November, also gives the green light to outdoor carol services, as well as door-to-door carolling.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales welcomed the guidelines and reminded people that while Christmas may be different this year, it provides the world with "a beacon of hope".

"The Christmas Guidelines are welcome in that they enable people to mark – albeit in a way still different from other years – this great Festival of Christ's Birth bringing joy and hope to the world," a spokesperson for the Catholic Bishops' Conference told *The Catholic Universe*.

"Pope Francis has spoken movingly of the call during this pandemic to recommit ourselves to being doers of the Word. This great celebration of Christ's Incarnation gives us both a beacon of hope that this pandemic shall pass, and a call to continue our efforts to share in Christ's mission by bringing light, hope and healing."

The guidance states that people can attend places of worship in all tiers from 2nd December, with re-

strictions on who they can meet while there dependent on the tier their area is in.

However, 'between 23rd and 27th December, you may also attend a place of worship with members of your Christmas bubble. This applies in all tiers,' the guidance states.

"Thanks to the work of the Faith Task Force and the advisers to various faiths in drawing up guidance for re-opening, we have demonstrated that places of worship can be among the most Covid secure in the country," said the spokesperson for the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

"We believe, on scientific advice, that worship services with appropriate precautions are safe and should be allowed to continue safely in any tier. We are pleased that government has recognised this following joint advocacy by faith leaders, led by Cardinal Nichols and Archbishop Welby.

"The opportunity for all Catholics is to work together, to play our part in suppressing the virus. Taking the key steps to prevent infection like physical distancing, hand washing and wearing face coverings. The greater care we put into this, the sooner we can look forward to the great celebrations of the Church's year being able to be observed with closer resemblance to former years."

People will be allowed to form Christmas bubbles between 23rd and

27th December, composed of people from no more than three households. An individual can only be in one Christmas bubble and cannot change it once they are in one. They can only meet their Christmas bubble in private homes or in their garden, places of worship or public outdoor spaces.

On singing, the Government has said that carol singing or carol services can take place if all attendees follow advice on the suggested principles of safer singing, published on 20th November, and guidance for the Performing Arts developed by an expert group co-ordinated by Public Health England.

However, the guidance reminds churchgoers that 'Covid-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, aerosols and through direct contact. Therefore, singing, shouting and physical activity increases the risk of transmission through small droplets and aerosols.

'If singing does take place, steps should be taken to reduce the risk of transmission, including limiting the number of people participating as far as possible. The cumulative effect of aerosol transmission means the more people involved, the higher the risk of transmission.'

The guidelines state that this applies to both professional and amateur choirs.

Continued on page 2

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Catholics attend Mass in Westminster Cathedral.
Photo: Mazur/cbcw.org.uk

Hark, the herald angels can sing

Continued from page 1

Those performing or rehearsing in a professional capacity or as part of a supervised activity for under 18s are not limited in number and do not have to adhere to gathering limits but should still follow the performing arts guidance.

For adult amateur performances and rehearsals, the Government advises that organisations, including churches, 'should consider the case for proceeding (or not), given the wider health context in your area'.

Those that do proceed, should follow performing arts guidance and will be subject to local gathering limits. This means that if more than one group of six (in tier 1) or household (in tier 2 or 3) is performing or rehearsing indoors, they must not interact, 'mingle' or otherwise socialise together. Social distancing between groups or households must also be maintained at all times.

Professional and amateur choirs may perform in any indoor venue but

Can school hold a nativity?

Yes, within existing school bubbles – but audiences can attend only in Tiers 1 and 2 (with safeguards in place). No audiences in Tier 3. In all cases, livestream if possible.

congregations should not participate in singing, shouting and chanting.

Professional and amateur choirs may perform outdoors and congregations may join in with singing but should follow social distancing of 2m.

Outdoor attendees should also remain seated where possible and the maximum number of people present should take into account the area of the outdoor space and the requirement to maintain 2m social distancing at all times.

Door-to-door carol singing can take place in groups of no more than six

participants. If there are more than six people in total, each 'group' must not interact, 'mingle' or otherwise socialise. Carollers should adhere to public health advice, including social distancing from anyone they do not live with.

Supervised activity for children is exempt from limits on gatherings in every tier, meaning that children's choirs and other out-of-school settings can continue.

Volunteers supporting people over the Christmas period can continue in all tiers. Where possible, this should be done from home but if this is not possible, they can volunteer outside their home.

Volunteers should follow advice on how to help safely, published on 4th November, and must follow social distancing guidance.

Guidance for the Christmas Period in full, see:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-the-christmas-period>

'Up to us all to do our bit' – Bishops' Conference

The General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has urged all who enter churches to ensure they are following the guidance in an effort to keep everyone safe. Canon Christopher Thomas said:

"We are delighted at the decision to allow the resumption of collective worship. This decision reflects the importance of the right of all people to express their faith and is an acknowledgement of the active collaboration the Church has had

in developing Covid-secure protocols in our churches. "But it is incumbent on all who come to worship God to play their part in keeping themselves and others safe by following all of the guidance that has been prepared."

Nichols critical over aid U-turn

Cardinal Vincent Nichols has told MPs that combatting the Covid-19 pandemic is 'an international endeavour' as he expressed his concerns about the Government's decision to cut UK spending on overseas aid.

In a letter sent to all MPs, the cardinal urges all parties to not step back from the UK's responsibilities to the world's most vulnerable people.

The Government's announcement marks a U-turn on a Conservative manifesto pledge to protect UK aid spending, reneging on its legal obligation to spend 0.7 per cent of UK gross national income (GNI) on poorer countries.

The decision came as the World Bank predicted that extreme poverty will rise in 2020 for the first time since 1998, with the Covid-19 pandemic expected to push a further 115 million people into that category, undoing decades of progress to reduce poverty and hunger.

In his letter to MPs, Cardinal Nichols says that in today's figures, a reduction of UK aid from 0.7 per cent of GNI to 0.5 per cent amounts to a cut of around £4 billion in spending.

'A clear measure of a nation's greatness is the manner in which it responds to the needs of its poorest,' he writes. 'The same is true for the response to poverty between nations. If we truly wish to be a great nation, then cutting the overseas aid budget is a retrograde step.'

'Promises were made by all parties on aid spending at the last election. In these extraordinarily difficult times, we should not now step back from

our responsibilities to the world's most vulnerable people, especially as combatting the spread of Covid-19 will necessarily mean richer countries supporting poorer ones in purchasing vaccines.

'Combatting Covid-19 is an international endeavour and we cannot neglect those countries that benefit from our aid. I hope that compassionate and wise counsel will prevail.'

The cardinal also highlights the impact the cut will have on forced mass migration and human trafficking.

'Trafficking must be tackled at its source. Carefully targeted and well

'If we truly wish to be a great nation, then cutting the overseas aid budget is a retrograde step.'



managed overseas aid programmes are an essential part of this effort,' he writes.

Cardinal Nichols also cites the words of Pope Francis, who in his recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, wrote: 'Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet.'

'If we are troubled by the extinction of certain species, we should be all the more troubled that in some parts of our world individuals or peoples are prevented from developing their potential and beauty by poverty or other structural limitations. In the end, this will impoverish us all'. (*Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, para 137).

Patel hammered for upping Channel obstacles

Humanitarian charity Detention Action has criticised the Home Secretary after she struck a deal with her French counterpart to increase French patrols against migrants hoping to reach the UK.

Ms Patel said an increase in police patrols on French beaches would slash the number of migrants attempting to cross the Channel, but the decision

was described by the charity as "shuffling the deckchairs on the Titanic".

Bella Sankey also accused Ms Patel of "massaging the numbers".

"No amount of massaging the numbers masks her refusal to take the sensible step of creating a safe and legal route to the UK from northern France, thereby preventing crossings and child deaths," she said.



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University in apology to pro-life student over suspension

A Catholic midwifery student who was banned from her hospital placement because of her pro-life views has won an apology and payout from her university.

Julia Rynkiewicz, 25, served as president of Nottingham Students for Life, a pro-life student society that was initially denied affiliation by Nottingham University's Students' Union.

Concerns around her fitness to practise centered on material available at the society's freshers' fair stall, as well as her public association with the society. She faced a suspension and a four-month fitness-to-practice investigation, disrupting her education.

But the Fitness to Practise panel dismissed all allegations against her and Ms Rynkiewicz believed that she was unfairly targeted for her beliefs, demanding that the university apologise "as a matter of justice".

The university has now conceded a settlement and apologised for suspending her.

"Putting my life on hold because of an unjust investigation was really difficult, both mentally and emotionally," said Ms Rynkiewicz. "The settlement demonstrates that the university's treatment of me was wrong. I hope

this means that no other student will have to experience what I have.

"What happened to me risks creating a fear among students to discuss their values and beliefs."

A poll released this week by ADF International (UK) found that 44 per cent of students self-censor in front of lecturers for fear that they would be 'treated differently' if they expressed their real opinions.

ADF International (UK) has called on the Government to take steps to end 'no-platforming' and strengthen legal safeguards for academic freedom and free speech.



Priests given new rules over social media use

Simon Caldwell

Priests must never "friend" children or vulnerable adults on Facebook or other forms of social media, the bishops of England and Wales said.

New safeguarding guidance makes clear to all clergy that they must 'never invite children or adults at risk, or accept invitations from them, to be "friends" or contacts on any personal social media sites we use, or otherwise interact with them on those sites.'

The guidance came to light after release last month of the report on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales by the Independent Inquiry on Child Sex Abuse. The report revealed that between 1970 and 2015 in the region of 900 complaints were received into 3,000 in-

stances of child sexual abuse against more than 900 individuals in the church, including priests, monks and volunteers.

The bishops' guidance for priests, *Caring Safely for Others: Pastoral Standards and Safe Ministry*, told them to 'refrain from communicating with a child on a one-on-one basis via technology or social media (including text messages or email) unless we have first obtained the written consent of that child's parent or legal guardian.'

It said they must 'notify immediately' Church safeguarding officials if they receive any inappropriate comments or images from a child or adult at risk, and they must always communicate in a manner modelled on the life of Jesus Christ.'

They must never exercise ministry when under the influence of alcohol, use profane language, or make suggestive jokes or 'indecent, vulgar or sexual comments', the document said.

Cardinal Nichols said the document "makes plain that which is simply not acceptable, that which is lax practice, and that which is all too often absent from good pastoral care."

He said the document was presented with "the full authority" of the bishops and brought a "new depth to our work of safeguarding."

The cardinal has said he is determined to implement reforms to the Church's safeguarding structures outlined by the recent Elliott Report, despite facing criticism of his own handling of abuse cases.

'Temporary' home abortions could become permanent

The UK Government has launched a consultation on whether the temporary measures allowing 'DIY' home abortions in England will end following their current temporary approval.

Home abortions were introduced under the Coronavirus Act 2020, but now this provision could be made permanent, allowing women to continue carrying out terminations at home without medical supervision.

The temporary policy allows an abortion provider to prescribe abortion pills over the phone or by video and then women perform their own abortion at home, by taking both abortion pills, meaning they are left to pass

their unborn child at home without direct medical supervision.

Right To Life UK has called for their immediate suspension following ongoing and significant safety issues.

A leaked email revealed that NHS England and NHS Improvement fear that there is an "escalating risk" around 'DIY' home abortions, while police have opened a murder investigation into the death of a baby who they believe was born alive despite her mother taking 'DIY' home abortion pills. There are also growing concerns that some women are at greater risk of being forced into a termination by abusive partners.

Ampleforth College vows to fight Government ban on new pupils

Ampleforth College has said it will appeal an enforcement notice banning it from taking on new students after Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said he was acting over 'very serious' safeguarding failures.

However, the £36,000-a-year Catholic boarding school in North Yorkshire said the ban 'is completely unjustified and based on incorrect information'.

The Education Secretary implemented the ban after reading reports by Ofsted and Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

According to the reports, the school was failing to meet independent school standards relating to safeguarding and leadership and management.

The enforcement notice acknowledges that the school has filed a complaint against Ofsted's recent findings but having taken this into account, the Secretary of State is satisfied that the standards are not being met. The St Laurence Education Trust, the proprietor of Ampleforth College, is required to cease to admit any new students.

Ampleforth College said: 'We strongly



ly believe, and have been advised, that this is completely unjustified and based on incorrect information.

'We will be pursuing a number of different options to resolve the situation before the restriction is enforced.'

The college said 'in the last 18 months we have put in place a robust safeguarding regime, a new and experienced senior leadership team, and a new governance structure – including new trustees – that has effectively

separated the abbey from the college.

'During this time, the Independent Schools Inspectorate has endorsed our actions.'

Ampleforth said the Department for Education's (DfE) action does not reflect the school it is today.

'We cannot understand why this decision has been taken, and we cannot understand why it has been published.'

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Sister adds: "We have so far helped nearly 300 families with dry food materials enough for a month, but the needs persist, with four villages being identified for special help. People with leprosy often live as scavengers, salvaging what they can from refuse, and on their behalf we seek your kind support."

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U04/12



Mum takes her vigil ban fight to European court

A single mother is taking her fight against a ban on vigils outside abortion clinics to the European Court of Human Rights.

That court's ruling could potentially impact on 820 million Europeans from 47 countries, including the UK.

Alina Dulgheriu said she had been forced to go to Europe after Ealing Council brought in a ban on groups offering counselling and prayer vigils outside abortion clinics. She asked: "What kind of society withholds help from vulnerable women? I'm challenging Ealing Council's ban at the European Court of Human Rights because my experience is typical for many hundreds of others."

"I didn't want an abortion but I was abandoned by my partner, my friends and society. My financial situation at the time would have made raising a child very challenging. But thanks to the help I was offered by a group outside a clinic before my appointment,

my daughter is here today. Stopping people from offering much-needed services and resources for women in my situation is wrong. Let them help."

The council's Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) how forbids such help from being offered near clinics. It is believed over 500 vulnerable women received help from vigil volunteers in the five years up to the ban.

Now Ms Dulgheriu hopes that the Court will overturn the council's decision and allow the volunteers to continue to offer support.

The wide-ranging order forbids even silent prayer near the abortion facility, thus raising concerns about the protection of freedom of assembly and expression, as well as freedom of religion or belief. PSPOs may only be brought into force if they are 'reasonable' in order to prevent a detriment to the quality of life in the area. Supporters of Ms Dulgheriu's campaign question the proportionality

of the order against the charity's support for women in crisis.

The UK High Court affirmed that the censorship zone violated fundamental rights, but found that the PSPO was justified nevertheless.

However, if the ECHR overturns this decision it will set a precedent for volunteers outside abortion facilities across Europe.

Ryan Christopher, director of ADF International (UK), said: "This censorship zone limits the options available to vulnerable women who feel as though they have no choice but to go through with an abortion. By criminalising even the most basic offer of help, Ealing has gone far beyond what is reasonable or proportionate.

"The European Court of Human Rights has reiterated the importance of guaranteeing freedom of expression, and it is clear that Ealing's censorship zone undermines this without sufficient justification."



Alina Dulgheriu and her daughter Sarah. Photo: Be Here For Me

Advent is a time of hope

Now more than ever, Ireland must turn away from despair and look towards the hope of Jesus Christ, the Primate of All-Ireland has said as he welcomed the start of Advent. The season offers "a new beginning and a promise of hope for better times," said the Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin, "a glimmer of light, that note of joy and consolation."

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Actor adds voice to *Emmerdale* criticism

Nick Benson

Actress Sally Phillips has condemned ITV soap *Emmerdale*'s controversial Down Syndrome abortion storyline as "thoughtless" and "irresponsible".

The actress, best known for starring in the Bridget Jones films as well as TV comedies *Miranda* and *I'm Alan Partridge*, said the plot, which sees couple Laurel Thoma and Jai Sharma abort their unborn baby after receiving a Down Syndrome diagnosis, is "at best poorly informed and thoughtless, and at worst irresponsible".

She told the soap it is causing "unnecessary hurt to a group of individuals", including her 16-year-old son Olly, who has Down Syndrome.

"The use of a Down Syndrome diagnosis brings unnecessary hurt to a group, many of whom watch the show precisely because there is a character with Down Syndrome," she told *The Daily Mail*.

"Disability hate crime is on the rise and running with this storyline in Disability Awareness Month was at best poorly informed and thoughtless, and at worst irresponsible."

Her comments come as around 30,000 people have signed an online petition urging the soap to 'bin' the 'prejudiced storyline'.

Opposition to the storyline has also



Sally Phillips with son Olly. *Emmerdale* is causing 'unnecessary hurt' says the star.

gained support from Stephen Morgan, MP for Portsmouth South, who has written to Carolyn McCaill, chief executive of ITV, on behalf of his constituents and the Portsmouth Down Syndrome Association, calling on the

channel to drop the storyline.

He said the storyline 'creates a negative and offensive narrative that individuals with Down Syndrome do not have a right to life, and are not viewed as equals in our society be-

cause of the incorrect assumption that they are unable to live full and productive lives.'

Pro-life groups said they were encouraged by Ms Phillips and Mr Morgan's support on the issue. A SPUC spokesperson said: "It is important that figures such as Sally lend their voices to the gathering outcry regarding *Emmerdale*'s troubling storyline.

"Mr Morgan's comments are to be welcomed, too, though the impact of his comments is dampened by his pro-abortion voting record. But if *Emmerdale*'s offensive storyline prompts MPs and others, such as himself, to rethink their position and realise that all abortion is wrong and that every child has a right to life, then something good might come out of this story."

Right To Life UK's spokesperson, Catherine Robinson, said: "It's encouraging that Sally is speaking out against this negative portrayal of those with Down Syndrome.

"On the one hand, it's great that the show has a character with Down Syndrome, as this helps to show just how normal it is. On the other hand, the producers are completely undermining this by introducing a plotline where a baby in the womb has their life ended precisely because he or she has Down Syndrome."

Actor loses expert backing over theatre sacking

The Employment Appeal Tribunal in London has upheld a judge's decision to reject expert evidence from a well-known theatre critic and Christian theologian in the case of sacked Christian actress Seyi Omooba.

Miss Omooba, an up and coming West End star, was removed from a lead role in a musical at Leicester's Curve Theatre in 2019 for a four-year-old Facebook post that cited what the

Bible says about marriage and homosexuality.

The theatre argued that the Facebook post was "deeply offensive to the LGBTQ community", so that the production could not go ahead with Miss Omooba in the lead role of the musical *The Color Purple*.

Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Miss Omooba is suing the theatre and Global Artists Agency who

refused to act for her on the grounds of religious discrimination and breach of contract.

Miss Omooba had secured support of an eminent theatre critic, Lloyd Evans, and a renowned theologian, Dr Martin Parsons, who both provided expert reports supporting her claim.

However, Employment Judge Elliott ordered both expert reports to be excluded from the case as inadmissible.

Parsons said that the Facebook post "constitutes a fair and reasonable expression of Christian beliefs".

Miss Omooba said: "Since I lost the role as Celie I have not been employed. All doors have been intentionally closed to me and people who used to give me the time of day now ignore me.

"My career was more than a job to me, it was something that I loved."



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It was very sad news this week that the giant Arcadia retail group has collapsed, putting some 12,000 jobs at risk. The future of a number of iconic high street brands now hangs in the balance, and employees will have an anxious wait to hear the outcome for not only their jobs, but their vital pensions as well.

The Arcadia collapse can't be blamed entirely on the pandemic: it's mega-rich owner Sir Philip Green was fond of lecturing us on the secrets of commercial success, but he failed profoundly to recognise the changes that were happening in the consumer market.

Long before Covid sent us all off to live online with our credit cards, many of us had already begun to ask deep questions about consumerism, the global exploitation of people and resources, and the presumed need for endless choices and cheap, throwaway products.

Experts say that the pandemic will change the high street forever, and perhaps it's no bad thing. Our local high streets were already wastelands, as large out-of-town retail complexes destroyed small family shops and diverse local businesses.

Losing a cherished job is one of the most devastating events that can hit us, but new jobs will be created as we pass through this pandemic, and they may just be better jobs that will help us to reconnect with people and rebuild our communities.

For those of us who can remember the immediate post-war years, new opportunities and new hope were built on the ashes of despair.

Though the heady days of the 1950s and 60s may seem like a dream of endless sunshine and plenty to us right now, the economic and social upheaval ahead may lead us all to just such a future.

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Police should prioritise negotiation over routine force to win back trust

Mike Hough



As a young researcher in 1979, I was out on patrol with two Strathclyde constables in a rough Glasgow housing estate. We drew up alongside half-a-dozen teenagers, who were sitting chatting on a wall – doing nothing illegal whatsoever. One officer told them, “move along, lads”, and they grudgingly shuffled off. When I asked why he had done this, he said: “It's just what we do.” What they were actually doing was demonstrating that they controlled the streets.

Fast-forward to 2020. The Black Lives Matter movement in the US and protests on this side of the Atlantic have shown how tensions between the police and parts of the community are unresolved and, in some cases, simmering.

Black Lives Matter erupted in the US in response to a tragic and seemingly unending series of police killings of black suspects. How American police continue to commit such outrages is a question that remains unanswered.

But this problem is not uniquely American. In the UK, ethnic minority groups are over-represented in deaths in police custody and black suspects are heavily over-represented in stop-and-searches. There were four stop-and-searches for every 1,000 white people last year, compared with 38 for every 1,000 black people.

The incident in Glasgow and the death of black men such as George Floyd while in police custody, represent two ends of a continuum of policing tactics involving the ‘performance of street control’.

The tactics range from simply moving people on to stop-and-search. This can be followed by arrest and – occasionally – death. The fatal shooting of Mark Duggan in 2011 and the death of Edson Da Costa in 2017 both led to riots in London.

In public order policing, kettling (where demonstrations are corralled in tight areas) is another tactic of street control. In mainland Europe, requiring people to produce their identity cards is another.

The outcome of all these performances of control can range from the anodyne (as in my Glasgow incident) to the tragic, where resistance leads to death.

But why don't police forces stop



overusing these tactics that seemingly do more harm than good, that alienate people and can have tragic consequences? My new book, *Good Policing*, examines why police sometimes appear to be locked into a vicious cycle of worsening relations between them and the public – especially those from ethnic minority groups. But it is possible for the police to navigate their way out of these traps.

Half an answer is found in long-running tensions between traditions of policing by consent and the more ‘common sense view’, that policing is about keeping criminals in check. To borrow a term from political scientists, police are often faced with a choice between hard power and soft power. Hard power involves the deployment of deterrent strategies and coercive force that keep a tight grip on unruly behaviour. Soft power, by contrast, requires supporting people's commitment to obey the law by winning hearts and minds. But too often, advocates of hard power simply win the argument.

Police fall into these traps when they overuse their power so much that there is no longer scope for the kind of soft power tactics which motivate consent to the rule of law.

When people are routinely treated with disrespect, they lose trust in the

police and no longer feel that the cops are on their side. When this happens, police often respond with a policing style that helps them maintain a tight grip on the public. This will involve routinely demonstrating that they are in control (as I saw in Glasgow) and overwhelming any resistance to this control with force, if it is challenged.

I believe that police departments in multi-racial cities in the US are stuck in these hard power traps. With intense mutual distrust between cops and people of colour, the opportunities for deploying soft power policing may have been squandered over the years – if they ever existed in the first place.

The police may believe that coercive hard power tactics are, realistically, all that are available to them.

Predictably, this leads to too many encounters between police and suspects which are characterised by mutual fear and hostility. It is this erosion of trust which all too often ends in tragedy.

Escaping from hard power traps is one of the hardest challenges facing policing. Reform in US cities may prove a real uphill struggle but the stronger UK tradition of policing by consent may provide firmer foundations for policing styles based on trust. There needs to be strong lead-

ership and better training to sell policing principles that value the building of trust, alongside fair and respectful treatment of the people being policed.

Much more effort needs to go into ensuring that frontline officers are equipped with de-escalation techniques – which can be as simple as listening and explaining – when it comes to handling conflict.

Meanwhile, there still needs to be much more scrutiny over the use of stop-and-search. The police obviously need powers to investigate suspicious activity but the extent of stop-and-search use needs to be curbed and the way that suspects are treated needs to be greatly improved.

All this will take time and effort. But the hard power alternatives just add to the erosion of police legitimacy in some communities.

And that – ultimately – leads to more deaths in police encounters, more riots and more urban unrest. • **Mike Hough was founder and director of the Institute for Criminal Policy Research (ICPR), and is now an emeritus professor in the School of Law, Birkbeck, University of London. He is the author of *Good Policing: Trust, Legitimacy and Authority* published by Bristol University Press.**

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Faith is beating heart of music, composer tells Catholic Union

Expressions of faith in music are needed now, more than ever, Scottish composer Sir James MacMillan CBE told the Catholic Union as he delivered the annual Craigmyle Lecture.

The title of this year's lecture, was 'Music, Faith and Politics', with Sir James addressing Catholic Union members and supporters online from his home in the Ayrshire countryside.

Sir James has composed concertos, operas and symphonies among other works, as well as the music for the opening of the Scottish Parliament and the papal visit in 2010.

Sir James said that his world revolved around music, but also described himself as a practising Catholic with a keen interest in politics.

Sir James said that the search for the sacred in music had a long history. "Some of the world's most important composers were profoundly religious



men and women", he said.

Sir James spoke of the number of contemporary composers who also have deep faith. "Far from being a

spent force, religion has proved to be a vibrant, animating principle in modern music, and continues to promise much for the future," he said.

In an increasingly secular world, Sir James said the music had an increasingly important role in bringing the sacred into people's lives and "offering a window into God's divine love affair with humanity".

Sir James said that expressing faith through music was fundamental to freedom of worship, which so many Christians around still do not have, and said that expressions of faith in music were needed more than ever.

Catholic Union Director, Nigel Parker, said: "We are most grateful to Sir James for agreeing to give this lecture and for his uplifting and inspiring words. This was the first time in the history of the Craigmyle Lecture that it has been delivered online. I'm delighted that so many people were able to take part and to have these dark days illuminated by the joys of music and faith".

Police apology after arresting 'loud' pastor

Thames Valley Police have apologised after a Milton Keynes pastor became the first church leader to be prosecuted for allegedly breaking Covid-19 regulations despite holding a legal service in line with Government guidance.

On Friday 20th November, two police officers demanded access to Kingdom Faith Ministries International Church in Milton Keynes, a Pentecostal ministry, after reports of 'loud music'.

Rev Daniel Mateola, 49, was holding a legal broadcast service to 150 online members of his congregation. The broadcast was part of a Men's Conference addressing male congregants' struggles during the pandemic.

In-person worship was banned during England's second lockdown.

However, guidance clearly stipulates that Church leaders can broadcast to their congregation online. After reviewing the case Thames Valley Police issued their apology, admitting their officers had been wrong.

Clifton Mass is star of BBC's Christmas plans

The BBC has announced that its annual Christmas Eve religious broadcast will be Mass from the Catholic Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul, Clifton, Bristol.

The Bishop of Clifton, Declan Lang, will preside and the Mass will be introduced by Canon Bosco MacDonald, Cathedral Dean, who will also preach.

The festive religious programming schedule also features Italian opera singer Andrea Bocelli, Catholic musical group The Priests and Diversity dance star Ashley Banjo.

Bocelli and The Priests will join an array of star guests, including Sir Cliff Richard, Katherine Jenkins, The Kingdom Choir and the Choir of St Paul's, in performing on *Songs of Praise: The UK's Favourite Carol*. The programme, which is set to air on the final Sunday in Advent, comes from St Paul's Cathedral and will see Aled Jones count down the top ten carols as voted for in a UK-wide online poll.

Ashley Banjo will narrate the annual show *On Christmas Night*, where he will tell the story of the first Christmas from Luke's Gospel. The show will also feature a musical performance to close Christmas Day.

Marking Advent on BBC One, Ellie Harrison and Angelica Bell uncover local customs, culture and traditions as they celebrate *A Very Country Christmas*, with episode one set to air on BBC One on Sunday 6th December.

