

46 DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR

# Lent

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17th February - 3rd April | 2021

A woman with a backpack is shown from the side, looking at a map in a field at sunset. The background is a soft, golden glow from the setting sun over a field of tall grass. The woman is wearing a white t-shirt and a brown backpack with a water bottle visible. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**  
— VICARIATE FOR FAITH & MISSION —

# Introduction

Lent means spring, the lengthening of the days, growing light and thawing ground. The earth is grimed with the tidemarks of winter and needs a good bath. Our homes and ourselves need a good clean. The months are named after purification - February - and war - March.

Winter doesn't leave without blustery battles that push things over and mess things up. If we honestly face Lent's fury, it will leave the landscapes of our lives littered with the debris of ourselves.

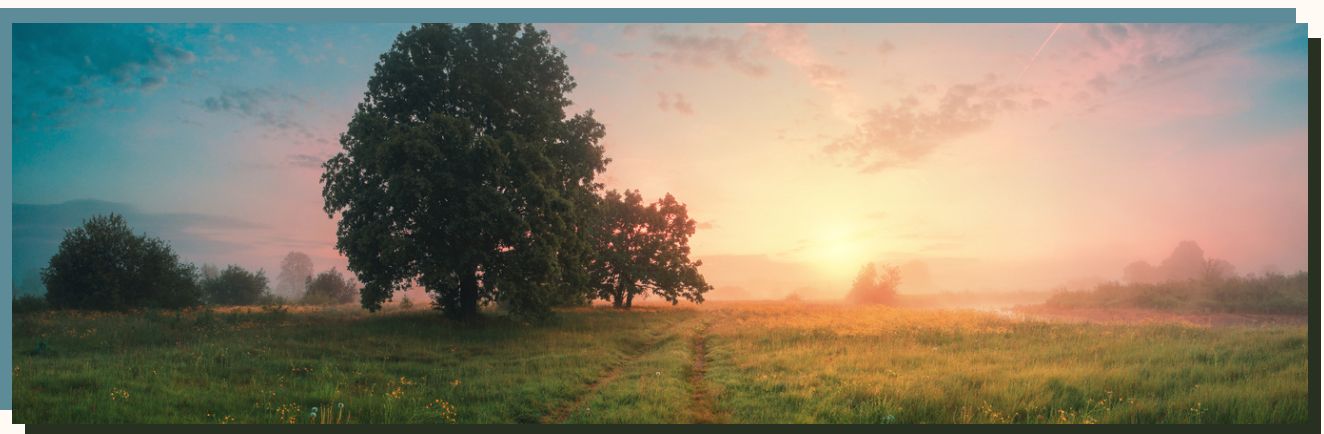
Lent isn't tidy. We start with blessed ash to show we are dust. We promise to pray, fast and give alms to show all is God's grace. We walk the 40-day journey marked with the Cross of Christ, a tree of life to beckon us back to Eden, a compass to show the way to sanctuary, a bronze serpent to save us from death in the desert.

Those of us who are baptised keep Lent in sympathy with the 'elect' -the catechumens chosen for baptism at Easter. We sympathise because we're not that different. What baptism began in us can easily be undone -and probably has been. That's why we seek penance, contrition, forgiveness, amendment. That's why, despite the present lockdown we again seek healing and wholeness, the warmth of God's mercy and the touch of his Son.

These resources are provided to stir our souls and settle our minds, to challenge new direction and shed tears of hope and reassurance. This Lent, we look to renewing our commitment to being missionary disciples as our parishes look beyond the lockdown. Thanks to those who have so generously contributed to them.

***Monsignor Andrew Faley***

***Episcopal Vicar for the Vicariate of Faith & Mission***



# A Daily Prayer for Missionary Discipleship

Heavenly Father,  
when your only begotten Son Jesus Christ  
rose from the dead,  
he commissioned his followers  
to “Go and make disciples of all nations”  
and you remind us that through our Baptism  
we are made sharers in the mission of the Church.

Empower us by the gifts of the Holy Spirit  
to be courageous and enthusiastic  
in bearing witness to the Gospel,  
so that the mission entrusted to the Church,  
which is still very far from completion,  
may find new and effective expressions  
that bring life and light to the world.

Help us make it possible for all peoples  
to experience the saving love  
and mercy of Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
One God, forever and ever.

Amen.

## Feast Days during Lent

Monday, 22nd February .....	The Chair of St. Peter, Apostle
Monday, 1st March .....	St. David Bp, Patron of Wales
Wednesday, 17th March .....	St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland
Friday, 19th March .....	St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Saturday, 20th March .....	St. Cuthbert Bp, Patron of the Diocese
Thursday, 25th March .....	The Annunciation of the Lord
Sunday, 28th March .....	Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Wednesday, 17th February 2021

## ASH WEDNESDAY

Joel 2:12-18, Ps. 50:3ff, 2 Cor. 5:20-6:2; Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18

“We are ambassadors for Christ,” so St Paul tells us this at the beginning of today’s Second Reading. Do you remember before going out on a school trip or going to a sports event the headteacher saying, “Remember when you go out of here you are ambassadors for the school”?

An ambassador is someone who represents the country or organisation that s/he is from. As far as the world is concerned we are Christ. Our example will either attract others or put them off Christ’s message.



The call to repentance in our First Reading and the familiar disciplines of prayer, fasting and good works that we take up in Lent, are

designed to help us become more like Christ, to be good ambassadors. Notice that all three are daily, regular disciplines. We are expected to pray every day of our life; to be disciplined in our eating, drinking, and indeed every aspect of our life, every day; and reaching out to others in their need is fundamental to our faith, every day.

In Lent, however, we are invited to pay particular attention to these things and to think what more we might do. Perhaps, in thinking about what we might do this Lent we might think, if we are to be better ambassadors for Christ, of what we might begin in these forty days and sustain into the future even after Lent is over.

Whatever we decide to do, the words of St Teresa of Avila will help us focus on our calling to be ambassadors, “Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good...”

*Sean Hall, St Mary’s, Forest Hall*

“*Christ has no body now but yours.*”

# Thursday, 18th February 2021

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm: 1:1-4,6; Luke 9:22-25

As we set off on our Lenten journey, let's pick up the cross that will lead us to victory. We know what a cross is not. It is not submitting to a bully who thereby never gets corrected. It is not a seasonal fast amongst the year-long binge. The cross we carry as we follow Christ is the sum of our hearts' resistance to his call. Confessional regulars know full well what niggling little habits trip them up on their way to holiness. Up they will pick that stumbling block and turn it into a cross.

Christ's burden is light but our sin is heavy so, as we carry our cross along his path, there's no need to beat ourselves up. The world will do plenty of that. Even our Lord fell three times under the weight of our sins, but he got up again, and so must we. Repent and try again. Neither should we flatter ourselves, for God alone can raise us from the dead. Daily, we must put to death our worldly instincts and habits, so we can live more fully as children of God and help to bring about his kingdom.

Keep proclaiming the truth, sharing the love and being the light. For us sinners, it is hard enough. And eat the chocolate, because we're all gonna need it.

*Frederique Gill, Blessed Edmund Duke Parish, Coxhoe/Sedgefield/Trimdon*

# Friday, 19th February 2021

Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 50:3-6, 18-19; Matthew 9:14-15.

I don't really like fasting. Yet, it's interesting what we can learn about ourselves when we fast. Not all of it good. Sometimes in the past, when I've been fasting during Lent, people have said that they are going out for a meal with friends. My immediate response was "Lucky you!" as the hunger pangs echoed around my stomach. That, I suppose, is envy. On other occasions, my reaction to people going out for a Lenten get-together has been indignation: "Going out for a meal? During Lent?!" So, sadly, envy and indignation are both facets of who I am. But do I, perhaps, see traces of something similar in today's gospel passage when the disciples of John the Baptist ask of Jesus: "Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?" Might this too be envy, or indignation, or something else?

Fasting cannot be an end in itself. It shouldn't lead either to envy or to feeling virtuous. Fasting is about choosing to go without things we don't actually need so as to focus more deliberately on those things we do need. So, what do I need? What is good for me, better for me - at every level? What are the things I know, deep down, that I am challenged to do to enable the Good News of Jesus to become more real for others? And what things, instead, do I tend to be drawn towards to satisfy my comfort rather than my need or my mission? What are the things from which I need to fast this Lent so that I can focus more deliberately on my calling as a '2021 disciple' of Jesus?

*Fr. David Coxon, Parish of St John Boste, West Durham.*

# *Saturday, 20th February 2021*

## *Isaiah 58: 9-14 Psalm: 86: 1-2; Luke 5: 27-32*

Have you ever judged a person based on how they look, what they do or where they are from? Have you ever internally judged how good a 'catholic' a person is? If we are truly honest with ourselves, most of us probably have. In today's Gospel reading, the Jewish religious leaders are flabbergasted at the fact that Jesus calls Levi the tax collector to follow him and that he chooses to dine with the outcasts. Why? Because the Pharisees and Sadducees expected Jesus to dine with them, after all they were the ones who had followed all of the 613 commandments, whilst at the same time ostracising all those who couldn't like the sick, the prostitutes, the shepherds, the tax collectors and those who were ill.

A great priest once told me that 'if you can't find Jesus in the homeless man at the door of the church, you will never find Christ in the Chalice on the altar'. Growing up, my late brother and I were polar opposites. He had many demons; drug addiction, regular involvement with police, one priest even jokingly offered to exorcise him to try and free him from his troubles. But whenever we went to church he was the first to seek out the homeless people on the streets in the town outside, he was the first to give them what little he could actually afford, he was the first to seek out the broken, the outcasted and the marginalised and share a smile, a joke or a cup of coffee, whilst I shamefully was the first to go in and find 'our' pew where we had always sat for many years. When I looked at my brother, I saw the love of Christ radiating through him. A broken and deeply troubled soul through no fault of his own who, to many might not have fulfilled the criteria of being a 'good Catholic', found it within himself to live out Jesus' two most important commands, namely; to 'love God with all your heart' and to 'love thy neighbour'. So, inspired by today's Gospel, let's embrace the call to truly be catholic, i.e. to be universal, welcoming and inclusive of all those on the fringes. Let's live out God's love rather than try to chart how deserving of it we are. As a universal Church, if we are to truly move forward, we need to ensure we do not judge, we do not try and keep score of how many rules we obey but ensure that we share Christ's love with all those we meet, wherever they are and whatever they have done. God bless you all and I wish you a spiritually refreshing Lent. Amen.

*Andrew Young, St. Joseph's Catholic Academy and the parishes of Hebburn and Jarrow.*



# *Sunday, 21st February 2021*

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Genesis 9:8-15; Psalm: 24:4-6, 7b-9; Mark 1:12-15.

In today's first reading, God tells Noah that a rainbow will be the sign of the covenant which God makes with the earth: "Whenever the rainbow appears, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind." (Gen 9:14) The rainbow is a sign of God's blessing on each and every creature and a reassurance that "never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life" (v.15).

How interesting that over the past year we have come to associate rainbows with NHS workers striving to protect each and every person in their care to prevent the pandemic destroying life. What a great witness of the kind of selfless generosity to which we are all called!

In his latest book 'Let Us Dream', Pope Francis sees an overflow of mercy coming out of the events of the last year: "The crisis has called forth in some a new courage and compassion. Some have been sifted and have responded with the desire to reimagine our world; others have come to the aid of those in need in concrete ways that can transform our neighbour's suffering."

