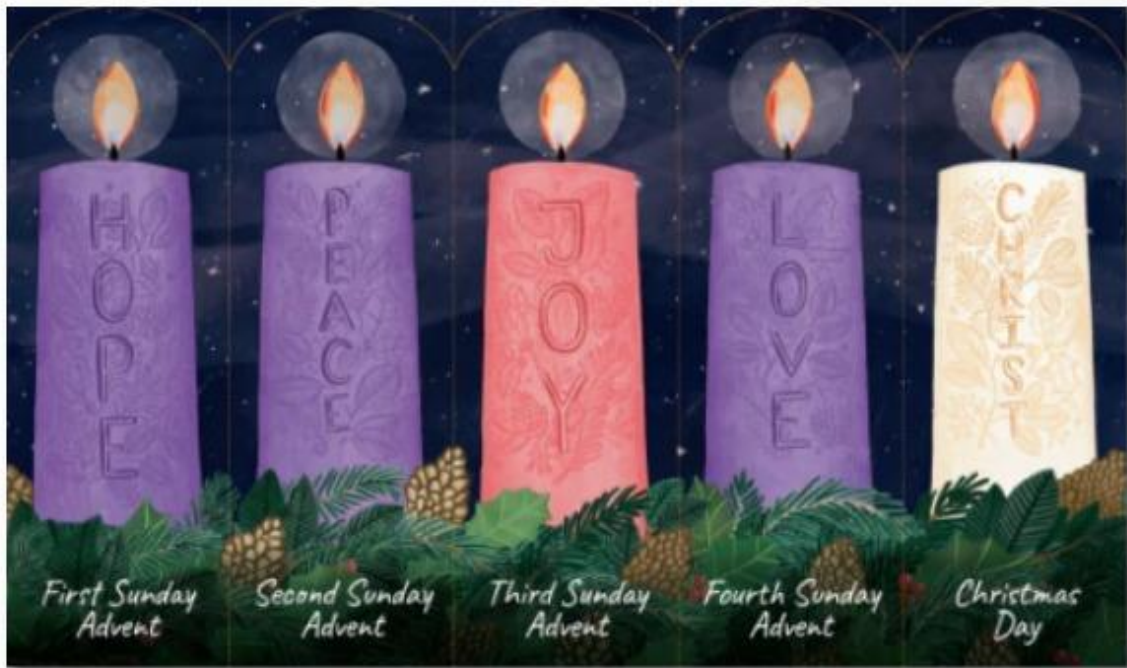


The Pilgrim

St Laurence's Parish Magazine, Advent 2023 Edition



Wishing you all peace, health and happiness this Christmas

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Invitation

to the children of the Parish

Parish Advent Activity



Sat 2nd December 1:30 – 3:30pm

St Laurence's Parish room

What's New?

A Parish Pastoral Council for St Laurence?

At the last Parishioners' Open Meeting, we agreed to discuss more widely the idea of starting a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). The aim is to do a better job of getting things done around the church and Parish, to invite and enable more people to get actively involved in running Parish life in support of our parish priest. Alongside the PPC, a series of core teams will be created to help organise different aspects of Parish life – such as communications, buildings or social life.

We will discuss the proposal whether or not to proceed at our next Open Meeting, which is on Tuesday, 21st November at 7.30pm in the Parish Room or by Zoom. If agreed, we will aim to set up the PPC and teams early in the New Year, and will be looking for volunteers at that time.

Meanwhile, it is important that a change like this happens only after there has been an opportunity to consider it, pray about it and have your say.

You can find more information on the Parish website: <https://www.saintlaurence.org.uk/forum/>

Caritas Festival at St Laurence's



Do you know, or have you heard, of Caritas?

Caritas shares the mission of the Catholic Church to serve the poor and to promote charity and justice throughout the world. It seeks a world where the voices of the poor are heard and acted upon. This is a world where women and men in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities are able to influence the systems, decisions and resources that affect them. They can then live under governments, institutions and global structures that are just and accountable.



On Saturday, 4th November, we hosted people from around the Diocese involved in social outreach in varying forms in our local area. Bishop Peter Collins joined us in welcoming groups from the Parish and the community. We began the day with Mass con-celebrated with Fr Simon Blakesley, Fr John Warrington, and Fr Peter Wagnanski.

The Parish Room was full of many displays and much information on the work being done and opportunities to get involved. Our Parish magazine was also represented as it is not only read by the parishioners of St Laurence's but passed around among friends, family and in the community at work, in care homes – to name a few places it reaches.

We listened to two very engaging speakers. Selwyn Image, the founder of Emmaus UK, who gave a talk about how Emmaus came in to being originally in France and how our local Emmaus in Landbeach was set up. And, Margaret Clark, past president of the National Board of Catholic Women, who spoke about 'The work of the National Board of Catholic Women in the life of the Church'. The day ended with quiet prayer and reflection led by the Bishop.

Chatting with Peter Ho

Nora Darby



Peter Ho is our resident Seminarian, who has been with us for a few months now, so most of our Parishioners know him. Peter happily agreed to have a chat with me about himself and his journey to St. Laurence's.

He is 29yrs old and comes from Vietnam, which is a country under Communist rule, but, which recognises the various religions. The predominant religion is Buddhism followed by Catholicism. Peter told me there are seven million Catholics there and he comes from a family with two priests and three nuns! I asked when he felt he might have a vocation. His answer was, "Since I was seven or eight. I was probably influenced by family members".

There are only state schools, so this is what he attended. Later he applied to enter a Seminary but, with 500 Seminarians in Vietnam, it was suggested that he go to another country.

Ten years ago, as he had relatives in Birmingham he decided to come to England and lived with them while discerning his vocation. Once his decision was made he went to London and the Westminster Diocese. He was told that he could not stay with them because of visa difficulties. He then went to the Birmingham Diocese but they had the same visa problems.

They recommended East Anglia; Peter was delighted to meet Fr Pat Cleary (a familiar name at St Laurence's) who is the Diocesan Vocations Director.

He then met with Bishop Alan, and it was agreed he could join other seminarians if the visa problem was solved. This was speedily done by Fr Pat and Peter went to study for the priesthood at Oscott College in Birmingham.

Bishop Peter made the decision that Peter should have parish experience and that it should be at St Laurence's. He told me he is very happy with us and finds it very beneficial. We find it a mutual experience! He has integrated into all aspects of the Parish – his smiling face, his offers of help and his presence in our church. I asked Peter what he likes to do to relax and he said, "I

like to travel around all the churches with their beautiful music."

Peter will go back to Oscott at Christmas to continue his studies. He hopes to be ordained as a deacon in 2025 and priest in 2026.

Bishops' Synodal Gathering 2023

The culmination of the Synodal consultation in which all parishes were invited to take part this year, recently took place in Rome over a three-week period at the beginning of October. Titled 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission', the Pope aimed to get the whole Church's opinions and emphasised the need to listen to each other.

The Synod was made up of Bishop and lay people, including women, who considered the responses sent in from all the Dioceses around the world following the Synodal Pathway's consultation.

Of the many things to come out of the Synod, Pope Francis would like the Church to be less focussed on itself and more outward-facing.

Radio Maria celebrates Four years!



A special Mass was held at Our Lady and the English Martyrs Church, on Hills Road, on 26th October, to celebrate four successful years of broadcasting for Radio Maria. The internet radio station has gone from strength to strength developing a strong programme line-up covering all aspects of Faith and life.