This year will also see the launch of the first joint BBC Radio 2 and Songs of Praise Young Chorister of the Year 2020 competition. From Gorton Monastery in Manchester, the Rev'd Kate Bottley with Katherine Jenkins and Aled Jones host the search for the best young singers in the country.

There will be live services for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day on BBC One as well as the much-loved *Carols From King's* on BBC Two.

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Imagine a different world

John Battle



Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, spells out the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic: 'Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing or to refine existing systems and regulations is denying reality.'

His radical challenge is that 'in this, our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity'.

'Let us dream, then, as a single human family'.

In her *Financial Times* book of the year *Doughnut Economics*, development economist Kate Raworth, who worked for the UN and Oxfam, presented a devastating critique of traditional economics as severely limited, disregarding the dignity of the person and the complexities of communities, and undermining our ecological environment. She questions the main obsession with a narrow economist idea of 'growth' and generating 'wealth' while neglecting its distribution. The result, as is more than evident, is a divided world of increasing rich and inequalities hitting the poorest hardest.

Moreover 'economics' is not to be regarded as an objective science with its own unquestionable rules.

We can as human beings make a new and different future by making better personal and political choices. We need not to be hemmed in by the outdated measures of GDP or even the notion of debt. Notably the Old Testament tradition regularly emphasised by the prophets challenged the notion of debt through cancelling personal debts every seventh Sabbatical year and wiping slates clean with a Jubilee fresh start every 50 years. The idea was basically to break into and interrupt economic, social and political arrangements that had ossified into harming the poor.

Today, again, we see low income countries hit by Covid-19 being driven back into unsustainable debts despite the achievements of the Jubilee Debt Campaign led by Cafod at the turn of the century.

Church Action on Poverty is now calling for the cancellation of the escalating personal debts closer to home.

In Advent we prepare for the radical break into our history with the birth of Emmanuel, the Christmas feast of the Incarnation. Rome didn't anticipate this new beginning and Herod could not stop it. Mary recognised from the angel's announcement that it meant removing the rich from their thrones and raising the lowly.

Pope Francis has always linked care for the earth and care for the poor in his teaching. *Fratelli Tutti* now provides an Advent handbook for our new times.

Free speech has become the political football of our times

Leon Spence



You wouldn't have thought that a lower league football match between Lincoln City and Accrington Stanley would ever make the headlines in national newspapers, would you?

But that is exactly what happened a couple of weeks ago, albeit not for what was happening on the pitch – a rather dull 0-0 draw by all accounts – but, rather what was happening in the commentary box.

Reporting on the match for the BBC Radio Lincolnshire was veteran broadcaster Steve Thompson, who was at the microphone when a scuffle broke out among opposing players. Commentators are usually not ones to think originally when a cliché or two will do and so Thompson resorted to the old classic, describing the fracas as 'handbags'.

Every football fan knows exactly what handbags means; it's that rather pathetic pushing and shoving young men tend to do in the heat of the sporting moment. Unfortunately, however, Thompson's tired commentary on this occasion caused offence. Sadly for him, according to Lincolnshire Live, he also described a player as being "a bit of a drama queen... he'd have been better wearing a skirt".

Complaints ensued and Thompson was suspended for his unreconstructed blokeishness. He won't be allowed back on air until the new year and in the meantime will have to take re-education training by the football authorities.

Let's be honest, the lower reaches of the football league are not somewhere you are likely to see 'peak woke'. Those football towns whose teams have made up the bottom two professional divisions for over a hundred years in general are not the sort of places where a phrase like 'handbags' will cause offence, although it may well be dismissed as old and tired.

But suspension? That's a bit much, isn't it? We're living in a world now where the right to be offended is above all others and the perpetrators that caused that offence held up as being only one step away from criminals. Certainly say the wrong thing and the perpetually offended will at the very least try to cost you your job.

We've seen exactly the same happen with author J K Rowling. Since the Harry Potter juggernaut rolled into view Joanne Rowling has been seen by most as a decent woman who rose from obscurity and relative poverty to become a billionaire phi-

lanthropist who on the whole has used her wealth for the right reasons. She has given money to deserving charities – well over £100 million as a conservative estimate; and donated large sums to political campaigns which are important to her – including £1 million to the Better Together campaign, established to fight to keep the union between her native England and the place she calls home, Scotland, in the run up to the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum.



Rowling isn't a woman who seeks to move to a tax haven to limit liabilities, but rather accepts that as someone who the state supported at her lowest ebb, has the duty to support it when she can afford to.

I would suggest that most people hold Rowling in the highest of regard, rightly so. Unfortunately, she too has become a victim of the same woke culture which brought down the local football reporter from the start of today's column.

Rowling's crime, for that is what her detractors feel she is guilty of, is that as a former victim of domestic violence herself she has reservations about the principle of self-identification for transgender people.

In what shouldn't be a controversial opinion at all, Rowling believes that women, particularly those who

have been abused themselves, should be able to rely on women's refuges as a safe haven and be somewhere it isn't possible for a man to proclaim by self-identification that he is female and potentially expect to use the same centre.

In what until the past few years would have been self-evident to anyone and in response to an article entitled 'Creating a more equal post Covid-19 world for people who menstruate', Rowling committed a thought crime by responding in a Tweet by saying: "People who menstruate". I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?"

It's fair to say she has been hounded since.

The list of infractions against 'wokeness' goes on and on, and for the most part is enabled by broadcasters like the BBC and newspapers such as the *Guardian*.

Just as important as that right to be offended is the right to express ourselves freely. I can well imagine listening to Steve Thompson and being bored rigid by his use of a clichéd football term which would have seemed old hat in the 1980s, but be offended by it? Get a life.

I happen to agree with most of what Rowling has said about the

“

We live in a world where the right to be offended is above all others and the perpetrators that caused the offence held up as one step away from criminals

transgender debate, but the pile on by her detractors in the wake of her comments has been pathetic, too.

In a related story next week 7,000 Cambridge academics will vote on a new 'free-speech' policy for the university. The draft document suggests that the opinions of academics, students and visiting speakers should be treated 'with respect'.

If adopted the policy would allow those subject to it to spout any old rubbish and heaven help you should you point out that to be the case.

Trying to get the draft policy overthrown is former alumnus and British National Treasure Stephen Fry.

Writing in last week's *Sunday Times* Fry wrote "A demand for respect is like a demand for a laugh, or demands for love loyalty and allegiance. They cannot be given if not felt."

I suppose it's true that each generation moves on from the ones that came before it. I look back to my own radical years and see how mine had moved on from my parents, and now that I am a parent myself I can see it happening again. But it's all going too fast, isn't it?

In the past we may have been offended by the words of our elders, but I don't think we tried to ban them, did we? We made an argument to counter their viewpoints, we responded with humour and even a healthy dose of sarcasm.

But those days are gone. If you now transgress from the new agenda you're removed.

It may well be that it's just progress, but progress isn't always good, is it?

Leon is a writer, political commentator and charity trustee

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Give someone you love the Gift of Hope



What will be vital to sustain people in the weeks ahead is the gift of hope. Our human nature is comprised of body and spirit, and the spirit is sustained by hope. It is in the heart that hope is born and builds within us the resilience we need to face the challenges in our lives.

The Right Reverend Marcus Stock, Bishop of Leeds, from 1st November letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson on proposed closure of churches

Dear Catholic Universe reader,

We do hope you are keeping safe and well in these challenging times. We would like to extend a personal thank you for your invaluable support as a regular *Catholic Universe* reader. We hope you are enjoying the paper and are gaining a lot of interesting benefits from reading its content.

As you are aware, Covid 19 has caused businesses in all walks of life great financial problems, and sadly many have had to close.

We have suffered also, but we have stretched every part of the company to continue to ensure that you receive a high quality Catholic newspaper every week.

Despite the current heavy pressures on our finances, we remain fully committed to our mission of spreading the interests of our Catholic faith, and sharing the good news with others across our Catholic community.

We would like to seek your help in doing this. Whilst it is always most appreciated to receive a donation, what is more important, and something we would be extremely pleased to receive from you, is your help in introducing new subscribers to *The Catholic Universe*.

Keeping our Catholic faith in the forefront of most Catholics’ thinking is our main mission, and this is best done by getting people to read a Catholic newspaper regularly.

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You can gift a subscription to a friend simply by filling in the form on this page, or by contacting us directly with their details, and we will do the rest.

Our thanks to you for your continuing help and support for our mission in bringing the Catholic message each week. We will keep you in our prayers.

Clive W. Leach CBE KSG
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IN BRIEF

Sunak praised and criticised over review

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced an additional £151 million to help end rough sleeping in England, bringing the total spend up to £250 million.

The announcement, which came as part of last week's Spending Review, alongside an increase to the living wage and a boost in pay for the lowest paid, was welcomed by many charities. However, concerns were raised over the failure to announce an extension of the temporary £20 increase to Universal Credit beyond April 2021.

The Catholic Union also criticised the absence of any extra support for charities and voluntary organisations that are helping people through the Covid-19 pandemic.

London-based think-tank Legatum Institute estimated that there are 690,000 more people, including 120,000 children, living in poverty now than at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in Britain.

Nigel Parker, Catholic Union Director, said this year's Spending Review revealed the scale of the economic shock caused by the coronavirus. "The combination of a public health emergency and an economic emergency is having a devastating impact. Sadly, it's people on the margins of society who are the worst affected," he said.

"Increasing the living wage and boosting pay for the lowest paid people in the public sector is welcome. But it's worrying that increases in Universal Credit have not been extended into next year.

"More support for people who are rough sleeping and victims of domestic abuse is also welcome," Mr Parker said. "But there was no extra support on offer for charities and other voluntary organisations, who are doing so much to help people through this difficult time."

Scrap the parking tax for heroes

Our 'NHS heroes' should not have to pay hospital parking charges when they go to work and battle to save lives, Tim Farron has said.

The former Liberal Democrat leader and devout Christian has joined over 40 cross-party MPs in writing to Prime Minister Boris Johnson to call for hospital parking for NHS staff to be made free permanently. In March the Government provided health trusts with funding to enable free parking for NHS staff. However, the government said the subsidy "can't continue indefinitely" and would end "when the pandemic eases".

"Those working in the NHS are heroes," Mr Farron said. "We owe them so much for their tireless work, caring for our loved ones and battling to save lives.

"They should not have to pay an extra tax for just doing their jobs. The Government should commit to fund local NHS trusts so that they can scrap hospital parking charges for NHS staff for good."

Brave Kiera's story offers society's gender identity zealots a salutary lesson

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



Last year, as readers may well recall, I was faced with the possibility of a criminal record for using strong language to condemn the actions of Susie Green, CEO of Mermaids, an advocacy group for 'transgender children'.

Green drew my ire because she used the experience of her own child as a model for other gender-confused children to follow and I felt it necessary to highlight the precise nature of the treatment that her son, as he was then, received, namely, a sex-change surgery on his sixteenth birthday.

Surely, I reasoned, if most parents knew the medical pathway that was being advocated for young children with gender dysphoria, they would likely change their mind.

Today, in a landmark judgment, the High Court has proved me right, ruling that children under the age of 16 are unlikely to be able to give informed consent to receive this type of medical treatment, following a case brought by three people: Sue Evans, a former employee of the Gender Identity Service (GIDS) who first raised concerns 15 years ago; Mrs A, the parent of a teenager with gender dysphoria; and a brave young woman named Kiera Bell.

Kiera, who is only 23, was first prescribed puberty blockers at the age of 16 and went on to have a double mastectomy at the tender age of 20, before regretting it. She said "I made a rash decision (as a lot of teenagers do) trying to find confidence and happiness, except now the rest of my life will be negatively affected".

Mrs A is the mother of a 15-year-old child with autism currently awaiting medical treatment for gender dysphoria, who said that her fear was not that their child transitions, but that they get it wrong, explaining that there was so little exploration as to why a child might feel that they



were the wrong sex, before the child was then put on puberty blockers.

As a mother to children of a similar age and who have been diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum, this is a concern that resonates. Autistic children tend to fear change, especially something as monumental as puberty, and I know that if you were to have offered at least one of my children a magic pill to supposedly pause puberty and 'give them time to think' then they would most likely have gladly accepted without a second thought.

Equally, not all of my children, in common with many others, conform to typical gender stereotypes and were you to suggest to them that this might be because they were in the wrong body, then they would happily have grasped this as a wonder solution as to why they are not like all of their friends. Add into the equation social contagion and that children who transition often achieve the social cachet, status and validation that they perceive to have been lacking and you can begin to account for the explosion in numbers of children who have been diagnosed as transgender over the past few years.

The High Court's decision is therefore a blessed relief for those who

were so desperately worried about the unnecessary medicalisation of children. What the court has recognised is that giving children puberty blockers is an experimental treatment where the long-term side effects are unknown. It means that children like mine are no longer going to be routinely subject to life-changing medical procedures and surgery.

The judgment means that any child under the age of 16 who wishes to be prescribed puberty blockers will firstly need the permission of the court and in all likelihood, so too will young people between the ages of 16 and 18.

This isn't about undermining children's ability to consent or take decisions about their medical treatment, but rather recognising that until a person has achieved a sufficient level of emotional maturity, some decisions are impossible.

How can an 11-year-old take the decision about their future fertility and to reject their physical body, when they are yet to experience sexual maturity? How can a 13-year-old know with any certainty, how they will feel about their body in years to come, when they haven't even got used to living in it?

How can any young person really consent to a lifetime of taking medication and the associated neurosis of whether or not they convincingly pass as the opposite sex? How can any child fully consent to a life where their risks of certain medical conditions and complications are quadrupled and an almost certain shorter life expectancy?

One of the disturbing themes running through this judgement was the lack of evidence to support giving children such radical treatment, with judges expressing shock that the clinicians had failed to gather even the most basic of data about the children who were being treated.

The Gender Identity Service has not collated any data in respect of the children who were treated between 2011 and 2020 and so the ages or sex of these children will remain unknown. Equally, neither was any data collected as to whether or not these children were on the autistic spectrum or had any other mental health diagnosis, nor was there any kind of investigation or analysis into this issue. Even more surprising, there was no tracking of the outcomes of children who were put on puberty blockers, or even stronger cross-sex hormones, and so it is unclear what happened to these children once they reached adulthood.

The right outcome might have finally been achieved but only thanks to the bravery of three women who were prepared to make a stand. I have to admit to crying upon reading this outcome, not tears of ecstasy but of relief, that families like mine, children like mine, are just that bit safer.

But they were also tears of sorrow for what other young people like Kiera Bell have had to endure, having had body parts unnecessarily removed and being given hormones which could render them permanently sterile and their bodies irrevocably changed and damaged at an age when they could not consent.

Society also needs to ask searching questions as to why this was ever allowed to happen.

Caroline Farrow is a Catholic journalist and UK campaign director and media commentator for Citizens Go

Judge ruling delights plaintiff as 'common sense' win

Keira Bell said she was "delighted" after three High Court ruling agreed that children under 16 with gender dysphoria are unlikely to be able to give informed consent to undergo treatment with puberty-blocking drugs. Dame Victoria Sharp, sitting with Lord Justice Lewis and Mrs Justice Lieven, said: "It is highly unlikely that a child aged 13 or under would be

competent to give consent to puberty blockers. "It is doubtful that a child aged 14 or 15 could understand and weigh the long-term risks and consequences of puberty blockers." They added: "In respect of young persons aged 16 and over, given the long-term consequences of the clinical interventions at issue in this case, and given that the treatment is as yet

innovative and experimental, we recognise that clinicians may well regard these as cases where the authorisation of the court should be sought prior to commencing the clinical treatment." Keira Bell added: "This judgment is not political, it's about protecting vulnerable children. I'm delighted to see that common sense has prevailed."

From parish to posting: Life as a permanent deacon in the RAF



On 7th July 2014, after months of prayer, discernment, inquiry, preparation and formal military training, I arrived at the Chaplaincy Centre at RAF Brize Norton (Oxfordshire) for my first day as a Station Chaplain – the Catholic Padre helping to complete the ecumenical make-up of the team.

This was very different prospect – exciting yet daunting – to that of parish deacon and school chaplain that I had been committed to for the four years previous, since ordination.

To date, after nearly seven years' service, I have experienced much: I have worked on three busy RAF Stations; served two four-month overseas deployments, first to the Falkland Islands and then supporting the UK contribution to the fight against Daesh in the Middle East; I am chaplain to the Forces' HCPT group; and, in 2019 I was appointed the Principal Catholic Chaplain (RAF). In October 2019 I had the joy



Pope Francis pictured in 2019 with Bishop Paul Mason of the Military Ordinariate and Bishop Santiago Olivera of Argentina, as they hold statues of Our Lady of Luján. Photo: Paul Haring

of accompanying Bishop Paul Mason, Ordinary of the Forces, to meet Pope Francis in St Peter's Square, along with Fr David Conroy (Principal Royal Navy Chaplain) and Fr Michael Fava CBE (then Principal Army Chaplain). There we were able to return a statue of Our Lady of Luján to Argentinian Catholic brothers and sisters, which an Army priest chaplain from my own diocese of Lancaster brought back from the Falkland Island conflict in 1982 for safekeeping. For 37 years the statue was cared for at the Military Cathedral, Aldershot. In this deeply moving encounter we received a replica

of the statue from the Argentine Bishop and people, and the Holy Father blessed both statues which serve as a reminder that the bonds of faith, love and peace endure through Christ Jesus.

These are just a few examples of the experiences of a military chaplain (the list is endless); however, by far the greatest privilege is the daily work of spiritual and pastoral accompaniment of our servicemen and women and their loved ones, our civil servants and contractors, as they experience the highs and lows of service life. Here is where the real work of proclaiming the Gospel

takes place!

Chaplaincy in the RAF is as old as the RAF itself. The RAF has always had pastors who were 'priests' to minister to its people, but it had not had deacons as regular commissioned chaplains until 2014. I was the first! This exciting new chapter means that today the aspiration of Catholic military chaplaincy mirrors more closely the aspirations of the Church's ordained ministry, which calls deacons, priests and bishops to make manifest the fullness of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The priest is called to minister God's love principally through the celebration of the Sacraments within the Church, while the deacon is called to minister God's love through the service of Word and Charity out in the world, often being the sacramental presence of the Lord and his Church on the very margins of society.

Together, priest and deacon collaborate in complimentary fashion, sharing in the ministry of the bishop.

In military chaplaincy deacons and priests are co-missionaries who are commissioned to "go out into the whole world and proclaim the good news" (cf. Mark 16:15). By accompanying the men and women of our armed forces, often quite literally to the ends of the earth, and by caring for their loved ones here at



Reverend (Squadron Leader) Deacon Dave Skillen

home, we each make manifest this call in many and varied ways.

This is an exciting and privileged context for ministry. Are you a deacon or priest who may be feeling called to serve, with the support of your bishop or religious superior, for a time in Her Majesty's Armed Forces? Why not take a look at the website of the Bishopric of the Forces where you can find out more: www.rcbishopricforces.org.uk, and do get in touch with Bishop Paul or any of our principal Catholic Chaplains!

Reverend (Squadron Leader) Deacon Dave Skillen, MA, QTS, BA (Hons); Principal Catholic Chaplain (RAF).

News



Precious Life supporters outside Stormont

Ni politicians happy to lose 6,500 lives – and waste £4m

Northern Ireland's leading pro-life group Precious Life has criticised health officials after it was revealed they had made plans to perform up to 6,500 abortions per year in Northern Ireland – at a cost of at least £4 million.

The figure was revealed in the notes of a meeting involving officials from Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care Board last December, shortly after abortion was forced on Northern Ireland from Westminster.

They relate to a discussion among health officials about how many abor-

tions they would need to cater for in Northern Ireland, presuming that abortion rates there will be the same as England and Wales.

"There were around 22,500 pregnancies in Northern Ireland last year. But there is absolutely no reason to make the presumption that a quarter of those will end in abortion," said Bernadette Smyth, director of Precious Life. "Northern Ireland has a pro-life culture, the majority of people here have stood united against abortion for 50 years. The people here didn't

ask for abortion to be legalised, it was forced on us by Westminster."

Ms Smyth pointed out that as well as "the evil of killing babies" there is also a high financial cost. "A conservative estimate suggests these planned abortions will cost £4 million but it could be as high as £5 million."

With 300,00 people on NHS waiting lists in Northern Ireland she asked "wouldn't this money be better spent treating these people, or providing support for women in crisis pregnancies?"

Health staff lead case against DIY abortion

Nick Benson

Hundreds of healthcare workers have expressed their opposition to 'DIY' abortion, warning Northern Ireland's Health Minister that it is 'unsafe' and 'unacceptable'.

In an open letter to Robin Swann, 277 healthcare workers said 'women and children in Northern Ireland deserve better care than these unsafe and unacceptable 'at-home' abortion schemes provide'.

They said they found it 'sadly ironic' that amid a deadly pandemic, when the whole of society is constraining itself to prevent sickness and death for vulnerable members of society, there is a push to expedite the ending of the lives of its most vulnerable member, the unborn child.

'At a time when precious healthcare resources are being sidelined for the rightful and necessary treatment and prevention of Covid-19, it is foolish to set aside funding and resources for a form of treatment that provides no improvement in healthcare outcomes, indeed in many cases providing worse outcomes, and is essentially ideological in nature,' they said.

The healthcare workers stressed

that it is their 'duty' to provide 'the best possible medical holistic care' and to signpost to the best possible social, practical and financial assistance in their time of need, especially during the difficult times of an unplanned pregnancy.

'Rather than seeking to further liberalise our laws with the introduction of 'at-home' abortion, the Assembly should move to bring forward legislation to repeal the extreme abortion legislation imposed on Northern Ireland by Westminster,' they said.

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) praised the healthcare workers for speaking out against the scheme, which it branded "dangerous and violent".

"We commend the brave healthcare workers who have spoken out against this dangerous and violent programme," A SPUC spokesperson said. "'DIY' home abortion provision is a travesty that should never have been introduced.

"Allowing women to take powerful drugs alone at home shows a complete lack of care and respect for women's health as well as the lives of their unborn babies."

Low-key but heartfelt consistory welcomes Church's new cardinals

Cindy Wooden

In a moving but deliberately low-key occasion on 28th November, Pope Francis ordained 11 senior Churchmen as cardinals in a special consistory at the Vatican, elevating them to the ranks of 'Princes' of the Church and assigning each a titular church in Rome last Sunday.

As with so many similar events around the world this year, the consistory was scarred by the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing officials to scale back what is traditionally a lavish ceremony full of pomp, noise and colour.

Gone were the huge crowds in St Peter's Square who usually accalm the new cardinals, with pockets of the faithful travelling thousands of miles to acknowledge their new red hat from their homeland. Instead each cardinal was accompanied by a priest-secretary and could invite only a handful of guests, so the congregation at the Altar of the Chair in St Peter's Basilica was barely 100.

Also missing were the 'courtesy visits,' a reception lasting several hours in the early evening when the general public was invited into the Vatican to greet the new cardinals.

Scrapped too was the traditional meet and greet with the congregations of the Rome churches to which the new cardinals were associated. Cardinals are given a 'titular' church in Rome, formally making them members of the Rome diocesan clergy, which is what the Church's first cardinals were.



But for all that it was still an incredibly moving ceremony, with one of the new cardinals saying the absence of fuss and crowds had made it more personal, as if it were an occasion just involving the pope, Jesus and me."

Two of the proposed 13 new cardinals could not attend: Cardinals Jose F. Advincula of Capiz, Philippines, and Cornelius Sim, apostolic vicar of Brunei, were forced to miss the consistory because of Covid-19 travel restrictions. They are still officially cardinals, however, and will receive their birettas and rings at a later date, the Vatican said.

In his homily at the prayer service, Pope Francis told the new cardinals that "the scarlet of a cardinal's robes, which is the colour of blood, can, for a worldly spirit, become the colour of a secular 'eminence,'" the traditional title of respect for a cardinal.

If that happens, he said, "you will no longer be a pastor close to your people. You will think of yourself only as 'His Eminence.' If you feel that, you are off the path."

For the cardinals, the pope said, the red must symbolise a wholehearted following of Jesus, who willingly gave his life on the cross to save humanity.

The Gospel reading at the service, Mark 10:32-45, included the account of James and John asking Jesus for special honors. "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left," they said. But Jesus reproaches them.

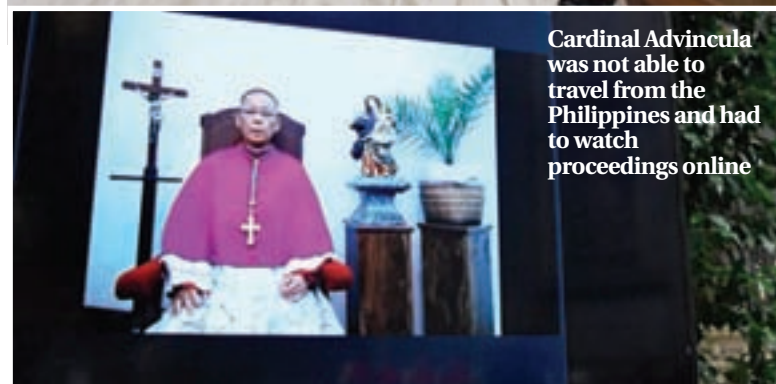
"We, too, pope and cardinals, must always see ourselves reflected in this word of truth," Pope Francis said. "It is a sharpened sword; it cuts, it proves painful, but it also heals, liberates and converts us."

According to canon law, cardinals are created when their names are made public "in the presence of the College of Cardinals." While many Rome-based cardinals attended the consistory, more members of the college were "present" online.

In fact, the formula for the creation of cardinals, recited in Latin by Pope Francis, says, "It chiefly concerns the Church of Rome, but it also affects the entire ecclesial community: We will call certain of our brethren to enter the College of Cardinals, so that

Pope Francis and new cardinals visit with retired Pope Benedict XVI at the retired pope's residence after the consistory.

Right, Cardinal Grech.



Cardinal Advincula was not able to travel from the Philippines and had to watch proceedings online

they may be united to the Chair of Peter by a closer bond to our apostolic ministry."

Mexican Cardinal Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel, retired bishop of San Cristobal de Las Casas, Mexico, told Vatican News that the new cardinals are called to reconfirm their commitment to making Christ the centre of their lives and "to collaborate with the pope in his ministry as bishop of Rome, and so we are assigned a parish in this city, as a sign of communion between that community and the one who presides over this local church, which is the pope."

Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, was the first mentioned by the pope in October when he announced he was creating new cardinals. As such, it fell to Cardinal Grech to address the pope on behalf of the new cardinals.

"Convoked in consistory at such a serious time for all humanity because of the pandemic, we want to turn our thoughts to all our brothers and sisters enduring hardship," the cardinal said.

He prayed that people would react to the pandemic as an "opportunity to rethink our lifestyles, our relationships, the organisation of our societies and, especially, the meaning of our lives."

Cardinal Grech also led the others in the recitation of the Creed and of an oath of fidelity and obedience to Christ and his Church and to Pope Francis and his successors.

The new cardinals came from eight countries: Italy, Malta, the United States, Brunei, the Philippines, Mexico, Rwanda and Chile.

All cardinals who came from outside Europe were tested for Covid-19 before

flying to Rome and again upon arrival. Even after testing negative, they were required to quarantine for 10 days and were tested again immediately before the consistory.

Cardinal Gregory from Washington DC said he hopes Pope Francis will find him to be "supportive, encouraging and trustworthy" in his role as a cardinal. The USA's first Black cardinal said he regretted that his two sisters had been unable to travel to Rome to attend, but knew that they were watching the livestream instead.

With the consistory the College of Cardinals now has 229 members, 128 of whom are under the age of 80 and eligible to enter a conclave to elect a new pope. Pope Francis has given the red hat to 57 per cent of electors.