On this first Sunday of Lent, Mark's Gospel tells us "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News." (Mk.1:15) We are urgently called to consider the lives we are living and to change whatever is holding us back from living our lives to the full – and that includes an active responsibility for those in need and for the world.

So, the next time you see a rainbow in the sky or on a badge or poster, let it remind you of God's covenant love and your responsibility to share that with others.

*Frank O'Neill, St John XXIII Parish, Washington*

**“** *The time has come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand.* **”**

# *Monday, 22nd February 2021*

*1 Peter 5:1-4; Psalm 22 (23); Matthew 16:13-19*

Today we commemorate the feast of Saint Peter the Apostle. Our readings point us to those immense qualities of Faith, Leadership, Authority and Shepherding emerging in the early Church and continuing till our present time. Jesus recognises the potential in Simon Peter as a leader, when he says, "You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church." Peter's luminous response to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" reveals that he draws from a source beyond himself - the Spirit Jesus shares with his heavenly father. This is the same Spirit of faith and trust which would help Simon Peter to overcome his fears and who in his turn would encourage the Apostles to be the "Shepherds of the flock of God that are entrusted to them."

The Gospel focuses on the primacy of Peter among all the apostles - the first to proclaim faith in the Son of God. The Church will always need a visible head - the successor of Peter, the Pope, with all the leadership and shepherding this entails. Such is the responsibility for this that Pope Francis says, "it is not possible to flee or remain neutral, or to send the answer or delegate it to someone else." He calls us to the love of our only Teacher, who calls us to renew our faith in him, recognising him as Son of God and Lord of all life - the first to renew his profession of faith is the Successor of Peter.

*Chris Smith, St. Robert's Morpeth.*

# *Tuesday, 23rd February 2021*

*Matthew 6:7-15*

I am sure that many of us at times, are guilty of using too many words in prayer and also when reciting psalms, canticles or set prayers, to sometimes allow our thoughts to drift elsewhere. In the Our Father, Jesus reveals to us a remarkable thing about God, who understands both our failings and our needs. He encourages us both to enter personally into a loving relationship with the Father but in use of the word 'Our' to be in a loving relationship with others.

In a sense it is not just a single prayer, rather a template for our entire being. Firstly to recognise the Creator who is the very basis of our existence as human beings. Next, in recognising the importance of God as the centre of all other relationships in life, we are encouraged to express a desire for God's Kingdom, one that is free from hatred, envy, greed and strife. On a simpler human level there is still a recognition of our very basic need for daily sustenance as well as our life long need for forgiveness for the many times that we get things wrong. Ultimately and most importantly the prayer expresses, our need to be saved from that, which can destroy our soul. As we go about our day today, we may we remember the 'Our' in the Our Father and look to deepen our relationships with others as Missionary Disciples on a journey.

*Carl Watson, St. Osmund's, Gainford.*

## *Wednesday, 24th February 2021*

*Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm: 50: 3-4,12-13,18-19; Luke 11:29-32*

There is something comforting about the Star over Bethlehem shining so brightly and internally illuminating our faith. We proudly hang stars over our nativity scenes or on our Christmas trees to remind us of such a hopeful sign that guides those with open hearts to the infant Jesus. In today's Gospel we are told of crowds gathering around Jesus asking for a 'sign' to which he responds that as Jonah became the sign for the Ninevites 'so will the Son of Man be to this generation.' Jesus brings us all the promise of redemption and it is that hope that we carry daily in our hearts as we strive to make the Gospel an integral response to our faith. When we are living in such challenging times is it a wonder that our own generation continues to expect outward signs and proof of God's presence in the world?

How can we help illuminate the faith of others? How can we point people towards Jesus as the Son of Man? How can we be missionary disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus established whilst on earth? We have the tools within us for we know how to love unconditionally as we are loved by God; we know how to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and we do so in the sure knowledge that we are loved and cherished by God whoever we are and however often we fail to be that shining light of example to others. As we continue our own journey of Lent, we yearn and pray for the day that the multitudes of this generation will come to know God themselves and share that hope of the Gospel that we are all privileged to experience.

*Trisha Tindall, St. Mary's, Forest Hall.*

## *Thursday, 25th February 2021*

*Esther 4:17; Psalm: 137 (138): 1-3, 7-8; Matthew 7:7-12*

During this first week of Lent as we meditate upon Our Lord's suffering in the desert, we draw strength from Esther's example in the first reading when she and her fellow Jews were facing genocide through a proud and corrupt official called Haman. She fasted and prayed that God would protect her and her people which he did and he delivered them from a very unpleasant outcome. Like Jesus, we too are called at this time to establish a discipline of meaningful and heartfelt prayer for a God who loves us and wants to draw us closer to him. Sometimes we can become preoccupied with trivial distractions in our lives but this Lent, like Esther, and in today's psalm, we should be able to say: "On the day I called you answered me and strengthened my soul."

In today's gospel, Jesus reminds us that the one who asks and perseveres will be heard and God will respond in a way that benefits our soul. There is goodness in everyone and most people love somebody, however imperfectly. We are therefore reminded that God's grace is necessary to enable us to live out Jesus' command to treat others as we would like to be treated. Covid restrictions permitting, this grace is available through prayer, supporting others, living simply, attending live-streamed masses with spiritual communion and by sharing our faith, perhaps via computer, phone or within our bubble. The Holy Spirit will lead us if we let it, Lent is also a good time to reflect upon anything which may have caused offence to others in order that through acknowledging our imperfections we are able to grow spiritually in happiness and holiness. Today we contemplate on how God strengthens our soul in order to reach out to others and share God's love and mercy.

*Brian Dunleavy, St. Augustine's Parish, Darlington.*

*Friday, 26th February 2021*

*Ezekiel 18:1-28; Psalm 130; Mt. 5; 20-26*

Not everyone's life is perfect. From being very young, things can affect us, rejections, feelings of not being loved or accepted. The response is often to hold onto it, hold the hurt, the anger and rejection; believing the lie- and it needs an act of grace to realise that I am being trapped and prevented from being who I truly am- who God has made me to be. A Priest friend once described it is a large weight being tied to my ankle which is fed throughout my life by hurt, resentment and blame; getting bigger and bigger - heavier and heavier, preventing me from growing and moving on. One of the central teachings of Jesus's Ministry was the forgiveness of sin. In the Gospel today he reminds me that before I come to the Altar if there is anyone I need to forgive, I am to let it go, cut the chain of all that holds me back. He asks us to take the time to remember, to face them, and whether they are alive or dead -to forgive, let go and allow God's grace to set us free. Hebrews 8:12 tells us that our loving God does not bring our sin back to mind. We ask God to forgive us as we forgive others - no one is perfect-certainly not me. Jesus lay down His life for this - for you and me, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Lk 23:34. One particular person in my life caused me great pain. I carried it for a long time from childhood, well into my adult life. It affected me in many ways and I made sure I kept people at length so that it couldn't happen again. I was in charge! Then one day, out of the blue, by the grace of God, the story of this person's childhood came to light. It didn't change what had been done to me, but I suddenly was given the light of understanding- what had happened in their childhood, how it had affected them - it was horrific, I couldn't forget what had happened to me - none of us can - but how it affects us, we can do something about. I was given a grace of insight and understanding- we do not know everything - but God does. He loves, us and calls us to lay down our burdens to take hold of our lives, and to follow Him - to come to the Altar bringing our gifts -the joys, sorrows and memories, and to lay them down. Our God receives them as we lay them down- and He draws us into oneness with Him, He feeds us and then commissions us- sends us out to go and bring His love, forgiveness and understanding to all we meet - to feed them and set them free. Just as He has done for me. Let us give time this Lent to reflect - to pray for the space for change - to look at; Where have I been? Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How am I going to get there? in order to move on into the Joy of Easter!

*Pat Kennedy MPS, St. Cuthbert's Parish, Kenton, Newcastle.*

*“ Father forgive them for they know not what they do. ”*

# *Saturday, 27th February 2021*

## *Deuteronomy 26:19-19; Psalm: 118; Matthew 5:43-48*

Although the lectionary has the Gospel reading commence: “Jesus said to his disciples” we need to remember that the words of the Sermon on the Mount from which this extract comes were actually addressed not to a small group of Christ’s intimate friends or a spiritual elite but to “the crowds.” This makes the final words of today’s Gospel reading even more challenging. Against a background of stress and anxiety, of isolation and Zoom-mediated relationships, of home-schooling and job insecurity, surely the perfection Jesus demands from the crowds, from us, is simply too much. It takes all our strength to cope with the struggles of the day and perfection will have to wait. The opening words of today’s psalm hardly help, promising happiness to those whose lives are blameless when we are conscious daily of our failings and flaws.

The Greek word used by Matthew, *teleios*, translated as ‘perfect’, has a root meaning of complete, undivided and whole. In our wounded and fractured world, perfection cannot be achieved by ourselves, no matter how hard we strive and how much we may try. We need help and today’s psalm tells us from whom it shall come: The Lord is our help and our shield. God has drawn close to us and, in perfect love, has offered us hope in the person of Jesus. He is the one who makes lives new and brings to perfection within us God’s dream for our wholeness and healing. Perhaps we, together with “the crowds” of our families, neighbourhoods and parishes should read the final words of today’s Gospel reading less as a command and more as an invitation to stay close to Jesus and to be transformed by his love. Jesus says to the crowds, to those who need him most, to us: Be not afraid...Be cured...Be healed...Be forgiven...Be made whole...Be perfect.

*Andy Doyle, St Cuthbert’s, Durham.*



*Sunday, 28th February 2021*

## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Mark 9:2-10

The encounter the disciples have in today's Gospel is incredibly compelling, and leaves us in a great deal of awe and wonder. I can't help but ponder on what sort of journey the disciples took up the mountain to witness this point of enlightenment and transformation. It strikes me that the author reveals very little about the journey these men embarked upon up the mountain. It can be very tempting to throw a lot of emphasis on our destinations and goals, and very little emphasis on the importance of the journey. We can often romanticise our destination without realising that it is the journey itself that often changes us. It is the journey itself that prepares us and moulds us, softens our hearts and, in some cases, breaks us open. Only then, when we are fully emptied and open, can we fully participate in the transformation. Only then can we fully engage with, and experience, the destination. A journey up a mountain is no easy task for our physicality and I find myself wondering what these disciples endured, faced, and withstood on their journey leading up to the transfiguration.

All journeys of transformation tend to require an often uncomfortable process of letting go and surrendering ourselves fully to the river of change. I find myself swept up in these journeys of change and growth regularly. At times the discomfort and restlessness is overwhelming and I find myself gasping for breath for what feels familiar to me. I want to be down the mountain amongst the safety of what I know and who I am. Not up the mountain enduring the growing pains of my spiritual path that is calling me to 'become' over and over again.