A sung Mass was celebrated by Bishop Emeritus Alan Hopes and RME Priest Director Fr Toby Lees, followed by a bring and share social gathering in church hall.



Radio Maria has recently expanded its DAB reach to broadcast to South Birmingham and Bristol, as well as covering London and Cambridge. Of course, you can tune in from anywhere in the world through their web page or using the Radio Maria Play app, on which you can listen live or catch up on the podcasts of shows you might have missed.

Features and Opinions

An Infant Small – William Blake and the Divine Imagination

Michael Allan

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

The Summer Day, Mary Oliver (1935–2019)

William Blake – poet, artist, visionary – was four years old when he first saw God, looking in at him through the window.

Born in 1757 into a moderately prosperous, lower middle-class family; died in 1827 in poverty and relative obscurity, but rich in Faith and vision. A friend described his death:

“He died in a most glorious manner. He said he was going to that country he had all his life wished to see and expressed himself happy, hoping for salvation through Jesus Christ. Just before he died his countenance became fair. His eyes brighten’d and he burst out singing of the things he saw in heaven.”

Blake had lifelong visions of God, heaven, angels, and other figures. God’s close presence was a burning reality for him, and he conversed with God daily. (One of his favourite books was *The Life of St Teresa of Avila*, who encouraged people to regularly both talk to and listen to God – who dwells within.) For Blake, this was the meeting of the Divine and the human, of heaven and earth – not distant, but dancing together – a dance where you can truly hold, as he put it, ‘Infinity in the palm of your hand, and Eternity in an hour’. He called this meeting, this creative dance, the Divine Imagination. Imagination, and the art of all kinds it creates, is, or can be, a step towards the real, a step towards the Divine. Blake tirelessly devoted his wild and precious life to this work of creation by engraving, painting, drawing, writing poetry, writing songs, composing music, and singing. (His wife Catherine – they were devoted to each other – often assisted him in this work.)

As an old man, he said that heaven was so near at hand that he once touched it with his walking stick. (Inevitably, some thought him a madman, others a genius.) Coupled with his experience of that joyous presence was a sensitivity to the misery of others. He wrote, that walking the streets of London, ‘In every face I meet marks of weakness, marks of woe.’ For Blake, joy and woe were mysteriously close:

Joy & woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine.
Under every grief & pine,
Runs a joy with silken twine.

Blake, alongside his joyful visions, knew much woe and hardship. His collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience* includes the following poem, simple yet profound, which reflects on that joy and woe, and on the Divine closeness:

On Another’s Sorrow

Can I see another’s woe,
And not be in sorrow too.
Can I see another’s grief,
And not seek for kind relief?

Can I see a falling tear,
And not feel my sorrows share,
Can a father see his child,
Weep, nor be with sorrow fill’d.

Can a mother sit and hear,
An infant groan an infant fear –
No no never can it be.
Never never can it be.

And can he who smiles on all
Hear the wren with sorrows small,
Hear the small birds grief & care,
Hear the woes that infants bear –

And not sit beside the nest
Pouring pity in their breast,
And not sit the cradle near
Weeping tear on infants tear.

And not sit both night & day,
Wiping all our tears away.
O! no never can it be.
Never never can it be.

He doth give his joy to all.
He becomes an infant small.
He becomes a man of woe.
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not, thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy maker is not by.
Think not, thou canst weep a tear,
And thy maker is not near.

O! he gives to us his joy,
That our grief he may destroy.

Till our grief is fled & gone
He doth sit by us and moan.

A father's love, a mother's love, reflections, albeit imperfect, of the Divine love. God is mother, father, and lover, sitting both the nest and the cradle near. Even closer still, 'becomes an infant small', and 'a man of woe', becomes Emmanuel, 'God-with-us'. In Blake's last great work of the Divine Imagination, his long epic poem *Jerusalem*, God says:

'I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend;
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:
Lo! we are One.'



William Blake by Thomas Phillips (1807)
([Creative Commons](#))

Cardinal Points – Aquinas and Advent

Ronald Haynes

On a first-time visit to Naples (June 2023), the start of a conference was wondrously prefaced by the final match of one of Italy's most famous professional football clubs, the local team which was formally crowned as the National Champions for the 2022–23 season. There was overwhelming delight and communal joy overspilling into so many streets and squares, as locals and visitors of all ages, families and seasoned fans celebrated sporting victory for 'The Blues' or 'The Little Donkeys'. So many signs and flags and other team materials highlighted the point that they had waited 33 years since last being champions of the nation. It was a kind of Advent, an excitement often beyond words, following the long waiting and then the ecstatic arrival of this shared honour and communal celebration.

An added surprise to all this was finding [San Domenico Maggiore](#), the great Dominican monastery and church complex nestled in the old town, beside [Naples University](#). At its height, there were up to 200 Dominicans based there, including some of enduring fame including Giordano Bruno and Thomas Aquinas. Their life paths diverged, of course, with Bruno condemned by the Roman Inquisition, while Thomas

was posthumously named Saint and Doctor of the Church, but with his own challenges.

Like his contemporary and fellow Dominican leader Meister Eckhart, Thomas Aquinas was not always well understood, and both had their work formally scrutinised. Both Eckhart and Aquinas were twice Professor of Theology at the University of Paris (an exceptional occurrence), and both seemed to experience serious conflict and misunderstandings of their work from early on. Among the challenges, Paris had increasing internal struggles between theologians open to new doctrines and the more conservative ones, which lead to turbulent years, certainly for Aquinas. The late [Fr Richard Woods](#) (RIP) – Dominican Philosophical Theologian, specialist in Mysticism and Spirituality, and Eckhart Society Trustee – believed that Eckhart was asked by the Order to return to Paris to help improve Aquinas' somewhat impaired reputation there.

Still, Aquinas' later reputation fared far better than Eckhart's (although the Eckhart Society has been helping to improve on that!). Given their shared Dominican milieu, it is perhaps easy to appreciate how Eckhart works through difficult discourses on divinity, and communicates them in ways which bear some similarity with how Aquinas approaches those subjects. Yet given their differences, it seems more curious to consider how Aquinas might have found himself gravitating toward a more Eckhartian path. When he left Paris the second time, in 1272, Aquinas returned to Naples (where he had entered the order). He founded a faculty of Theology, where at the time the Dominican monastery formed a part of the University. Like Eckhart, Aquinas balanced his academic work with preaching and sharing the deep insights from prayer and study (e.g. in Latin) with his fellow citizens in their mother tongue, in this case the Neapolitan vernacular.

An even closer commonality is what we often call mystical experiences, or occasions where the communion and close communication with God or the saints is particularly evident, sometimes witnessed by others. There are a number of such witnessed occasions in Aquinas' life, including two especially significant ones in Naples.

According to the testimony of the sacristan at the monastery, the image of a crucifix spoke to Aquinas sometime in 1273 (a year before his death). It is traditionally held that, after Matins on that day, Thomas lingered and was seen to be levitating in prayer, with tears before an icon of the crucified Christ. Christ said to Thomas, "You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward would you have for your labour?" Thomas responded, "Nothing but you, Lord."

In many of his sermons, Eckhart emphasises this desire and seeking for ‘nothing but God’. In Sermon 12 (translated/edited by Maurice O’C Walshe, revised by Bernard McGinn), he tells us: ‘Love at its purest and at its most detached is nothing but God.’ In Sermon 44 (Walshe), he quotes St Augustine saying: ‘He is a true servant who seeks in all his works nothing but God’s honour alone.’