The full list of new cardinals is:

- Mario Grech, from Malta, 63.
- Marcello Semeraro, an Italian who is prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes, 72.
- Antoine Kambanda, Rwanda, 62.
- Wilton D. Gregory, USA, 72.
- Cardinal Jose F. Advincula of Capiz, Philippines, 68.
- Celestino Aros Braco of Chile, 75.
- Cornelius Sim, Brunei, 69.
- Paolo Lojudec of Siena, Italy, 56.
- Mauro Gambetti, custos of the Sacred Convent of Assisi in Assisi, 55.
- Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel, retired bishop of San Cristobal de Las Casas, Mexico, 80
- Silvano M. Tomasi, Italy, 80.
- Raniero Cantalamessa, Italy, preacher of the papal household, 86.
- Enrico Feroci, 80, former director of Rome's Caritas.



Cardinal Cantalamessa

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New cardinals arrive in procession at St Peter's Basilica for the consistory
Photo: Vatican Media



Pope warns new red hats: beware sin of 'worldliness'

Carol Glatz

Concelebrating Mass with the newly created cardinals, Pope Francis said Advent is a time to be vigilant, hopeful and helpful.

People of faith who believe in the Heaven that awaits them should not be caught up with earthly concerns, he said during a Mass in St Peter's Basilica on 29th November, the first Sunday of Advent, which marks the start of a new liturgical year.

"Why should we be anxious about money, fame, success, all of which will fade away? Why should we waste time complaining about the night, when the light of day awaits us?" he asked.

The Mass was celebrated with the 11 new cardinals created the previous day, all wearing their new purple vestments. They were joined by pastors or rectors of the 13 Rome churches to which the new cardinals were associated and about 100 others who had been invited by the new cardinals.

In his homily, Pope Francis said the two key phrases for the Advent season were God's closeness and people's vigilance against indifference and mediocrity.

Advent reminds people that God came down "to dwell in our midst" and that they must always call for his assistance, he said. "The first step of faith is to tell God that we need him" and to ask that he "come close to us once more," the pope said. "God wants to draw close to us, but he will not impose himself; it is up to us to keep saying to him, 'Come!'"

People should repeat this short

prayer frequently throughout the day – "before our meetings, our studies and our work, before making decisions, in every important or difficult moment of our lives – 'Come, Lord Jesus!'" the pope said.

People must be watchful and focused on what is essential in life, the pope said, because "one great mistake is to get absorbed in a thousand things and not to notice God."

"People must not let themselves be overcome by discouragement, but live in hope," he said.

"If we are awaited in Heaven, why should we be caught up with earthly concerns?" he asked. "Why should we be anxious about money, fame, success, all of which will fade away?"

Waiting and being watchful are difficult, though, he said, and everyone is vulnerable to dangerous kinds of "drowsiness."

There is the "slumber of mediocrity," he said, "when we forget our first love and grow satisfied with indifference, concerned only for an untroubled existence."

This "lukewarm, worldly" life slowly eats away at faith, which must not be lukewarm, but a fire that burns, "a desire for God, a bold effort to change, the courage to love, constant progress," he said.

Faith "is not a tranquiliser for people under stress, it is a love story for people in love!"

Another danger is "the slumber of indifference" when people show no concern for those around them and "everything revolves around us and our needs," he said.

"We immediately begin to complain about everything and everyone; we start to feel victimised by everyone" and then end up believing everything

is part of a conspiracy, he said.

Instead, Pope Francis said, people must stay awake and remain vigilant through charity and compassionate service to others.

"When the Church worships God and serves our neighbour, it does not live in the night. However weak and weary, she journeys toward the Lord," he said.

Before praying the Angelus with people in St Peter's Square, the pope spoke of the importance of believing in a God who comes to dwell among his people.

"We are well aware that life is made up of highs and lows, of lights and shadows, and life has been especially difficult for so many because of the pandemic," he said. The worry, fear and discouragement so many people feel actually risk turning into "pessimism, closure and apathy."

People should remember the Lord "is our help and our shield," the pope said; he is "present in history to lead it to its ultimate goal and to its fullness, which is the Lord Jesus Christ."

For Christians, God is the "God-with-us," who "walks beside us" and to help people discover the meaning of life, "to give us courage when we are under duress or when we suffer," he said. "In the midst of life's storms, God always extends his hand to us and frees us from threats."

The pope asked that people use this time of great difficulty to pray simply as a family, live more moderately and to reach out to help their neighbors in a way that is respectful and discreet.



First black US cardinal does matter

Shannen Dee Williams

When Pope Francis appointed Atlanta Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory to become the first African American to lead the Archdiocese of Washington in 2019, many observers considered it a foregone conclusion that he would become the first Black cardinal from the USA. After all, five of Gregory's six immediate predecessors had ascended into the highest-ranking body of the Church.

Pope Francis' demonstrated commitment to more equitable representation in the College of Cardinals raised the chances of Cardinal Gregory's selection even higher.

However, Black Catholics in the US still held their breath, but when it came his appointment was a monumental milestone.

First and foremost, Cardinal Gregory's appointment is a recognition of his distinguished record of moral leadership in the white-dominated US Church. An unyielding champion of racial equality and advocate for the Church's marginalised, he has consistently demonstrated a commitment to the common good and all humanity without distinction.

But his appointment is also uniquely significant to the nation's longstanding and long denied Black Catholic community. In fact, some see Gregory's elevation as even more significant than the 2008 election of the nation's first Black president.

While some might feel inclined to argue that Cardinal Gregory's African American heritage should not matter, the fact remains that race has mattered in the modern Church since the dawn of the transatlantic slave trade and Europe's violent colonisation of the Americas and Africa in the 15th/16th centuries.

Indeed, one cannot tell the story of Black Catholicism that seeded Gregory's rise without acknowledging the foundational African roots of the US Church, or reckoning with the Church's long and largely unrecconciled histories of colonialism, slavery, segregation and exclusion.

But Gregory is also the product of a longstanding tradition of Catholicism that has fought against racism and white supremacy at every turn. It is a tradition that has always understood that Black lives matter and that Black history in the United States and wider world is, and always has been, Catholic history.

And for that alone, let the Church say amen.



Abusers put end to innocence

Fr Shay Cullen



We celebrated the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November. It establishes the right of every child to a life of peace and security, dignity, fulfilled needs, a happy family, education, freedom, protection from abuse and poverty, right to health, justice and play and happiness.

The Convention binds all member nations to respect and implement the rights of the child and act in the best interests of the child.

Before the Convention, the recognition that the child is the most vulnerable and needy was unrecognised by the public, who preferred not to talk about child protection and abuse issues. In many societies, that is still the way things are. Reporting of child sexual abuse is improving slowly but has a long way to go. It was and is taboo for many, the unspoken evil that, like a monster, would haunt anyone who talked about it. The best way to deal with child sexual abuse and slavery was to bury it away and cover it up. That is why the Convention is so important.

There is now an awakening in society. Many nations have new strict laws and awareness. Brave and courageous children are coming forward to protest. The #MeToo movement creates an environment where speaking out is encouraged.

Millions of people went through school and college and were never warned against child sexual abuse being so prevalent. Even the Ten Commandments do not explicitly condemn it. Jesus of Nazareth did and placed children as the most important in the Kingdom and said abusers should be cast into the sea with a millstone tied around their necks. He had it right and took a strong, clear position on it. But it was ignored by Church leaders over the ages. Not surprising, then, that clerical sexual abuse of children was and is such a frequent crime that it was ignored and covered up. We have to stand against it and expose it everywhere.

Seven million children between 10 and 18 are sexually abused every year. They will grow up with anger and hatred in their hearts and be more prone to be violent in their family or society and turn to crime and insurrection.

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Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI meets the new cardinals created by Pope Francis, during an audience in his private chapel

Swiss choices full of holes, says diocese

A Swiss Catholic diocese that elects its own bishop from a shortlist drawn up by the Holy See has rejected all three candidates proposed by Pope Francis.

The Diocese of Chur said all three candidates to replace retired Bishop Vitus Huonder were “unsuitable” as they either did not have strong links with the diocese or were too near retirement themselves.

Pope Pius XII established that Chur could select its own bishops in the 1948 decree *Etsi salva*, which accorded the cathedral chapter the privilege of electing a bishop from among three priests proposed by the Holy See. Since then the diocese has retained a fierce independence from Rome interference.

Vatican says Chinese bishop ‘is in communion with pope’

Carol Glatz

The Vatican confirmed that a bishop recently ordained in China is in full communion with the pope and that more Vatican-approved nominations would be coming.

Bishop Thomas Chen Tianhao, 58, is the new bishop of Qingdao in Shandong province and was ordained on 23rd November.

Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, said that Bishop Chen was the third bishop to be named and ordained within the regulatory framework of the provisional agreement between China and the Holy See on the appointment of bishops.

“I can also add that undoubtedly other episcopal consecrations are foreseen” given that work is currently underway for the appointment of several

new bishops, Bruni said.

Bishop Chen’s ordination took place in St Michael’s Cathedral in Qingdao with Bishop John Fang Xingyao of Linyi, Shandong province, presiding.

Bishop Fang, who is president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, celebrated the Mass with Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun, vice president of the Council of Chinese Bishops, and Archbishop Joseph Zhang Xianwang of Jinan, vice president of the ‘Liang hui’ association, which includes the council of bishops and the patriotic association.

The Mass was not open to the public because of Covid restrictions, but participants included 21 priests and more than 200 nuns and lay faithful.

Bishop Chen was born in Pingdu, Shandong province, in 1962, and or-

dained a priest in 1989. He served as president of the patriotic association of Qingdao and has been a member of the standing committee of the patriotic association since 2010.

The activities of all religious communities in China are subjected to government oversight and approval.

The Vatican-China provisional agreement, signed in 2018 and renewed in October, outlines procedures for ensuring that Catholic bishops are elected by the Catholic community in China and approved by the pope before their ordinations and installations.

Vatican officials have said that giving up full control over the choice of bishops would not be what the Vatican hoped for, but that the agreement was a good first step toward ensuring

greater freedom and security for the Catholic community in China.

The agreement has meant that, for the first time in decades, all of the Catholic bishops in China are in full communion with the pope and there will no longer be illegitimate ordinations, that is, bishops ordained with government approval, but not the Vatican’s consent.

Pope Francis has told reporters that the agreement envisions “a dialogue about potential candidates. The matter is carried out through dialogue. But the appointment is made by Rome; the appointment is by the pope. This is clear.

“And we pray for the suffering of some who do not understand or who have many years of clandestine existence behind them.”

Veiled warning for Germany as Church fears fresh schism

Pope Francis has launched a thinly veiled attack on the German Church, saying it was working in such a way as to sow disunity.

“At times, I feel a great sadness when I see a Church community that takes a wrong path because it thinks it is building a Church through gatherings, as if it were a political party, considering what the majority want; they do not ask for the Holy Spirit to help.

“It says it is on its ‘synodal path’. But where is prayer? Where is the community’s love? Where is the Eucharist? Without these four co-ordinates, the Church becomes a human society, a political party,” he said. “But there is no Holy Spirit.”

If one of those aspects is missing, he added, then the presence of the

Holy Spirit is missing, which risks converting the Catholic Church into “a beautiful humanitarian association,” but “it is not the Church.”

While the pope did not mention a specific country, he has previously urged the German Church to ensure that its ‘synodal path’ was guided by



‘The Church’s current synodal path could lead to schism’ said Cardinal Woelki

the Holy Spirit with patience and was not simply a “search for results that generate quick consequences but are ephemeral due to the lack of maturity or because they do not respond to the vocation to which we are called.”

The Catholic Church in Germany

launched its Synodal Path in 2019, debating the issues of power, sexual morality, priestly life and the role of women in the Church.

Other topics include priestly celibacy, promoting more women in the Church and reviewing Catholic teaching on sexual morality.

Some German bishops are concerned about the process. In September Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne warned that the Synodal Path reform project, on its current trajectory, could split from Rome and create “a German national Church.”

“The worst outcome would be if the Synodal Path leads to a schism ... with the universal Church,” Cardinal Woelki said. “That would be the worst thing if something like a German national Church were to be created here.”

Vatileaks butler dies, aged 54

The papal butler who was pardoned by Benedict XVI for his role in the ‘Vatileaks’ affair has died at the age of 54.

Paolo Gabriele passed away on 24th November after a long illness, the Vatican reported. He leaves a wife and three children.

Gabriele served as the German pope’s personal butler from 2007 to 2012 when he was arrested on suspicion of leaking classified papal documents to an Italian journalist. He was indicted for aggravated theft and stood trial in the Vatican where he told judges that he did not “feel like I’m a thief,” adding that he “acted only out of visceral love for the Church of Christ and for its visible head on earth.”

He was found guilty of theft and given a reduced sentence of 18 months.

In December of 2012 Benedict XVI visited Gabriele in his cell to pardon him.



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World News

NJPN Comment

A time for eccentrics

Fr Rob Esdaile

Advent is an eccentric time. I don't necessarily mean 'odd' (though the way our culture has stuffed a season of restraint, pregnant anticipation and hope with Yuletide feasting is definitely quite contrary). I mean it's focus lies beyond itself.

It points both to the future (Christ will come again) and the past (his birth at Bethlehem) to provoke an encounter in the present. And, as with those mechanical systems which operate outside their natural centre of gravity, there is something inherently unsettling in that. A good living of this season draws us beyond habitual orbits.

John the Baptist is the Advent figure par excellence and undeniably eccentric in both senses of the word. Decidedly odd (all camel skins, locusts and wild honey) and a bit too 'shouty' for our tastes, he also points beyond the here and now. He is the voice crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare a way for the Lord!' (Mk 1.1-8) and 'the witness to speak for the light' (Jn 1.6-8).

A leader whose narrative was not about himself: that would be a refreshing prospect! A figure both indicating a way forward and inviting the whole community to unite in making straight the crooked paths: that is surely what we need if we are to 'build back better', post-pandemic. But if we want that to happen in the political space, then we need prophetic voices in the Church space, too. We need to allow ourselves to be eccentric in the truest sense. Our focus also must be beyond ourselves, our centre of gravity outside our own immediate orbit, fixed on God's Kingdom and the sharing of God's mercy.

However, if we choose that trajectory we shall certainly be viewed by our neighbours as eccentric in the other sense. There is something odd about Christians who speak up and act up, not just observing the crooked ways but demanding change and working with the like-minded to achieve it. There is something peculiar in those who embrace sufficiency in a world of excess – contenting themselves with 'wild honey and locusts' rather than the overprovisioned online shop. Some understand that that truth, here and now, is not yet fully realised and that our pilgrimage, our struggle, must go on.

Yes, that is all a little strange – though not as strange as the prospect of Jesus Emmanuel, Divinity enfleshed in a new-born infant in a borrowed byre in Bethlehem. That truly is eccentric. **Fr. Rob Esdaile is parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Thames Ditton**

Thanksgiving's legacy ready to hit US - Fauci

Coronavirus cases worldwide have now reached 60 million, with 500,000 new cases reported in a single day at the start of the week – a global record.

Over 1.5 million people have been killed, confirmed the World Health Organisation, whose director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the news was a "sad milestone in this global struggle."

The news came as he proclaimed positive news from vaccine trials was "light at the end of this long, dark tunnel that is growing brighter".

But he reiterated his warning against allowing the poorest and most vulnerable to be "trampled in the stampede" to get inoculated.

Cases remain high across a number of regions of the world, with countries that had initial success in suppressing first wave outbreaks now seeing infections rise again.

The statistics prove that "once the virus gets a grip on a society it is virtually impossible to shake off without drastic steps such as lockdowns," the WHO chief said.

The United States continues to record the highest new cases and death toll, with more than 13.5 million cases and nearly 270,000 deaths. This week there are more than 90,000 people in hospital, more than in either of the two previous peaks of the pandemic.

The country's leading epidemiologist, Dr Anthony Fauci, said he feared the country faced another surge this weekend after Americans celebrated the Thanksgiving holiday last week. "It usually takes a week for new cases to show up on official figures," he said, "so I would expect to see the consequences of Thanksgiving start to work its way into our figures by this weekend."

The outbreak has had a devastating impact on the US economy. Nearly eight million Americans, many of them children and minorities, have

Boys search a rubbish dump in Najaf, Iraq, for food or something useful to sell. The UN has suggested that globally, 265 million people will face starvation soon as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic



fallen into poverty since May, according to researchers.

In Europe, France is now far and away the worst affected nation, with more than two million cases; Spain, Italy, Germany and the UK have all recorded more than one million cases, but their numbers have either stabilised or started to fall in recent days. New cases have also been rising in Russia, Turkey and Ukraine.

Outside Europe, cases are rising in Asia once more, with Japan on 'high alert' after seeing a record number of daily cases in what could be a third wave of infections. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga urged people to be wary of increased social interaction.

In the Middle East, both Iran and Jordan have seen the number of daily infections rise sharply in recent weeks.

In Latin America, Brazil has more than six million confirmed cases and the world's second highest death toll. There are concerns the country is now facing a second wave of infections despite it moving into its warmest weather period. Argentina, Colombia

and Mexico have also recorded more than one million cases; Peru is nearing that milestone but it's rate of new infections is falling after the Government introduced strong measures to counteract its spread.

India has driven the increase in numbers in Asia, with over nine million confirmed infections, the second-highest official total in the world after the US.

Africa has recorded more than two million cases, although the true extent of the pandemic there is not known as testing rates are low. South Africa, with about 800,000 cases and more than 21,000 deaths, is still the worst affected country on the continent. Morocco, Egypt and Ethiopia are the only other African countries to officially record over 100,000 cases.

Damage to the world's major economies is four times worse than the 2009 global financial crisis, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has said; the UN believes that up to 265 million people could soon face starvation.

Nigeria sees another priest kidnapped

A Nigerian archbishop has asked for prayers for the safe release of a priest kidnapped in Abuja last weekend.

Fr Matthew Dajo was kidnapped on Sunday night, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Abuja said, and he appealed to the local community to assist police in locating his whereabouts.

Fr Dajo was abducted by gunmen during an attack on the town of Yan-koji, where his parish, St Anthony's, is located.

"Armed bandits raided the community and shot sporadically for about 30 minutes," Fr Kevin Oselumhense Anetor reported. "The gunmen scaled through the fence of the priest's house, while others positioned themselves outside, before entering Fr Matthew's bedroom and whisking him away."

Kidnappings of Catholics in Nigeria are an ongoing problem that not only affects priests and seminarians, but also lay faithful, Kaigama said.

"We have cases of abductions, detentions, and killings by terrorist groups, criminal herdsmen, bandits, and gangs of kidnappers to contend with," he said.

"Last week, in one of our parishes in Abuja archdiocese, five children were kidnapped from one family who live behind the parish house, and the following day a woman preparing for her wedding was also kidnapped. They have not been found."

The Islamist group Boko Haram is behind many of the abductions, including that of 110 students kidnapped from their boarding school in February 2018. Of those kidnapped, Leah Sharibu, is still being held. "Leah has become a symbol of Christian resilience against forced conversion," the archbishop said.

He added that "we must also not forget the 112 Chibok girls and others who are held captive, with many either dead or forcefully married off," referring to the kidnapping of 276 Christian girls in Borno State in 2014.

Crisis feared as Tigray fighting continues

Pope Francis has asked people to pray for Ethiopia's Tigray region, where the United Nations has said that "a full-scale humanitarian crisis is unfolding."

A spokesman for the Holy See said that the pope was following the news coming from Ethiopia closely and asked for prayers its people.

Weeks of violence in the Tigray region have led to the deaths of hundreds of civilians and forced tens of thousands of people to flee to Sudan.

"The Holy Father, in inviting prayer for this country, makes an appeal to the parties in conflict to stop the violence, to safeguard the life, especially of civilians, and to restore peace to the populations," Holy See Press Office Director Matteo Bruni said.

The Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced last weekend that Government forces had ceased military operations in the Tigray region,

and the Ethiopian state broadcaster reported that the region was under control of the government.

But multiple international news outlets have been unable to independently verify these claims due to

the communications blackout in the region, amid claims that rebel forces have continued shelling the border region with Eritrea. The US Embassy has said sporadic fighting is continuing across the region.



Tens of thousands have fled fighting in Tigray

The northern Ethiopian region of Tigray is run by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The group once dominated the ruling coalition of Ethiopia but was marginalised by Prime Minister Abiy's political changes after he took office in 2018. He dissolved the ruling coalition and merged its ethnicity-based regional parties into a single party, the Prosperity Party, which the TPLF refused to join.

Tigrayan leaders have said they were unfairly targeted by political purges and allegations of corruption. They have argued that Abiy's postponement of national elections due to coronavirus have ended his mandate as a legitimate leader.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Babar Baloch, has warned that "a full-scale humanitarian crisis is unfolding," and that an estimated 40,000 refugees have crossed from Ethiopia into Sudan.



Cindy Wooden

Pope urges the valuing of all human life - p20



Chris McDonnell

From the outside, looking in - p21



Fr Michael Collins

The Octave at Christmas - p24

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A CATHOLIC UNIVERSE SUPPLEMENT

Vatican tells young people to ask for 'words of wisdom' for Christmas

Carol Glatz

One present young people should ask for this Christmas is words of wisdom from older people they know, a Vatican dicastery said.

"Today, in the difficult circumstances of a Christmas still overshadowed by the pandemic, we are proposing that young people post on social media a memory, a piece of advice or a 'gift of wisdom' they have received from one of the elderly people with whom they have formed a bond in recent months," said the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life.

The invitation was part of a new campaign launched on 27th November aimed at encouraging young people to reach out to their grandparents and other older people, not only to help alleviate the isolation and loneliness caused by pandemic restrictions, but also to create new and creative bonds.

The unusual circumstances caused by the pandemic means "there is an opportunity for young people to receive a special gift" for Christmas this year, the dicastery said in a news release.

"Because of the pandemic, there are more elderly people who live



Ben and Isaac talk to their grandparents, Sue and Alan, through a window as they self-isolate at their home in Cheshire. (Catholic News Service photo/Martin Rickett, PA Images via Reuters)

alone. We can create bonds with each of them – this is a treasure waiting to be discovered!"

The Vatican office asked that people reach out to older people and ask for "the gift of their wisdom." People can then take the advice, memories and nuggets of wisdom they collect and post them on social media using the hashtag #aGiftOfWisdom.

"Some of the best posts will be shared" on the dicastery's social media accounts @laityfamilylife, it said.

"Unfortunately, in many cases, because of the health regulations in

force, visiting can only take place remotely, via telephone, video calls and messaging. But it is possible to participate in this campaign" by sharing "the wise words of grandparents and the elderly on social media," it added.

The latest campaign follows a similar effort the dicastery launched in July in which it "collected virtual hugs sent by many young people to both their own grandparents and to 'adopted grandparents,'" it said. The effort was meant to encourage young people to show kindness and affection to older people who may be feeling lonely.

For other ideas and guidance, the dicastery has posted on its website, laityfamilylife.va, a free e-book, *The Richness of Many Years of Life*, which offers a toolkit in multiple languages "for the development of a true pastoral ministry that reaches out" and involves the elderly as active participants in the church.

The e-book includes the proceedings of the first international conference on the pastoral care of the elderly the dicastery held in January 2020 to promote a "renewed concern for the pastoral care of the elderly in every ecclesial community."

Social justice must be founded on care for others, pope tells judges

Junno Arocho Esteves

Guaranteeing justice for all men and women is not possible while a few people control most of the world's wealth and everyone else's right to a dignified life is disregarded, Pope Francis said.

In a video message released on Monday, the pope encouraged judges from North and South America and Africa not to lose sight of "the distressing situation in which a small part of humanity lives in opulence, while an increasing number of people are denied dignity and their most elementary rights are ignored or violated."

"We cannot be disconnected from reality," he said. "This is a

reality you must keep in mind."

The judges were taking part in a two-day virtual meeting on "*Building the New Social Justice*." The meeting was sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Committee of Pan-American Judges for Social Rights and Franciscan Doctrine.

At "such a critical time for all of humanity," the pope said, the virtual meeting to discuss the work of building "a new social justice is, without doubt, excellent news."

Offering a reflection for their discussions, the pope said that building social justice is a "collective work" that must be achieved on a daily basis "because imbalance is a temptation at every minute."

Working towards true social justice must also be done with an "attitude of commitment" that follows "along the path of the Good Samaritan" and that is mindful of not falling "into a culture of indifference," he said.

People "must recognise the all-too-frequent temptation to disregard others, especially the weakest," the pope explained. "We have to assume that we have become accustomed to turning a blind eye, to ignoring situations until they hit us directly."

And, he continued, one must not ignore history with all its "struggles, triumphs and defeats."

"Therein lies the blood of those who gave their lives for a full and

integrated humanity," he said, as well as the roots of what people are experiencing today.

Pope Francis insisted that true social justice is impossible if the human person is not the centre of concern.

"God asks us believers to be God's people, not 'God's elite.' Because those who go the way of 'God's elite' end up in the so-called elitist clericalisms that work for the people, but do nothing with the people, do not feel like a people," the pope said.

Lastly, Pope Francis said that solidarity is essential in the fight against poverty, inequality and unemployment.

Solidarity means "fighting

against that culture that can lead to using others, to enslaving others and ends up taking away the dignity of others," the pope said. "Do not forget that solidarity, understood in its deepest sense, is a way of making history."



An Iraqi boy collects recyclable garbage at a dump in Najaf, Iraq. (CNS photo/Alaa Al-Marjani)

In brief

VATICAN CITY: The approval decades ago of a Zairean rite of the *Roman Missal* demonstrated that it is possible also to develop a rite for the Amazon region, Pope Francis said in a preface to a new book.

The Zairean rite, an example of liturgical inculturation, “suggests a promising way also for the eventual elaboration of an Amazonian rite, in that the cultural needs of a specific area of the African context are acknowledged without distorting the nature of the *Roman Missal* as a guarantee of continuity with the ancient and universal tradition of the Church,” the pope wrote.

The pope’s remarks appear in the preface of a new book, *Pope Francis and the Roman Missal for the Dioceses of Zaire: A Promising Rite for Other Cultures*.

The book, currently only in Italian, is due to be released on 9th December by the Vatican publishing house. The Italian Catholic newspaper, *Avvenire*, published the pope’s text earlier this week.

Edited by Congolese Sister Rita Mboshu Kongo, a theologian and member of the Daughters of Mary Most Holy, the book is meant to help readers learn more about the different aspects of the Zairean rite, which incorporates elements of Congolese culture and reflects the needs of Catholics in the sub-Saharan African nation, formerly Zaire, now Congo.

MEXICO CITY: Mexican Church and civic officials have cancelled public feast celebrations for Mexico’s patroness at her shrine in Mexico City due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The celebration normally attracts 10 million pilgrims to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the world’s most-visited Marian shrine.

At a joint news conference, Mexico City Cardinal Carlos Aguiar Retes and Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum urged pilgrims to stay away from the basilica and to avoid congregating in the area.

Pilgrims normally descend on the area – often arriving on foot from cities and towns surrounding the Mexican capital – and gather at midnight prior to the feast day on 12th December to serenade Mary. Church officials instead urged devotees to celebrate the feast at their local parishes or at home via broadcasts from the basilica online and on public television.

“We already know that the Virgin moves and moves to where her sons and daughters are, especially those who are grieving,” Archbishop Rogelio Cabrera López, president of the Mexican bishops’ conference, said at the news conference.

TALKING POINT

Catholic social teaching can bridge divisions in society, says archbishop

Catholic social teaching, “with its understanding of natural law,” can bridge the divisions that exist in US society between religious adherents and secularists, said Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami.

Archbishop Wenski portrayed the divide this way: “One side, the secularists, holds for a radical autonomy by which truth is determined not by the nature of things but by one’s own will. The religious side – our side – holds that men and women are not self-creators but creatures, that truth is not constructed but received, and that it must reflect the reality of things.”

“Catholic teaching proclaims the dignity of every human being but also acknowledges the reality of sin,” Archbishop Wenski said in his column for the November issue of the *Florida Catholic*, Miami’s archdiocesan newspaper.

“Our police forces, our social services agencies, our schools, our courtrooms deal with the consequences of sin every day,” he added.