But, I am learning over time to befriend the discomfort, welcome the challenges and surrender to the growing pains. I am learning over time each cycle brings a new me, a fuller me, a truer me. A me that is more connected to my Creator than I could have ever imagined. I am learning there is no such thing as a destination without the beautiful chaotic mess that is our journey. When the great mountain top calls me, I am learning to embrace another mountain journey within. Just like the disciples in today's Gospel, I am always left humbled, in awe and wonder at what I see at the top of the mountain. So I invite you, this lent, to fully embrace your journey. Let's take our eyes off of our destination and, in faith, engage with what the journey itself is doing within us. Let's unclench our fists, stop using all efforts to swim against the current of change, and let's indeed allow ourselves to become fully transformed. Let's fully participate in change this lent, so that we can indeed fully participate in the new life, new beginnings, new perspectives, new selves that Easter so faithfully brings. In order to make way for the new, we must endure the process of letting go of the old. To be fully acquainted with the gifts of Easter, we must be fully acquainted with the gifts of Crucifixion. Time and time again.

*Katy Kettner, Holy Rosary Parish, Gateshead*

# *Monday, 1st March 2021*

## *Philippians 3: 8-14; Psalm- 1; Matthew- 5:13-16*

As we march through the uncertainties of the pandemic this Lent, let us ponder over Salt and Light as 'influencers.' Imagine yourself as a deep-rooted faithful person. Allow yourselves to be dissolved as salt in the vessel (world); so that when the spiritual food (scripture) is ready to influence, it leaves an indelible mark. Gazing through the missionary discipleship lens, gather the courage to ask others to become salt for the needy world today.

Similarly, think of yourselves as a light in the midst of the darkness that surrounds the world currently. Over the last two months, I have been sharing a 'daily bible verse' with a church friend who has suffered from multiple illnesses. On posting John 8:12 one day, the person wrote back to me saying – 'you are my light.' No I am not, I replied; but pointed out that Christ is. Embracing that radiating spirit, let's vow to be the Salt and Light to all we meet in and through our lives.

*Alison Rebello, St Aidan's, Benton*

# *Tuesday, 2nd March 2021*

## *Matthew 23:1-12*

I was waiting with excitement to write this reflection for you, as the Gospel readings were given out at random and I knew the Holy Spirit would send me my Gospel reading. I was very curious what message would be included for me to share with you.

While I was waiting, I put myself through an intensive interview process, spent time preparing, predicting questions putting all my energy into it. I was not successful. I immediately experienced feelings of sadness and sorrow. My good friends comforted me; one friend wrote: "God is good." I believe in God's goodness, never doubt that my life has purpose given by God, who knew me long before I was born and chose my path. It is not about me but about my mission in life to live and give witness to the Gospel. In chaplaincy I always have work to do, people to support and no time to waste on feelings of sadness just because I did not get my way. Just as I began to move on the, impatiently awaited Gospel reading was sent to me. I was so delighted with it that I called it "the postcard from heaven." If the Holy Spirit had ran out of people and creatures to work through, we would get post cards with scripture reminding us of God's love. I kept reading it repeatedly and every time my attention was drawn to this passage: "The greatest among you must be your servant." Comforting messages of love and validation of my work were in this passage. It gave me strength to continue with my work. Once again, through scripture, I was reminded of Jesus' teaching to go and look after the poor and the needy. I could not ignore this clear message. I therefore continue with my work in school. When working in the school food bank and with the students, I feel close to God who transcends through the people I support, my friends and my "post card." And my heart is full of love that refuels every time I fulfil my God given purpose. My friend was right; "God is good."

This day we reflect, Where is God's goodness in my life? How can I bring this to those around me?

*Kasia Szczepanska, Chaplain at St Aidan's Catholic Academy in Sunderland*

## *Wednesday, 3rd March 2021*

*Jeremiah 18:18-20; Psalm 30(31):5-6,14-16; Matthew 20:17-28*

Plots feature throughout today's readings. A plot against Jeremiah in the first reading, the psalmist reflects on plots against him and, in the Gospel, Jesus talks of the plot against himself bubbling in the background, soon to be realised. In this context, a plot is a plan made in secret to commit a harmful or illegal act. However, a plot can also be the main events within a story.

In the Gospel, we hear of an attempt to control events in the story of the sons of Zebedee, James and John. Jesus reminds them - and us - that some events are simply not in our hands. Isn't that so true? Just look at the situation we all find ourselves in at the moment. We would all surely have preferred an alternative plot twist!

Lent could be seen as an opportunity to answer Jesus' question: "Can you drink the cup that I am to drink?" Through our sacrificial prayer, almsgiving and abstinence, we are answering in the affirmative, but, like James and John, being a disciple of Jesus does not give us a passport to control our plots. Some things are for the Father alone to determine. Realising when to let go and let God handle things would be ultimately what Jesus did, and so, too, should we.

*Patrick Rutherford, Blessed Edmund Duke Parish, Coxhoe, Sedgfield and Trimdon*

## *Thursday, 4th March 2021*

*Jeremiah 17:5-10, 21-24; Psalm: 1:1-4,6, 9-11; Luke 16:19-31*

Lent gives us an opportunity to take a step back from 'the norm' of our daily lives. In many ways, we have had a year of what feels like Lent – this past year we have had to give up so much of what we would normally enjoy. However, when we live a life of service, sacrifice, humility and fragility, like Lazarus; we in turn experience life more fully. Challenge and struggle lead to growth and change. The Sacred Heart of Jesus reminds us that humanity is about pain as well as joy; full of powerful love, yet pierced.

We can too often become like the rich young man, surrounded by comfort and relying on earthly treasures to feed our souls. However, this can stunt our growth as we become blind to what really is important – matters of the heart. May we learn from Lazarus, whose life circumstances of pain and suffering led him to eternal love, light and beauty. May we have courage to step out of our norm, may we be bold in our vulnerability and may we be drawn to that which truly feeds us and sets our soul on fire. May we be mindful of and embrace our own brokenness which will only draw us closer to the broken-hearted around us. The rich young man couldn't see the beggar as a dignified child of God because he was wasting his days in conspicuous consumption. May we learn from the rich young man too and instead, strive to see the world and humanity with the eyes of God. Let's listen to The Heart and live a life as missionary disciples.

*Maria Vare, St Bede's Church, Bedlington.*

## *Friday, 5th March 2021*

Gen 37:3-4, 12-13A, 17B-28A; Ps 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21; Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

“Never talk about religion or politics.” How many times have you heard that comment? Avoiding these two subjects keeps everything smooth and harmonious. We may never really know what another person thinks but we all keep our temper and get along – at least on the surface. In today’s gospel, Jesus is right in the thick of it with the pharisees: religion and politics all mixed up together in a frank exchange of views. In Israel in those days, it was pretty impossible to prise religion and politics apart. The Jews were God’s chosen people and religion was a state affair.

Jesus gets stuck right in with a parable about the tenants of a vineyard not giving their produce over to its owner. Worse than that, they beat and kill the owner’s servants and then his only son. It didn’t take a genius to work out that the vineyard was Israel, the servants the prophets and the son Jesus. The pharisees got it straight away. And they knew what the punishment should be too: put the wretches to death and lease the vineyard to others. It is ironic that this harsh judgement on the tenants comes from the mouths of the pharisees: they are condemning themselves.

Jesus has the last word in the story and it’s still a word of judgement: the vineyard is going to be taken from those who bear no fruit and given to those who do. Yet the harshness has gone. There is no talk of wretches, no talk of executions, no anger or raised voice. Maybe we can learn something here about how to talk about religion because if we never talk about it, how can we share our belief in the risen Jesus with others?

So perhaps we should pray that we are fruitful with the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control and maybe we should also ask for the grace to share them with those we meet.

*Gareth L Rowe, St. Oswin, Tynemouth.*



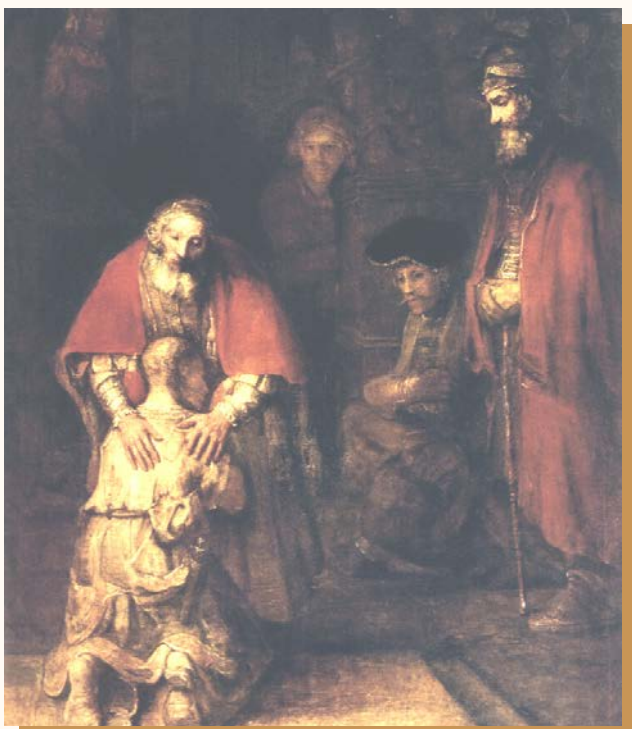
# Saturday, 6th March 2021

## Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

This beautiful parable is well known as the prodigal son but can also be called the loving forgiving father! After prematurely demanding his inheritance, the younger son leaves his family, squanders all his money and sinks to the degrading pit of looking after pigs, (disgusting to a Jew) and he begins to starve. At rock bottom he returns home and hopes his father will take him back as a paid servant. His father, watching and waiting, sees him from a long way off and runs (probably undignified as an old man in a long robe!) to drape himself around his sons neck and kiss him tenderly. (An action which would break all Middle Eastern protocol). The father is thrilled and does this before the son has the chance to say "Father I have sinned against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son" There is no lectures on his costly mistakes, no guilt put on him about the hurt he has caused, no conditions on return, just a robe, a ring, sandals and a party! This is an absolute reversal of status and restoration of son ship! We might not have completely turned away from God like the son did, but this Lent let us mindfully and prayerfully have conversations with our Father in heaven about what we need to repent of, confident that the incomprehensible, unconditional love and grace of God our Father, because of Jesus sacrifice, will always forgive and accept us back, if we genuinely say sorry. We can then be confident to ask for the Fathers blessing, so we can grasp more, not just in our heads but in our hearts, our identity as Gods beloved children and therefore our destiny and purpose also.

Jesus received this hug of son ship, through the Holy Spirit, at His baptism, which empowered Him and projected Him to enter His mission and ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. We too need to know that we are Gods beloved sons and daughters in whom He is well pleased, in order to "go out into the entire world and proclaim the good news to everyone", as Jesus told us to, in whatever way He shows us!