Later, in December 1273, there was perhaps one of the best-known events of his life – during the celebration of Mass, Aquinas was reportedly in an unusually long ecstasy. Afterwards, it was noted that he decided not to write anymore, breaking his routine of dictating to his colleague Reginald of Piperno. In response to Reginald’s pleas to return to work, at least to complete the unfinished works, Thomas is reported (with slightly variable accounts) to have replied, “Reginald, I cannot, because all that I have written seems to me like straw compared to what I have seen and was revealed to me.”

In Sermon 71 (Walshe), Eckhart seems to describe perhaps a related transformation: ‘I have called upon Him and invoked Him and cajoled Him, and into me has come the spirit of wisdom, and I have preferred this to all kingdoms and to power and glory and to gold, silver and precious stones, and compared to the spirit of wisdom I have regarded all things as a grain of sand, as a puddle, and as nothing.’

The *Summa Theologica* remained incomplete when, three months after that December experience, on his way to the Council of Lyon, Aquinas died in the Benedictine Abbey of Fossanova, early on 7th March 1274. Eckhart and Aquinas have much more in common than it may sometimes seem, and arguably complement each other rather well.



Latin signs above and beside the door to Aquinas’ Schola, the room where he taught.

The stone plaque roughly translates:

‘wayfarer, entering hither, stop a step, and venerate this image and this chair, in which sat that great divine teacher Thomas Aquinas, a Neapolitan, with a multitude, as was equal, of audience, concourse, and of

the happiness of that age many others of the admirable learning of theology he taught, he gathered. In the first year of the reign of Charles the First, a salary of one ounce of gold was established for him every month. F.U.C. In the year 1272 D.S.S.F.F.’



In this 18th century oil painting by Francesco Solimena, St Thomas Aquinas is presented with the typical Dominican iconography. The saint is depicted with his attributes: the sun on his chest, a symbol of erudition, the book, the pen and the dove of inspiration.

Interior of the basilica church of San Domenico Maggiore in Naples, attached to the Dominican monastery founded in the 13th century.

In a previous Cardinal Points (*The Pilgrim*, June 2020 <http://saintlaurence.org.uk/pilgrim/pilgrim-2020-06.pdf>) it was noted that Eckhart paraphrases Augustine to provide a powerful and very personal take on the Creed (Jesus as ‘eternally begotten of the Father’) and what the Incarnation might mean for us: Here, in time, we are celebrating the eternal birth which God the Father bore and bears unceasingly in eternity, because this same birth is now born in time, in human nature. St Augustine says, ‘What does it avail me that this birth is always happening, if it does not happen in me? That it should happen in me is what matters.’ (Sermon 1, Walshe)

This very transformative Advent theme is well reflected in a poem by St John of the Cross called ‘If you want’, as indicated in this moving selection:

‘If
you want
the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy,
and say,
“I need shelter for the night, please take me inside your
heart,
my time is so close.”

Then, under the roof of your soul, you will witness the sublime
intimacy, the divine, the Christ
taking birth
forever,’

Render unto Caesar

Fr Bob Eccles

A Homily Preached on Sunday 22nd October 2023 Isaiah 45:1.4–6,
1 Thessalonians 1:1–5, Matthew 22:15–21

‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ These words are often heard as if they say, be true to your religion, but give to the secular state everything that is its due: keep its laws, pay its taxes, and salute its flag. And be sure to respect the distinction between religion and politics, the sacred and the profane, above all in what you allow the Sunday preacher to get away with!

Nothing could be further from the truth! The trouble with the coin of the realm which was burning a hole in the pockets of our Lord’s critics, but not it seems in his, was that it was the graven image of a false god. It had on it the head of Emperor Tiberius and the inscription, the divine Caesar. A loyal citizen of Rome was meant to burn incense on an altar to this sanctified tyrant, a useful way for the Romans to find out whether Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus and company were committing the capital crime of treason or not. In this conversation, the Roman coin reminds the Jews where true power lies.

Rome too is a religion, with its altars and priests; ask Mary Beard. So, show allegiance to Caesar, and you may not find it easy to make your offering to God, because the bishop has crossed you off the list of communicants!

Now, you may want to suggest that if we love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our mind and all our strength, as our Saviour teaches, there will be nothing left to render to Caesar except his share of the love we owe our neighbour. I can see no objection. The traditional Jewish view of these things, and the Muslim view also, is that the category of the secular is only a mirage. All things in heaven and on earth come from God and belong to God. Israel is the Lord’s vineyard, the people of his own possession, and its king the anointed one. But God is God not only of the Jews but of the Gentiles, as St Paul says in Romans, so he may well anoint a pagan king, like Cyrus the Great founder of the Persian Empire, so that he may be God’s chosen instrument to restore Israel and build a new temple, as he actually did in 538 BCE.

If the secular sphere does not exist, or exists in a subsidiary way, does that make the nation with its rulers holy? Or at least some nations? The editor of *The Tablet* wrote on 14th October, when Hamas had let loose its unspeakable crime and slaughtered so many innocents, ‘God who honours his promises has at last given the Jews a homeland where they can protect themselves. Hence the central importance of the Israel Defence

Forces, a sanctified lifeboat in a sea made stormy by anti-Jewish hatred.’ But he added, ‘Israel has a solemn obligation under international law to protect the wellbeing of the civilian population under its jurisdiction.’ So, Gaza? The sanctified lifeboat proves to be a fireship that destroys all in its path.

God has given the Jews a homeland. In quite what sense? As it happens there are many Jews who think the name of God, and the title of the state founded in 1948, don’t belong in the same sentence. There are rabbis who teach that only God, not man, can restore the kingdom to Israel. Then there are the secular Jews who found no need of religion to return to the land. David Ben-Gurion, their pioneer thinker and first prime minister, was an atheist, or at most a pantheist, whose project was for a pluralist, not a theocratic state.

A Catholic will see Israel’s place among the nations as assured, to the extent that all such historic realities can be assured, not by an illegitimate recourse to Judeo-Christian thought (the idea of Divine election), but by international law. It is the claim that asks to be respected. All Catholics should want to hear the voices of those Israelis who have at heart the place and the representation of the Palestinian Arabs in their midst.

A new state that can only justify itself by excluding and repressing the existing inhabitants, taking possession of their homes and fields, and reducing them to clients trapped in poverty or forced to emigrate, behaves like a new kind of all-powerful Caesar, and creates conditions in which there can be no progress, no dialogue, nothing but further violence. Our own movers and shakers who are silent about the things Palestinians have to say for themselves are false friends to Israel.

A long time ago, in 1890, the Dominicans founded the *École Biblique* at St Stephen’s Priory in Jerusalem. You see, we too have family in the Holy Land! The biblical archaeology, the books about the lands of the Bible, the preservation of ancient things, the translations, the moments of exchange and dialogue among every variety of people, have been our own significant contributions to the land, though we have not always had an easy passage. A Dutch member of the *École*, Fr Lucas Grollenberg, brought her story up to date, as long ago as 1977, his history book is called *Palestine Comes First*. A couple of clicks on the computer, and you can ‘borrow’ it to read.

Oh, and has my homily wandered into secular politics? Or is it still concerned with the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love, in other words God’s business, who cares for the poor and the dispossessed? That’s for you to say. I do know that when we really do make an honest attempt to come at the heart of the matter and publish the truth in a sea of lies, we render to God the things that are God’s.