“Today we see much anger in our society. And much of that anger is seen in our streets and expressed in social media,” the archbishop said. “We hear warring slogans: ‘Black lives matter,’ ‘blue lives matter,’ ‘all lives matter,’ and from those who identify as pro-life, ‘unborn lives matter.’ And they all do matter – beneath these slogans there is an argument about ‘who truly belongs to our society?’ and ‘who is shut out?’”

He added: “Catholic social teaching on the life and dignity of the human person, on human solidarity, on the common good and the necessity for governments to respect the principle of subsidiarity can make important contributions to addressing the social unrest that besets our society today as it faces the challenges of enduring racism, growing inequality and the intolerance of a ‘cancel culture.’”

When Irish novelist James Joyce described the Catholic Church as “here comes everybody,” he did so disparagingly, Archbishop Wenski said. “But the Church does welcome everybody – saint and sinner, rich and poor, the learned



Pope Francis greets Archbishop Thomas J. Wenski of Miami during a meeting with US bishops at the Vatican in February. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

and the unlettered.”

Much is being made of the election of Joe Biden as president, since Biden (pictured) would be only “the second president in our



history who identifies himself as a Roman Catholic,” Archbishop Wenski said.

“Because of his (Biden’s) apparent dissent from Catholic teachings due to his support of certain anti-life policies of his party (the Democrats), he has been criticised by many for ‘not being Catholic enough,’” he added. “But at the same time, our newest Supreme Court justice (Amy Coney Barrett) has been criticised by others as being ‘too Catholic.’”

While Biden will be just the second Catholic among 46 men to serve as president, there are currently six Catholics on the Supreme Court, and 31 per cent of those in Congress are Catholic despite Catholics accounting for just a bit over 20 per cent of the US population, noted Archbishop Wenski. “And Catholics are likewise overrepresented in law

enforcement and the legal profession.”

“This is quite an achievement considering that for much of our nation’s history, Catholics were looked on with suspicion as being ‘un-American,’ and ‘anti-Catholicism’ remains a deeply entrenched bias in American life,” he said.

“As Catholics, we should not get caught up in internecine arguments about ‘who is too Catholic’ and ‘who is not Catholic enough.’ In any case, Jesus will sort it out on Judgement Day,” Archbishop Wenski said.

“In the meantime, every baptised Catholic can call himself or herself a ‘practising Catholic’ because this life is our one chance to practise the faith until we get it right,” he added. “And, because we all are sinners, we all must practise very hard.”

Church aids tiny Colombian island's residents left homeless by hurricane

Cody Weddle

Laidy Betancourt now sleeps in a tent with her husband and 10-year-old son on the sanctuary floor of Our Lady of Sorrows Church (Nuestra Señora de los Dolores) on the tiny Caribbean Isle de Providencia.

She, along with many of the island's 5,000-plus residents, were left homeless after powerful Hurricane Iota slammed Colombia's only island province on 16th November.

"We're thinking this will be the first and last time we experience this," Betancourt said. "We'll be moving back to the Colombian mainland."

Iota marked the first recorded Category 5 storm ever to hit the island, which sits off the coast of Nicaragua. The Colombian Government estimates that the hurricane damaged 100 per cent of structures, destroying eight out of 10 of them.

Iota later hit Nicaragua as a Category 4 storm, then barrelled through Honduras, both already reeling from Hurricane Eta, which passed through two weeks earlier. Authorities in Central America have confirmed more than 140 deaths from Eta and more than 40 from Iota, including one person on Providencia.

"The hurricane started at eight in the evening, and at three in the morning the eye arrived," said Father Benito Huffington, the parish priest who has ministered on the island for 31 years. "Then at 10 in the morning the next day, it was as if another hurricane arrived, and that was what finished everything off."

As warnings started arriving from the central government while the storm neared, Fr Benito worked with the local mayor's office to offer shelter to residents. Nearly three dozen people took shelter in the church's youth centre and dozens more in the concrete parish offices. For 10 hours, Fr Benito hunkered down in the bathroom of his home with three nuns who oversee a local school.

"We saved our life because we had a bathroom with a sturdy roof and concrete," he said.

But the roof of the youth centre did not hold up as well and collapsed during the storm. Dodging the beams, the 33 people inside, including Betancourt, waited for a respite from the wind to run to the parish offices a few yards away.

"That was a very hard day, that breeze started to come in, and boof, boof, boof, the roof was lifted up," Virginia Webster, who was born and has lived on the



The Nuestra Señora de los Dolores Catholic Church is pictured on Providencia island, Colombia. The church was the only one of six Catholic churches on the island to not be destroyed entirely during Hurricane Iota.

(below) Bishop Jaime Uriel Sanabria Arias prepares to celebrate Mass at the parish offices of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores Catholic church on 22nd November. (Catholic News Service photos/Cody Weddle)

island her entire life, said in a mix of English and her native Creole.

When the winds subsided about 1pm, relieved residents emerged to an island largely razed by the 160-mile-per-hour winds. Fishing boats sat in the middle of streets that were lined by piles of rubble.

Of the island's six Catholic churches, only one has not been damaged beyond repair. A pile of blue and white boards replaced the three-story Mary Immaculate Education Institute where the nuns educate 250 local children. Built in 1932, the building had been declared a national monument.

Our Lady of Sorrows Church lost its roof, its pews strewn around inside.

Providing some hope amid the despair, a concrete statue of the Mary on Santa Catalina island directly north of Providencia remained standing unscathed.

After seeing the statue during a tour of the island a day after the storm, Colombian President Ivan Duque noted that "after a Category 5, the Virgin still stood there. Many people are saying she is

miraculous because many lives were spared."

Government flights and ships eventually arrived at the island, delivering vital emergency supplies. Duque has promised 15 tons in humanitarian aid and the Government has delivered 1,500 tents. However, it has declined to evacuate all residents.

Bishop Jaime Uriel Sanabria Arias, apostolic vicar of San Andres and Providencia, arrived three days later from San Andres Island, 55 miles southwest of Providencia.

"Here people are in need of spiritual assistance, because in a tragedy of this magnitude, people need hope, encouragement, and presence," he said. "And our presence here is important and the fundamental help we can give."

Bishop Sanabria has remained on the island and on 22nd November celebrated the first Mass for dozens of residents at the parish office.

Colombia's Government has promised to start delivering temporary housing and has set up



a field hospital after the hurricane left the health clinic in disrepair.

At the church sanctuary where residents continue to camp in tents, Fr Benito has pleaded for tarps to cover the roof. Many islanders have complained that they are struggling to stay dry because of constant rain and lack of adequate shelter.

The Colombian Government has promised to rebuild all structures

by 2022. The islanders remain mostly unable to contact family and friends in the outside world.

Hurricane Beta in 2005 was the last storm to cause significant damage to the island. It damaged more than 1,500 homes.

"Now it's not just that homes don't have roofs," Fr Benito said. "Homes are no longer standing and we know that as an island, it will take longer for us to fix this."

Cindy Wooden



VATICAN LETTER

‘Make space at the table’: Pope urges valuing and welcoming all human life

Pope Francis admits he is not an economist, but he is a pastor.

And as a pastor, he has seen how the global economy has cast aside many members of his flock, and he knows that the Gospel and Catholic social teaching call for a different response.

“Solidarity is not the sharing of crumbs from the table, but to make space at the table for everyone,” Pope Francis said in a new book written with Austen Ivereigh.

The book, *Let Us Dream: The Path to A Better Future*, was published on 1st December by Simon & Schuster. Journalists were given copies in advance.

The pope’s concerns about the current situation of the world, especially given the coronavirus pandemic, will not be new to anyone who followed his homilies as the pandemic developed in the spring, watched his weekly general audience series on Catholic social teaching or read his new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on *Fraternity and Social Friendship*.

But the new book sets out systematically how he takes the “see-judge-act” method of social action – what he calls “contemplate-discern-propose” – and uses it to describe the current state of affairs, to look at attitudes behind many issues and to call for a new way of doing things.

Part of the new book, Ivereigh said, is based on Pope Francis’ recorded responses to his written questions and part on suggestions outlined by the pope, elaborated by Ivereigh and then redacted by the pope.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a global trauma or trial, Pope Francis said, and it is precisely how one acts in a trial that reveals the state of his or her heart: “How solid it is, how merciful, how big or small.”

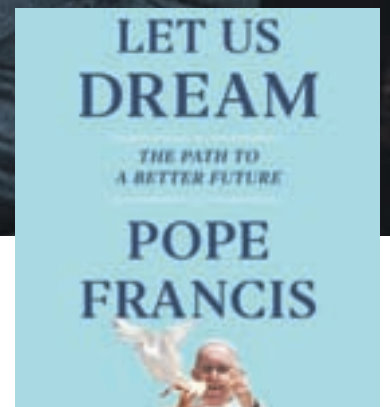
“God asks us to dare to create something new,” he said. “We cannot return to the false securities of the political and economic systems we had before the crisis. We need economies that give to all access to the fruits of creation, to the basic needs of life: to land, lodging, and labour.”

And, he said, “we need a politics that can integrate and dialogue with the poor, the excluded and the vulnerable, that gives people a say in the decisions that impact their



Pope Francis meets author Austen Ivereigh at the Vatican in October 2019. The pope collaborated with Ivereigh on the book, *Let Us Dream: The Path to A Better Future*. In the book the pope said he experienced three “Covid moments” in his lifetime: lung problems that threatened his life when he was 21; his “displacement” in Germany in 1986 for studies; and when he was sent away to Cordoba, Argentina, for almost two years in the early 1990s. *Let Us Dream* was published on 1st December by Simon & Schuster.

(Catholic News Service photos/Vatican Media)



lives.”

In other words, the pope said, “we need to slow down, take stock and design better ways of living together on this earth.”

The only way to get a proper perspective, he said, is to go to the margins of society, to the places where people suffer most and allow that suffering to touch one’s heart.

“I think often of persecuted peoples: the Rohingya, the poor Uighurs, the Yazidi – what ISIS did to them was truly cruel – or Christians in Egypt and Pakistan killed by bombs that went off while they prayed in church,” he said.

The pope’s prescription is centred on dialogue, a recognition of the God-given dignity of every

human being and an understanding that the Earth and all the good it contains were meant by God to be a gift for everyone, not just those strong enough to grab the most the quickest.

“I cannot stay silent over 30- to 40-million unborn lives cast aside every year through abortion,” he said. “It is painful to behold how in many regions that see themselves as developed, the practice is often urged because the children to come are disabled, or unplanned.”

“Human life is never a burden. It demands we make space for it, not cast it off,” Pope Francis insisted.

“Of course,” he said, “the arrival of a new human life in need – whether the unborn child in the womb or the migrant at our border – challenges and changes our priorities. With abortion and closed borders we refuse that readjustment of our priorities, sacrificing human life to defend

our economic security or to assuage our fear that parenthood will upend our lives.”

To claim “to promote the Gospel and not welcome the strangers in need, nor affirm their humanity as children of God, is to seek to encourage a culture that is Christian in name only, emptied of all that makes it distinctive,” Pope Francis said.

Abortion, anti-immigrant sentiments, racism, lack of care of the elderly and the embracing of an economic system that focuses on profit at all costs are all signs of the “erosion of the value of life,” he said.

“Without a vision for society rooted in the dignity of all people,” he said, “the logic of the unfettered market ends up turning life from a gift into a product.”

As he did in a letter in April to grassroots workers’ co-operatives, Pope Francis said in the book that he believes “it is time to explore

concepts like the universal basic income (UBI), also known as ‘the negative income tax’: an unconditional flat payment to all citizens, which could be dispersed through the tax system.”

The payment would guarantee every citizen has the minimum necessary to survive and, he said, could encourage people to job share with others, increasing employment, or give more time to volunteer work.

Pope Francis urged people to pause and look around for something new and different they could do to help someone else.

“When you feel the twitch, stop and pray,” he said. “And then act. Call up, go visit, offer your service. Say you don’t have a clue what they do, but maybe you can help. Say you’d like to be part of a different world, and you thought this might be a good place to start.”

“Human life is never a burden. It demands we make space for it, not cast it off”

Chris McDonnell



JOURNEY IN FAITH

From the outside, looking in

Belonging to a social group, a sports club, a political party or a local community association involves accepting certain rules and patterns of behaviour. Our behaviour is modified for the greater good of all. Breaking the rules might lead to a minor sanction or, ultimately, to expulsion if the matter is considered serious enough. I would like to explore this week the implications of 'belonging' and the consequences of finding oneself on the outside, consequences for the group and for the individual concerned.

Our membership of any group is usually a voluntary action. No-one forces you to become a card-carrying member of a political party nor demands that you join the local golf club. It is a course of action that we undertake for personal reasons. Our social commitment leads us to associate ourselves with a particular group, so we confirm our point of view by joining our voice to theirs. We apply for membership of a sports club or gym in order to share activity with others. Both actions benefit the group we join as well as ourselves.

But joining does not nullify our own voice. In fact most groups have clear 'Standing Orders' that enable member's opinions to be heard for the greater good.

Expressing a critical comment should not imply disloyalty, rather the opposite. Very often it is because we care for the greater good that we feel compelled to speak up. The Member of Parliament, David Lammy, recently said: "You can be critical of your own country but still love it".

We should always be aware of the prejudice of the group. Every group has a prepared position on a variety of subjects. For example a football crowd have very clear loyalties during a match and are usually vocal in expressing their opinion.

All very well, but what happens when disagreement with the group leads to rejection, how is that managed?

I have just finished reading Fr Tony Flannery's latest book, *From the Outside*, an account of the last eight years since his public ministry of priesthood has been forbidden by the CDF. An Irish member of the Redemptorist Order, he has spent a lifetime caring for very many people across the island of Ireland, preaching and leading retreats. It is a challenging read that demands the attention of the reader, calling to

question the management of his position by Rome and his own religious order over a long period of time. A former friend of Flannery's described it as "a book of religion for adults", indeed an apt description. Asking questions is an integral part of a fulfilled faith, even if some of the answers are uncomfortable. I have always encouraged young people to ask questions but not always to expect a neatly packaged answer. There is a mystery in life that remains in spite of everything.

A compassionate argument listens to both sides, hears both points of view before reaching a conclusion demanding action. Being placed on the outside without the opportunity of dialogue only exacerbates the position when there is disagreement. At times of such stress and loneliness we should reflect on the words of the Nobel Laureate, Albert Camus who wrote: "Don't walk in front of me... I may not follow. Don't walk behind me... I may not lead. Walk beside me... just be my friend". We expect friendship even when there is disagreement over principle.

Rejection and exclusion are cul-de-sac solutions when a disagreement occurs. It is often said that a family can be defined as the place where it is safe to disagree with one another, being aware that a relationship of love exists that is strong and lasting.

Trust and the comfort of personal security allow honest views to be expressed as each person within the group strives to experience an understanding of another's point of view.

We sometimes use the phrase 'speaking when the time is right'. We all know that we can exaggerate disagreement by saying



the wrong thing at the wrong time. Sometimes it is best to let a point ride to a later date when a dispassionate exchange may take place in a more conducive atmosphere.

In the light of the recent news that the seminary at Womersley is to close due to a lack of new students, Flannery's reflection on his experience of seminary life offer much food for thought. His description of a narrow and tightly controlled atmosphere challenges the suitability of seminary training for the future priestly ministry of its students.

With the recent publication of the IICSA report on abusive behaviour within the Catholic Church in England, surely the time has come to re-examine the context of vocation and preparation of our priests? One practical outcome from this whole sorry mess would be for our hierarchy to establish a National Commission on the nature of priesthood, patterns of preparation for ministry and options for parish life.

It is no longer possible to continue with a model of priesthood that is outmoded and is, in so many ways, dysfunctional. That will mean confronting issues that some would rather not face. We should expect that those with

the courage to speak out are listened to and their opinions valued. Another perspective must be sought if we are to find credible solutions.

We shouldn't be fearful of such honest discussion; rather we should welcome it as our opportunity to contribute to Mission. At every moment the Church exists in historical time. In our 'otherness' we might attempt to ignore the society that it is our lot to share. We may agree or disagree with the surrounding milieu that we experience, but we cannot ignore it.

Our appreciation of scriptural narrative is testimony to expert scholarship over many years. Some of the conclusions drawn from such scholarship might be uncomfortable for us to assimilate but rejection out of hand limits our honesty and challenges our integrity.

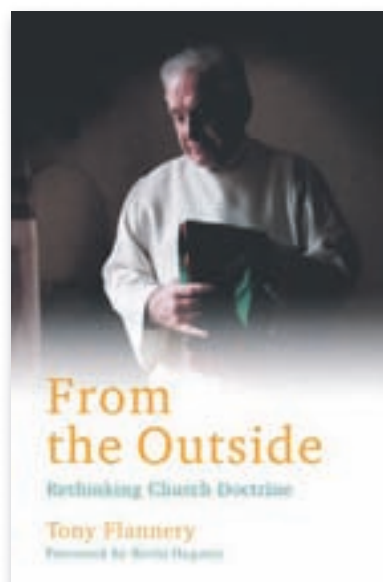
So why not call a National Commission on priesthood where our voices, many and varied, might be heard for the greater good of all? We have a narrow window of opportunity before church doors are locked as the age profile of our

priests advances. Closure will not be temporary as with Covid, but long term due to a structural failure of our Catholic Community to recognise the need for radical change before it is too late.

Reflect back some 60 years to the time when John XXIII considered calling a Council. Knowing what he knew about the entrenched views of the Roman Curia, he must have been fearful of opening the windows to let fresh air in. But he did so from a position of faith, he trusted in the Holy Spirit and that trust enabled him to act.

Too often, when someone offers a dissenting opinion, rather than address their point of view, we accuse them of acting in bad faith, of not understanding the details of the argument. Their journey in faith becomes a lonely trek in an arid desert wilderness.

Tony Flannery writes from the experience of such a personal desert journey, his words challenge many preconceptions that are accepted without question. He is to be thanked for this honest contribution to a journey that it is ours to share.



I have always encouraged young people to ask questions but not always to expect a neatly packaged answer

Fr Francis Marsden



The need for us Catholics to know our Scriptures thoroughly

Bible Sunday. How should we as Catholics relate to Born-again Bible Believers, so-called?

One afternoon I was walking through a Merseyside shopping precinct en route to buy some stationery. I noticed three men sitting on benches. One wore a yellow fluorescent jacket which declared “Jesus saves”. Agreed. In front of them a short elderly man, Bible in hand, was shouting the Good News at all and sundry, but all and sundry were walking on by, paying no attention.

Seeing me, the preacher cried out: “Even the priest walks past.” Embarrassing, certainly. Inside the stationer’s, I decided that if he shouted again when I walked back, I would engage him in “dialogue.”

Well he did: “Even the priest walks past!” So I stopped and asked: “Which church are you from?” One of his mates came up and shoved a crumpled leaflet into my hand. I unfolded it . . . “List of Catholic Heresies and Human Traditions adopted and perpetuated by the Roman Catholic Church in the course of 1600 years.”

Obviously it wasn’t to be an ecumenical tea-party!

I never knew we sponsored so many “heresies”: wax candles, veneration of angels and ‘dead saints’, the Mass as a daily celebration, the ‘worship’ of Mary, Mother of God, Extreme Unction, purgatory, the Latin language, the papacy, kissing the pope’s feet, worship of the cross, images and relics, holy water, the veneration of St Joseph, baptism of bells, Friday and Lenten fasting, priestly celibacy, the Rosary, transubstantiation, the ‘adoration of the wafer,’ the scapular, indulgences, confession to a priest, the Ave Maria, the “apocryphal books” of the Bible, the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary, and papal infallibility.

Here were all the supposed iniquities of Catholicism in a tidy chronological list.

We joined in lively debate. The younger “evangelist” kindly in-

formed me that I wasn’t saved. If I was truly saved, you see, I would leave the Catholic Church. He knew much more than I did about the state of my soul. He could tell me that I didn’t really have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I objected. He firmly put me in my place: “You only think you have, but you don’t!” Good news?

The Catholic Church is wrong, he said, because it teaches that you can’t know for certain if you are saved. (Well, we have firm hope and pray for final perseverance). Whereas in his Bible-sect he enjoyed infallible knowledge that he personally was saved and destined for glory, alleluia! I wondered how he could object to the canonisation of saints, when he had already canonised himself.

The Catholic Church teaches people, he alleged, that they can save themselves by their own good works (It doesn’t! That’s Pelagianism). He held to justification by faith alone: only believe in the Lord, nothing else, and yippee, you are irrevocably saved! Once saved, always saved! Doesn’t the New Testament teach that baptism, keeping the commandments, repenting of sin, receiving Jesus’ Body and Blood, and an active love of neighbour are normally necessary for salvation too?

Such Fundamentalism claims to take every word of the Bible literally. It disrespects its literary genre or culture. Human traditions are ungodly. If a particular tradition isn’t explicitly commanded in the Bible, it is corrupt. It ignores the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised his disciples “will lead you into all truth.” It contradicts Jesus’ promise to remain with his Church until the end of the age. (Matt 28:20)

In their *sola scriptura* world, the Bible alone says what is permitted. It proposes Christianity, as the religion of a Book, a written text, like in Islam. However, Jesus never said to his apostles: “Write a New Testament and whatever is not included



The Adoration of the Trinity, by Albrecht Dürer (1511): from top to bottom: Holy Spirit (dove), God the Father and the crucified Christ.

in it is false.” Instead he founded a community, the “Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” (1 Tim 3:15)

The *sola scriptura* doctrine of “the Bible, the Bible and only the Bible”, is ironically not to be found in Scripture. Martin Luther invented it about 1519. In fact St John’s Gospel says the opposite: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (Jn 21:25)

The fact that such Bible-only sects do accept the New Testament as the Word of God is nevertheless a back-handed compliment to the Catholic Church. It was Catholic saints who wrote the NT books, recognised them as divinely inspired, discarded other non-apostolic works, and drew up the canon of books approved for reading at the Eucharist – the NT.

Catholic monks and scholars were copying and circulating NT manuscripts for 14 centuries before the first “Bible-only” sectary ever existed. Anyone who accepts the NT is implicitly depending upon the witness of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The Holy Spirit dove did not fly down from heaven at Pentecost with the completed NT in its beak.

Another error of Bible-only sects is their emphasis on a subjective experience of “being saved” or “being

born again.” Often this replaces the traditional, Biblical route of repentance of sin, profession of faith, baptism and the Eucharist. They reduce the sacraments to mere ritual ordinances, not the normal, essential channels of grace which regenerate our souls.

St John Henry Newman wrote: “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.” These sectaries have minimal understanding of Church history. About 330 AD, they say, Constantine founded the Roman Catholic Church to replace genuine Christianity with pagan customs.

They ignore Jesus’ foundation of his indefectible Church upon the Rock, St Peter. (Matt 16:18 ff). Instead, they believe Jesus’ church did fail – horror of horrors, it became Roman Catholic! Never fear – they have restored genuine Christianity in their little Bible-congregations!

In reality, Divine Revelation was always wider than the written Scriptures alone. It began with the Apostles’ experience of Jesus’ life and Resurrection. At first they communicated this by preaching and teaching – Oral Tradition. “Tradition” means simply “that which is handed on,” from Latin tradere, to hand over. St Paul’s epistles mention this oral tradition, in Greek, *paradosis*.

In the early decades there was no written NT scripture. As the Apostles’ generation was dying out, their written Gospel “memoirs,” written

between 60 and 100 AD, preserved a reliable account of Jesus’ principal words and deeds. These texts crystallise the key events of Jesus’ life, but they do not contain everything. They constitute Written Tradition.

Oral Tradition and Written Tradition therefore complement each other. The Oral Tradition now survives in the early Church’s life – its martyrdoms and saints, its prayers, liturgies and Creeds, the writings and sermons of the Fathers, the great Councils and Synods. The written Scriptures became an important part in the matrix of life in the early Church, but they were never the only element.

Many of the so-called “Catholic heresies” listed earlier do exist in Scripture, in seed: the veneration of Mary – “all generations shall call me blessed;” her Immaculate Conception (“full of grace”) and Assumption (Rev. 12); the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist (John 6); the priestly absolution of sins (John 20:23). Others like fasting, anointing the sick, the Mass, the Hail Mary, purgatory, holy water and relics are Biblical too.

This demonstrates the need for us Catholics to know our Scriptures thoroughly. “Ignorance of the Scriptures is indeed ignorance of Christ.” (St Jerome). Nevertheless, duly chastised, I will refrain from baptising bells and kissing the pope’s feet in future.

BOOKCASE

Parishes could benefit from communal study of book on priesthood

JESUS AS PRIEST FOR OUR TIME: ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK by Father Bernard Bonnot. Paperback - 237 pages. Available to buy from all good bookshops or online at Amazon.

Father Bernard Bonnot thought through and wrote this book as a meditation upon the meaning of his 50 years as a Catholic parish priest. Jesus, he notes correctly, was not a priest among his own people, not a descendant of Aaron.

He was a layperson with no appointed role in the Temple to offer sacrifice. Indeed, like many Jews of his time, he was critical of the Temple priests for their collaboration with Rome, as his dramatic cleansing of the Temple illustrates.

Jesus was closest to and may have been a Pharisee, which is why the New Testament shows him so often in spirited dialogue with Pharisees. It is important to note, though Fr Bernard does not go into this in sufficient detail, that with one exception (divorce), Jesus affirms the understanding of the spirit of the law/Torah held by the Pharisee followers of Hillel as opposed to the more restrictive understanding of Shammai.

Interestingly, Rabbinic Judaism also follows the Hillelite interpretation, so Christianity and Judaism to this day have a very similar understanding of how to live out our respective understandings of being in covenant with the one God of Israel. The book would have been deepened by this larger context, since Jesus lived and died a



faithful Jew of his time, affirming the law/covenant and demanding, like the Hebrew prophets before him, that his followers fulfil the law by living it in their hearts and in their deeds, caring for those in need.

Jesus did not in any sense “destroy” the law by “radicalising” it, as Fr Bernard states. He deepened our understanding of it and what is central to it, love of God and neighbour (Lv. 19:18, Dt. 6:5).

The key biblical passages behind the title are those in Genesis, where a non-Jewish priest, Melchizedek, comes out to congratulate Abraham on his victory in battle, and the references to it in Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7. Fr Bernard goes into detail about the biblical understandings of priesthood in the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament.

He goes through the lengthy history of the development of the

understandings and practices of priesthood in Christianity, breaking down the key understandings and sometimes misunderstandings in various periods.

Although the Church’s views on priesthood became frozen at the Council of Trent reacting to the Protestant Reformation, they were radically re-understood by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent official statements, culminating in Pope Francis’ emphasis on priestly ministry as a pastoral rather than hierarchical calling.

Throughout the book Fr Bernard illustrates his interpretations of priestly ministry with the understandings he has gained from his half-century of parish service to the priestly people of God, the Church.

He notes, accurately, that worldwide, there is a crisis of fewer men believing themselves to be called to the priesthood, which has had consequences such as the closing and consolidation of many parishes, making it more difficult for Catholics to come together and celebrate the Last Supper, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

He urges the ordination of married men, noting that the apostles were married; the ordination of women as deacons, noting that the early Church had many women deacons; and even the ordination of women as priests, since none of these are doctrinally defined.

(On 8th April, 2020, Pope Francis announced creation of new commission to study the ordination of women as deacons. But he has reiterated the Church’s ban on women priests, citing St John Paul II’s declaration on it in the document *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, though this could be overturned by a future pope because it was not formally, solemnly proclaimed as infallible.)

Fr Bernard’s book should be read not only by priests but by laypersons, and could well serve as a text for an ongoing communal dialogue within parishes. It could help dedicated laypersons to understand better their priestly role within the community and in the celebration of the Eucharist, which was and is a communal meal, not simply the action of a single person.

Reviewed by Eugene Fisher

Ellis Heasley

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Ethiopia’s Tigray crisis: Serious human rights concerns amid violence

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) recently raised concerns at reports indicating that atrocity crimes may be underway in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, where a violent civil war has been taking place since the start of November.

The conflict began on 4th November when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a military offensive against the Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF) forces in response to an attack on a federal army base which the Tigrayan authorities described as pre-emptive.