*Anne Connor, St Augustine's, Darlington.*



“

*Father I have sinned against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.*

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*Sunday, 7th March 2021*

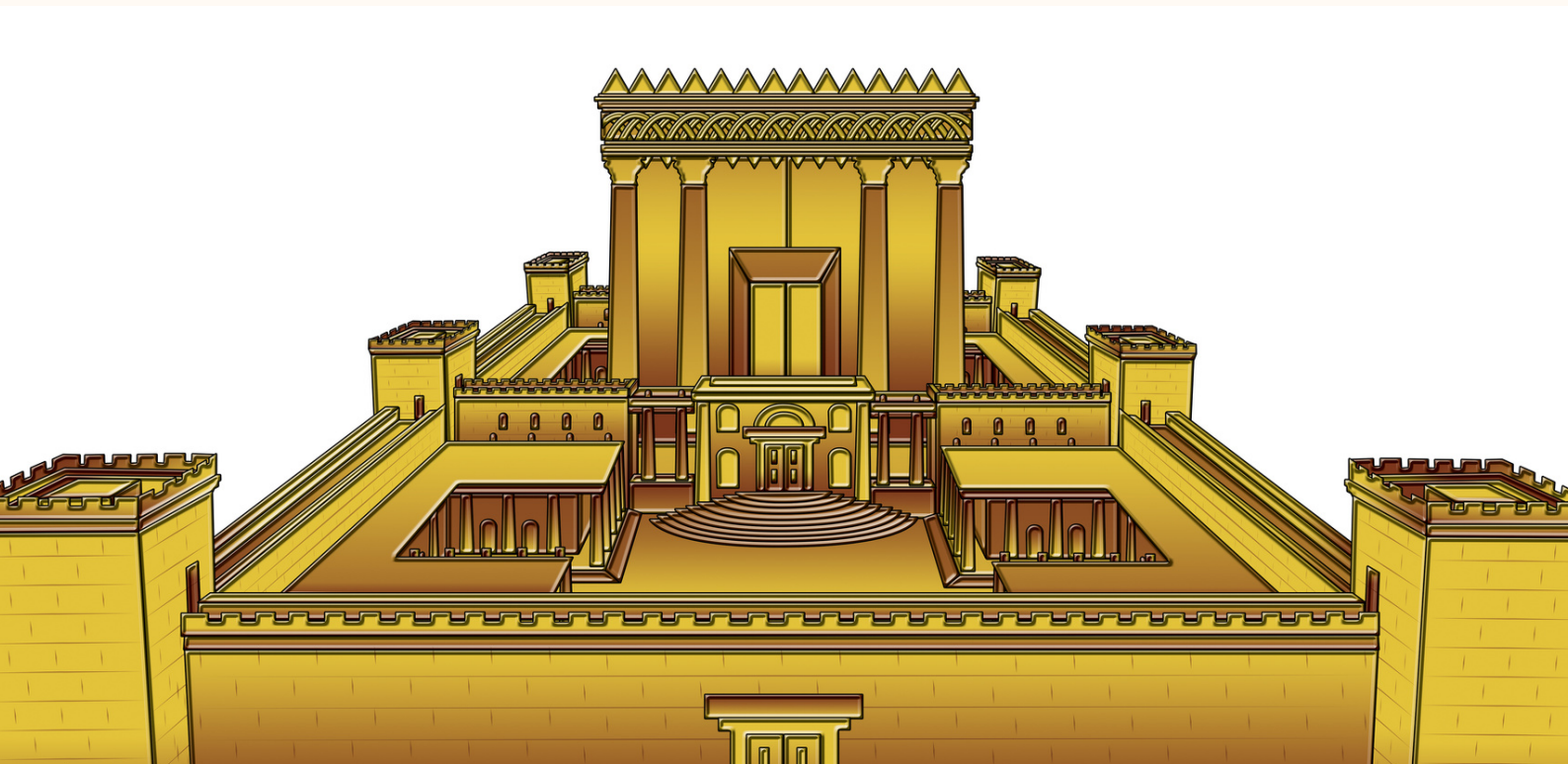
## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

*John 2:13-25*

The cleansing of the temple is a well-known account. We have Jesus casting out the animals, turning over tables, scattering money from the court of Gentiles, The temple is holy, a place of worship, a place of prayer, not a cattle market. Jesus was angry at what he saw. He chased out the animals, turned over the tables because he had this righteous anger as he witnessed the abuse of the temple and he had to act. We too can have this righteous anger that calls us to action. It is right, it is just. We can see situations in the world that make us angry. Abortion, abuse of all kinds, refugee abuse, the need for food banks, and the list goes on. This righteous anger calls us to action; my parents were called to action to help the homeless in the south-east for example. How does God want us to respond to the righteous anger we experience?

Jesus states in the second part of this account "Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up." We know that when Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple was torn in two, top to bottom. It was designed to separate the "holy of holies" from ordinary people, only the high priest could enter this part of the temple once a year and even they had to be without sin or would die. This veil was over 30 feet high and up to 4 inches thick. No man could rip it apart. God wants us to develop a personal relationship with Him. He wants us to enter into the holy of holies. Through Jesus' death, we can have this deeper relationship, just as Adam and Eve had before the fall. St Paul states in 1 Corinthians 6 v19 "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." Due to Christ's death and resurrection, we are His temple and also need to be sure that we are cleansed and purified so that we are a temple of God, reflecting His Love to the world.

*Gerry Connor, St. Augustines. Darlington.*



# Monday, 8th March 2021

2 Kings 5:1-15; Ps: 41:2-3,42:3-4; Luke 4:24-30

The trouble with change is that at some point it has to start today, and we may not be ready yet. We might find this passage harder to pray with than other ones, not just because the Nazarenes try to do away with Jesus, but also because Jesus does nothing to soften the shock of his message: firstly, he is the anointed one; secondly, the Lord's favour is on the poor, the oppressed and the afflicted – and it's a universal blessing, which includes their greatest enemies.

We all have blind spots (“surely God doesn't expect me to love them”) and it can be tempting to turn to the Bible to endorse our own point of view rather than to let God speak to us. Pope Francis said recently, “The believer does not turn to the Holy Scriptures to support his or her own philosophical and moral view, but because he or she hopes for an encounter.” Do we hope to meet Jesus in the Gospels, and do we invite him onto our home territory? Or do we also have a tendency to love our traditions, to hope for the future, but to shy away from the invitation of the present moment?

When Jesus does something that we don't like or don't understand, we might want to push him out to the periphery of our minds and throw him over the edge, or we might have the courage and confidence to say to him, “Hang on a minute, Lord. What exactly did you mean when you said that?”

*Julie King, St Augustine's Church, Darlington.*

“

*All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*

”

*Tuesday, 9th March 2021*

*Matthew 18: 21-35*

“ *Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?* ”

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times”*

Peter, in what appears to be an opportunity to prove his worth, asks this question of Jesus. The response leaves Peter crestfallen by the gravity of what Jesus demands of him and his fellow disciples. It is easy to miss the depth of Jesus’ response if we focus only on the numbers. Peter was thinking that getting to seven would be hard, but eight would be too many. In response, Jesus shows that Peter isn’t even close. Forgiveness must become a way of life rather than merely an occasional event. To truly understand the depth of God’s forgiving love we must reshape our thoughts, our actions and our emotions. Pope Francis states that we: *“are a mission on this earth; that is the reason why we are in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, healing and forgiveness”* (Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel).

After answering Peter, Jesus then proceeds to tell a parable about an unforgiving servant – someone who receives forgiveness for an extraordinary debt only to then go out and hold someone else accountable for a much smaller debt. The parable is straightforward to understand, yet hard to embody. Given what God has done for us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, it would be inconceivable for us not to forgive our sisters and brothers for much smaller sins. Yet, in reality this happens all the time. When we withhold forgiveness we retain the pain and discomfort of the offense that has been caused. However, when we forgive we not only release our offender, we release ourselves and we become free. Let us use this Lenten journey to embody the actions of the King in the parable and offer the same forgiveness that God, through the Church, offers us in matters great or small.

Dear God, empower us through your Holy Spirit to make forgiveness a way of life. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

*Andrew Davis, Head of RE at St Robert of Newminster Catholic School.*

# Wednesday, 10th March 2021

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Ps. 147:12-13,15-16, 19-20; Matthew 5:17-19

The one line introduction in the missal today reads: "Take notice of the laws and observe them." A summary of what today's readings are about. Moses is exhorting the people to keep God's laws. If they do they will enter the land God has promised them and by keeping His laws they will demonstrate their 'wisdom and understanding.' So far, so simple but the reading ends with 'But take care what you do and be on your guard. Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart...' We know that the people of Israel did indeed forget to follow God's laws. There were some dramatic lapses in their relationship with God, such as idolatry but the phrase which struck me was 'let slip from your heart.' Many of the people of Israel were, like us, not committing sin on a large scale but over time their commitment slipped from their hearts. The exhortation to follow God's laws seems simple enough but our adherence to His laws can begin to erode gradually and if our faith is merely based on keeping to the rules, it can soon become jaded instead of the life-giving relationship which Jesus offers.

In today's gospel, Jesus says: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them." Reading that statement by itself, it may seem as if Jesus is wagging his finger to his listeners and saying you must continue to obey the Laws, of which there were hundreds, relating to every aspect of life. This gospel reading, however, comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus shows us how to live by God's Laws when they are embedded in our hearts and are the result of living by the two greatest commandments of loving God with all our soul, and mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus goes on to look at different aspects of the Law: "You have it said..." and then explains how that Law should be put into practice, which is not only far more demanding than rule keeping but also far more compassionate. This culminates in Jesus saying: "You have heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." Jesus is completing the Laws by explaining how they should be carried out in a spirit of love and selflessness.

During Lent we seek to deepen our relationship with God. We may have chosen to deny ourselves something to remind ourselves of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. We may have chosen to follow some of the Church's traditions by attending daily mass and Stations of the Cross, which bring us closer to God. We may be following God's law. Our challenge is not only to keep the Law but also to allow Jesus to complete it in us, by loving others as ourselves, by turning the other cheek, by not judging others, by following what Jesus says later in Matthew chapter 5: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