***Madonna Del Magnificat*, (Tempera on panel)
Alessandro (Sandro) Botticelli, 1481**

Mary Walsh



[Madonna del Magnificat](#)

Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi is known by his nickname, which he adopted formally – Botticelli. ‘Botticelli’ is Italian for ‘little barrel’, which may have been referring to the fact that he was the younger version of his older, rotund brother. Sandro Botticelli was born circa 1445 in Florence, where he lived almost all his life in the family home where he had a large studio. He never married. He died in May 1510 and was buried in his local church, Ognissanti [All Saints]. He was a trained goldsmith. He loved painting and became an apprentice of the famous Florentine artist Fra Filippo Lippi who was very popular with the powerful and wealthy Medici family. Botticelli spent most of his career working for the Medici family and their friends.

The city of Florence is considered the birthplace of the Renaissance, especially of Renaissance painting. Fra Filippo Lippi and Giotto were leading artists of the Proto Renaissance, which preceded the Early Renaissance when Fra Angelico, Uccello, Bellini and Botticelli flourished. Much of the art of the Renaissance was commissioned by the Catholic Church. Depictions of the life of Christ, of Mary and the lives of the saints were painted to adorn the beautiful churches and were expected to be of the highest quality. They had to echo the beauty of the Faith and to proclaim the grandeur of God and His works. They often were used as teaching aids, as most people could not read. A commission from the Church would transform an artist’s career. In 1481, Botticelli was invited by Pope Sixtus IV to Rome to join a cohort of artists to paint frescoes of Old and New Testament events in the Sistine Chapel. It was the only

period in his life when Botticelli worked away from his studio and home in Florence. Botticelli returned and became a favourite artist of the wealthy Florentines who commissioned devotional pieces for their homes.

Madonna del Magnificat (Virgin and Child, and Angels) was painted in 1481. This beautiful painting is 118cm in diameter. The panel portrays Mary writing a prayer in a book with Jesus on her knee and five angels. It was probably painted for a private residence as a devotional piece because nothing was known about it until it was purchased for the Uffizi in 1784. Sacred art for a private home was typically a tondo as this painting is. A tondo is a painting in circular form. They were often commissioned for the bedrooms of grand residences. A tondo was a popular wedding or anniversary gift.

The Magnificat – also known as The Canticle of Mary or Ode of the Theotokos (Godbearer) – is Mary’s song, praising God for what He has done. They are the words Mary spoke to her cousin Elizabeth when she visited her after she had been told by the angel that she was going to be the mother of Our Lord. In the painting, Mary writes the words of The Magnificat in Latin on the righthand page of the book. Mary’s Magnificat praises God in humility for fulfilling His promises. She rejoices in her role in their fulfilment. In sacred art, if there is a book in the painting it means the event depicted is written about in the Bible. Jesus sits on Mary’s knee with His little hand gently guiding hers. Although He has not been born yet, the artist places Him on His mother’s knee. Before God was made incarnate He was and is always present. Jesus looks heavenward so the viewer is reminded that all scripture is ‘inspired’ or ‘breathed’ by God.

‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour
for He has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and Holy is His name.’ (Luke 1:46–51)

The painting does not show Mary visiting Elizabeth, but rather Botticelli is visualising Mary’s joyous words and feelings, and simultaneously depicts her as the mother of the Saviour. Her left hand holds a pomegranate and Jesus holds it too. The pomegranate with its red juice is a symbol of Christ’s Passion but is also a symbol of new life and rebirth. It has many seeds. When Mary holds a pomegranate, it is also a symbol of chastity. Mary knows that everyone will call her ‘blessed’. What does blessed look like? For 15th century Florentine Catholics, blessed would mean having a close spiritual relationship with God. Here is Mary writing her prayer while holding Jesus whom she carried in her womb. That is a close and intimate relationship, it is a relationship which will endure. Both their hands

simultaneously hold the pomegranate and each other. Mary will be there to comfort Jesus at the Passion and he will ensure her safety and wellbeing from the cross. Two angels crown Mary with a golden coronet covered with stars. Botticelli paints her as a heavenly queen. He looks forward to Mary's blessed position in heaven described in the Bible:

'...and on her head a crown of twelve stars and adorned with the sun' (Revelation 12:1)

Botticelli paints the rays of God's reflected light over her head. The two angels or helpers holding the book and the inkwell, and the third one assisting them are wearing red for charity or love, green for hope, and orange, which may well be a reference to the Medici family and their trade of oranges in the East! Jesus, of course, is wrapped in pure white.

Patrons or commissioners of artworks were often in the painting. I think that as Mary is wearing a gossamer veil and is very glamorous here, this painting may well be a portrait of the new bride and members of her and her husband's family.

Mary's blue cloak frames Jesus and forms a tent shape around her precious Child. In the Old Testament, during the journeys of Israel, the Ark of the Covenant was covered with a blue cloth. The Ark of the Covenant carried the two tablets of Moses (God's commandments), a pot of manna (the bread that fell from heaven) and the rod of Aaron (a symbol of priestly authority). In the painting, Jesus, the Word, the Bread of Life, and true high priest is present to remind us that Mary's womb is a tabernacle for Jesus. For Catholics, she is the new Ark of the Covenant.

The purpose of sacred art is to open the viewer spiritually. When Mary said, 'be it unto me according to Thy word' (Luke 1:38), and later when she speaks the words of The Magnificat, she is the perfect example of openness to the will of God.

Growing through Advent with Caryl Houselander

Fr Simon Blakesley

During the 1930s and 40s, the theologian and poet Caryl Houselander (1901–1954) reflected in her book *The Mother of Christ* (Sheed & Ward) on the season of Advent. She said, 'Advent is an urgent longing for the dawn of Christ's light in the world; its lovely liturgy gathers up the desire of the suffering people of God, waiting in the darkness for the incarnation, and carries it on a great wave of hope down the centuries into our

time. It concentrates the longing of the whole world in each heart that longs for Christ's coming and puts upon each tongue the age-old prayer thought might well have been written for us today: "Dawn of the east, brightness of the light eternal, Sun of justice, come and enlighten them that sit in the darkness and in the shadow of death".'

She goes on to say, and it is as if she knew how life would be in the 21st century: 'There is a widespread idea today that it does not matter what our conception of God is like. How vague it is, how confused, or even how distorted. "We all worship the same God" has become almost a shrug of the shoulders, dismissing the responsibility of knowing God as he reveals himself to be as if to know him truly made no difference to us at all; but as our conception of God is, so we ourselves become. If we think he is hard we grow hard. If we think he is a killjoy, we become killjoys. If we think of him as an omnipotent secret policeman, all-present, all-seeing, all terrible, we shrink from him and the heart that shrinks from God shrinks to nothing.'

Caryl Houselander was a Catholic not from the cradle or by adult conversion but, as she liked to say, from her 'rocking horse', for she was received into the Church at the age of six when a family friend encouraged her mother to have the children brought up as Catholics. Her education was nothing if not ecumenical, a Jewish kindergarten, followed by schools run by nuns, Protestants and the state. For a number of years, she fell away from the practice of her faith and explored other religious traditions including Russian orthodoxy. At times, she experienced crippling depression, but it was because of her own insights into the conflicts of the human soul and her own long history of mental suffering doctors began to send her their patients for psychotherapy, an experience that led her to writing her book *Guilt*.