The Ethiopian authorities have claimed that their forces are only targeting the Tigrayan leadership, forces and allied militias; however, this does not appear to be the case. Numerous egregious human rights violations against civilians have been reported over the course of the conflict. These include rape, extrajudicial killings, and the indiscriminate bombing of homes, churches, mosques, educational establishments and other civilian structures.

On 22nd November *The Sunday Telegraph* reported that the country “may be on the edge of genocide,” detailing violence including the decapitation of four children, and babies being cut out of pregnant women. CSW has also received disturbing reports of house to house shootings in the town of Zalambesa that allegedly resulted in the extrajudicial executions of over 50 people.

The conflict also raises serious human rights concerns for Eritrean refugees residing in the region. Last week, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Human Rights Concern-Eritrea (HRCE) confirmed that thousands of Eritrean troops, including mechanised armour divisions and conscripts, have been fighting in Tigray since hostilities began, and have sustained heavy casualties.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), there are an estimated 100,000 Eritrean refugees currently residing in the

Tigray region, primarily in four camps within reach of the Eritrean border. As regular readers of this column will be aware, these refugees fled a government that is committing some of the gravest human rights violations in the world today, including of the right to freedom of religion or belief. With the presence of Eritrean troops confirmed in Tigray, there are genuine concerns that these refugees may be targeted or even forcibly repatriated to Eritrea, where they would likely face indefinite arbitrary detention, torture or even execution.

Additionally, concerns are also rising regarding the impact of the conflict on neighbouring Sudan, where an estimated 40,000 people have already fled. This could present that country with yet another humanitarian crisis, placing an additional strain on Sudan’s fragile democratic transition.

From these developments, it is clear that the international community must take swift action, and it is encouraging to hear the UN Security Council will finally be holding a session on Tigray on 24th November. Ethiopia must be reminded of its numerous national, regional and international legal obligations to ensure protection for refugees and other vulnerable populations, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.

Please pray for the situation in Tigray. Pray that God would raise up peacemakers who would bring an end to the conflict. Pray also that God would comfort all those who have lost their loved ones, homes and livelihoods, and that he would protect vulnerable groups like the Eritreans currently residing in the region’s refugee camps. Finally, please pray that the international community would take robust action to end the violence and to hold those responsible for serious violations of human rights, some of which may amount to atrocity crimes, to account.



Seminarians at the Pontifical North American College attend the ordination of deacons in St Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican on 1st October. (Catholic News Service photo/Paul Haring)

Fr Michael Collins



The Octave of Christmas

“If my grandchildren come near me at Christmas, I’ll shoot them,” said the lady sitting on the wall beside me. She was addressing a friend as she poured tea from a flask. “I’ve got this far, and I want to stay this way till the vaccines arrive.”

Her companion nodded in vigorous agreement. “I couldn’t agree more with you,” she affirmed. “And the bonus is that I won’t have to bake like mad for Christmas.”

Being very polite, I turned away from the conversation so as not to eargwig. But I had visions of the grandchildren piling out of a car outside the house on Christmas morning. Windows shut, curtains drawn, lights off. Where is Granny? A chink pulls across in one of the nets, and a side window opens. The nozzle of a M2 Browning machine gun protrudes slowly and sprays the sky with a warning round of ammunition. The family race back to the car and take off like lightning. Granny meanwhile retreats, puts on the kettle and settles down to watch the Queen’s Speech.

I told the children of Fifth Form in Dublin’s St Conleth’s College, where I am chaplain about Granny with the gun. They squealed with delight as they imagined their own grandmothers weekly shooting lessons before Christmas. “My Granny can use the All4One voucher I got her last Christmas at a gun range,” suggested one 10-year-old. The hands waved imploringly at me as they wanted to tell the class what a good shot they thought their own grandmother might be. Curiously, grandfathers did not figure. If they ever introduced the right for citizens to bear arms in these blessed Isles, I foresee this bunch will be the first to purchase machine guns.

There has been a lot of talk in Ireland over the past week about the Government “opening the economy” and “saving Christmas.” You can’t blame anyone. People are genuinely tired and not a little traumatised by the events of the past year. While governments place us in lockdowns and introduce coloured tiers, the pandemic has turned the world upside down. Understandably, people want Christmas, which is one of the stable things in the calendar, to be the same.

Christmas carols, mince pies, roast turkey, sherry trifle, twinkling lights on glittering trees – they all make up a lovely end of the year. True, Christmas is often a time of sad memories, and even regrets. There is a longing for times past, where marshmallows

The Adoration of the Shepherds, by Italian artist Guido Reni. The feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated on 25th December, the first day in the eight-day celebration of the Octave of Christmas. (CNS/Bridgeman Images)



roasted over the fire and the air was filled with roasting chestnuts over charcoal. Even if these were only in our imagination, that is what we want. When a great many people ceased to believe in Jesus and his birth, they transferred their longing to a mythical Santa Claus invented by Coca Cola.

Over the past few days, my family have been trying to make Christmas Day arrangements, and who would host who. Rules of Six don’t apply in Ireland, but I suggest a Rule of Eight.

For centuries, Christmas and Easter have been followed by an Octave, a period of eight days in which the feast is prolonged. Indeed, the prayers at Mass specifically refer to each successive day as “today.”

I would like to propose that the

Octave of Christmas might help get some of us over a quandary. If we embrace the traditional octave, we can spread out the festival. So, instead of packing the house with well-meaning family, we could have a diary of visits. Then people can feel free to visit at an appropriate time. I know it means foregoing the traditional meal for some, but this is a particular year where what we want to do is replaced by what we can do.

By observing the traditional Octave of Christmas, we can also focus on the wondrous event of that first night. The period of Advent, which we began last week, is a month-long preparation for Christmas. It makes sense then that we might prolong the festival by a further week. Just think, Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* grew

out of liturgical music provided in the days following the feast of Christmas.

In the old days, the Christmas Octave was followed shortly afterwards (on Twelfth Night) by the Octave of the Epiphany. Once more, the feast was too important to slip by on just one day and so the festival continued for a further week of prayer and carols.

These thoughts bring to mind the calendar of saints which we observe throughout the year. Since the beginning of the Christian faith, the day of a person’s death was called their *dies natalis* - the day of birth into eternal life. That comes from the time when the date of a person’s birth was seldom remembered but when the day of death was carefully recorded – often for the payment of death duties!

The Christmas Octave is arranged as follows:

Sunday within the octave: feast of the Holy Family; celebrated on Friday, 30th December when Christmas is a Sunday;

26th December: feast of Saint Stephen;

27th December: feast of John the Apostle;

28th December: feast of the Holy Innocents

29th-31st December: days within the octave, with assigned readings and prayers, on which the celebration of optional memorials is permitted according to special rubrics (but as noted above, when Christmas is a Sunday, the feast of the Holy Family is celebrated on 30th December);

1st January, octave day of the Nativity; solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

As the year passed, these dates were added to until the whole year was full and saints had to crowd together to share one feast day. The Second Vatican Council tried to whittle these down and a committee examined the historical evidence for the saints venerated over the centuries. There was general consternation when saints such as Christopher and Philomena were declared to be the product of little more than pious myth and Pope Paul VI struck their names from the calendar of the saints.

The feast days still resound in popular culture and even today historians refer to the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, rather than the date of 24th August, 1572.

In the 18th century, the people of Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Sea called tropical storms after saints. Given the season, these were generally saints whose feast days were celebrated between August and November.

So, if there are any children reading this letter, I don’t want to alarm you. Please don’t worry – I am sure you will be quite safe visiting your grandmothers on Christmas Day. However, if there are any children in south county Dublin, perhaps it might be a good idea to wear a bullet-proof vest, just in case!



The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God: The 1969 revision of the Roman calendar restored it as a solemnity concluding the Christmas Octave.

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SUNDAY WORSHIP



Preparing the way for the Lord

6th December –
2nd Sunday of Advent

1st Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

God is coming to save his people and to open up our way into the future.

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received
from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
"In the desert prepare
the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain
and hill be made low;
the uneven ground
shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the
Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the
Lord has spoken."

Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem,
herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

See, the Lord God
comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock
like a shepherd;
he will gather the
lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

**2nd Reading: Second Epistle of
St Peter 3:8-14**

*God gives us time to repent and
so be ready to meet him when he
comes.*

But do not ignore this one fact,
beloved, that with the Lord one
day is like a thousand years, and a
thousand years are like one day.
The Lord is not slow about his
promise, as some think of
slowness, but is patient with you,
not wanting any to perish, but all
to come to repentance. But the
day of the Lord will come like a
thief, and then the heavens will
pass away with a loud noise, and



St John the Baptist Baptises the People, by Nicolas Poussin. Circa 1635.

the elements will be dissolved
with fire, and the earth and
everything that is done on it will
be disclosed.

Since all these things are to be
dissolved in this way, what sort of
persons ought you to be in leading
lives of holiness and godliness,
waiting for and hastening the
coming of the day of God, because
of which the heavens will be set
ablaze and dissolved, and the
elements will melt with fire? But,
in accordance with his promise, we
wait for new heavens and a new
earth, where righteousness is at
home.

Therefore, beloved, while you
are waiting for these things, strive
to be found by him at peace,
without spot or blemish.

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

*John the Baptist prepares the
people for the coming of their
Saviour.*

The beginning of the good news
of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As
it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
"See, I am sending my messenger
ahead of you, who will prepare
your way; the voice of one crying
out in the desert: 'Prepare the way
of the Lord, make his paths
straight,'"

John the baptiser appeared in the

desert, proclaiming a baptism of
repentance for the forgiveness of
sins. And people from the whole
Judean countryside and all the
people of Jerusalem were going
out to him, and were baptised by
him in the River Jordan,
confessing their sins. Now John
was clothed with camel's hair,
with a leather belt around his
waist, and he ate locusts and wild
honey. He proclaimed: "The one
who is more powerful than I is
coming after me; I am not worthy
to stoop down and untie the thong
of his sandals. I have baptised you
with water; but he will baptise you
with the Holy Spirit."

Our need for preachers

The ministry of John the Baptist
could be the focus of today's
homily. He prepared the minds of
people for the age of the Messiah.
God sends the message of
salvation and meaningful living to
us through each other. St Paul
once asked: "How can people
know about God if they have
never heard? and how can they
hear if nobody is sent to them?"
He holds the vocation of
preaching as vital, if God is to be
known and loved. Jesus found his
first disciples among the circle of
the Baptist's followers. John

taught the value of self-control
and of prayer, and urged them to
listen to the inner voice of God in
their hearts. The high point of
John's short ministry was meeting
with Jesus. As well as baptising
Jesus, he encouraged some of his
own followers to join the Jesus
movement. It was through the
Baptist that Andrew and his
brother Peter, and Philip and
Nathanael became apostles.

Each of us can help other people
to know and love God. If we were
more committed, maybe we could
do more to influence others
towards faith. Parents can
introduce their children to God by
teaching them about trust and
prayer. But this will only be
effective if built on the example of
their actual life. In all sorts of way,
people are in position to influence
others, for good or ill. This is
clearly so for those who work in
the communications. But ordinary
people doing ordinary jobs can
also influence the views and
values of those they interact with.
Does our way of speaking and
behaving help others to share our
values, or do we confirm their
suspicion that this world is a
selfish and cynical place?

What about promoting vocations
to the priesthood or other ministry,

or any form of service to the
Church of Christ? The future of
our Church as an organised, priest-
served community handing on the
prayer-life and values of Jesus is
under serious question today. But
if enough people open their hearts
to God's work, like John the
Baptist and those first disciples,
Andrew and Philip and Peter, then
a way will be found to keep the
world aware of the saving message
of Christ. In the process, our
bishops may need to be urged by
many practising Catholics to open
up the priesthood to well
motivated married people, as well
as to the traditional but
diminishing cadre of the
voluntarily celibate.

Comfort my people

The word 'power' can have
negative echoes for us, suggesting
an overbearing will to dominate
others. Isaiah speaks about power
of the Lord that in a very different
way. God is like a shepherd
feeding his flock, gathering lambs
in his arms, holding them to his
breast, and gently leading the
ewes who are due to give birth.
This is a very tender power, a life-
force of faithful and enduring
love, a love that gathers and
nurtures and reassures. This is the
God whom John the Baptist
invites us to rediscover this
Advent.

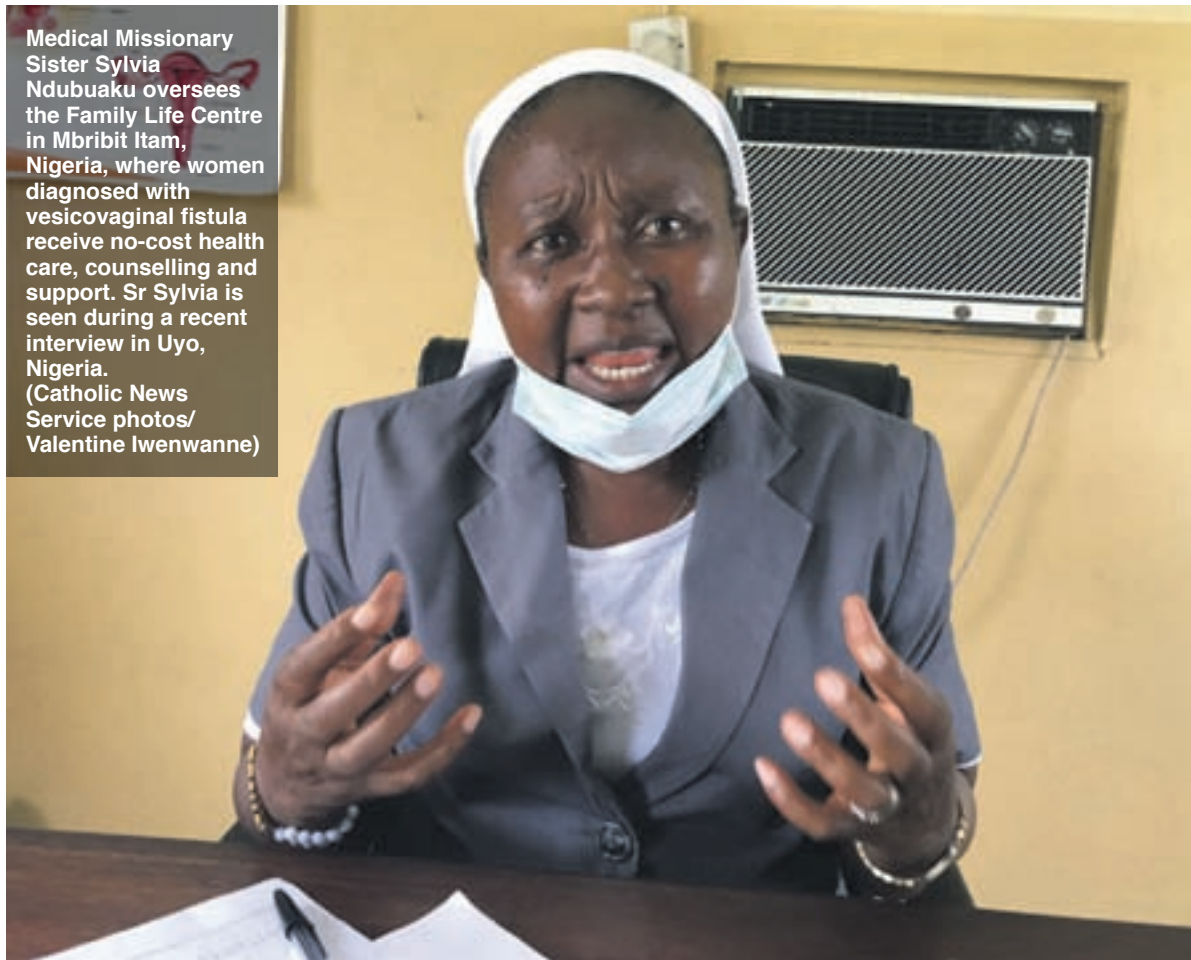
It is this God who comes to us
in the person of Jesus of
Nazareth. John the Baptist refers
to Jesus as "more powerful than I
am." Jesus is the powerful one, in
the sense that the first reading
defines power. He gives full
expression to God's tender love
that brings healing to the broken,
strength to the weak and rest to
the weary. It is this adult Jesus,
now risen Lord, whose coming
towards us and present to us we
celebrate at Christmas. The
Baptist calls us this Advent to
prepare a way in our lives for the
coming of this Lord, this
Shepherd, in whom *mercy and
faithfulness have met, justice and
peace have embraced.* (Responsorial Psalm). This is the
God whom we seek this Advent,
who can give greater depth to all
our other encounters.

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HEART OF THE MATTER

Nuns provide free maternal health care for fistula patients in Nigeria

Medical Missionary Sister Sylvia Ndubuaku oversees the Family Life Centre in Mbribit Itam, Nigeria, where women diagnosed with vesicovaginal fistula receive no-cost health care, counselling and support. Sr Sylvia is seen during a recent interview in Uyo, Nigeria. (Catholic News Service photos/ Valentine Iwenwanne)



Valentine Iwenwanne

It took some time, but Esther Edet finally received the health care she needed.

She credits the Medical Missionaries of Mary who run the Family Life Centre in Mbribit Itam, where women experiencing a variety of health issues, including fistula, are able to receive treatment and care. Edet, who asked that her real name not be used, is now 17 and continues to recover.

Edet's ordeal began when her stepmother forced her out of the house, accusing her of being responsible for her half-brother's unfortunate death. She was 15.

Moving in with a friend, Edet got involved in a romantic relationship at her friend's behest and soon became pregnant.

"He started sleeping with me because I didn't have money to feed," she told me. "He buys me food and some few other things I needed so I couldn't stop him. But he ran away when he got to know that I was (pregnant)."

That's when Edet's health began to deteriorate. The doctor Edet saw didn't help, leading her to contract vesicovaginal fistula, known as VVF.

Obstetric fistula is an abnormal

connection between the vagina and bladder or rectum through which urine and/or faeces continually leak.

Edet was taken to a traditional birthing home when it came time for her child to be born. But she experienced a prolonged and difficult labour and couldn't give birth.

"The baby was forced out, but it couldn't make it. When I started having problem, they directed us to this place (the Family Life Centre)," Edet told me.

Edet underwent fistula repair surgery at the centre, but still battled complications that included gynatrasia and foot drop, also known as drop foot, in which a person cannot lift the front part of one or both feet because of muscle weakness or paralysis.

The centre provides no-cost surgery and other health care to the less privileged in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria's oil rich state in the Niger Delta region.

Medical Missionary Sister Sylvia Ndubuaku, who oversees the hospital, said the congregation focuses "much more on maternal health needs of the people in far-to-reach communities where access to medical doctors is limited."

The sisters provide medical,

physical and spiritual care for women and girls, treating about 200 patients annually. Care this year, however, has been complicated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Around the world, 50,000 to 100,000 women develop obstetric fistula annually, with upward of 60 per cent of the cases in Africa. The World Health Organization estimated that more than two million women in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean are living with VVF. The WHO said the illness can develop after prolonged and obstructed labour and may result from common African practices of child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Health experts say 200,000 women live with fistula in Nigeria. No data is kept on the number of women who have died from the condition. The disease is prevalent in Nigeria because of sociological and cultural beliefs and practices, poverty and poor health care.

In response, the sisters and centre staff engage visit villages to look for women with VVF. They distribute fliers to help raise awareness; they also have quarterly radio and television programmes and catchy public service announcements which are

broadcast to reach a wider audience.

Sr Sylvia said fistula is a preventable condition that requires a match between a foetus and a mother's pelvis. A mismatch can lead to a difficult delivery, she explained, "and may require a cesarean section to get the baby out."

"But when a girl is given out in marriage at a very early stage when her pelvis is still maturing, it pushes her into hard labour, which may not turn out well in the end," Sr Sylvia said.

The nuns also provide rehabilitation, mental health counselling and skill development in soap making, hair dressing, sewing and baking to women and girls who have lost their self-esteem and means of livelihood.

"We speak with them with soothing words to encourage them, and that early approach loosens them up for treatment and expedites their recovery process because they have been traumatised," Sr Sylvia said.

Iyang Joy, who was part of the skills development programme, told me the love and care of the sisters is evident daily. "My mum was brought here for a surgery in November 2019, while staying with her in the hospital; I decided to join the girls in the rehabilitation centre to perfect my

hair styling craft and the sisters approved of it," she explained.

"When it was time the girls whom the rehabilitation centre was actually set up for to graduate and become independent, I was surprised to be part of them because I am not a patient," Joy said.

Joy was settled with about £225 to buy hair dressing equipment and a power generation system to set up her own salon, allowing her to earn money to continue her education and support her family.

The sisters also have a natural family planning unit which teaches couples about relationships and natural family planning derived from the Billings ovulation method. Sister Cornelia Udoka, who runs the unit, said she and the staff help couples understand the method so they can plan when it is best to have a child.

To reach more women with the disease, Sister Ngozi Ahunaya, who heads the centre's Safe Motherhood team, and her colleagues travel into communities with a mobile clinic. They provide temperature and blood pressure tests, diabetes screening and treatment for malaria and typhoid. They also administer immunisation services, school health and other treatments for those who cannot regularly visit the hospital.

Women religious from the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Nigeria taught Iyang Joy hair styling skills and provided funds for equipment so she could open her own salon business. Joy, pictured in Uyo, Nigeria, said the love and care of the sisters is evident daily.



Questions and answers... with Fr Francis Doyle

Why did Jesus call himself the ‘Son of Man’?

Q. We refer to Christ by various titles: the Messiah, the Lamb of God, Son of the Father, etc. But I have never understood why, in the Scriptures, Jesus refers to himself as the “Son of Man”. That sounds, to me, a little less than divine. Why does Christ call himself that?

A. Your question is an insightful one and has been the subject of considerable discussion by Scripture scholars. St John Paul II (on 29th April, 1987) devoted one of his weekly audience talks to explaining what Jesus meant when he called himself “Son of Man”. That title is used in the four Gospels, always within the sayings of Jesus; and depending on the context, it can refer either to Christ’s humanity or to his divinity.

At certain times, the pope pointed out, Jesus seems to be highlighting the fact that “he took his place with that same name as a true man among men, as a son of a woman, Mary of Nazareth”, one who shares entirely our earthly condition and suffering.

An example comes in Matthew’s Gospel (8:20) where Jesus says, “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.”

In other passages, though, Jesus uses the title with clear reference to the prophecy of Daniel (7:13-14), which was viewed by all as messianic: “I saw coming with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man...He received dominion, splendour and kingship; all nations, peoples and tongues will serve him.”

When Jesus cures the paralytic who has been lowered through the roof, for example, he ascribes divinity to himself by first saying to those looking on, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth...” (Mk 2:10).

Even more patently, when on trial before the Sanhedrin he was asked: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus answers: “I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mk 14:61-62).

So the one title, Son of Man, had a dual purpose: to lay claim to Christ’s unique nature, which was both human and divine.

Q. Several years ago, my wife and I were asked to be the godparents of five children whose parents were joining the Catholic Church at the time. We willingly agreed. Later, the couple had four more children; we were asked to be their godparents as well and were proud to do so.

Two years ago, though, the parents decided to leave the Catholic faith. Their children are now ages two through 13, and we are wondering what are our responsibilities to those children now?

A. What pleases me, with your question, is how seriously you view your responsibilities as godparents. That is the ideal the Church seeks to achieve, although many sponsors fall short. The Church’s *Code of Canon Law* in Canon No. 872 states that a godparent ‘helps the baptised person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfil faithfully the obligations inherent in it’. So a continuing relationship is clearly envisioned.

Even in the circumstances you describe, you can continue to fulfil some of the responsibilities – mainly, to continue to serve as examples of faith-filled Catholics by the tenor of your lives and sacramental practice and by praying regularly for the children you have sponsored.

You might even consider sending them a card or note each year on the anniversaries of their baptism, but this would depend on how that would be viewed by the children’s parents and you are in a better position to measure that than I.

If you lived in the same vicinity and if the parents had simply fallen away from Catholic practice through laziness or the general busyness of family life, you might even offer to take the children to church and to religious education classes.

But what I suspect from your question is that the parents made a conscious decision to withdraw from the Catholic faith – in which case you might drive them (and their children) further away by pressing too hard.

If you are still friendly with the parents, you might consider having an honest discussion with them – explaining to them that you still feel some personal responsibility for the children’s growth in the faith but that you don’t want to do anything that would offend, and asking the parents what they would be comfortable with.

Q. In Matthew 18:21-22, we are given a standard of forgiveness which I interpret to mean that we are to forgive always (‘not seven times, but seventy seven’). I’m at a loss, though, as to how to apply that in my case. For a long time, I’ve had a terrible relationship with my mother, who lost custody of two of her three children (including myself) for continually putting us in unsafe and inappropriate situations.

I’ve never had a problem feeling compassion for my mother and I often pray for her. But I decided a long time ago that when I had children of my own, I would love my mother from a distance and not give her the chance to hurt or influence my children. A few times since then, I’ve tried giving her opportunities to redeem herself only to find out that I was wrong – to the detriment of my children’s well-being.

Despite this, I am forever being asked by friends and family to give my mother another chance by allowing her some controlled interaction so that she’ll know the blessing of grandchildren. What I’m struggling with is this: Is it enough that God knows I’ve forgiven my mother, or must I show it by giving her another chance with my children?

A. You are correct in thinking that the mandate for a Christian is to strive to forgive always. From the facts as you’ve explained them, I believe that you’ve done that. (Bringing the person before the Lord in prayer is a good first step to forgiveness, because it reminds us that all of us are flawed and in need of God’s help.)

I hope that your mother knows you’ve forgiven her, and I imagine you’ve been able to communicate that to her.

Forgiveness, though, does not demand that you put your children in peril, and you, as their parent, are in the best position to know what would cause them harm. It is difficult for me to make a clear

call here with limited information: I have no idea what your mother’s original missteps were that caused her to lose custody, nor what damage you perceived when you tried giving her the chance to be an active grandmother, nor what sort of ‘controlled interaction’ your friends and family are now suggesting.

In situations like this, you are probably best advised to have a face-to-face discussion with a priest or other trusted counsellor where all of the circumstances can be reviewed.

Q. Recently, a local priest refused to bury a resident of his town because the person did not go to church. The priest was told that the deceased had confessed and received Communion on his deathbed, but that did not seem to matter. Fortunately, a neighbouring priest was willing to celebrate the funeral Mass. What should we do with regard to the first priest, except to pray for him (which I am doing)?

A. Sometimes in cases like this, the story contains elements of hearsay and the facts become clouded. But if it really happened as you describe, then I would disagree with the first priest’s determination.

According to the *Code of Canon Law* (No. 1176), Catholics have the right to a church funeral, and this is generally true even if the deceased was not regularly practising his or her faith at the time of death. In certain situations, Catholic funeral rites may be refused, but only by exception –

notably (in No. 1184) for ‘manifest sinners who cannot be granted ecclesiastical funerals without public scandal of the faithful’. Notorious members of crime syndicates would be an example of this.

No matter how openly sinful a person’s life has been, a Catholic funeral is never to be denied if the person has manifested repentance before dying. When opera star Luciano Pavarotti died in Italy in 2007, some expressed surprise that a funeral Mass was celebrated in his hometown cathedral with messages of condolence from an archbishop and even from Pope Benedict XVI, since it was commonly known that, following a divorce, he had conceived a child with his secretary, whom he later married in a civil ceremony.

According to several news sources, Pavarotti’s pastor stated that the singer had been reconciled to the Church before his death.

In the case you mention, if the priest had any doubt as to the proper course of action, Canon No. 1184 states that he should have sought the advice of his bishop. In such situations, I believe that the presumption should normally favour the deceased – a presumption only to be overridden in extreme situations.

Simply being a sinner does not render one unworthy of a Catholic burial – in fact, it’s precisely because we are sinners that we need the funeral Mass.

■ Please note that Fr Doyle cannot answer readers’ personal questions through this column.