*Janet Wallbank, St. Teresa's, Heaton/Newcastle-upon-Tyne.*

*Thursday, 11th March 2021*

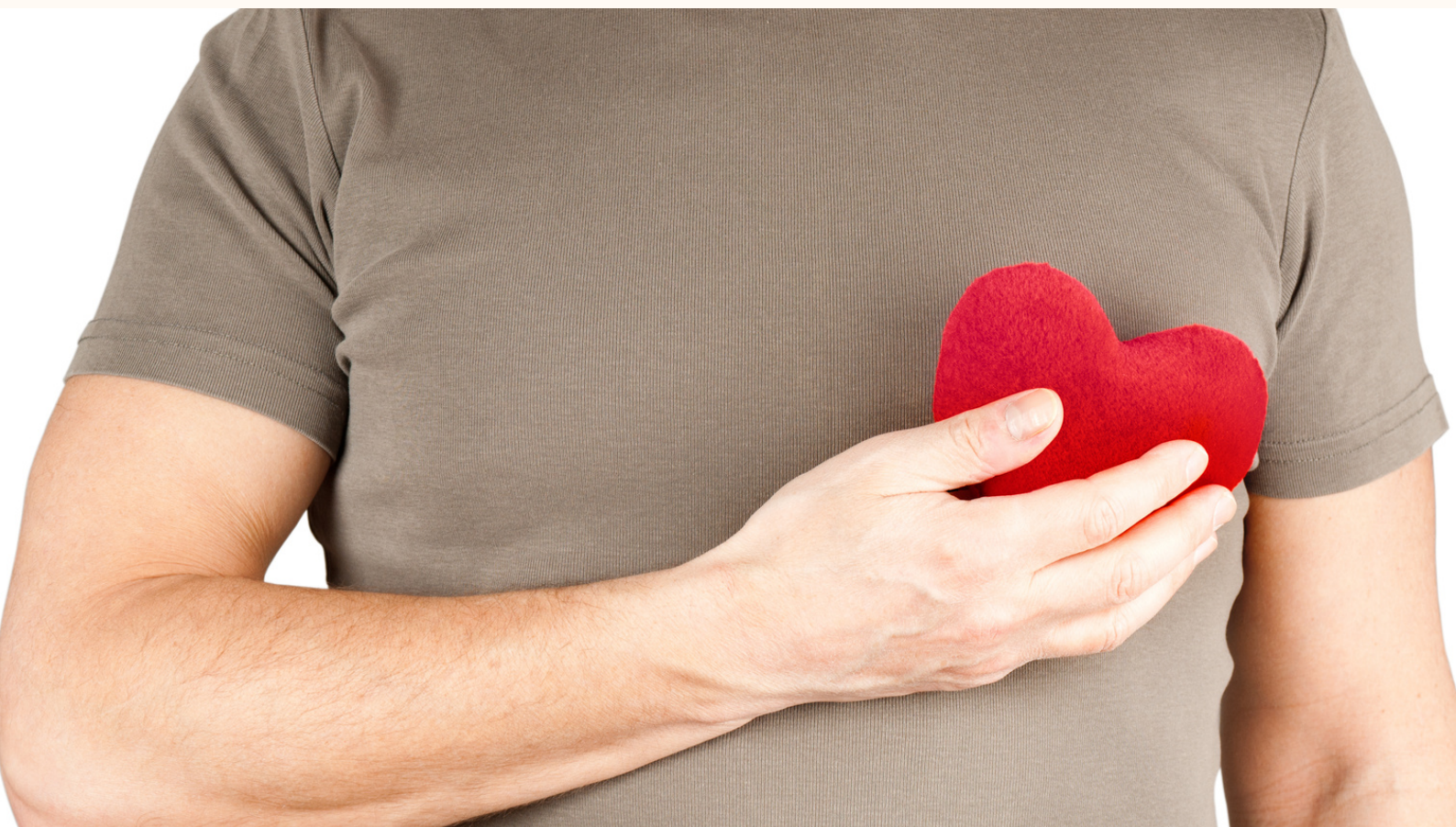
*Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalm 94:1-2, 6-9; Luke 11:14-23*

'O that today you would listen to his voice! 'Harden not your hearts'

In today's gospel, we find people questioning by whose power Jesus performs the miracle of healing the man who was dumb. Jesus seizes this teachable moment to point out that what they are seeing is the Kingdom of God at work. He knows that their motives are mixed and some are asking to catch him out. Notice they don't question whether it was actually a miracle, this seems to be taken as fact. What they are focusing on is whether this is an act from God or from the devil. Jesus' response is very clear. The Kingdom of God is at work and they must be either in or out. They mustn't be divided, "He who is not with me is against me."

Jesus was doing God's work here, it can be painful when our motives are misunderstood and not recognised. Or when people choose to focus on negative details and fail to see the big picture and the Spirit at work. Jesus knows their hearts in this conversation and he uses their critical questions to demonstrate that he is looking for authenticity, disciples who are pure of heart, genuine believers. People willing to follow him by word, thought and deed. Sometimes we can find ourselves divided between the good we want to do and the words and actions we use. Lent is an ideal time to stop and reflect on this. Are my words and actions aligned to my thoughts and prayers? If God knows our hearts will he find us listening or will he find our hearts hardened by criticisms and disagreements with others?

*Amy Cameron, Faith & Mission Co-ordinator.*



# Friday, 12th March 2021

Hosea 14:2-10; Ps. 81:6-17; Mark 12:28-34

In the Gospel today, we hear Jesus asked by the Disciples which, out of all the commandments, is the “most important one?” to which Jesus answers “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”, and to “Love your neighbour as yourself”. This is a story we will all be familiar with from our days at school, or from our time in our parishes. It’s a piece of scripture that reminds us that love is at the very root of our faith – indeed, love is the very source of our Christianity. It can, however, be difficult to remember this, especially amidst all the uncertainty that the current pandemic has ensued, and the questions we may have about God’s presence in this time. In our psalm today, we hear of God bringing the people out of captivity in Egypt. Our God is the God who provides for us time and time again, and even through the trials of the current world, when we’re feeling hopeless, or even feeling angry at God, the scriptures remind us of His unending and unfailing love for us.

Arguably, it is the second greatest commandment which can prove to be somewhat of a challenge for many of us. To “Love your neighbour as yourself” is no easy task at the best of times, but is more important than ever in the current climate. This pandemic has demonstrated to us time and time again how important it is to look out for one another, and to be grateful for those risking their own lives to keep us safe. It has demonstrated that we need community, and as many of us are missing physical closeness with our families and friends, we remain sure in the knowledge that we won’t take each other for granted when we’re able to get back to as close to ‘normal’ as possible. However, “Love your neighbour as yourself” extends to far beyond our families and friends, our parish or diocesan communities, even our country. As Christians, we have a duty to love and care for those we don’t even know on the other side of the world, and do all we can to support our global brothers and sisters who are vulnerable or who are suffering. So, today, spend some time in prayer interceding for our neighbours: those we love and those we find it hard to love; those we are close to and the ones we will never meet, asking God to protect them and fill them with hope, because to “Love the Lord your God”, we must also love his children.

*Hannah Bartlett, St Joseph’s, Birtley (YMT)*

**“ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. ”**

# *Saturday, 13th March 2021*

## *Hosea 5: 15-6:6; Ps. 50(51); Luke 18: 9-14*

Today's readings give us a beautiful way to grow closer to God. This Lent God is calling us to offer our hearts to Him as a gift of love. This is a gift God will not refuse. God wants us to love Him and to know Him more fully. The parable in today's Gospel shows us the difference between someone who covers their heart with external actions and someone who has a true devotion to God. Sometimes the most pious appearing person is acting with mere shadows of what they think love of God looks like. This is not who God calls us to be! In this parable, Jesus challenges us to be honest with ourselves in order to present our true selves to God. Like the tax collector, this may mean genuinely admitting our sinfulness, recognising some area in which we are currently struggling or perhaps realising that we have relied too much on ourselves rather than God's strength. We first must acknowledge what is really happening in our own hearts and develop a humbled, contrite heart so that we can offer this as an authentic gift to God.

Whatever sacrifice we offer to God this Lent, let us do so with humility; focusing on the great mercy of God and the promise that God will not refuse the sacrifice of a contrite spirit. That way any fasting or giving we do will not be empty and in vain like the arrogant Pharisee, but we can be at rights with God like the humble tax collector. The prophet Hosea reminds us that even in the most difficult of times, when we feel we have been torn to pieces, we have a sure hope that we shall live in His presence. Whatever situation you are in this Lent, however you feel or even if you feel nothing at all, offer your whole heart to the Lord in love and humility. So that you may draw ever closer to the God who is as certain as the dawn.

*Sophie Taylor, St Joseph's Birtley.*



*Sunday, 14th March 2021*

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

*2 Chron. 36:14–16, 19–23; Ps. 137:1–6; Eph. 2:4–10; John 3:14–21*

‘God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...’ It seems that no matter how many times I hear those words I still struggle to wrap my head around this fact! It’s mind-boggling! The Creator of the entire universe loves each and every one of us so much that he was willing to send his Son, willing to take on our human condition, to come to us as a servant; more than that, to suffer and die for us and to desire to spend the rest of eternity with us! When I pause and try to take it all in I can’t help but wonder why?

God certainly didn’t need to do any of that, and if he really wanted to save us, all he had to do was raise a divine finger and simply will it to be: that would have been more than enough. So why then did he send his Son?

The traditional - and still valid - answer is that we had messed things up so much. Time and time again we had demonstrated our capacity to make crooked what God had made straight, to turn upside down what God had put the right way up. Time and time again we demonstrated our unwillingness to listen to the prophets he sent us, to follow the laws he wrote for us: both the ones on stone tablets and the ones written in our hearts. We repeatedly demonstrated our capacity to hurt ourselves and others. Finally, despite revealing himself to us, we clung to our skewed images and flawed ideas of God.

Saint Augustine said, ‘Only God could break through our deafness.’ When we were so caught up in ourselves, only God could reach out to us and get our attention. Only God could bridge the divide we had put up between him and us. What’s truly astounding is how God chose to do it: he took on flesh and blood and then died for us. ‘No one has greater love than this,’ he said, and then showed us by power of his example.

Today, the Lenten purple softens and becomes rose. We’re invited to pause our journey for a moment and see how far God’s grace has already brought us. God loves us, and despite our best efforts, nothing will frustrate his love for us or his plan for us to spend eternity with him. The proof of that is Jesus Christ, crucified, and our response is twofold: to be thankful and to love God back with all our heart, mind, body and soul.

*Fr Christopher Hancock MHM, Our Lady of Mercy, Sunderland.*

“

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

”

# Monday, 15th March 2021

## John 4:43-54

Today we look at the Gospel of John where Jesus leaves Samaria for Galilee to perform his second miracle by healing a sick child. Immediately upon entering Galilee Jesus is confronted with the possible task of healing another person or not, giving attention to someone or not, expending his energy with someone or not. Jesus' human side resonated sympathy from within to perform this act of healing, this act of service. However, his divine nature sparked within him a comment of frustration to say to the father of the child, "So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents?". We can take from this Jesus' difficulty that they still do not believe, that they are waiting for him to perform another act of divinity. What he has already done throughout his ministry is still not good enough for him to be taken seriously as the Son of God. His missionary actions to this point are not convincing enough!

We as missionary disciples can feel like this sometimes. Where our good works are not good enough. Our acts of love, compassion and kindness to others are not enough. Jesus felt this way and as his missionary disciples we will also feel this way. You see the point is not that everyone will believe in our message of faith. Missionary discipleship is not easy. Rather, we are called to live as missionary disciples as this was entrusted to us through our baptism. Jesus encountered many frustrations through his mission, so will we. Jesus did not give up on us so we should not give up in serving him through our service to others. This Lent let us continue to live in the example of Christs' perseverance. This perseverance in our missionary discipleship will ultimately set us free which is ultimately Christ acting in us. Amen.

*Adam Morales, School Chaplain, St. Joseph's Catholic Academy.*



# *Tuesday, 16th March 2021*

## *John 5: 1-16*

The man in the Gospel was ill for 38 years. His sickness serves as an example of a life of sin, as it was perceived at the time. However, not even a sickness persisting for 38 years is able to escape Jesus' curing power. Christ's power is stronger still. We should therefore take hope, for no sickness, no sin – or life of sin – is too great for him to cure. All that is needed is that we turn to him with a humble and contrite heart: "Lord, I am not worthy, but only say the word and I shall be healed."

Nothing is impossible for Christ. He can heal the sick; he can also forgive their sins. All it takes is for this sick man to reveal his weakness – and he does so with detail, like a true confession: how he has attempted to enter the pool, how as he has tried, someone else has beaten him to it. Perhaps without this detailed account of his failure, he might not have been cured. The sick man admitting both his personal weakness and desire to plunge into the pool moves Jesus to compassion. This is the remedy to all of our illnesses: presenting ourselves to Christ as we truly are, with all of our weakness, and thus moving him to compassion. Jesus, the only way that I can be like the man at the pool of Bethesda is to be grateful for the gifts you have given me, to fight against a life of sin, and to clothe myself with the "new man." I am ready to embrace your will with love, even if this means dying to myself. As Easter approaches, I will humbly recognise my sinfulness and seek God's healing grace in the sacrament of confession.