Doctor Eric Strauss, the psychiatrist and neurologist, said of her work with disturbed children, that 'she loved them back to life' and her writing of poetry and novels has been a great gift to the Church in the 20th century. Her understanding of the average human person was always accurate and poignant, she writes, 'It is the particular tragedy of today that so many people have lost their faith in mammon and have not yet found it in God, because of the wrong conception of "him" that is printed upon their imagination; there is nothing to attract them to seek for him. Religion, they say, is an escape, but it is the only escape that they do not try. The man who has slammed the door on God must try to escape from the emptiness in the House of his soul. The solitude that is sweet is to be alone with God; to be shut up alone with oneself is more than human nature can bear.'

In talking about the seasons of the year, she says, 'Neither is he, who knows the earth, impatient of the winter. When day is short and dark, when night comes early and nature sleeps, he is content to sit by the fire in the long silent evenings and slumber too. He accepts the law of growth and lives by it. Like life in the earth Christ grows in us. He is, St Paul says, formed in us. The supernatural growing is a slow ordered process of which natural life is a shadow. Before Christ flowers visibly in our lives he must, as he has ordained, fulfil his own law of growth in us. It was his will to grow in Mary, to grow in his humanity from babyhood to boyhood, from boyhood to manhood, to grow not only in body but in wisdom and in grace.'

It is significant that although she wrote so much in her life, many of her texts, including this one were only published after her death in 1954. The quotations are from *The Mother of Christ* (Sheed & Ward, 1978).

May the hidden life of Christ grow deep within each of us during this Advent season.

Wellbeing the Catholic Way: the Five First Saturdays' Devotion – What is a Rosary?

Karen Rodgers

The quizzical little girl looked a picture in her beautiful white First Holy Communion dress alongside her friends, all similarly immaculately attired and she peered up at me enquiringly. The girls along with the little boys with their smart red sashes were the image of enthusiasm and innocence.

I thought of the faded, but treasured, commemorative photograph of my seven-year-old father Leo, circa 1934, in his red group, and for him the prayer was a standard part of everyday life. Later, when facing great challenges, I remembered him always, come what may and against great odds, taking us girls to church each Sunday at the Sacred Heart in Teddington and kneeling at the side altar to Our Lady after Mass, no doubt to pray for strength to face yet another seemingly impossible week. Then, later still, I remembered him at the very end of his life telling me that, when he left Dublin in 1945 for Liverpool after his mother's death, he went to the local church and knelt and asked Our Lady to protect him and that she always had.

Yet, despite attending Catholic schools throughout, I grew up without the Rosary. The 1970s in Britain was a desert as far as Sacramentals went and Confession was a rarity. I realise with hindsight that my father had been stunned by the suddenness and dramatic nature of the liturgical changes which occurred in the early 1970s to

such an extent that he sensed that, in catechetical terms, the rug had been pulled out from under him; he no longer felt he could say anything much with authority about the Faith or worship to us girls.

It was only when I spent a year in Mexico at the age of 20 that I discovered the Rosary; my friend's family said it all together at 6pm each evening. This was a revelation to me. The practice has brought great peace to my life; by nature an anxious person, I find the more I say the Rosary the less I worry.

So what should I say to the little girl on her First Communion?

'What is a rosary?'

A rosary is a set of beads which remind us of how much God loves us, which keep us under the watchful and loving eye of Our Blessed Mother, and close to and under the protection of Our Lord.

The Church has other crucial practices to help us in everyday life which most have forgotten. So what else have we been missing?

A wise priest commented that failing to attend Confession regularly is rather like failing to visit the dentist; fine (maybe) in the short term but in the long run liable to result in pain and regret.

Fr Daniel of the Holy Rood, Oxford, on Trinity Sunday commented, "We do not like being told what to believe but that is more of an 'Us' problem than a 'God' problem." Our Lord tells us that 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' and that we should not dwell on fear but trust Him, and that His Priests have the power to absolve sin.

As a loving mother, Our Lady gives us additional good advice:

'try to console me, and say that I promise to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all those who, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, go to Confession and receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary and keep me company for a quarter of an hour while meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me.'

A Polish visitor was baffled. She asked me, "Do you not celebrate The First Saturdays here at St Laurence's?" In Poland, churches are full of families on First Saturdays, reciting the Rosary, meditating on the mysteries, attending Mass and Adoration. My Polish friend was dismayed when she found the church so empty on a first

Saturday. “Please (she enjoined me) tell the people here about First Saturdays”.

Recitation of the Rosary and regular attendance at Confession bring peace to our children and to our homes, even in this most anxious of ages, but the Rosary and Confession are more than a simple alternative to all of the wellbeing programmes which are now so fashionable.

We have it on good authority that these practices not only prove calming but also bring us closer to Our Lord. As parents, we have the sacred responsibility not merely of presenting our children for the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation but additionally of fostering our children’s Faith and there are few better ways to do this than by attending Mass on Saturdays each month together with our children and reciting the Rosary together. Where our children are concerned, we lead by example if we lead at all.

I think of my father kneeling at the side Altar of Our Lady at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Teddington, where I was baptised, made my First Holy Communion and my Confirmation. I think of the eager, fresh-faced First Holy Communion candidates of 2023 and I wonder if these children, when they encounter the inevitable storms of their own lives, will know to do the same as my father Leo and to have recourse to the patronage of Our Lady.

So, next First Saturday consider setting aside time to come along to Mass and Confession, and to say the Rosary. And bring your children.

The First Five Saturdays – you can help to end the war and end abortion.

When Our Lady appeared to the three shepherd children in Fatima in the early 1900s, she warned them over and over again about nations being annihilated and Russia spreading her errors if people did not heed her call to pray. Today we see Russia invading Ukraine. Let us remember what Our Lady said to Sr Lúcia on 10th December 1925 and act upon it, “My daughter, look at My Heart surrounded with thorns with which ungrateful men pierce me at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. You, at least, try to console me, and say that I promise to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all those who, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months go to Confession and receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary and keep me company for a quarter of an hour while meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me.”

How to practice the Five First Saturdays’ Devotion

1) Confession. Make a good Confession during the eight days prior to the first Saturday with the intention of offering reparation for the offences against Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart.

2) Communion. You should attend Holy Mass and receive Holy Communion with the intention of offering reparation for the offences against Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart.

3) The Communion should be received on the first Saturday of the month.

4) The Confession must be repeated for five consecutive months, without interruption, otherwise you must recommence from the beginning.

5) Recite five decades of the Holy Rosary with the intention of making reparation to Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart.

6) 15 minutes meditation on the mysteries of the Holy Rosary. Accompany Our Lady by meditating on the mysteries of the Holy Rosary. This can be done by reading the biblical texts of the mysteries of the Holy Rosary slowly thinking of their content. You could meditate on one mystery for 15 minutes at the end of the prayer as Sr Lúcia did. This meditation is in addition to the recitation of the Rosary.

7) Say the prayer to the Immaculate Heart of Mary to conclude the devotion.

Immaculate Heart of Mary,
full of love for God and mankind,
and of compassion for sinners,
I consecrate myself to you.
I entrust to you the salvation of my soul.

May my heart be ever united with yours,
so that I may hate sin,
love God and my neighbour,
and reach eternal life with those whom I love.

May I experience the kindness of your motherly heart
and the power of your intercession with Jesus
during my life and at the hour of my death. Amen.

Why five Saturdays?