A funeral takes place in Westminster Cathedral. Catholics have the right to a church funeral, and this is generally true even if the deceased was not regularly practising his or her faith at the time of death. (Photo: © Mazur/catholicchurch.org.uk)

FAITH ALIVE: ADVENT – WEEK 2

Where to find God: Advent conversion in 2020

David Gibson

Long months of the vicious Covid-19 pandemic preceded the arrival of this year's Advent season leading to Christmas. Neither Advent nor Christmas in 2020 will escape the pandemic's shadow.

But Advent is a season for conversion, a hopeful, forward-looking period that keeps spiritual growth high in mind. The season asks where God is found.

Was God present despite the pandemic's ravages? It entailed real pain and proved stunningly disruptive. Yet many attest that God-like developments occurred in all kinds of homes and communities during this time.

Conversion during Advent is, in particular, "a question of converting our idea of God," Pope Francis says. It is a time "to welcome not a fairy-tale character, but the God who challenges us, involves us and before whom a choice is imposed," he remarked on 15th December, 2019.

How might a person's idea of God need to grow? A speech Pope Francis gave in December 2018 described several ways the idea of God goes awry,

"The Bible and the Church's history show clearly" how believers "can frequently come to think and act as if they were the owners of salvation and not its recipients," Pope Francis explained. He cautioned:

"Being Christian ... does not mean acting like an elite group who think they have God in their pocket but as people who know that they are loved by the Lord" despite their imperfections.

Clearly, disturbing events in our surrounding world can shake us and leave us asking once again who God is for us or, more simply, how life suddenly could become painfully frustrating and confusing. Has the 2020 pandemic



A deacon lights candles on the Advent wreath. The Second Sunday of Advent is celebrated this weekend.

(Catholic News Service photo/Jaclyn Lippelmann, Catholic Standard)

often been such an event?

Early in Christian history a different kind of event, but also one stemming from the early Christians' immediate world, shook believers and left them wondering if they had misunderstood a promise of God. We hear about this on Advent's second Sunday in 2020.

A reading that Sunday from the Second Letter of Peter (3:8-14) describes a big issue that arose at that time and ultimately prompted many to refocus their understanding of God. The issue involved Christ's second coming in glory at the end of time, which is a key Advent theme today.

Many early Christians apparently expected the second coming of Christ to occur quickly. But parents and grandparents died as time passed, and some Christians began to wonder if God had delayed the promise of the second coming.

Unsurprisingly, there were scoffers who began to suggest not only that God had delayed the second coming, but that there might be no second coming at all. Some insinuated that God no longer was intimately involved with this world's life, according to a note in the New American Bible.

But God's promise remained, the Second Letter of Peter affirmed. It advised the Christian community that "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day." Moreover, "the Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard 'delay,' but he is patient with you" (3:8-9).

It was a disturbing moment in time among early Christians. It seems, though, that conversion and renewed faith followed in its wake, as the author of Second Peter urged Christians to turn to asking "what sort of persons" they ought to be and to focus their energies on conducting themselves "in holiness and devotion" (3:11).

To hear God's voice, Christians pray, reflect, participate in worship or consult Scripture and the faith community, for example. But cannot an incarnate Lord also speak within the world and

through its ongoing events?

Did this occur for the ancient Christian community or with today's 2020 pandemic? Is God found and heard in the context of disturbing current events?

The pandemic threatened and changed human lives. It did this in ways that felt painful. Nonetheless, doors somehow were left open for good outcomes.

Suffering was no stranger to the pandemic. But the online, virtual methods that emerged for fulfilling the demands of jobs, schoolwork or essential shopping frequently yielded surprising human rewards.

Then there was the simple fact that so many now spent much more time at home in the company of family members or friends. How many of them found during this time that they were developing a renewed appreciation of each other and of their relationships?

The pandemic "has enabled us, perhaps for the first time in our lives, to recognise the deeply interconnected relationship of all living things and the urgent need for us to repent and change our lives," Franciscan Father Michael Perry (pictured right), a priest who is minister general of the Order of Friars Minor, observed in a homily in Assisi, Italy on 1st August.

"The call to repentance, conversion, to open our minds, hearts and lives to a new way of living together on this planet is more urgent now than at any other moment in human history," he said.

An Advent poem

Out of sight

Darkness has a way of
overtaking our senses,
our sight, our stability.
It suffocates, stifles.

It is difficult to find our way.

As it was in the beginning,
as it is now, as it was then.
And we wonder will
we ever see again?

And yet.

Out of sight.
Somewhere hidden
Something is growing.
Goodness itself

Light tucked inside
a teenage womb.
Tender and treasured
She taps her tummy as
expectant mothers do
Light rolls and kicks
and moves inside her.
Light from light
Immensity sheltered
in such a small space
Waiting to shine

It is the same now
We wait in anticipation

Pleading, begging, wishing,
longing, hoping

For the light to overtake
the darkness.

As in the beginning,
When the earth was
formless, void.
When darkness covered
the surface of the deep,
And light crashed through.

Christians are called, Fr Michael stressed, "to seek the way back towards God, towards one another, towards ourselves and towards creation."



Two girls wearing face masks pray during a Mass celebrated in September. Neither Advent nor Christmas in 2020 will escape the pandemic's shadow. But Advent is a season for conversion, a hopeful, forward-looking period that keeps spiritual growth high in mind.

(CNS photo/Chaz Muth)

Advent: it's a time for us to look both backwards and forwards

Stefan Kaminski

Advent has a complicated history. It is both an observance and a season that, like so many other practices in the Church, has been present and grown organically since the Church's early years, but took some time to find a certain formal unification.

The temptation with other practices that were manifested in this way, for example with the question of a celibate priesthood, is to say that the practice was only 'invented' much later on, whenever the first, formal, universal decree came into effect. This is neither true, nor does it represent a good understanding of the Church's development of doctrine or liturgical life.

It is difficult to pin down when Advent first began to be observed. The earliest record of Advent arises in 380AD, when a local synod held in Saragossa (Spain) established a three-week, Lenten-style fast from the 17th December to the Epiphany (6th January). This also appears to be the earliest record of the celebration of Christmas as a liturgical feast, which was variously kept on the 25th December or on the 6th January.

A synod in Gaul (France) in 581AD ordered a 40-day preparation for the Nativity beginning on the feast of St Martin of Tours (11th December). Fasting was required on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and on these days Holy Mass would be celebrated according to the Lenten liturgy. Advent thus became known as 'St Martin's Lent'.

Over the next few centuries, this practice spread to England, Italy, Germany and further afield. At the same time, the Lenten nature of the period began to be relaxed, and the 40 days reduced to the current four Sundays by the 11th century. The second half of the Middle Ages saw a continued back-and-forth as various popes and bishops, including St Charles Borromeo, sought to maintain the ancient spirit of penance, and to encourage the laity – rather than just the clergy – to practice this.

Whereas the Church in the West developed liturgies and offices for the Advent period even from the 6th century, the Greek Church does not have a dedicated liturgy. Instead, it continues to observe Advent as a period of 40 days of fasting, beginning with the feast of St Philip the Apostle on 14th November, during which meat, butter, milk and eggs are abstained from.

Our Advent season today, therefore, is one that is marked out primarily at the liturgical level; indeed, it constitutes the beginning of the Church's liturgical year – theoretically of far greater significance than the calendar year!

This new year is given its significance and validated, however, not simply in view of Christmas. The Nativity and its Octave are only celebrated because they foreshadow the



*The Adoration of the Shepherd
by Matthias Stomer c1634-1640*

Easter mystery; in turn, Easter is the Church's major feast because it promises Christ's second coming and the renewal of creation.

Thus the liturgical New Year, with the Advent season, marks the passage of time towards the end of this world and the Final Judgement. Advent is therefore not intended simply as a preparation for the celebration of Christ's first coming: but as a continued and longer-term preparation for His second.

The prophetic words of Isaiah and Jeremiah that will echo throughout Advent, announcing the birth of the Saviour, contain within them the announcement of Christ's future coming. In the same way, the Child in the manger is to be adored because, hidden within that helpless form, is the full power and divinity of the Godhead, Who was, is and will ever be.

Part of the Christmas mystery is evidently this paradoxical contrast between appearance and reality: one that invites, rather than demands, attention. That paradox and the gentleness of the Lord's first manifestation also serves as an opportunity because, as St Cyril of Jerusalem reminds us, the second coming will be very different in character. He contrasts the two comings by noting that while the first was hidden, the second will be visible to all; that at the first, Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes whereas at the second, he will be clothed in light. At the first he was judged, at the second he will judge; and that while the Kingdom was offered freely at the first, at the second his Kingdom will rule over all.

This tension between the two comings, as between the hidden and

the visible, is also a tension that we live in this present life. As Christians, we live in the knowledge that this world is not the last word, and that the turbulence of this time is only the 'birth-pangs' of a world waiting to be renewed, as St Paul puts it. And Advent is a time of preparation for that renewal.

If, on the one hand, the practice of Lenten penances and fasting has been lost to us in the West, on the other, the treasures of the Advent liturgies – especially in the prophetic texts and the Psalms – provide a clear direction and guide to this season of waiting and preparation.

The readings of the Church's Office (available online at www.universalis.com) provide a rich source for daily meditation. The Advent wreath – borrowed from the Lutherans in the early 1500s – is also an essential aid

in the home-celebration of Advent, marking each Sunday with the lighting of the candle and the accompanying prayers. And among many works of art that can provide a visual aid, Matthias Stomer's *Adoration of the Shepherd* is one example that captures that Advent tension beautifully. Following Caravaggio's style, Stomer makes use of light and dark to inversely portray what is hidden and what is apparent. The hiddenness of God emanates as light from the Child Jesus, while the world around is left in darkness. The contrast is further heightened by the rough, older faces of the shepherds who gaze on the new-born babe. With the young Mary standing by, a more tranquil and innocent scene could not be imagined; and yet, within that scene is contained the promise of a violent end to all violence and the reordering of creation under the Kingship of Christ.

Many of our spiritual ancestors in the first centuries after Christ expected that second manifestation of the Lord in their own time – perhaps part of the reason why Advent took some time before becoming established.

No less than them, however, is the spirit of preparation appropriate to us, two millennia later.

**Stefan Kaminski is Director,
The Christian Heritage Centre**

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Champ warns F1 'don't ignore human rights'

Nick Benson

Lewis Hamilton has insisted that Formula One "needs to do more" to improve human rights issues in some of its host countries.

Revealing that he had received letters from rights groups when arriving in Bahrain for last weekend's grand prix, the Catholic sportsman said it is "very important" that all sport stars and organisations use their platform "to push for change".

"The human rights issue in so many of the places we go to is a massive problem," he said. "We are one of the few sports that go to so many different countries and I do believe as a sport we need to do more."

Hamilton, who recently drew level with Michael Schumacher's all-time record of seven Formula One world championships, said the sport has taken "a step in the right direction" but added, "we can always do more".

"They have put some steps in place for the places we go to but it is important to make sure they are implemented in the right way and that we see some action taken," he said.

"That is going to take some work but it's all in the background."

Hamilton's call came as 30 MPs wrote to Formula One chief executive Chase Carey urging the sport to 'put people above profit and human rights above racing'.

The MPs' letter came ahead of the Bahrain Grand Prix, following concerns over the country's human rights record.

Human rights groups have also raised concerns over other Formula



One host countries, including Russia, China, Azerbaijan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Saudi Arabia, which is set to host a Formula One grand prix for the first time in 2021.

A Formula One spokesperson said: "We have always been clear with all race promoters and governments with whom we deal worldwide, that we

take violence, abuse of human rights and repression very seriously.

"Our human rights policy states that the Formula One companies are committed to respecting internationally recognised human rights in its operations globally; our partners and host countries commit to respect human rights in the way their events are hosted and delivered."

Wenger: My successful career built on Catholic upbringing

Nick Benson

Arsenal legend Arsène Wenger has revealed how his Catholic upbringing drove him to become the most successful manager in the Premier League club's history.

The 71-year-old, who managed the North London club from 1996 to 2018, said growing up in Duttlenheim, France, in a devout Catholic family who owned their own bistro helped instil his strong work ethic.

Wenger, who was named as FIFA's new Chief of Global Football Development last year, explained how as a child his faith helped to shape much of his outlook and values and led him to always strive to better himself and never settle for less than the best.

In an interview with Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*, he said: "I think the impact for me was that you're never completely happy because you never do well enough."

"The religion makes you feel always feel a bit guilty because the Catholic religion is like that but overall, the desire not to be scared to work."

Wenger, who attended Mass every day as a child, admitted that he was so eager to please that he even began inventing sins for confession.

"We had to confess every week and sometimes I learned to lie as well because I didn't always remember what I did wrong," he said.

"You came out fresh, you always felt, 'Okay I have confessed now. God's forgiven me - I can start my life again.'"

Wenger said he would often work in La Croix d'Or in Strasbourg, the bistro owned by his parents, Alphonse

and Louise, but said the demands of running a family restaurant took a toll on their family life.

When asked if his parents were able to make any time to for family activities or holidays, Wenger said: "I wouldn't advise anybody to open a bistro and have children. At the time there was no family life."

"The bistro was open every day of the year. It closed only one day, from four o'clock in the afternoon until midnight. That was on Christmas Day because the village was dominated by religion. So that was no holiday."

Wenger, who won three Premier League titles and seven FA Cups during a 22-year spell in charge of Arsenal, said it was very difficult when he eventually left in 2018 but he still supports the club.

"That's life, you do your best and after other people come in."

"What you want is that they are faithful to the culture of the club and carry the values that you have built and that the club continues its development as well."





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Beautiful and revealing new film offers glimpse into priest's life

A new film shot by one of Britain's leading documentary makers offers a tantalising glimpse of life as a modern priest.

Priest chronicles the life of Bradford-based Fr Paul Grogan in the parish of Mary, Mother of God during non-pandemic times from the beginning of Lent to Easter Sunday. It is produced and directed by filmmaker Michael Whyte.

The film follows Fr Grogan as he supports his people through their ups and downs – in their joy and in their pain. The film opens with a funeral; features a baptism and shares the intimacy and beauty of a deathbed scene. The work of 'The Priest' is one of love and service, not just in ministering to his parish, but providing invaluable, social support to the local community.

Fr Grogan, originally from Halifax, worked as a journalist after graduating from the University of Cambridge. He went onto train for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome in the late 80s to mid-90s. Since then he has spent time as a university and hospital chaplain and worked in a Young Offenders' Institution. He has also been the vocations director for the Diocese of Leeds and, since 2015, has been the parish priest of Mary, Mother of God.

In the film, Fr Grogan says that he thought about becoming a priest at an early age: "I remember my two brothers and I sitting on the sofa when we were young and Sr Magdalene, a Sister of Mercy, standing over us saying, 'and which one of you three is going to be the priest?' and I thought it's probably me, but I'm not going to out myself just yet."

The making of the film has made him aware of how lucky he is to be a priest.

"Michael's camera allowed me to gaze upon my own life and work from a perspective outside of myself," he said. The film shows him with a young couple as they mourn

the death of their severely disabled child – "and I get to spend time with them in their grief," he said.

Another scene is particularly moving. "An elderly woman – called Mary Cunningham – is dying – and it is to me that she says the simple lapidary words which are etched in my memory: 'I am not afraid of dying'." Finally, "two adults with learning difficulties look forward to receiving the First Sacraments and I get to share with them as best I can what it all means."

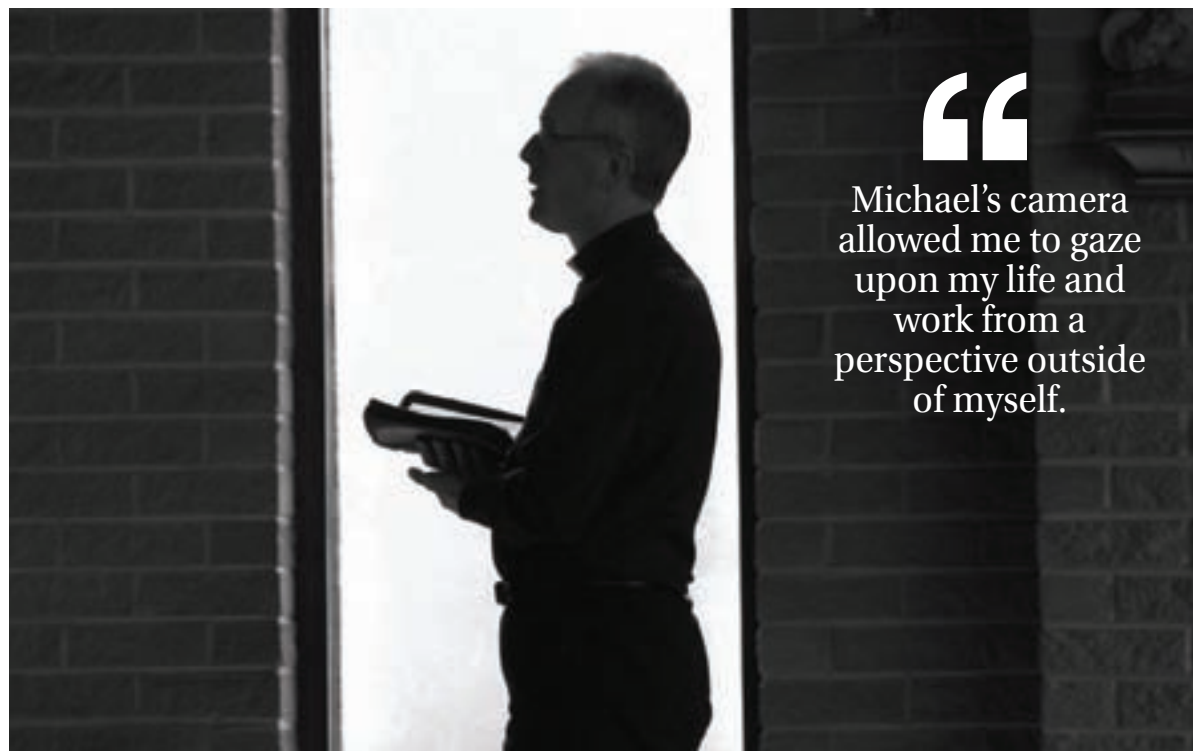
It has also brought into sharp relief his failings and shortcomings: "I was so defensive when a widow criticised me for not having visited her just-deceased husband sufficiently regularly that I wrote a letter to her, trying to justify myself. It was a cruel and cowardly thing to do and her niece properly upbraids me, at some length, in the film."

"As a young priest I was in denial on a couple of occasions that my relationships with women had become too close. When I mentioned that in the film I felt newly overcome by shame because of the confusion and the hurt I caused."

The Bishop of Leeds, the Right Reverend Marcus Stock, Fr Grogan's bishop, says that the film portrays the highs and lows of parish ministry: "This film provides a 'fly-on-the-wall' view of the day to day life and ministry of a Catholic parish priest," he said. "It captures the breadth of ministry and demonstrates the privileged access that a priest is given to the lives of people during vital moments of great joy and profound grief."

"Frankly and honestly, it depicts some of the highs and lows in parish ministry but also allows the deep personal faith and commitment of the priest to shine through in all that he undertakes in the name of Christ and the Church."

Documentary maker Michael Whyte says that he never takes for



Michael's camera allowed me to gaze upon my life and work from a perspective outside of myself.

granted the privilege afforded by his work: "Making documentaries is an immense privilege and to enter into the lives of other people with such intimacy should not be taken for granted and is often a humbling experience."

"For instance, when I was filming the Last Rites being given to Mary Cunningham, I had two thoughts: one, I should not be in this room, intruding on this very private and intimate time; and second, this is a powerful scene showing the value of the priesthood as Fr Paul commits Mary into the arms of God."

"I should add that the family had given permission and Mary herself had requested to be filmed."

Michael came to this project as an outsider, not a Catholic and "hopes that it gives an insight as to why people chose to commit their lives in the service of the Catholic Church."

He was inspired to make the film, despite the fact that the Catholic Church has been beset by scandal, because he was "more concerned with those members of the Church who have a profound belief and commitment to their faith and how

they go about their daily lives in the shadow of this scandal."

He is keen to point out that "working with Fr Paul, I had a privileged view of the priesthood as it should be."

Priest completes his trilogy of films exploring faith in the Catholic Church.

• You can stream *Priest* or buy the DVD via Amazon, where you can find other examples of Michael Whyte's work.

This article previously appeared on the website of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

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“

Frankly and honestly, it depicts some of the highs and lows in parish ministry but also allows the deep personal faith and commitment of the priest to shine through in all that he undertakes in the name of Christ and the Church.”

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CATHOLIC NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND



Brentwood parish so proud after securing 80th Livesimply award

Brentwood

Bernadette Tsocos

The Livesimply award has hit a major milestone after St Joseph's Parish in Upminster, Brentwood diocese, was named as its 80th recipient.

Two assessors – Ellen Teague of the Columbans and Colette Joyce, co-ordinator of Westminster Justice and Peace – conducted an evaluation last month with three members of the parish co-ordinating team: Bernadette Tsocos (co-ordinator), Mary-Anne Madden and Yvonne Dickens. All paid warm thanks to parish priest Fr John Tuohy for his support.

The parish began working towards Livesimply accreditation in May 2018, looking at actions as a parish which not only took care of our own but reached out to the wider community. Parishioners were urged to review their lifestyles and consider what changes they could realistically make to live more simply.

Many parishioners were already aware of *Laudato Si'* and we used this as our guide. We also read widely from the words of Pope Francis and looked to role models both in the past and the present. Our weekly quotations in the parish newsletter have been taken from a wide range of cultures, creeds and religions, from the famous and the less so. Bidding prayers on the care of creation were also included at Mass.

The Livesimply campaign was launched at every Mass that same month. We spoke from the pulpit, gave out leaflets and met with parishioners. Each one took a pledge form and over the next few weeks



The knitting group was praised for bringing together previously isolated members of the community. The fruits of its labours have been donated to local charities

signed up to undertake certain actions under the three Livesimply headings: Living simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.

A Livesimply '100 Ideas' Sheet was distributed and discussed. Pledges were assembled and to date more than 200 have been collected. We made a display of pledges at the back of the church – one from our younger parishioners and one from adults. The childrens' display was based on the 'Tree of Life' and the adults' one was a 'Road of Achievement'.

We also launched the Livesimply campaign in the local Catholic primary and secondary schools by conducting assemblies, working with classes and forming 'Green Teams'

which would take responsibility for encouraging pupils and their families to live a simpler life in solidarity with those less fortunate and to protect the natural environment. We also asked the sixth form to encourage their local communities to live more simply.

A huge number of projects were agreed upon. We supported the Thurrock Food Bank every week with food collections, pledged to involve isolated and lonely parishioners through prayer and took care of the grounds of our Mass centre, St Peter's, as a way of improving the natural environment. We encouraged young parishioners to connect with nature, providing a haven for wildlife and a reflective environment

for parishioners. Parishioners donated 800 bulbs, flowers and shrubs for this area, along with birdfeeders and bird food. Children spent a day making bug hotels which were hung on the trees.

A parishioner volunteered to begin a knitting group to encourage the more isolated parishioners to come together and to give those who are housebound a chance to contribute. This group has been an outstanding success and has knitted and donated a huge number of items to a variety of charities. They also knit for our social events and sell their goods. They stayed active through lockdowns, enabling the parish to donate to charities we had not previously supported.

Finally, a concert featuring professional and amateur musicians and choirs raised over £2,000 for the homeless charity 'Only A Pavement Away'. My brother, who is the CEO and founder, Greg Mangham, came and gave a talk on the charity. My son, who is a professional musician, took rehearsals and secured the services of the professionals for free. This will be an annual event once lockdown is lifted.

It was affirming to be commended by our two Livesimply assessors for our small and dedicated team achieving so much in the parish and local schools, even with the Covid restrictions of 2020. They applauded making Livesimply initiatives visible through the parish website and weekly newsletters, and the commitment to be inclusive of vulnerable and isolated people in the parish with such initiatives as the Knitting Group and SVP outreach.

There is no doubt that participating has re-awakened our understanding of the need to be less wasteful and be more aware of how our lives impact on others, whether it be ensuring the goods that we buy are from sources which protect the rights of workers and are environmentally friendly or our understanding of how our decisions affect others.

We expected Livesimply to do much for individuals, but it has done much for our parish too. We were asked if the project would continue post award; "absolutely" was our immediate response!

Bernadette Tsocos is the Livesimply Co-ordinator and Chair of the Pastoral Parish Council at St Joseph's, Upminster.



East Anglia: On All Saints Day Fr Philip John from St Philip Howard in Cambridge dedicated a new grotto to Our Lady in the grounds of the church. It replaces an older grotto which was already in place. The new grotto, built by parishioners, faces the road.

Like the cross, which likewise faces another road, the new grotto is a visible symbol of faith. It invites people to come in. Created just before the second lockdown, it offers a place to pray, even when the church building is not open for private prayer.

Parishioners pack hall for 'great toy giveaway'

Falkirk: A 'Great Toy Giveaway' took place last weekend at St Francis Xavier's parish in Falkirk thanks to the generosity of parishioners and the local community.

A parish appeal for toys, books and various gifts led to a church hall packed with presents, meaning struggling parents can give children a Christmas to remember.

Parish priest, Fr Jamie Boyle, said it had been "an amazing response to our appeal for a toy exchange."

He added: "This will lighten the burden for so many families this Christmas and it's good for the planet too!"

A parishioner posted a video on the parish Facebook page and said: 'When Fr Jamie came in and looked at the hall and saw everything, he filled up, because I don't quite think he could believe the generosity.'



Around the Parishes



Lincoln: A Catholic family of eight from Lincolnshire have written, performed and professionally recorded a song to raise money for March for Life. *Christmas is Coming (Our Saviour is Born)* is an uplifting song to give people hope in these

strange times and despite the talk of Christmas being cancelled due to Covid, Christmas IS Coming!

Euan (13) plays cello and trombone on the track, Leo (12) drums and violin, Pearce (9) viola, Vincent (8) violin and the with the

youngest, Edith and Micah (5 and 3), on glockenspiels. Mum, Fiona, sings the lead vocals and plays piano, while dad, Mark, a local teacher, plays the tubular bells to add the right Christmas feel of the song.

"We want the song to remind people of the

real reason for the season, Jesus is our Saviour," he said.

As well as spreading some good cheer, the Braddish family hope with every download they will raise money for March for Life. The song is available on iTunes and Amazon.

Young adults lead Christ the King's holy half hour

Salford: On the Vigil of the Feast of Christ the King, the diocesan Young Adults group helped to lead a virtual Holy Half Hour of prayer for the end of the pandemic.

The service was streamed from St Catherine of Siena, Didsbury, and was introduced by Bishop John Arnold. Following was a period of silence, bidding prayers prerecorded by young adults from the group and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

During the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, a candle was lit for every parish in the diocese in an act of solidarity from the young adults.

Youth ministry manager, Lorraine Leonard, said: "We were really pleased that our Young Adult group was able to host the holy half hour, which was experienced by many around the diocese.

"It was a really powerful way of, on the Feast of Christ the King, standing in solidarity with all of those around the diocese facing challenges and loss due to the pandemic."

If you would like more information on the Salford Young Adults Group and would like to be kept up to date re: forthcoming activities and events, please email Alex at SalfordYoungAdults@vol.dioceseofsalford.org.uk

Shrine promises much with Mgr Philip leading the way

East Anglia: It's been a few weeks now since Mgr Philip Moger's induction as Rector of the National Shrine at Walsingham. He spoke to Eldred Willey to let people know a little bit more about him.

"Thank you very much," said the Pope. "Especially for the silence."

That was the parting tribute at Birmingham Airport from Pope Benedict XVI to Mgr Moger, who was director of Liturgy for his visit to England.

It says a lot about the priest he was addressing. Although he is a master of liturgy, he is not a great blower of trumpets. An interview with him, like a papal visit, is punctuated by silences in which God is present.

Mgr Philip is devoting much of this initial period in Walsingham to making friends with the locals, whom he has found to be friendly in return. "Not just at the Shrine," he said. "But also in the shops in Fakenham and selling ice cream in Cromer." And the scenery? "The hills are... not what you'd call hills in Yorkshire, but the coast is lovely."