*Monica Kelsey, St Joseph's Birtley.*



# Wednesday, 17th March 2021

1 Peter 4:7-11; Ps. 95(96):1-3,7-8,10; Luke 5:1-11

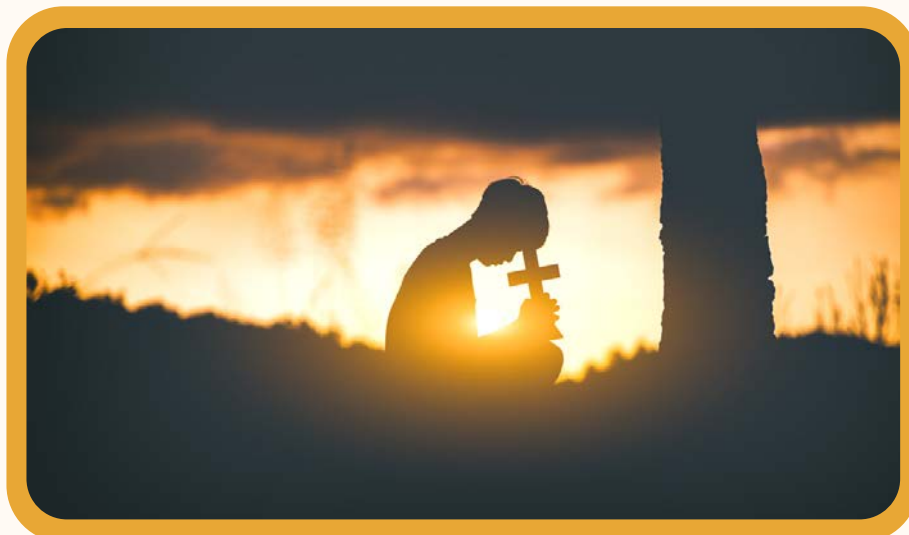
For some of us with magnetic memories, automatic association or intuitive connections, we immediately see or hear in St Peter and St Augustine, in St Patrick and Pope Francis the words: “leave me alone Lord, I am a sinner”- Confession? And to hear the First Reading today affirming us that “each of you has received a special gift...”, keep calm, sober and remember that sincere love and hospitality cover all sins, is so soothing and invigorating – not just because we are sinners, but that we each have talents, treasures, virtues, charisms and so much goodness to radiate in a needy or evil or delicate world.

To hear the expression “there is Irish blood” in him or her, is often an affirmation of benevolence, hospitality, compassion, and charity. I’m sure we have similar expressions, not for gossip but about the good of other countries or continents.

And talk of charity, when I do the Redbox Mission Appeals around the Diocese or country, I always highlighted that the people in the UK are exceptionally charitable. How many of us give feel for and away to beggars, homeless poor on the street, or food, money and essential items to or through Cafod, Mary’s Meals, Caritas, SVP, Missio, Cancer Research!

And so, overwhelmed, each one of us, by not only the sufferings we endured like St Patrick (slavery, hardships, conflicts, attacks, own flaws) and the sufferings of others around us, we are unmistakably elated, enchanted, enthused by Divine Providence that called us, saved us, endowed us, sustains us, and propels us. “Do not be afraid (of your weaknesses or temperament, of storms or evil prevalence) from now on, it is people, (men, women, children, creation, nature) that you will catch” – by your prayers, by your charity, by your sacrifices, by your conversion, by your story, by your sufferings, by your example, by your humility, by your obedience, by your Lenten journey, by your penance, by your daily reflections St Patrick and St Peter, pray for us.

*Fr Emmanuel Nuh Mbeh, MHM.*



# Thursday, 18th March 2021

## Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm: 105; John 5:31-47

Fake news! Modern technology gives us unlimited access to news and opinion. Anyone can blog or tweet; anyone can express their point of view. But, in the babble of competing voices, it's as hard as ever to get to the truth. Who should we listen to? We are most likely to listen to those we trust; to the voices that speak with integrity.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is responding to the Jewish authorities, who criticised him for healing a sick man on the Sabbath day. Jesus replies that his works – the miracles that he performs – testify that God the Father has sent him. The Scriptures, too, testify that Jesus is doing God's work. He is speaking words of life and truth, but still his opponents reject him – just as, in the desert, the people quickly rejected the true God who had rescued them from slavery, and turned to worshipping the golden calf instead.

At the heart of today's Gospel is the idea of testimony – bearing witness to the truth. John the Baptist gave his testimony, and so does Jesus himself; by his life, his teaching and his death on the Cross. We have heard his words and believed in him. Now, Jesus calls us to give our testimony; to bear witness to the truth that we have heard.

*Fr Andrew Downie, Parish Priest of St Cuthbert's, Durham & Durham University Catholic Chaplain.*



# Friday, 19th March 2021

Sam. 7:4-5,12-14,16; Ps. 89:2-5, 27,29; Rom. 4:13,16-18,22; Mt. 1:16,18-21,24

## Accepting the Will of God

As Christians, we are formed by the covenant of Love. St Joseph was an example of service and love. In our lives, we are on a course and sometimes we just expect things to be as they are. Joseph and Mary were to marry. Sometimes plans change, for all of us. We might be surprised and are faced with a decision that calls upon us to take on different responsibilities. When God asks us to do something, we must endeavour to answer that call. Often it requires of us adjustment and some form of sacrifice, and we should accept sacrifice. Joseph was honourable and he knew what his love for Mary really meant.

During Lent we associate with sacrifice and service. The food of Love is the Word of God and like St Joseph, we should accept that it is God's love and a command that we must follow. In today's Gospel Matthew cites Joseph's heritage, but also the vocation he is to undertake as the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and as Guardian of the Redeemer. The Angel of Lord said: 'Joseph son of David. Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit.' What a great gift and such a privilege for Joseph. God, in his generosity, gave his Son, Jesus Christ to us, but it was to Mary and Joseph who in saying 'yes' became special parents. The message for us is to accept what God asks of us and regardless of the challenges accept it as an act of sacrifice and love. What can we do this Lent to take God's Love out into the world? Are we making time for God to speak to us?

*Bernie Walsh. Parish of Blessed Edmund Duke – Coxhoe, Trimdon and Sedgfield*



*Saturday, 20th March 2021*

## **Feast of St. Cuthbert**

*Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 88(89):2-5,21-22,25,27, Matthew 9:35-37*

What a wealth of scripture the Church gives us today, on the Feast of our Patron St Cuthbert. In Hexham and Newcastle we have no less than twelve Gospel passages to choose from, and nine Old Testament readings. Reading through these shows a rather direct and challenging message: 'Go out and proclaim the Good News; Go and make disciples'. That is more than a little scary, not just because it sounds difficult, but because it clearly isn't meant to be optional. To follow Christ, to say yes to his invitation as the fishermen did by the Sea of Galilee, is something that must change our lives for good. What is expected of us is made explicit by Jesus in the Gospel reading from John (15:9-17) "...I chose you and commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last." The reaction of the called Apostles is radical – "They left everything and followed him".

That we are called to such a precipitate change of life when He calls us is sobering. We feel very unsure of ourselves and our ability to do what He asks us. Surely we have tried all this before and nothing works? We can echo Simon's cry "Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so I will pay out the nets" (Luke 5:1-11) and the reward is that the boats are filled almost to sinking with fish. Jesus asks us to trust Him, and He will give us what we need. In the Old Testament reading from Jeremiah today (Jeremiah 1:4-9) we can hear ourselves say "Ah, Lord; look, I do not know how to speak: I am a child!" Do not be afraid the Lord says "I am putting my words into your mouth". However timid we feel, whatever limitations we think we have, there is no avoiding the call to service in the Gospels. But He has promised to be with us every step of the way 'to the end of time'. Perhaps, like St Cuthbert in his hermitage, we can spend some time this Lent in quiet contemplation, getting closer to our friend Jesus, and learning to trust Him. Then, with the Joy of Easter in our hearts we can step out and proclaim the Good News to those around us.

*Joe Ronan, St. Mary's Hexham.*

“

*I chose you and commissioned you  
to go out and to bear fruit,  
fruit that will last.*

”

*Sunday, 21st March 2021*

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

*Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm: 50; Hebrews 5: 7-9 Gospel: John 12: 20-33*

Today marks the beginning of Passiontide, where the Church turns its eyes towards the city of Jerusalem and the events which surround the Passion of Our Lord. This junction which we have approached during our journey of Lent is marked by the veiling of Statues and Crosses within our Churches and it reminds each one of us of the impending doom that is to come. However, our readings today remind us that death is not a bad thing. Jesus gives us the image of the seed that is planted. It is only when planted in the earth that the seed can produce life and has the ability to grow. For the people of Israel, in our first reading, the waiting for a new covenant would bring them and the rest of the world new life and new hope. It is only through the death of Jesus that this new covenant is given to us all.

Over the course of this last year each one of us has been reminded about just how fragile life can be, how our best prepared plans can be changed or affected at the drop of a hat. As a result, each one of us has been given the opportunity to think and reflect again on what our faith means to us and how we live out our call to be disciples of Christ in our world today. No one knows what impact the pandemic will have on the Church, but what we do all know is that we must be bold in what we do. It is in our most challenging experiences that we grow the most and discover what we are truly capable of. This is true of the early Church and it is true of the Church here and now. There is nothing new about the 'new' evangelisation or about being a missionary disciple because this is what Jesus tells us to do in the great commission. It is only by loving is love returned, only by reaching our beyond ourselves do we learn and grow, only by giving to others that we ourselves receive, only by dying do we rise to new life.

As we make this final journey into Jerusalem with Jesus let us commit ourselves to becoming Christlike so that our world may know the person, and the love, of God.

*Father Jonathon Bowes, Assistant Priest at the parishes of Saint Charles Borromeo & The Sacred Heart, Gosforth.*



# *Monday, 22nd March 2021*

*Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62; Psalm: 22 (23); John 8:1-11*

Today's gospel is simultaneously one of the most dramatic, and yet one of the most comforting, passages in the scriptures. The Pharisees had set a trap for Jesus in asking whether the woman should be stoned. In first-century Palestine, the occupying Roman power did not allow the Jews to put anyone to death themselves, so if Jesus had said that she should be condemned, it would have put him in conflict with the Roman authorities. Yet, if he said that she should not be condemned to death, it would seem as though he was setting aside the Law of Moses. So, whichever answer he gave would be problematic for him. As we read this account, we cannot help but discern the glee of the Pharisees, and their smug, self-righteous cruelty in bringing the woman to Jesus in the Temple, in public. The woman could have been brought before Jesus in private, rather than subjecting her to abject humiliation in the middle of the Temple. The Pharisees were cruel, simply because they could be, and wanted to be. And since you cannot commit adultery on your own, where was the man whom she was found with? The ancient Mosaic law prescribed that both should be punished. The woman stands alone before the group, disgraced, terrified and under threat of a horrific death.

We have no idea what Jesus wrote on the ground, though many have speculated. Did he write the Commandments, or passages from the Law and the Prophets? Did he write names, and sins? We don't know, but we can safely assume that it was powerful, and somehow prompted the pompous, arrogant elite, to be stricken with a real sense of their own shame. When Jesus said to the Pharisees that anyone who had not sinned should be the first to cast a stone, we are told that they went away, quietly, one by one. And finally, we are left with the poignant scene of Jesus alone with the woman. The tenderness with which Jesus, the merciful judge, deals with her, speaks to us over the centuries. He alone knows all the circumstances, the vulnerabilities weaknesses and fears which are inside us all. Whilst he does not set aside the gravity of her sin, his forgiveness is simple and complete – "Neither do I condemn you.... Do not sin any more."