Our Lord told Sr Lúcia that the five Saturdays represent the offences against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

“My daughter, the reason is simple. There are five types of offences and blasphemies committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary:

1. Blasphemies against the Immaculate Conception;
2. Blasphemies against Her Virginity;
3. Blasphemies against Her Divine Maternity, in refusing at the same time to recognise Her as the Mother of men;
4. The blasphemies of those who publicly seek to sow in the hearts of children, indifference, or scorn or even hatred of this Immaculate Mother;
5. The offences of those who outrage Her directly in Her holy images. Here, my daughter, is the reason why the Immaculate Heart of Mary inspired Me to ask for this little act of reparation.” (29th May 1930)

Confession

Sr Lúcia clarified what should be done if Confession cannot be made on the first Saturday of the month:

“My Jesus! Many souls find it difficult to confess on Saturday. Will Thou allow a Confession within eight days to be valid?”

He replied: ‘Yes. It can even be made later on, provided that the souls are in the state of grace when they receive Me on the First Saturday and that they had the intention of making reparation to the Sacred Heart of Mary. – My Jesus!’

And those who forget to form this intention?

They can form it at the next Confession, taking advantage of their first opportunity to go to Confession.” (15th February 1926)

Communion

During a revelation by Our Lord on the 29th May 1930, Sr Lúcia clarified what one should do if all the conditions for the devotion, like the receipt of Holy Communion, could not be fulfilled on the first Saturday. Our Lord said:

“The practice of this devotion will be equally accepted on the Sunday following the first Saturday, when, for just reasons, my priests will allow it.”

Spiritual Attitude towards the devotion

Our Lady promised that she would “assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation” the souls who make the First Five Saturdays. However, it is important that the desire to console Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart by making reparation and growing in holiness is the main motivation for the practice. To underline this fact, Our Lord told Sr Lúcia:

“It is true, my daughter, that many souls begin the First Saturdays, but few finish them, and those who do complete them do so in order to receive the graces that are promised thereby. It would please me more if they did Five with fervour and with the intention of making reparation to the Heart of your heavenly Mother, than if they did fifteen, in a tepid and indifferent manner...” (15th February 1926)

<https://www.mdrevelation.org/rosary-crusade-for-peace/how-to-practice-the-five-first-saturdays-devotion/>
<https://www.catholicgallery.org/prayers/immaculate-heart-mary-prayers/>

[For those who are interested in taking part in local First Saturdays’ Devotions, they take place at St Philip Howard Church, Walpole Rd, Cambridge and are broadcast live on Radio Maria England – Editor]

2024 The Year of Prayer

Sarah Sykes

Pope Francis announced that beginning this Advent we will have a year focussed on prayer in preparation for the 2025 Jubilee Year.

On *Evangelii Gaudium* Sunday (17th Sept), we were encouraged to think about how, what and why we pray. We were also asked to think about how we might accompany someone else to pray during the year.

There will be published ‘guides’ to ‘help rediscover the centrality of prayer’ which, the Pope says: ‘they will be a good read, which stimulate prayer with simplicity in accordance with Christ’s heart.’

“Let us roll up our sleeves and renew every day the joy and commitment of being men and women of prayer. Prayer from the heart.”



You can also download an app specially designed for the Jubilee in 2025, where you can see what special events are coming up, check out the Jubilee hymn and prayer and keep up to date with other news about the Jubilee.

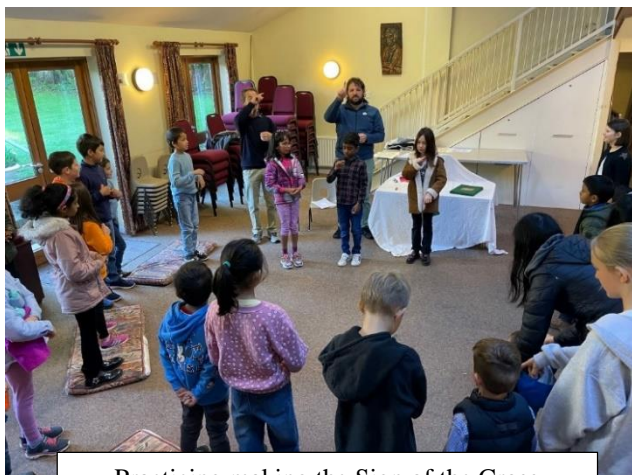
How do you plan to grow in prayer over the coming year?

Parish Organisations and Activities

Children's Liturgy at St Laurence's & Advent Activity Session 2 Dec at 1.30pm

Leonie Isaacson

Children's Liturgy continues to be well attended at both Sunday 9.30am and 11am Masses, with often over 30 children attending for each Mass. It is a real joy to see these numbers of children participating in learning about the Liturgy of the Word and about their Faith.



Practicing making the Sign of the Cross

To keep running Children's Liturgy sessions and activities at both Masses with this level of attendance, we could really do with more volunteers coming forward to help. Sessions are run by two volunteers/session on a rota basis, at either 9:30am or 11am, whichever is your preferred Mass. Guidance and training is provided as well as partnering with a more experienced volunteer. It really is a rewarding experience – come along and observe a session and see for yourself!

We are planning, at the start of Advent, an activity session. We welcome children and volunteers. See the [invite on the inside of the cover.](#)

If you would be interested in learning more about helping with the Children's Liturgy, please contact: jim.infield1@gmail.com or nonie.isaacson@gmail.com



Family Fridays

Helena Judd



Here is a photo from a Family Friday session with the children's author, Tammy Fernando. We also had 'Learning Some Makaton' with Serga. The group learned about the Trinity and shared some ideas about how they connect with each person of the Trinity. The children's favourite was Jesus – and how he was a storyteller. Sam gave a great example of how to tell a story, although many of the children thought Jesus was better at getting to the point :-)

We need more help for Family Fridays to continue. Please email Confirmation@SaintLaurence.org.uk if you are interested.

First Holy Communion update

Paula Hawkins – Catechist

The First Holy Communion sessions are now underway.

We started with our Inscription Mass, where many of you saw the children beginning this incredible journey in September. We are a big class this year at nearly 60 children. Please pray for the children and their parents on this special journey. We will give more updates throughout the year.

St Vincent de Paul Society update

Ciarán Ward

Dear Parishioners,

Every year we submit an annual return which is a record of our charitable activities over a 12-month period, and which we are obligated to do for Charity reporting purposes. As our President, I am astounded how time given by our members accumulates. Here below, I share some of our stats (recorded by one of our dedicated members) from our Parish group:

- Total time spent in visiting/phone calls: 1207 hours (including 184 hours in phone calls)
- Total transport lifts provided: 142 lifts and 71 hours spent providing them
- Practical assistance provided in vouchers/goods/equipment: 168 occasions
- Time spent on admin/material assistance/events/talks: 608 hours

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our core members and everyone who has supported us with their time too (the latter group is not recorded above and there are a good number who support us).

Most of all, these stats allow us to give a thought for all those parishioners who give up precious time for Children's Liturgy, First Communion preparation, Catechisms, Eucharistic Ministry, Mass Welcoming, transportation to Church, flower arrangement, Music, Parish Meetings, Prayer Groups, IT, Pilgrim Editors, and of course and not least those who have dedicated their life to service, the Clergy and Religious, and many more, all for the Glory of God and indeed the driving force behind us! How many more hours are spent by these groups, I wonder? The SVP acknowledges and is ever grateful for them!