Mgr Moger grew up in the more contoured landscape of West Yorkshire, in the parish of St Mary in Halifax. After his mother, sadly, died when he was just five, his paternal grandmother, who was active in St Mary's, stepped in to help with his upbringing. At the age of eight he first sensed the call to become a priest, and it returned powerfully in his late teens.

Four years working at Nat West Bank were never likely to draw him into a secular career, and in his early 20s he arrived at Ushaw Seminary – at that time a heaving centre of



Mgr Philip Moger in the Slipper Chapel in Walsingham

learning with 180 students and more than 20 priests on the staff.

After ordination in 1982 he was appointed assistant priest at St Urban's parish, Headingley, a suburb of Leeds. So began a pattern of priesthood which always seemed to be offering the most diverse experiences and the widest insights into the mission of the Church. In the first parish there was school chaplaincy, a Sue Ryder home and a hospital for people with learning difficulties.

After Vatican II the Diocese of Leeds had begun experimenting with a pastoral centre – at that time a new concept. In 1985 it took over Myddleton Lodge, a recusant house in Ilkley, as a new base for the project. Mgr Moger was one of two priests who moved in to run it. For seven years he had the opportunity for brief pastoral encounters with a huge number of visitors.

In 1992 Mgr Moger took on his first role at Leeds Cathedral, as one

of four priests responsible for liturgy. He returned in 2008, this time as Dean, a position he would hold for 11 years. Numbers had grown and the ethnic make-up had become more diverse. In this period music at the cathedral thrived in an extraordinary way. There were 100 singers in various choirs, and an outreach to 2,000 musicians in schools and choirs around the diocese. "There was a dynamism and richness in the music," said Mgr Moger, "and especially a belief in the talents of children."

More networking came when he was appointed vocations director, a role which took him on termly visits to the seminaries around England and once a year to Rome.

In 2001 the role of Bishop's Secretary was added, along with more parish experience at St Cuthbert's in Bradford, which delved into the richness of Catholic history. The parish was founded by Mgr John O'Connor, the model for Fr Brown in

the Chesterton stories, and both that church, and its mother parish, with which it merged in 2006, contained significant works by Eric Gill.

It was two days before Christmas in 2009 when Mgr Moger received the call from Bishop Arthur Roche asking him to take charge of liturgy for the visit of Pope Benedict XVI. "It was a wonderful experience," he recalls. "The Pope depended utterly on the Holy Spirit and on other people to smooth the way for him. There was a calmness about his presence, and he did not go about checking microphones." Like the Pope, he too remembers "the absolute silence in Hyde Park" which marked one of the key celebrations.

An unexpected call on his talents was role-playing the Pope himself, dressed appropriately in white, during the rehearsal at Westminster Abbey. It was an opportunity to exercise his natural rapport with Anglican leaders. As he walked in with Archbishop Rowan Williams he remarked: "You're wearing your Vatican II ring." "Yes," replied the Archbishop. "Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor gave it to me, and tonight I'll be wearing the ring which Pope Paul VI gave to Michael Ramsay." Mgr Moger remembers Archbishop Williams as sympathetic and approachable. "He would have made a good parish priest," he adds, which from him is probably the ultimate compliment.

So what of Walsingham itself? "It's about the presence of Our Lady," he said, "sharing her joy and meditating on her simplicity, and her openness to God's grace. It's something we'll probably never get to the bottom of."

**SALFORD
YOUNG
ADULTS
GROUP**

Education

Schools unite to help London's homeless

Children from 14 Catholic schools across London and Hertfordshire have taken part in a joint action to help the homeless this winter.

The project, co-ordinated by Catholic charity, Caritas Westminster, was timed to coincide with the international Catholic World Day of the Poor. 675 children packed winter essentials and hygiene items into St Vincent de Paul Society's 'Vinnie Packs' for distribution by charities and community groups to homeless and other vulnerable people across the country. Caritas Westminster also helps with distribution of the packs.

It is thought a grand total of 3,375 Vinnie packs were filled by the children at the 14 schools.

The headteacher of St Paul's Catholic Primary in Cheshunt, Katie Worton-Geer, said her school was "delighted to take part. 'The children all thoroughly enjoyed packing the boxes and knowing that they were helping others. It was also a good opportunity for us to help teach the children about the importance of social justice and how we can make a difference through our prayers and actions.'

One of the children said: "I really enjoyed making the Vinnie packs because I like helping others just like Jesus tells us to in the Bible.

"The boxes had lots of warm things in like socks and gloves to help the homeless on the streets over the winter month. The packs also had face masks in to help keep the people safe."

A child from St Joseph's Catholic Primary in Willesden commented: "People usually walk past homeless people and don't do things to help so I am so happy that I was able to help."

Collette Hough, a teacher from St Mary of the Angel's in Bayswater said it was an "Amazing opportunity for the children to be a part of. On a daily basis the children from Year 6 have asked to go and pack more Vinnie packs for the homeless."



Children packing the Vinnie packs at, above, St Paul's Cheshunt and (left) Our Lady Catholic Primary School, Hitchin.

Photo of St Paul's by kind permission: Mazur / cbcew.org.uk

"Children have been able to learn about what it means to be homeless, and issues of social justice and the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding caring for the poor and respecting the dignity of all people.

Among the dozens of projects which will help distribute the Vinnie Packs to those in need, is the Dad's House Foodbank in Kensington. Dad's House was originally set up to support single fathers bringing up children on their own, but are now supporting families, single mums, rough sleepers and those in need of their foodbank.

It has seen an astronomical rise in the numbers of people in hardship

during the pandemic, as people were first furloughed and then made redundant – in some cases these people will also have lost their homes.

Rosa Lewis from Caritas Westminster was encouraged by the number of schools taking part and was pleased "to see the enthusiasm of the children to do something practical for World Day of the Poor."

She added: "We're really grateful to all the teachers who have got involved. It is not an easy time for schools at the moment, so it is wonderful to see how many are still thinking about social justice, and wanting to reach out to others."

Kilgraston's proud as 'Wear it Again' makes awards final

Kilgraston has achieved national recognition as the only Scottish school to be nominated as a finalist at the UK-wide i25 Awards.

The school, near Perth, was short-listed for its pioneering 'Wear it again' pre-loved clothing campaign, garnering national coverage and adopted by many organisations.

The virtual ceremony recognised UK-wide excellence in innovation and impact across the independent education sector.

"I am particularly pleased that our initiative for recycling clothes and raising the environmental implications of 'fast fashion' was embraced so enthusiastically and especially by our pupils," said Dorothy MacGinty, head teacher at Kilgraston.

She continued: "Waste, and its reduction, is a matter of huge significance for everyone and so very important that tomorrow's adults understand and act to redress the situation."

"Being nationally recognised for our work, together with learning about others' projects and initiatives, is so important," said Mrs MacGinty, "we

must never stop learning and that applies to teachers and Heads just as much as it does to pupils.

The awards ceremony highlighted a host of impressive educational innovations in everything from the teaching of astronomy; various pupil initiatives, including the campaigning by prep school pupils of Government, resulting in 'Finn's Law' - ultimately changing legislation regarding violence towards animals in the line of duty; and the introduction of a life-long learning curriculum that explored different ways to tackle a subject.

Dozens of Kilgraston parents and pupils tuned in to the event, with many dressing-up for the occasion: "It gave me a great excuse to wear my vintage Dior," said Mrs MacGinty, "and there are precious few of those occasions these days!"

The over-all winner was Westminster School in London for its 'liberating power through education' campaign to provide bursaries and out-reach support.

Pictured below are some of the sixth-form Kilgraston pupils in vintage clothing for Wear It Again day.



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Yorkshire’s own Greta wants climate action from Sunak

Mathilde Iveson, a 14-year old student from St Francis Xavier RC and CoE School in Richmond, North Yorkshire, has written to her MP, the Chancellor Rishi Sunak, to ask him to help her and fellow students progress their plans to be a zero carbon school.

She also asked him to help the school increase biodiversity through more flower beds in and near the school, and by helping it to switch to hybrid or fully electric school buses.

Mathilde, who is in Year 9 and part

of the school’s Eco Team, is passionate about the need to make changes in order to reduce the UK’s climate emissions. She’s been involved in eliminating single use plastics, litter picking, bulb planting and is a key Eco Team speaker.

Mr Sunak visited the school in 2019, the year it won the 2019 Education Estates Award for Sustainability.

Since then the students have become even more aware of the climate emergency and have worked hard

with their teachers and the Trust to step up their environmental actions.

St Francis Xavier has signed up to Let’s Go Zero, pledging to be zero carbon by 2030.

Let’s Go Zero is run by Ashden, a UK-based climate solutions charity.

Harriet Lamb of Ashden said she hoped “We hope that the Chancellor Rishi Sunak listens to Mathilde and the many others at the school who are taking a lead on the fight against climate change.”



Students with Ronnie the Recyclist – a temporary art display in Richmond made from ecobricks.

Inset, Mathilde with her letter to the Chancellor

New academy trust wants to bring joy into children’s lives

St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Academy Trust – a recently formed collection of 17 schools from across the Diocese of Middlesbrough – has published its vision to ‘Bring Joy, Hope, Opportunity and Purpose for our children in an uncertain world’ via a new brand identity and website.

The release of the vision coincided with the Trust being shortlisted for a Department of Education Sustainability Award in its first year.

Amy Rice, CEO of St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Academy Trust, said: “Our vision was crafted when we started a year ago, but it has never been more relevant.

“The staff across this Trust are determined to make a real and enduring difference to children’s lives and give them the strength and independence not only to face the challenges that are ahead, but to be the adults and young people who will reshape our future into a fairer and more loving world.

“In the current circumstances, we hope that people can experience our vision, virtually, through our new, engaging website.”

The Trust is open about wanting to do things differently and majors on its value of courage, which will, according to the Trust team, see it break

the mould to give new and exciting opportunities to all of its children and staff over the coming years.

Ms Rice added: “We firmly believe that each child has that spark, that gift within them. It’s our job to help them see it and to nurture it so that they can be a positive force for good

‘Each child has a spark inside them... it’s our job to help them see it and nurture it...’
Amy Rice



in whatever they do in their future.

“That requires an approach that looks at each child as a precious individual, unconstrained by mechanistic targets or the usual expectations.

“We are hugely ambitious for our children academically, of course, but that is far from the whole story. We hope that people with the same ambition and the same hope for our children’s future will feel inspired to join and support us, in whatever way they can.”

St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Academy Trust was formed in June 2019 and by September of the same year, 17 schools – two secondary and 15 primary – were part of the Trust.

You’re our heroes

St Pancras Catholic Primary School in Ipswich celebrated All Saints with a special dressing up day, inviting children to come in as saints and as their personal heroes.

The school asked them to think about people they look up to or who have inspired them. The children dressed in a huge array of costumes: saints, NHS workers, superheroes, astronauts, and climate activists. Many came as their grandparents or parents.

Teachers also got involved. Mr Grimwood dressed as St George. It was a lovely day and a wonderful way to celebrate inspirational people in the children’s lives.



Left, Mr Grimwood as St George and Grace as St Teresa of Calcutta

Above, George as his Great-Great-Grandad who fought in the First World War, Ella as Greta Thunberg, Roman as a police officer and Oliver as Sir David Attenborough

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GARDEN

Here in the UK we're pretty blessed in many ways.

Sure, the sky spends most of its year an ugly slate grey. But while we're not impervious, we are well out of any areas prone to major natural disasters; the weather is annoying rather than terrifying and the chance of you getting bitten by a poisonous insect really depends on whether you're flying to the tropics anytime soon.

Nevertheless, there is one force so destructive it has homeowners up at night frantically Googling a way out of its overgrown grasp, striking fear into the heart of all that come into its path in a way that even an infestation of black widow spiders couldn't hope to match.

We are, of course, talking about Japanese knotweed. It strips homes of their value, in some cases com-

"By the mid-1800s, Japanese knotweed was available to buy in the UK, and was being sold as the latest exotic accessory"

pletely by way of rendering them unsellable, collectively costing UK homeowners around £160million per year in devaluations and getting it fixed.

This is more than an inconvenient plant; this is a veritable fight for survival in many cases, which makes it all the more ridiculous that we invited the beast here in the first place!

Japanese knotweed became available in the UK in the mid-1800s. It was sold as the latest exotic accessory for any fashionable garden. Having been named 'the most interesting ornamental plant of the year' in 1847 by the Society of Agriculture and Horticulture, both Kew and Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens then received specimens, growing plants from these for commercial aims.

People said it would feed cattle, which isn't true, and praised the plant for its sturdiness, and ability to grow and adapt quickly, which definitely is true. They also said it would make the ideal natural material for fencing areas off and protecting other species, which obviously isn't entirely accurate either. Yet, amazingly, it wasn't until almost 100 years later that it stopped being sold to people looking for something 'a bit different', because by then it was



Photo: Angus MacAskill

Overstayed welcome: Japanese knotweed

It's one of the most damaging plants known to man, capable of devastating properties and wiping value from assets. Why, then, did we invite it to live here?



Persicaria; a herbaceous knotweed species



The stalk of Japanese Knotweed

clear that 'a bit different' meant 'power-mad and near-unstoppable.'

So, what can be done?

Thankfully there are some ways of killing knotweed. Sadly, though, none are particularly cheap. In fact, they are crushingly expensive.

Poisoning the plant can take up to five years... each application costing around £2,000

The first is poisoning the plant itself, which can take up to five years of repeat applications, each setting you back some £2,000, but this doesn't always guarantee 100% effectiveness. Shoots can reappear from plants you thought were already long gone, and, frustratingly, years down the line. The alternative is uprooting, for which you'll need to excavate to more than 2 metres in depth to ensure you've got it all. Estimated cost: £10,000.

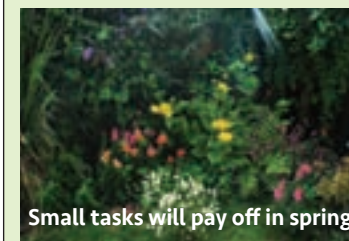
Still, it's cheaper than losing a home.

December jobs for the garden

If you've had a look round your garden recently you'll have seen the change in seasons reflected on the ground, which will be littered with fallen leaves.

We've just left November behind – a glorious month by any month's standards. Some love July's beautiful blue skies, or cherish December for the freezing snow as much as Christmas itself. Yet November is something even more special. It represents change. We have said goodbye to summer and we've arrived in December, far colder and a lot more wintry.

But this change to winter also means hard work. Protecting vulnerable plants from frost is now essential, and the sooner you do this the better. Sometimes it only takes one frost to wreak havoc, and the devastation can take serious work to repair.



Small tasks will pay off in spring

Start clearing up properly.

Any leaves or foliage need to be raked up in a bid to eradicate diseases or pests that could lie dormant once the temperature really drops, but then return stronger than ever before when we emerge into spring again.

The dead leaves you collect should be placed into dustbin liners with holes punched in by a fork. Tie these but don't dispose. Instead, leave to stand in a sheltered area, and watch as they degrade into leaf mould. At the end of it you'll have a great substance to dig into soil that needs texture improvement.

Start a compost heap.

Combine both soft, green, moist garden waste with dry, brown items for the best results – this will ensure there is plenty of nitrogen and carbon present, which is what you need for this to really work.

Plant new life

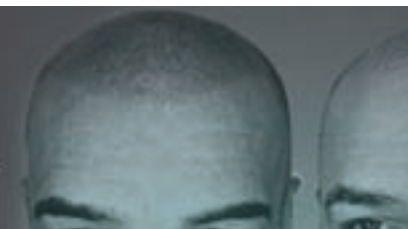
All spring bulbs need to be in the ground before the end of the month or they stand little chance of survival, with the exception of tulips, which really needed to be last month – so be quick!

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These are a few of our favourite things...

Many homeowners class items with sentimental value as their most treasured possessions but despite how precious they are, not all of us may have insurance.

HOME

You can't take it with you, according to the old saying; but even if we could, 'it' probably wouldn't be the most expensive item we own ... so what is this precious item that has, according to a recent survey, been named as homeowners' most valuable possessions?

While computers and jewellery top the list of the most expensive objects owned, 74 per cent of homeowners said that sentimental items such as photos, letters and drawings their child has done are more precious than their most costly possessions.

In a survey of 2,000 homeowners, insurance company Confused.com discovered that for nearly three-quarters of UK homeowners, photos are the most precious items because of their sentimental value. Men are not as sentimental as women, with 29 per cent of gents saying that the most financially valuable items they own are also the most precious to them, while only 23 per cent of women agreed.

In contrast, 47 per cent of women feel that photos are the most precious sentimental items they own, while just 34 per cent of men saying that these items were more important to them than their fancy gadgets.

After photos, the second most popular item for women was jewellery, while the second most popular items for men are letters.

However the over 55s are more likely to say that items inherited from a relative are among their most precious items. Photos and letters remain consistently precious across

Old letters and photos are worth more than material items.



all age groups.

Despite admitting how precious our possessions are, not all of us have insured these items, and Londoners are the worst offenders. When it comes to insuring possessions, Londoners are most likely to take the gamble and fail to take out a home contents insurance policy. Only 64 per cent of Londoners who own their home actually have home insurance, compared to a national average of 80 per cent.

However, the younger generation don't fare much better, according to

the study. When it comes to 18-24 year old homeowners, 16 per cent of these do not even know if they have home contents insurance or not, while 30 per cent of the same group say they don't have a policy. Despite such a large proportion of homeowners not bothering with home insurance, 20 per cent have been burgled. Not surprisingly, jewellery is the top item stolen by burglars, followed by items of sentimental value.

Home insurance and a good home security system is all vital to keeping property and valuables safe, says Gareth Kloet at Confused.com. "Sadly, burglary is a fact of life that one in five of homeowners whom we surveyed had already experienced.

While insurance cannot replace items such as photos, it is possible to name precious items that have a value of more than £1,000 on your home insurance policy.

"This helps ensure that possessions such as jewellery or antiques or expensive technology can be replaced or compensated for in the event of a burglary."

Click-happy: the benefits of shopping from home

The pandemic has turned us into a nation of home shoppers. But can it ever be better than a trip down the high street?

FASHION

Home shopping is nothing new. We've been getting our stuff delivered to our door for decades; remember when catalogues from Kays, Freemans and Grattan were all the rage back in the 70s?

Nowadays, catalogue stores are online and you can shop for anything you like in the comfort of your own home, but does it still win out over a trip to the shops? We think so. Here are the top five advantages of home shopping.

1. Convenience

The shops might close, but the internet never does; you can browse and order to your heart's content at all hours of the day and night – even on Boxing Day when the sales start. All this while avoiding the crowds and never having to deal with a pushy sales assistant who pounces on you the minute you get through the door.

2. Transport

Home shopping saves you queueing for hours to find a space in your local multi-storey. No more fiddling around for change for the meter or worrying how you're going to carry a multitude of bags back to the car: your purchases are delivered right to your door in a matter of days.



3. Price comparison

There are search engines dedicated to finding the best price for whatever item you could dream of, so unless it's your thing, you can say goodbye to traipsing from shop to shop trying to find the best deal on that must-have item. Try pricerunner.co.uk to find the best deals. Many catalogue shops display reviews of their products too, so you can see what other people thought of them before parting with your cash.

4. Choice

Home shopping offers a choice of items that you simply can't find in the high street. Many local businesses are now trading online, each with their own unique items, you could find distinctive home and garden products too that you just can't get at your local Homebase.

If you're looking for more specialist items, you can browse and buy from abroad, too – just remember to check the cost of delivery and the website's overseas shipping policy before you buy.

Bear in mind also that some items are subject to Customs Duty, Excise Duty or Import VAT if you want to avoid the shock of having to pay the postman for your deliveries. The HMRC website will tell you what items are affected: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/customs/po-st/buying.htm>

5. Try before you buy

Of course, you can do this in high street stores, too – but is there anything worse than showing all your lumps and bumps to the world while battling through a session in a cramped communal changing room on a busy Saturday afternoon?

Most sites offer a hassle-free returns system and will give you a certain period of time – usually seven to 14 days – to make sure you're completely happy with your new items.

Home shopping offers so many conveniences over the high street that it's hard to list them all, but these are some of our favourite plus points.

Why not give it a go for your Christmas shopping this year?



From the track to the street: five of the best

Want a hardcore car to drive fast on the track? Pick from this bunch of high-performance specials, says Darren Cassey.

MOTORING

In the heavy traffic of the modern world, driving quickly on the road is often irresponsible (not to mention possibly illegal). That's why track days have boomed in popularity over the past decade, allowing enthusiasts to drive their cars safely at the limit.

If this sounds appealing, you might want something fit for the job. Many manufacturers now make more hardcore versions of their performance cars, tuned for the smooth surfaces found on race tracks.

Here, we've collected some of the best...

McLaren 765LT

This is the new kid on the block, being one of McLaren's most hardcore models. The Senna sits above it in the firm's track-focused range, but this model is based on one of the firm's 'standard' supercars – the already potent 720S.

It barely weighs more than a Ford Fiesta but packs 754bhp in its 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 engine – so performance is blisteringly quick.

Porsche 911 GT3 RS

If you're looking for a performance car, the first model on your shopping list should be a 911 – and the GT3 RS is the most focused of them all.

The latest '992' generation doesn't have a GT3 RS version just yet, so your choice is to either wait or jump into the used market. That's no problem, because the previous generation 991.2 is utterly fantastic, offering the kind of performance and driver involvement unparalleled this side of a race car.

Lamborghini Huracan Performante

Another model that's no longer on sale new but is totally worthy of your attention, is the Lamborghini Huracan Performante. It's the track-focused version of the firm's already-rapid Huracan supercar,



McLaren 765LT



Renault Megane RS Trophy-R

Lamborghini Huracan Performante



Porsche 911 GT3 RS

with extra performance and trick upgrades that make it handle better.

The V10 engine makes 631bhp and the car is 40kg lighter than the standard model, but it's the clever aerodynamics that steal the headlines. 'Aerodinamica Lamborghini Attiva' – or ALA for short – allows the

wings and spoilers on the car to move independently depending on whether you're turning left or right, maximising downforce on the side that needs it. Clever stuff.

Renault Megane RS Trophy-R

You don't have to spend six figures on a tuned supercar or to enjoy your time on track. The humble hot hatch has been a hugely popular segment in the UK.

The Renault Megane RS Trophy-R might just be the ultimate version of this – and it should be, with prices starting at over £50k. With a stripped out interior, Ohlins shock absorbers, Akrapovic exhaust, Brembo brakes and carbon-fibre parts, it's a serious bit of kit.

Caterham Seven

There are seemingly endless variations of Caterham Seven, but it doesn't matter which one you get, they're all about as pure a driving experience as you can get.

You slot down into a tiny frame that has nothing more than the bare essentials of body panels, four wheels and somewhere to sit. If you want an antidote to today's heavy, numb cars, this is the one for you.



Caterham Seven

Deals and wheels

A round-up of the latest car reveals, consumer issues and hot deals.



Gritting firm warns of icy winter ahead for British motorists

A major gritting firm has warned British motorists to prepare for an icy winter on the roads after it took delivery of 3,000 tonnes of salt.

Ice Watch, which provides gritting, snow clearance and winter maintenance services, warns that winters that have followed similar summers to 2020's tend to be much colder.

The firm works with MeteoGroup, which provides weather forecasting for the BBC and government agencies worldwide. It says there is an increased chance of higher pressures over the Arctic, which leads to colder weather in the UK.

Because of this forecast, Ice Watch has invested in its salt sup-

ply and urged UK businesses to also prepare for the worst.

Ice Watch meteorologist Timo Strom said: "When you look at winters that follow similar summers to 2020, there's an increased chance of higher pressure over the Arctic bringing cooler polar air."

"This would bring cold weather to the UK and businesses need to be prepared."

"We are heading into a negative phase of ENSO (El Niño–Southern Oscillation) called La Niña. During November and December, the Met Office says La Niña can lead to an increase in northerly/north-westerly winds, which would bring colder conditions to Northern England and Scotland, and the increased chance of snow, sleet and ice."

Jaguar: We're prioritising SUVs for electrification over saloons

Jaguar has revealed it will prioritise its SUVs for electrification, rather than its more traditional saloon models.

The firm currently only offers its electric I-Pace SUV when it comes to electric vehicles, though a plug-in hybrid version of its high-riding F-Pace has recently been revealed. The smaller E-Pace is also set to receive a plug-in hybrid powertrain.

According to Jaguar, this all comes down to its "priority in terms of investment", which means that its best-selling SUVs gain hybrid power first and then other models will follow once funds allow.

Scott Dicken, Jaguar sales director, said: "Investing in electrification is very expensive. The market opportunity is in SUVs."

"Our priority is to electrify our SUV nameplates, and to be can-

did, we sell more of those and that's the area of the market that's growing, which is where we prioritised our initial investment."

Ford takes wraps off its Fiesta ST Edition hot hatch

Ford has revealed a more performance-focused version of its Fiesta ST hot hatch – but only 300 will be on sale in the UK.

The Fiesta ST Edition gets unique styling details and upgrades to optimise it for road or track use. It has been tuned on the Nurburgring Nordschleife by Ford Performance engineers.

It gets two-way adjustable coilover suspension, which drops the ride height by 15mm at the front and 10mm at the rear.

Under the bonnet is the usual 1.5-litre turbo engine, which makes 197bhp and 290Nm of torque, contributing to a top speed of 143mph.

It also gets unique styling touches that include an Azura Blue paint that was previously only available on special order, gloss and matte black parts, carbon-fibre-effect finishes inside and leather for the steering wheel, gear knob and handbrake.

The Ford Fiesta ST Edition is priced from £27,075.



Jaguar is investing in electrification



Do play with your food

Lookit Cookit is a cook book with a difference. Aimed at children, it encourages them to enter the kitchen, and gets them interested in cooking.

BOOKS

It doesn't take you long to realise that Judy Jackson's attempt at getting kids interacting with food has a very different approach to other cook books. In fact, one look at the 'Un-contents' alone (a list of what isn't in the book) will suffice:

- No long recipes or lists of ingredients you don't have.
- No mention of eating five-a-day or hiding vegetables in a sauce. Fruit and the green things are not to be taken like medicine, before you're allowed dessert
- No instructions for making Chocolate Rice Krispies - if you want to get messy fingers there are more exciting things to cook - like Sticky Chicken Wings or Blueberry Pancakes.

With that in mind, it's probably best to focus on what *Lookit Cookit* does offer, which is plenty. Jackson, a food writer herself, has compiled over 25 kitchen games, 130 photos and innumerable hours of research to deliver a publication that aims to do two key things: encourage children to enter the kitchen, and get them interested in

food. Not least, what goes into a dish and why those elements may appeal to their palate.

The idea presumably being that when people are more aware of what it is they are eating, their diets usually reflect this with a focus on healthier options. Given the ongoing problems Britain faces thanks to its decidedly unhealthy youngsters, and the constant relationship between edibles deemed to be "fun" and junk, it was only really a matter of time until someone came along with an idea like this.

So by developing these unique tasks and challenges, which are in themselves recipes, the author has created a somewhat psychological road map to instilling good eating habits in our little ones. Rather than simply being a case of explaining which ingredients need to be mixed in order to serve up a dish, instead they are given an insight into why flavours are the way they taste, various methods of cooking, and how a healthy, mixed diet can be delicious, exciting and doesn't need to involve parental tricks – thus appealing to their desire for independence.



Have fun with a piping kit to make unique combinations. *Lookit Cookit* photo/Judy Jackson

Each "game" comes with a star rating, making it easy to work out the age a child should be in order to take it on. The selection offered ranges from the simplest tasks to preparing an entire three course meal, the latter best reserved for older youngsters.

The final tasting, then, is an addition to the culinary bookshelf that families are likely to revisit time and time again, making for both a worthwhile investment in advance of inevitable rainy days to come, and a shrewd purchase on the part of anyone that wants their kids to understand that they are what they eat.