The late Cardinal Hume spoke beautifully about the nature of God's merciful judgement in similar terms. He said:

"Judgement is whispering into the ear of a merciful and compassionate God the story of my life which I had never been able to tell..."

So let us pray today that our trust and confidence in God's love and mercy will be renewed, and we may be able to witness to this more effectively in our wounded, broken world.

*Tim Fetherston, St Joseph's Parish, Sunderland.*

*Tuesday, 23rd March 2021*

*Numbers 21: 4-9; Ps: 101; John 8: 21-30*

“As he was saying this, many came to believe in him.”

These words offer such a hopeful ending to this passage - especially after such a sombre beginning - and they invite us to reflect upon what it means to “believe in” Jesus. Believing in Jesus surely means more than simply accepting that he existed – after all, as St James reminds us, even the devil believes in the existence of God! And believing in Jesus surely means more than simply having an opinion about him, perhaps in the way that we might have a political belief or an opinion about the best way to vote in an election. Believing in Jesus means being willing to follow his example of complete and utter trust in his Father – learning, that is, to trust ever more deeply in the goodness of God, even when – especially when – we experience times and seasons of distress, depression or even tragedy in our lives.

Having this kind of trust might seem to be very risky indeed but in *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis encourages us to show our belief in Jesus by being willing to entrust ourselves to him:

“The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realise that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.”

May each day of our Lenten journey bring us a step closer to Jesus and increase our belief in the power of the one who has been lifted up for us.

*Deacon Vincent Purcell, Parish of Blessed Edmund Duke, Coxhoe, Trimdon and Sedgfield*



# *Wednesday, 24th March 2021*

## *John 8: 31-42*

***Know the Truth, The Truth Will Set You Free.***

I began this reflection wondering why Jesus directed these words to the group of the Jews already believing in Him, a call to know the truth. What about us? I believe these words are equally directed to us as His followers. Jesus' conversation through this Gospel passage with the Jews clearly brought their misconceptions to light and so it appears He wanted to awaken their minds through this encounter and put them on the right track. Again, on our part, can it be we too are not getting it quite right and need to get on the right track? The main focus here is: to know the Truth and be set free as a result of this Truth, in other words, to be set free from the slavery of sin just as Jesus called everyone who commits sin a slave of sin.

I was moved at this point to reflect on the word 'freedom' and realised that it is generally something 'priceless' and any lack of it brings some sort of tension/chaos and feelings of bondage- the consequences of Covid-19 offer practical examples here. Spiritually speaking, sin does the same- it messes us around, we become slaves of it. In this gospel, Jesus who is Truth Himself, offers the lasting solution: to remain in His word in order to know the Truth that sets free. This requires a sincere, inward-self-journey with the aim to discover areas of spiritual chaos or bondage, which I think, is the first and good starting point to growing closer to God in this Lenten season. It requires also the determination to take actions toward necessary changes resulting from this journey. I encourage everyone to embrace this spiritual exercise, then be sure of that freedom promised by our faithful God.

*Sr. Paschaline Okolo, Our Lady Immaculate and St Cuthbert/Crook.*



*Thursday, 25th March 2021*

## THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

*Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38*

Today we find ourselves on the feast of the Annunciation, the day we remember Mary's yes! As the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with the news that God had favoured her, the scriptures describes Mary as 'deeply disturbed by these words' and she asked herself what this greeting could mean. It is only from an honest retelling of this account, by Mary herself, that we would have this detail. Mary responds with the words 'let what you have said be done to me' a sentence which demonstrates her enormous faith in amongst her uncertainty.

Mary must have recognised that what was being asked of her was radically new. God dwelling in human form, within her, it was no wonder that her first reaction was to be disturbed. In accepting that nothing is impossible to God she agreed to do his will. Today, we are invited to give our yes to God despite our uncertainties. To welcome the radically new ways that God wants to work through us. As we go about our day let us remember that Christ has no body on earth but ours, we are the hands, the feet, the mouthpieces for God in building his kingdom. We are invited to allow the Holy Spirit that dwells within us to break forth into the world as we come to do God's will, one zoom call, one conversation at a checkout, one socially-distanced interaction at a time.

If you are struggling with your Lenten fast you might want to remember that the Church considers today a feast day!

*Amy Cameron, Our Lady & St Cuthbert's Parish Prudhoe.*



*Friday, 26th March 2021*

*Jeremiah 20:10-13; Ps. 17(18):2-7; John 10:31-42*

In today's Gospel, Jesus encounters those in the Temple who don't acknowledge him as the son of God. They are ready to stone him because they see Jesus claiming to be God – regardless of all the good works Jesus is doing and the good acts he performs. Jesus asks them, even if they don't believe in him as Messiah, to at least acknowledge God moving through the good works and miracles he has performed; that those doings are fulfilling God's work and God is very much at the centre of those acts. We have all heard the phrase 'faith in action' and know that practicing what we preach is a key aspect of being a Christian. We are not called to act for others in our world simply because Jesus or God asks us to - blindly following Church teaching because it is tradition; or because we have been told to; or even because other people do it. But instead, because by their very nature good acts have God running through them at their very core, then we can be sure that doing good works, providing for people who have nothing, standing up for the rights of minorities, the disenfranchised and the oppressed, 'practicing what we preach', are all acts of God... they are not just our good acts but actually they are God acts. And oh how God acts in the good....

*Michael Thompson, Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish, Whitley Bay  
School Chaplain at St. Thomas More Catholic High School*

**FAITH IN  
ACTION**



# Saturday, 27th March 2021

## John 11:45-57

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus moving away to Ephraim, "bordering on the desert". The desert is traditionally a place where people can encounter God. During these past five weeks of Lent, we have surely spent time in prayer with our God, as Jesus must have done in those days leading up to the festival of the Jewish Passover in Jerusalem.

Jesus was coming to the end of his active ministry of preaching, teaching and healing the sick in mind and body. As Caiaphas prophesied, he was about to "die for the people" and, as John puts it "to gather together in unity the scattered children of God".

Jesus was going to do this by allowing himself to be arrested, by putting himself into the hands of those who would have him falsely accused, whipped, crowned with thorns and crucified.

In those days before all this happened, he must have gone apart from his disciples, as he had done many times before, to pray to his Father, sharing his emotions and receiving comfort and courage. A consolation for us to think that, whatever any of us has to endure in these difficult times of the pandemic, Jesus has already suffered in his Passion and is with us, sharing every sorrow and sadness, every situation of loss and loneliness.

Ezekiel tells us that the Lord says: "I will make an eternal covenant of peace with them....I will be their God, they shall be my people". In our Lenten prayer time, we have been moving ever deeper into this relationship with our God, being called into newness of life that we may respond to his loving call in service to others.

Once we focus our minds and hearts on God, we see more clearly what should be the right priorities in our lives. What we treasure most in our hearts and whatever gives meaning and purpose to our lives is revealed by the way we relate to each other. As disciples of Jesus, we are missionaries carrying those truths and values with us wherever we go.

*Angela Joyce, St. Mary's Cathedral, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.*

**“ I will make an eternal covenant of peace with them.... I will be their God, they shall be my people. ”**

*Sunday, 28th March 2021*

## PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

*Isaiah 50:4-7; Ps. 21; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47*

We think of this Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, as Palm Sunday. We have a lovely long tradition of making our palms into crosses and then keeping them for the rest of the year. The liturgy describes this Sunday though as 'Passion' Sunday. Is this simply because it is the first reading of the passion, today from Mark and Friday from John? or does it have a deeper meaning? What does the expression 'passion' bring to mind? It is something that moves us at our deepest level, at what is called the heart level. We are being invited to enter the inner heart of Jesus, to feel with his heart. In the Scripture the heart is much more than emotion, it is the place of decision, of choice, of commitment. To enter into the passion of Jesus is to make a decision to walk with him. To move through adulation on his entry to Jerusalem, to the friendship of the Paschal meal with his disciples, to abandonment by his friends and even his Father. To finally reach that place of redemption we call Resurrection. This is a passionate journey for each of us, a journey into hell and back. Today we receive the courage to move forward on that journey, together.

Passion means life itself, without passion we are lifeless. With passion we have the power to say 'yes' and 'yes' again as we walk in his way of the Cross. Does God want us to be 'passionate' people? It is not something that we normally think of in our Christian lives. We have, even as Catholics, a traditional English sense of reserve and a suspicion of getting too involved. I remember, when young, my Father telling me not to get carried away by my faith! And that was from a very good and committed Catholic!! My invol-

vement with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal taught me that the Holy Spirit is passionate in his love for us. My years of travelling in Italy showed me wonderful generations of saints passionately in love with God. I have had to ask myself, like St. Catherine of Siena, what would I give my life for, if I was not passionately in love with Christ? Becoming passionate is what this week's journey is all about, enter into it with all your life and all your heart. May God bless you in this journey into passion.



*Fr. Michael Whalen, Our Lady & St. Cuthbert, Prudhoe.*

*Monday, 29th March 2021*

## MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

*Isaiah 42:1-7; Ps. 26(27):1-3,13-14; John 12:1-11*

Oil is something that we use most days of our life. Typing into Google "What do we use oil for?" One site told me that there are 72 uses for oil in everyday life, from medicine to clothing and beauty to agriculture. We probably don't think much about it when we do use it. Oil is used within the life of the Church; in Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and the anointing of the sick. It is in using this oil that we show the worth and dignity of the life of the person who is being anointed. Jesus the Messiah (the anointed one), is anointed by Mary, we are told with pure nard worth around 300 denarii, which is reckoned to be around \$54,000 US dollars in today's terms. In that anointing, Mary shows her true love and devotion as well as preparing Jesus for his burial. For Mary it wasn't about counting the cost, unlike Judas who cannot comprehend such an act of love, because of the evil that lay within his heart.

Each one of us has been anointed and set apart to be Missionary Disciples in the world, to reach out in love and devotion to our brothers and sisters who are made in the image and likeness of God, to recognise their true dignity and worth as God's beloved children. In this week known as Holy Week, we contemplate the greatest act of love for us, the death of Jesus on the cross. In that moment it reminds us to put aside selfish motives, and to be open to be selfless.

Lord, helps us to remember that we are called to give and not to count the cost as Mary did for you in your impending passion, death and resurrection.

*Father Shaun Purdy, St Aidan, Ashington.*

*Tuesday, 30th March 2021*

## TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

*Isiah 49:1-6; Ps. 70; John 13:21-33, 36-38*

Let's be honest. Even at the Last Supper, the disciples of Jesus didn't get it. They didn't get that his whole life and message was about being compassionate, seeing God as a loving Father rather than a judge, loving and including people rather than excluding and dismissing those who were different. These closest colleagues of Jesus, whom God had called before their birth to follow Jesus in being the light to the nations, simply didn't get it. They certainly did later, but we'll have to wait for their gradual awareness and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to fully celebrate that.