It is also a reminder to all of us that a little time spent each week indeed adds up and contributes to a healthy whole!

Past events

We were delighted to all those who came to the Mass of Anointment on Saturday 7th October and who joined us for tea and cake afterwards. We enjoyed your company!

SVP has also been busy supporting Wintercomfort (a charity supporting the homeless in Cambridge) by joining in their arranged quiz on Wednesday 11th October. We were firmly beaten by another St Laurence's table filled with our parishioners but we

came in a low-mid table position – we promise to work on it for next year!

Many of our group attended the SVP Festival on 1st October, where we heard many spiritual talks about trusting in God in our work. There were also uplifting and impactful talks from two of our St Laurence's members on SVP 'expanding the tent', another on their work in Fine Cell Work (an embroidery charity which helps with rehabilitation arrangements for prisoners) and another on our Twinned Conferences and our activities supporting them! Indeed, St Laurence's was very well represented here!

Upcoming Events

Look out for our Giving Tree!!! Advent is approaching fast and our tree will be up from the first week of Advent (on the weekend 2nd/3rd December) just outside the Parish Room (and online too!), so please do take a tag and return the presents before Friday 17th December.

The Giving Tree is always well supported and will benefit the children of the families that SVP support.

Want to Join?

If you can spare an hour or two please do, or pray for us – there really is no help too small for the SVP including your prayers.

Contact us:

- SVP President Ciarán – 07540 842 078
svp@saintlaurence.org.uk
- Any member of SVP that you know

God Bless

The SVP Members

Mass of Anointing for the Sick

Nora Darby

The annual Mass for the Sick took place on a Saturday afternoon in early October. Mass was celebrated by Fr Simon to a large number of parishioners and visitors. People sat in every other bench so that Fr Simon was able to walk among the people to give the anointing without people needing to leave their seats.

After Mass, the SVP hosted tea and cake in the Parish Room. The whole afternoon was greatly enjoyed by all.

Many thanks to all who helped organise the occasion, and to all who gave lifts.

St Laurence School

To mark the end of their topic 'The Kingdom of God' Year 5 and 6 had a go at Bible journaling. Bible journaling is an exciting way to engage with Scripture and the way you spend time in the Word. We hope to start an extracurricular Bible journaling club at school to support our children's knowledge of the Word.

The Year 5 and 6 children worked on The Beatitudes and highlighted and illustrated key messages that spoke to them.

BLESSED are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

BLESSED are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

BLESSED are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

BLESSED are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

BLESSED are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

BLESSED are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

BLESSED are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

BLESSED are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

BLESSED are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

BLESSED are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

BLESSED are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

BLESSED are the meek

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

mercy

The Beatitudes

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven

Blessed

THE BEATITUDES

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Isaac

LOVE

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

THE LORD IS LIGHT

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

GOD BLESS YOU

but

Paul

Nikeden

B Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Be who you truly are

L Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Let your real self be seen

E Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Express yourself

E Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Express yourself

S Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Hold you to the world

S Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Sometimes risks are worth taking

E Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Everyone is different

E Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Everyone is different

D Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Don't give up

GOD IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"
 "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted"
 "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth"
 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled."
 "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy."
 "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God."
 "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God."
 "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Respect

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."
 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."
 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."
 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."
 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."
 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
 "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Love one another as I have loved you

Peace

Trust

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."
 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."
 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."
 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."
 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."
 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
 "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

+ GOD!

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."
 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."
 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."
 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."
 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."
 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
 "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

JOY!

HOPE!

FAMILY!

PEACE!

COMPASSION!

PRAISE!

Love

FRIENDSHIP!

Summary of Parishioners' Open Meeting 21st September 2023

Present: Fr Simon Blakesley, Deacon Geoff Cook, Seminarian Peter Ho, Stephen Warde (Chair), Sarah Sykes

Parish & Diocesan News

The Chair welcomed Peter Ho to the meeting. He is a 4th year seminarian and is here to experience parish life. He will be with us until Christmas. He has another two years of study ahead of him.

Fr Simon reported that the Bishop has a new priest secretary, Fr Peter Wygnanski. We are still waiting to hear when we will get a visitation by the Bishop.

Our first Holy Communion classes will be starting shortly. Inscription Mass is taking place on Sunday 24th September. 65–70 children are due to sign up.

We are required by the Diocese to conduct a count of those present at Mass over the next four Sundays. This used to take place during October, but the numbers were affected, to a certain extent, by people being away during the half-term break. The count will now take place during the last two weeks of September and the first two weeks of October. The count for last weekend totalled 570 people. We are pleased to see our attendance is getting nearer to our pre-covid attendance.

On 30th September, Sr Gemma Simmonds will be leading an afternoon of teaching about the Synod and in particular reflective listening. The Meeting held a short discussion about what time this will finish.

Building update

Jim O'Sullivan has been exploring options for a new heating system for the church building. He has received five quotes from three companies. Having consulted with the Finance Committee, it has been decided that the job will be offered to Dunphy, a leading specialist in church heating. As part of the new installation, we will have 19 new radiators in the church. The new system will be programmable so that particular temperatures can be set for particular times of the day. We are currently awaiting Diocesan approval and then an installation date will be agreed. It is hoped that the installation is completed before the winter months.

We have also received some quotes in connection with installing more solar panels on the church buildings. Fr Simon suggested that an inline installation of panels (ie panels replace roof slates) would be preferable. It is hoped that this can be progressed within the next six months.

Other maintenance – the water heater in the kitchen has been descaled and the water boiler in the sacristy, which had been leaking badly, has now been replaced with a hot-water-on-demand model.

Bench cleaning – Steve Warde reported that all our pew benches have had their backs cleaned, sanded and oiled. We had a good number of volunteers and the job was completed in just over an hour. Thanks were recorded to all who volunteered.

Support for Couples

Paolo Mannu and his wife Una proposed that we organise an evening where couples could come together for some social time. They have been volunteering in this area of ministry for a while and suggested that we run our event on the Saturday before Valentine's Day. It will be a time to share a meal, build friendships and share Faith. The Meeting was supportive of the idea. The evening will be aimed at those who are married or in a long-term relationship. It will be advertised in the newsletter. Also, invitations will be sent out to groups such as the parents who are supporting children in their Confirmation preparation.

Pastoral Assistant Proposal

Members of the Synodal Pathway Action Group (SPAG) have been developing a job description for this role. They have read through a few examples from other dioceses, taken advice from the Margaret Beaufort Institute, Cambridge, and consulted with a parishioner who was in this role in another local parish. They prepared a draft description for discussion. The hope is that whoever takes on the role will expand and enable parishioner involvement and engagement in the Parish.

Synodal Pathway

Kay Dodsworth shared that the Bible study group are coming to the end of a block of teaching within the next couple of weeks. They will take a break and then restart in the New Year. Roberta Canning mentioned the possibility of doing another Sycamore course. This is currently under consideration. It was felt that it would be quite useful particularly for those who are looking into joining the Catholic Church.

Social Activities

Feast day celebrations – The Chair thanked all who attended and helped run our Parish Feast day party, which had been well attended and was an enjoyable occasion.

Children's activity day – Jeanette Milbourn suggested that we could revive the children's activity day that had

run in past years on the Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent, perhaps in conjunction with the Children's Liturgy team. She agreed to contact the team and discuss the idea with them.

Coffee Hub – continues to be an important informal social gathering for the parish.