Tasks and challenges in the book are in themselves recipes. *Lookit Cookit* photo/Judy Jackson

Finding the right balance

Brits are fuming about losing their hobbies – and they are pointing the finger of blame at that pesky thing called work for getting in the way of a spot of fun or a fitness drive

HEALTH

We've all heard the old adage "all work and no play make Jack a dull boy", which is why so many of us take up a hobby. However, with less free time to spend on hobbies and more time spent at home, it seems Britain's work-life balance has fallen seriously out of kilter.

If you find yourself too tired to go to that yoga class you've been meaning to join or long work hours prevent you from indulging in after-work activities, you are not alone.

As many as nine out of 10 of us would like more free time to spend on our hobbies, according to a study by leisure information website realbuzz.com.

The independently commissioned survey delves into perceptions regarding the UK's work-life balance and the amount of time and money the British public invests in a hobby or pastime.

Unsurprisingly, the study shows that the British don't have enough time to do the things they enjoy do-



ing – with 87 per cent wishing they had more free time for a hobby or pastime. Only five per cent said they have ample free time to themselves.

Pastimes play such a vital part in our lives, helping us to reduce stress, keep fit and meet new friends. More than half of us believe work severely gets in the way of our social life at least once a week, while an additional quarter of the UK workforce think their career impacts on their hobbies at least twice a week. Cumulatively this shows that more than three-quarters of us feel that work has a noticeable, and ultimately negative, impact on the enjoyment of their free time.

Work hours are not only curbing our free time but they are now stopping our hobbies, too. When asked how much money people spend on a hobby or pastime the results showed that 38 per cent – one in three of us – do not actually spend any money on their hobby. This has triggered a resurgence of free pas-

Free hobbies such as cycling, running and walking are on the rise.

times such as walking, cycling, reading and jogging, and now more of us are beginning to indulge in a more physical pastime.

Work is also impacting our choice of hobby, as one in four of us finds colleagues far more motivational than our own family and friends – particularly in terms of getting us to do a more physically challenging activity. Going to the gym, walking and running are some of the more physical hobbies we are most likely to start because of our workmates.

This growing level of resentment toward work from hobby-loving Britons surprises Fiona Gibbins, marketing director of realbuzz.com. "Our research has some interesting findings. It's staggering to see how strongly the British public feels about work impacting on their free time and ultimately getting in the way of them enjoying a pastime."

Going to the gym and running are some of the more physical hobbies we are most likely to start doing because of our workmates.

■ NICK'S MUSIC PICKS

Nannie couldn't be prouder

Recording a song for 'Nannie' has led to a major record deal for 11-year-old Lancashire schoolboy Cormac Thompson, who has just released his debut album, *Hear My Voice*.

The Music Scene
Nick Benson

A simple act of kindness from an 11-year-old grandson to his beloved 'Nannie' – performing her favourite song for her on YouTube as they could not be together due to lockdown – has led to the young lad being signed by the legendary Decca Records and playing Freddie Mercury's piano!

When Cormac Thompson's heartfelt performance of *Danny Boy* came to the label's attention by chance on social media, they immediately signed him up and his album *Hear My Voice* has just been released today, (Friday 4th December).

Cormac is from Lancashire and his maternal grandparents live in Northern Ireland. Due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions, they

could not see each other and so he had the idea to perform a song virtually. Now, since the song was shared and people far and wide fell in love with his wonderful voice, he finds himself label mates with the likes of Alfie Boe, Katherine Jenkins and Andrea Bocelli. Not only that, but he started work on the album at the Metropolis Studios where everyone from Queen to U2 to Adele has created masterpieces. Cormac even got to warm up by using Freddie Mercury's piano. He played it wearing gloves so that he could keep them as souvenirs.

Cormac's 'Nannie' (Colleen) said: "I could never have imagined that his little pieces, sung for me, would have led to this amazing opportunity. My husband and I are so very proud of Cormac, and we hope that his singing will give much pleasure. We also hope that it will help to shed



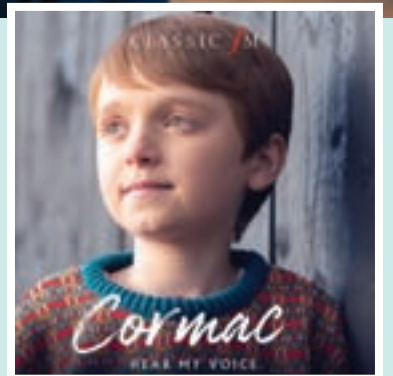
Cormac Thompson.

a little light during these dark times we are all having to endure."

Hear My Voice features 15 brand new recordings that showcase the pureness and clarity of Cormac's voice. The material included ranges from his own takes on songs like Snow Patrol's *Run*, to evergreen classics like *Pie Jesu* and there is a very contemporary take on the Christmas classic *Walking in the Air*. Thematically there is a nod towards missing loved ones, distance and the Gaelic tradition. Of course, the album features Nannie's favourite, *Danny Boy*.

Whilst this has been an extraordi-

nary adventure already for Cormac, and one that he could never have expected when he first decided to cheer up his grandma, he is a very down to earth boy. Singing live, perhaps performing his music in a cathedral seems a slightly remote possibility at the moment. Cormac will have to content himself with the virtual world – as an 11-year-old he would love to do a show on Fortnite like Marshmello, Travis Scott or Dominic Fike! While that may be a stretch, what is for certain is that Nannie couldn't be prouder, and the whole nation will love *Hear My Voice*.



• *Hear My Voice* by Cormac is out now on Decca Records.

■ NICK'S TV PICKS



Jamie Oliver gets into the Christmas spirit. Channel 4 ©

Jamie: Keep Cooking At Christmas
Sunday 6th December
8.00pm-9.00pm
Channel 4

Jamie Oliver and his family invite us to get into the Christmas spirit with a helpful guide to the whole festive season.

From creating edible presents to reinventing leftovers, Jamie has loads of handy hints and tips for a bespoke Christmas 2020.

Jamie also shows us how to make a beautiful sage, onion and apricot stuffing that can be made before Christmas day, and top tips for a wonderful Christmas dinner served with a simple but phenomenal chestnut gravy. This year, Jamie promises to make sure your festive lunch is magical.



Gary Barlow hosts an hour of musical fun. ITV Plc ©

Gary Barlow's Night at the Museum
Sunday 6th December
9.00pm-10.05pm
ITV

Gary Barlow hosts an hour of musical fun from the Natural History Museum in London.

Gary will be joined through the night by a range of special guests including global superstar and friend Michael Bublé, Jack Whitehall, Jason Donovan, Ronan Keating, Alesha Dixon and Alfie Boe.

Guaranteed to be the hottest ticket in town, viewers will have a front row seat at this exclusive music event.

"I am so excited to host this music special," said Gary. "During a tumultuous time for the whole country, it feels amazing to be able to put on a proper night of entertainment"



Consumer duo Helen Skelton & Sabrina Grant. Channel 4 ©

Luxury Christmas For Less
Monday 7th December
8.00pm-9.00pm
Channel 4

This Christmas we all need a festive pick-me-up. But with money being tighter than ever, we want both quality and value.

That's why Sabrina Grant and Helen Skelton want to show you how to get a luxury Christmas for less.

The consumer duo reveal why you shouldn't be afraid of doing your special Christmas shop at a dis-counter and how our tastes and our shopping habits can be used to our advantage to grab a bargain Christmas present.

And Sabrina reveal the secret to buying a turkey and what separates the luxury mince pies from the rest.



Coronation Street celebrates its diamond anniversary. ITV Plc ©

Coronation Street: 60 Unforgettable Years
Monday 7th December
8.30pm-10.00pm
ITV

This special explores the legacy of the world's longest-running soap opera, narrated by Joanna Lumley OBE

It promises never heard before secrets from the show's stars – from first audition nerves, to fall-outs, to their special memories of the storylines that gripped the nation.

Giggles and gaffes, jaw-dropping moments unseen for decades as *Coronation Street: 60 Unforgettable Years* tells the story of how this treasured soap has become a national institution.



Julia Bradbury hikes up the mighty Helvellyn peak. Multistory Media. ©

For The Love Of Britain
Tuesday 8th December
7.30pm-8.00pm
ITV

For The Love of Britain is a new series in which Julie Walters invites us to take a great escape into our great outdoors.

Britain is made up of some gloriously landscapes. Sitting within those landscapes are plenty of hidden gems many of us are yet to discover.

In this episode we visit Britain's most popular national park, the Lake District.

Julia Bradbury will be hiking up England's third highest peak, the mighty Helvellyn, and Ben Fogle has an unusual climbing experience at Honister slate mine.

Pope implores world to ensure its children don't pay price for Covid

The Global Compact on Education, a Vatican-led body that works to raise educational standards around the world, held its annual meeting recently, with Pope Francis delivering the keynote address. In it he issued a heart plea for governments to prioritise education in their post-Covid-19 recovery plans and use it to create a new global social harmony

Educational systems worldwide have felt the effects of the pandemic at every level. Attempts have been made to offer a rapid response via online educational platforms, but these have brought to light a marked disparity in educational and technological opportunities. They have also made us realise that, due to the lockdown and many other already existing needs, large numbers of children and adolescents have fallen behind in the natural process of schooling.

Recent statistics have led some to speak, perhaps hastily, of an 'educational catastrophe', inasmuch as millions of children were forced to leave school as a result of the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus. This has only increased an already alarming gap (with over 250 million school-age children excluded from all educational activities).

Faced with this situation, we know that necessary healthcare measures will prove inadequate unless accompanied by a new cultural model. We have become more conscious of the need to change our model of development.

In order to ensure that the dignity of the human is respected and protected, development ought to start from the opportunity that global interdependence offers to communities and peoples to care for our common home and to foster peace. We are experiencing a comprehensive crisis that cannot be reduced or limited to any single sector. It affects everything. The pandemic has led us to realise that what is really in crisis is our way of understanding reality and of relating to one another.

Here it is evident that neither simplistic solutions nor wishful thinking will do. Education, as we know, is meant to be transformative. To educate is to take a risk and to hold out to the present a hope that can shatter the determinism and fatalism that the selfishness of the strong, the conformism of the weak and the ideology of the utopians would convince us is the only way forward.

To educate is always an act of hope, one that calls for co-operation in turning a barren and paralysing indifference into another way of thinking that recognises our interdependence. If our educational systems are presently marked by a mindset of replacement and repetition, and are incapable of opening up new horizons in which hospitality, intergenerational solidarity and the value of transcendence can give birth to a new culture, would this not signify that we are failing to take advantage of the opportunity of-

fered by this historic moment?

We also know that the journey of life calls for hope grounded in solidarity. All change requires a process of education in order to create new paradigms capable of responding to the challenges and problems of the contemporary world, of understanding and finding solutions to the needs of every generation and in this way contributing to the flourishing of humanity now and in the future.

We consider education to be one of the most effective ways of making our world and history more human. Education is above all a matter of love and responsibility handed down from one generation to another.

As such, education is a natural antidote to the individualistic culture that at times degenerates into a true cult of the self and the primacy of indifference. Our future cannot be one of division, impoverishment of thought, imagination, attentiveness, dialogue and mutual understanding. That cannot be our future.

Today there is need for a renewed commitment to an education that engages society at every level. Let us heed the plea of the young, which opens our eyes to both the urgent need and the exciting opportunity of a renewed kind of education that is not tempted to look the other way and thus favour grave social injustices, violations of rights, terrible forms of poverty and the waste of human lives.

What is called for is an integral process that responds to those situations of loneliness and uncertainty about the future that affect young people and generate depression, addiction, aggressiveness, verbal hatred and bullying.

This entails a shared journey that is not indifferent to the scourge of violence, the abuse of minors, the phenomenon of child marriage and the tragedy of children sold into slavery. To say nothing of the 'sufferings' endured by our planet as a result of a senseless and heartless exploitation that has led to a grave environmental and climatic crisis.

At certain moments in history, it is necessary to make radical decisions that can shape not only our way of life but above all our stance in the



Pope Francis addresses the conference via videolink

face of possible future scenarios. Amid the present health crisis – and the poverty and confusion it has caused – we believe that it is time to subscribe to a global pact on education for and with future generations. This calls for a commitment from us all, on the part of families, communities, schools, religions and governments. Today we are called to have the necessary parrhesia to leave behind superficial approaches to education and the many shortcuts associated with standardised test results, functionality and bureaucracy, which confuse education with instruction and end up atomising our cultures.

Instead, we should aim to impart an integral, participatory and polyhedral culture. We need the courage to generate processes that consciously work to overcome the existing fragmentation and the conflicts that we all bring with us.

We need the courage to renew the fabric of relationships for the sake of a humanity capable of speaking the language of fraternity. The value of our educational practices will be measured not simply by the results of standardised tests but by the ability to affect the heart of society and to help give birth to a new culture.

A different world is possible, and we are called to learn how to build it. This will involve every aspect of our humanity, both as individuals and in our communities.

Let us appeal in particular to men and women of culture, science and sport, artists and media profession-

als in every part of the world to join in supporting this compact and promoting by their own testimony and efforts the values of care for others, peace, justice, goodness, beauty, acceptance and fraternity.

'We should not expect everything from those who govern us. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies. Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles' (*Fratelli Tutti*).

This calls for a pluralistic and multifaceted process in which all of us can work to provide meaningful responses in which diversity and methods are harmonised in the pursuit of the common good. The ability to create harmony: That is what is needed today.

For these reasons, we commit ourselves personally and in common:

First, to make human persons in their value and dignity the centre of every educational programme, both formal and informal, in order to foster their distinctiveness, beauty and uniqueness, and their capacity for relationship with others and with the world around them, while at the same time teaching them to reject lifestyles that encourage the spread of the throwaway culture.

Second, to listen to the voices of children and young people to whom we pass on values and knowledge in order to build together a future of justice, peace and a dignified life for every person.

Third, to encourage the full participation of girls and young women in education.

Fourth, to see in the family the first and essential place of education.

Fifth, to educate and be educated on the need for acceptance and in particular openness to the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Sixth, to be committed to finding new ways of understanding the economy, politics, growth and progress that can truly stand at the service of the human person and the entire human family, within the context of an integral ecology.

Seventh, to safeguard and cultivate our common home, protecting it from the exploitation of its resources, and to adopt a more sober lifestyle marked by the use of renewable energy sources and respect for the natural and human environment, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity and a circular economy.

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we want to commit ourselves courageously to developing an educational plan within our respective countries, investing our best energies and introducing creative and transformative processes in cooperation with civil society. In this, our point of reference should be the social doctrine that, inspired by the revealed word of God and Christian humanism, provides a solid basis and a vital resource for discerning the paths to follow in the present emergency.

The goal of this educational investment, grounded in a network of humane and open relationships, is to ensure that everyone has access to a quality education consonant with the dignity of the human person and our common vocation to fraternity. It is time to look to the future with courage and hope. May we be sustained by the conviction that education bears within itself a seed of hope: the hope of peace and justice; the hope of beauty and goodness; the hope of social harmony.



It is time to subscribe to a global pact on education for and with future generations. This calls for a commitment from us all...

Classified/Crossword/Sudoku

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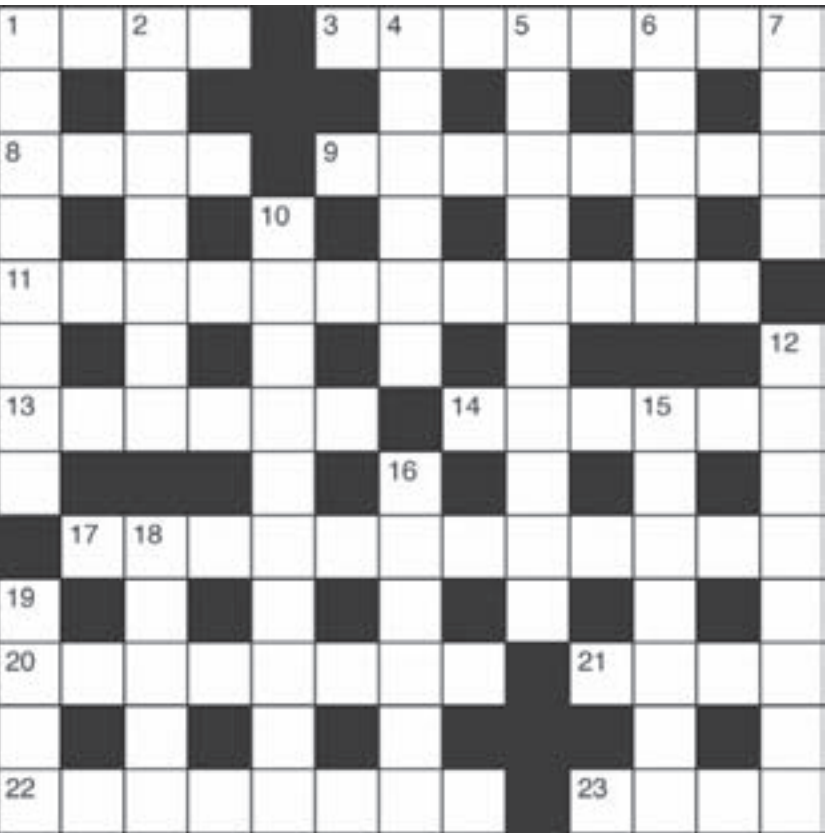
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The Catholic Universe Crossword

No. 675



- Across**
- 1. Wipes up (4)
 - 3. Crucial (8)
 - 8. Tumult (4)
 - 9. Bettered (8)
 - 11. Seldom (12)
 - 13. Belt (6)
 - 14. Tarry (6)
 - 17. Esteem (12)
 - 20. Commonwealth (8)
 - 21. Homeless child (4)
 - 22. Supplied (8)
 - 23. Prophet (4)

- Down**
- 1. Wedding (8)
 - 2. Tender (7)
 - 4. Popular report (6)
 - 5. Oppressive (10)
 - 6. Polite (5)
 - 7. Swimming pool (4)
 - 10. Grievous (10)
 - 12. Convey (8)
 - 15. Facial contortion (7)
 - 16. Writer (6)
 - 18. Dissertation (5)
 - 19. Stumble (4)

SOLUTION -
see page 43

The Catholic Universe Sudoku

No. 275

Every
Sudoku has a unique
solution that can be
reached logically.
Enter numbers into
the blank spaces so
that each row,
column and 3x3
box contains the
numbers 1 to 9.

Stuck?
see page 43



Classified/Crossword/Liturgical Calendars

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For the Promotion of the Traditional Roman Rite

During the coronavirus outbreak, the LMS Office is closed and our staff are working from home. For details of Masses being streamed from around the country go to lms.org.uk/mass-listings

www.lms.org.uk **020 7404 7284**

MASS TIMES

Jesuit Church, Farm Street
Regular Mass & Service times:

SUNDAY: 6pm (Saturday Vigil); 8am; 9.30am (Family); 11am (Latin); 12.30pm; 5.30pm.
WEEKDAYS: 8am; 1.05pm; 6pm.
SATURDAY: 8am; 6pm (Saturday Vigil)
BANK HOLIDAYS: 1.05pm.

All Masses are currently livestreamed on our website.
OPENING HOURS:
The church is open daily from 7.30am to 6.30pm.
CONFESSIONS: Mon-Fri: 12pm-1pm; Saturday: 10am-12 noon.
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www.farmstreet.org.uk

VOCATIONS

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 The Church needs religious sisters URGENTLY (ministers of religion) to bring Christ to others by a life of prayer and service lived in the community of Ignation spirituality. Daily Mass is the centre of community life. By wearing the religious habit we are witnesses of the consecrated way of life.

If you are willing to risk a little love and would like to find out how, contact Sister Bernadette.
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1 Our Lady's Close, Off Hermitage Road,
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Email: sr_bernadette_vfcss@hotmail.com

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For more information: Fr Gerald Wilson O.A.R., St Rita's Centre, Ottery Moor Lane, Honiton, Devon, EX14 1AP. 01404 42601 ex 1
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Crossword Solution (from p42)

Across: 1 Mops; 3 Critical; 8 Riot; 9 Improved; 11 Infrequently; 13 Girdle; 14 Linger; 17 Appreciation; 20 Republic; 21 Waif; 22 Purveyed; 23 Seer.

Down: 1 Marriage; 2 Proffer; 4 Rumour; 5 Tyrannical; 6 Civil; 7 Lido; 10 Deplorable; 12 Transfer; 15 Grimace; 16 Scribe; 18 Paper; 19 Trip.

Sudoku Solution (from p42)

9	5	6	3	7	1	8	4	2
4	7	1	2	5	8	6	9	3
8	2	3	9	6	4	1	5	7
2	4	5	7	1	3	9	8	6
1	3	9	5	8	6	7	2	4
6	8	7	4	2	9	3	1	5
5	6	2	8	9	7	4	3	1
7	9	4	1	3	5	2	6	8
3	1	8	6	4	2	5	7	9

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Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar
Sunday Year B, weekday cycle I

December: Month of the Immaculate Conception Second Sunday of Advent Sunday, 6th December: Is 40:1-5,9-11; Ps 84; 2Pt 3:8-14; Mk 1:1-8	Wednesday, 9th December: Is 40:25-31; Ps 102; Mt 11:28-30
Monday, 7th December: Is 35:1-10; Ps 84; Lk 5:17-26	Thursday, 10th December: Is 41:13-20; Ps 144; Mt 11:11-15
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Tuesday, 8th December: Gn 3:9-15,20; Ps 97; Eph1:3-6,11-12; Lk 1:26-28	Friday, 11th December: Is 48:17-19; Ps 1; Mt 11:16-19
	Saturday, 12th December: Ecclus 48:1-4,9-11; Ps 79; Mt 17:10-13

Extraordinary Form Calendar according to the Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)

Sunday, 6th December: Second Sunday of Advent Rom 15:4-13; Mt 11:2-10	Thursday, 10th December: Feria Readings of Sunday repeated
Monday, 7th December: St Ambrose bishop, confessor & doctor 2 Tim 4:1-8; Mt 5:13-19	Friday, 11th December: St Damasus I pope & confessor 1Pet 5:1-4,10-11; Mt 16:13-19
Tuesday, 8th December: Immaculate Conception of Our Lady Prov 8:22-35; Lk 1:26-28	Saturday, 12th December: Feria Readings of Sunday repeated
Wednesday, 9th December: Feria Readings of Sunday repeated	Compiled by Gordon Dimon, Senior MC of the Latin Mass Society

The importance of showing gratitude to others

Mgr Vladimir Felzmann

When we express gratitude or are thanked, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin, the two crucial neurotransmitters responsible for our emotions that make us feel 'good'. They enhance our mood immediately, making us feel happy from the inside.

"The joy I get from winning a major championship doesn't even compare to the feeling I get when a kid writes a letter saying: 'Thank you so much. You have changed my life,'" wrote Tiger Woods, widely regarded as one of the all-time greatest golfers.

The dictionary defines gratitude as, "the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness." The word originates from the Latin *gratus*, meaning pleasing and thankful.

Kathy A. Feinstein, Sport Performance Consultant based in Florida, writes: "Did you know that practising gratitude can improve athletic performance? Research confirms what the world's elite sports stars already know – that being kinder to yourself, and to others, and being grateful – is good for your mental health. Athletes have talked about how having compassion, gratitude and a sense of perspective enable them to balance the demands of being a full-time athlete with having a family."

"When you start each day with a grateful heart, you are inviting positivity to your day. Gratitude is a simple trait we mustn't forget to practise. We need to practise it every single day, regardless of the circumstance. We can always find something to be grateful about. It can be big moments or small accomplishments. It's just important to be grateful," teaches Ben Francia, an Internet Marketing Consultant based in the Philippines.

Gratitude encourages humility. Appreciating all those who have helped – on and off the pitch, court or pool – encourages the use of "we" rather than just "me".

Thanking – eucharistia [in Greek] – expresses appreciation; itself evidenced in taking care of that gift. I express my gratitude to God for all I still have across my PIES – the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual dimensions of my life – by taking care of them. Hence my 83 pushups on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and the same number of full-squats on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. [Regular readers will remember the 83 = 81 + ½ years of breathing plus nine months in my mother's womb, rounded off to the nearest higher integer.]

Grateful athletes recognise people who go unnoticed. They shake the hand of the maintenance worker who helps cut the grassy field that they are about to tear up with their cleats or the janitor who mops the floor so their feet won't slide on the dust. They write their athletic trainer a thank you note for taping them up, helping them rehab, or stretching



them out before practice. They give a hug to the die-hard fan that is at every game and cheers for his/her team regardless of the outcome.

Like the great New Zealand All Blacks who tidy up their dressing room after every game and training – and believe humility is aligned with greatness – grateful athletes appreciate everyone around them. They appreciate everything they receive – there is no attitude of entitlement.

Grateful athletes appreciate what they have: the opportunity to play a sport they love and all of the benefits that go with that sport – fitness, relationships, life lessons, joy of winning, the learning from losing and the opportunity to challenge and test your abilities.

Grateful athletes are grateful for competitors – from Latin *com*: "with, together" + *petere* "to strive" mutually helping each other improve. Competitors can bring out the best in you and without them you do not have the opportunity to play and

test your limits. In his autobiography former Olympic track star Carl Lewis admits that he chose to embrace his competitors as essential in his quest for performance excellence – rather than as enemies meant to be beaten down.

Grateful athletes enjoy the pressures that enable them to demonstrate their skills and test their limits. They want to win, but appreciate their process, the competition and the challenge.

"Remember to be grateful for what you have including your opportunity to play your sport. Sport is not something you *have* to do, but something you *get* to do!" wrote John Haime, President of 'New Edge Performance': former professional athlete and current bestselling author of *You are a Contender! Build Emotional Muscle to Perform Better and Achieve More ... in business, sports and life*.

Practising gratitude – saying or writing thank-yous – has been shown to increase happiness as well as physical and mental health; shifting away from resentment, jealousy, and other negative emotions.

Along with a more positive outlook, individuals who regularly practise gratitude often sleep better, express more compassion, report feeling more alive, and have stronger immune systems. It's also related to higher levels of optimism, life satisfaction, and well-being, and a greater likelihood of engaging in prosocial behaviour. Gratitude is like a supplement for your brain – reducing the noise and focusing in on

what matters.

One study performed at The University of California, Berkeley, asked individuals in states of mental distress to write gratitude-focused letters – which they were not required to send. Results showed that individuals who wrote letters experienced positive mental health beginning four weeks after the study – and they lasted up to 12 weeks after the act of writing.

By monitoring brain activity, researchers were able to note which areas of the brain were active while participants were making their decisions. Those who wrote letters were more likely to be motivated by gratitude than by guilt or obligation.

The differences in brain activity demonstrated that a continued focus on gratitude over time will create physical changes to the prefrontal cortex. You can physically change your brain and train it to be more gratitude-ready.

Beyond the benefits to your outlook, immune system, and sleep schedule, a few studies (and plenty of anecdotes) have documented the positive impact that gratitude can have on an athlete's performance. If you remember that sport is a metaphor for life you might ask yourself – as part of your night prayers: "How many times did I say 'thanks' today – to whom?" Have a think on what you can do to become a more grateful human being. Perhaps thanking God the Father for the great gift of your life, Jesus Christ for giving that life meaning and the Holy Spirit for God's love? If, cur-



Arsène Wenger stepped down as manager of Arsenal FC in May 2018 after helping the Gunners win three Premier League titles and seven FA Cups during his 22 years in charge. A fan is pictured at his final fixture with the words, 'Merci Arsène' on the club's home kit.

rently you do not, to show gratitude, why not say, even silently, grace before all meals [including breakfast!]?

I know people who systematically cultivate gratitude, typically by keeping a "gratitude journal" in which they regularly record the things for which they're grateful. At night, as part of your night prayers, why not think about two things you are grateful for from the day? Get into the habit of being ever more grateful. It will improve your life.

In a couple of weeks, we shall focus on perseverance.



At the end of your day write down two things you are grateful for from the day. Get into the habit of being ever more grateful. It will improve your life. (Photo: iStock)