I sometimes wonder if we're not living during a time of 'not really getting it'? We maybe don't get that being a 'missionary disciple' implies that everything we say, everything we do, every choice we make reflects the life and words of Jesus. If we don't fully get it, we can take comfort from the fact that we are alongside the disciples at the Last Supper. We read in the Gospel today that Jesus was 'troubled in spirit' sensing that someone was about to betray him. Maybe during our prayer today, we can imagine ourselves at that Last Supper, imagine Jesus being troubled in spirit, imagine the other disciples wondering what the future would bring. We may well be wondering what the future will bring once the pandemic recedes and we have more control over our lives. We can be sure that Jesus is with us during it all, just as he was with his disciples during the last week of his life on earth.

*Jim O'Keefe, St John XXIII Washington/Penshaw.*

*Wednesday, 31st March 2021*

## WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

*Isaiah 50:4-9; Matthew 26:14-25*

In today's readings we hear about Judas betraying Jesus. It states that he was paid thirty silver pieces. The amount that was usually exchanged when a slave had been accidentally killed. It wasn't a large sum of money and that in itself is part of the betrayal. He participated in Jesus' death for comparatively little financial gain. Matthew's account of this agreement goes on to say that 'from that moment on he looked for an opportunity to betray him.' This wasn't a spur of the moment decision but a calculated plan that took time to complete. Such is the focus on the 'betrayal' that the word appears five times in this short passage.

Interestingly, the disciples when presented with the concept of betrayal by Jesus asked 'Not I Lord, surely?' They could not believe that they would be capable of this act, despite the cowardice they would go on to show in the coming days. They also didn't naturally turn to Judas as the obvious weak link of the group. Jesus has spent the last three years walking alongside, training his disciples. He has seen their hearts and passion for his Mission yet he knew they were weak. He knows all of this but he loves them anyway.

As we examine our own hearts today, I wonder whether we have the strength of faith to share it with others, or whether we hold back and shy away. I wonder whether we are quick to judge others rather than love them. I wonder whether we are holding onto an act of betrayal, large or small, that does not align with our belief to Love our enemies and pray for those who hurt you. I pray for peace in your hearts as you take the time to reflect, to repent and to believe in the Good news.

*Amy Cameron,  
Coordinator for Faith & Mission.*

*"Not I Lord,  
surely?"*



*Thursday, 1st April 2021*

## HOLY THURSDAY

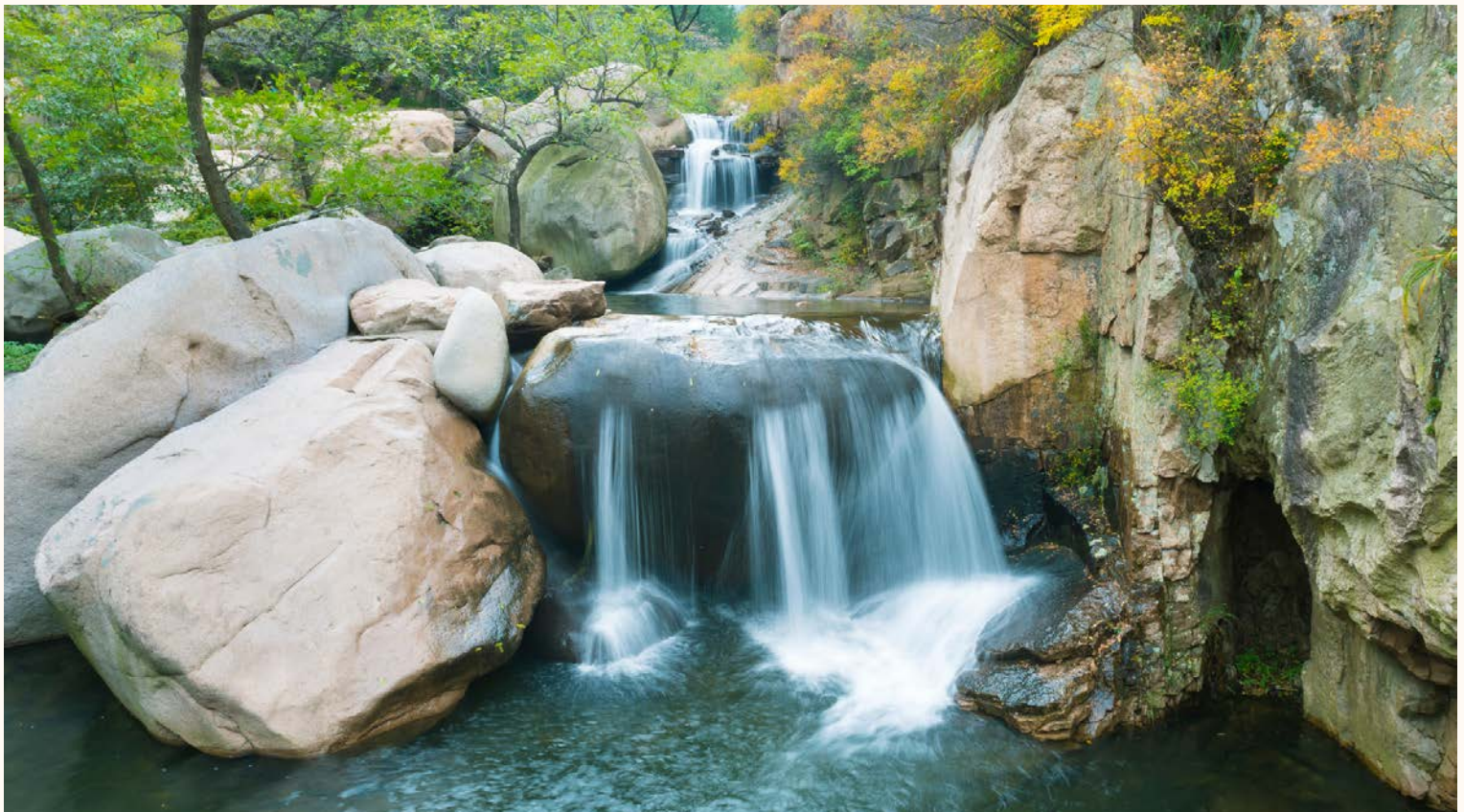
*John 13:1-15*

Listen to St Ambrose of Milan: 'Jesus, I wish you would let me wash your feet, since it was through walking about in me that you soiled them. I wish you would give me the task of wiping the stains from your feet, because it was my behaviour that put them there. But where can I get the running water I need to wash your feet? If I have no water, at least I have tears.'

Today is the last day of Lent and the first day of the Triduum, the three days to Easter. In Jesus washing his disciples' feet we see what service means. Jesus, breaking the bread and pouring the wine of the Last Supper shows us what love means.

Pope Francis teaches that love and service go together, otherwise nothing works. Love and service are anchored in the Sacraments that Jesus instituted at the Last Supper and are the foundation of His message. Jesus wants us to be experts in the task of loving others, showing them, in the simplicity of daily small gestures of affection and attention, the caress of divine tenderness. God wants us to be humble servants, because it is Jesus who sends us and reminds us that the servant is not greater than his Lord, nor is the one sent greater than the one who sent him (John 13:16).

*Monsignor Andrew Faley, Our Lady Star of the Sea, Whitley Bay.*



*Friday, 2nd April 2021*

## GOOD FRIDAY

*John 18: 1- 19:42*

Each of the four gospels proclaims the truth that Jesus was arrested, unjustly condemned, and died a slow and painful death. We hear his final words, we see him dying. What is different in each gospel is the way in which the writer invites us to understand the death of Jesus. In John's Gospel, the last of the four to be written, we are given a picture of the way in which Christians had come to see our Lord's Passion about seventy or eighty years after the event. The Jesus we see here is Lord and King, and throughout his arrest, trial and crucifixion, he is in control. John gives various details to make this point: those who come to arrest Jesus fall to the ground before him; he orders them to let his disciples go; he answers his accusers and Pilate calmly and with authority; Pilate insists on writing 'Jesus,.. King of the Jews;' his dying words are 'It is accomplished' – he has done his work; the weight of spices and the linen cloth in which his body is wrapped indicate a burial fit for a king. In John's Gospel the Cross is a royal throne.

On Palm Sunday we hear the Passion according to Matthew, Mark or Luke, depending on the three-year cycle. On Good Friday, the Passion is always according to John and it can never be shortened. On this, the most solemn day of the year the Church wants us to hear this proclamation of Christ as King for two reasons: First, so that we don't think of Good Friday as a day when we try to feel sorry for Jesus; he has accomplished the mission his Father gave him, by his death he has trampled down death; this is a day of triumph, not mourning. Second, the Passion according to John prepares us to celebrate Christ's resurrection – the heart of the Easter Vigil, the heart of our faith. The Eastern Orthodox Christians end their Good Friday liturgy by coming one by one to place flowers on an icon of Jesus – to share with Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus in burying our dear Lord. They do this because it's so important to see ourselves and the people of our world as participants in the Passion; it is not just ancient history, but the story for our world today and for each one of us. As you look at his arrest, trial and death, try to remember all whose human rights are denied, those who are unjustly imprisoned and tortured, those who abuse their power; place your own life and the life of your family at the foot of the cross. The Passion of Jesus is at the heart of our world, and as we watch him we learn how to live like him and how to die with him.

*Canon Chris Jackson.*



*Saturday, 3rd April 2021*

## HOLY SATURDAY

Mark 16:1-8

### Senses

In the early hours the two women come feeling their way along walls and through gaps, gingerly finding the right footing on the rough and uneven ground, their progress slow and nervous, the route hidden in darkness but plotted in their mind's eye. The darkness robs them of sight accentuating the acute sensory deprivation that death brings; of losing the sight and sound of him, his touch and embrace, aroma and the taste of him in the bread and wine of that last meal fading now on their tongues. They are driven by a deep longing, yearning and painful ache from the depths of their souls to find him again. Like a widow, maybe you, waking at 3am the space by you empty, an ache driving you to get up and open the wardrobe door and bury your face amongst familiar shirts and jackets to find an aroma or texture to make the beloved present.

They carry spices to perform the ritual preparation of the body, postponed by their Sabbath observance. Our familiar rituals of grief have been altered and postponed by Covid19. The spices will fill the tomb and their senses with their heady, sweet aroma, filling their lungs too and stinging their eyes with tears as the ritual expresses their excruciating loss and proclaims all is different now! A stone unexpectedly found rolled away raises their anxiety and panic, how much more do we have to suffer? has death not taken enough that even what is left is taken away? Relatives have stood in our time at the doors of A&E or hospital wards unable to accompany their quarantined loved ones, 'they have taken him away and I don't know where they have put him' John 20:13.

Their sensory deprivation is suddenly filled by a vision. A messenger clothed in white, whose angelic light had once led the shepherds to his birth now carries the Paschal Light, struck and fanned to flame in our liturgy tonight: 'let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King' Exsultet. The pale light of dawn now clears the way, so not gingerly but purposefully they and we are impelled to go, hastily carrying the Paschal Light to others, filling up the senses of the broken, lost, frightened, sick, dying and grieving with the light of hope that love has overcome. 'He is Risen' Alleluia!

*Fr Mark Millward, Parishes of St John XXIII Washington & Peshaw and St Joseph, Birtley.*

**“ Let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her Eternal King. ”**

*Sunday, 4th April 2021*

**EASTER SUNDAY**

First Week  
In Light



"This day was made by  
the Lord, we rejoice  
and are glad"  
Happy Easter.



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**  
— VICARIATE FOR FAITH & MISSION —

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