Parish Groups

SVP – Ciarán Ward reported that there is an East Anglia SVP Festival taking place in Newmarket on 1st October from 12noon. There will also be Mass at 11am. If anyone is considering joining the SVP or would like to know more about the SVP in general, that this would be a good opportunity to learn more.

Mass for the Anointing of the Sick on Saturday 7th October at 3pm – all are welcome and if anyone can help with lifts or serving refreshments after Mass, please get in touch as soon as possible.

Other news: the group continue with their usual support work within the Parish. There has been an increase of people asking for money at the presbytery. The group are developing a leaflet that can be given to people asking for help with information about what help is available and where they can get it. Thanks were expressed for donations received of both money and goods.

CAFOD – Nora Darby reported that the Parish group is looking to recruit new members and find new leadership for the group, perhaps 3–4 people taking on this on rather than one person. Meanwhile, the Family Harvest Fast Day is being organised. Envelopes for donations will be available next weekend. Any help with this is most welcome. The new donation point recently installed in the Porch can be used for people to donate to CAFOD, but James Dore suggested that a separate hand-held machine would also be needed.

Justice & Peace – Ron Haynes reported that the group have been promoting the Season of Creation, which culminates on the Feast of St Francis. They are planning a nature walk on 24th September. The Stargazing Evening was very quiet. The group is also thinking about its plans for Advent, and on doing a presentation on *Laudato Si* part 2 (currently being printed) which, among other things, looks at climate change issues.

Tech Group – Ron H reported that the church CCTV is no longer working. Its hard drive storage needs to be replaced. The group will arrange to do this. They are also looking into sourcing laptops that can be reconditioned and passed on to people who need them via the SVP.

James Dore mentioned that the donation machine in the Porch can be used to donate to the general offertory, second collections, SVP and CAFOD. It's currently battery-operated, but a permanent energy supply will be installed.

AOB

Parish newsletter – Nora Darby mentioned that the newsletter a couple of weeks ago was printed with very small print because there was so much news and this made it very difficult to read. Sarah Sykes presented a [sample redesign](#) of the newsletter which uses colour to highlight information and make the newsletter a bit more engaging to look at, and split the notices into three categories: **Notable and New** – for when a notice first goes into the newsletter, or there's something to particularly take note of, **Parish Groups and Meetings** – covering notices on parish life and activities, **Other News** – information of interest and not necessarily taking place in the Parish.

Two other sections were added 'Upcoming Funerals' dates (so that people can see more than a week ahead when funerals are scheduled to take place) and 'How to arrange baptisms'. Space was gained by making the area taken up by the list of the week's Mass times a little smaller, which meant some notices from the reverse page could be moved to this page.

The Meeting expressed general approval of the ideas shown, and agreed that, in conjunction with Reece, a new design could be drawn up and presented at the next meeting.

It was also mentioned that, when submitting a notice, the sender should state how long the notice needs to stay in the newsletter. And if there are any long-running notices, they can run for a few weeks, come out, and be re-entered later. This would help free up space, particularly when there are a lot of new notices on any given week. Ron H would like, at some point, to design a webform which would help with this.

Rotas – Nora Darby emphasised that more people are needed as Eucharistic ministers in particular, but Welcomers and Readers are also welcome.

School display in the Porch – Ursula passed on a message of thanks from the school governors for the school display area in the Porch. They have received positive comments about it and felt that it was a great support of the school for Education Sunday. In the future, displays of work shown at the school will hopefully make their way down to this display area.

Date of Next Meeting – Tuesday 21st November 2023 at 7.30pm in the Parish Room and online.

The High and the Low of being a Stella Maris Port Chaplain

Julian Wong (Regional Port Chaplain of East Anglian Ports)

Stella Maris is the largest ship-visiting network in the world, and the official maritime charity of the Catholic Church. Stella Maris was founded in 1920 by a group of Catholic men and women with the founding belief that every seafarer deserves fair working conditions and respect for their human rights.

Seafarers help transport about 90% of everything we use and consume. They are separated from their families for up to nine months at a time. They live in often crowded conditions onboard and they work in hazardous conditions. They work four hours on and four hours off as soon as they step onboard until the day when they sign off to go home.

Stella Maris Port Chaplains and volunteer ship visitors visit them when they arrive at our ports and provide them with practical, emotional and spiritual support. Port chaplains are contactable at any time. If the vessel is not at their port and still at sea, they can contact the Stella Maris Port Chaplain at their port of arrival and request a visit to the crew upon their arrival. This is possible because Stella Maris has 220 chaplains and 750 volunteers visiting seafarers in 54 countries. In the UK, we have 21 chaplains, supported by our volunteers.

As the Stella Maris Regional Port Chaplain at the East Anglian Ports, I visit Felixstowe, Ipswich, Harwich, Mistley, King's Lynn, Gt Yarmouth and Lowestoft. My ministry with the seafarers is seldom the same each day and there is always the unexpected.

Called to serve the downhearted

Early in October 2023, I was contacted by the Felixstowe Port Operations Manager (Marine) informing me that there had been an unexpected death on board a container vessel while it was anchored off Portugal. A seafarer, working on the deck and helping to prepare for docking, suddenly vomited blood. The other crew members and an officer helped him to his cabin, but he died within half an hour. After the vessel had docked at Port of Sines, Portugal, the body of the seafarer was taken off the vessel and an investigation into his unexpected death was started.

The vessel was due to berth at Felixstowe Port in two days and would be alongside for approximately 48hrs. The Captain had agreed I could visit and mentioned that the crew had not talked much since the incident. I had previously visited the vessel when it was last in Felixstowe Port in May 2023.

I boarded the vessel and was taken to the ship's office. I spoke to the Master who said he was expecting my visit.

I suggested that I should go up to the Crew Mess Room and, if anyone wanted to speak to me, I would be happy to see them there individually or in a small group.

The Third Officer then went to relieve the seafarer who was on deck duty and he came to the office. I told the Captain that I would like to speak with the seafarer alone in the Crew Mess Room if I may. He agreed.

The seafarer told to me in detail what had happened and that he was working on the deck just a metre away from the seafarer who suddenly vomited copious amount of blood. He said he called for help and the Third Officer came and they took him to his cabin. I gave him plenty of time to gather his thoughts, listened and empathised with him, and assured him that it was normal for him to feel the way he was feeling. I mentioned a range of emotions he might be experiencing and assured him that they would be normal reactions, and that it was important for him to verbalise how he was feeling. He responded well to this. After some time, I asked if there were other crew members who would like to talk with me and he called two other seafarers and they came to join us in the Mess Room. I explained that they were all individuals and that they would all react differently and to different degrees. I explained to them about the importance of verbalising their feelings after such a traumatic experience. I talked about seeking God's peace and comfort at such a distressing and sad time. I suggested that they talk to each other and support each other in the days ahead. I encouraged them to take shore leave and they said they would. I gave each of them, as well as the other seafarers, a SIM card each and they were very happy with this simple gesture. I befriended them on social media so they would have direct contact with me. Though they were Muslims, they were happy for me to pray for them and were very thankful.

Visiting *Laura Maersk*, the world's first methanol-enabled container vessel



On the morning of 29th September 2023, the world's first methanol-enabled container ship, *Laura Maersk*, arrived at Felixstowe port. It

was an impressive ship and I had planned to visit the crew with my chaplaincy manager, Sharon, who had come from Bournemouth to 'ship visit' with me. However, I was advised by the Harbourmaster that there

would be various celebrations onboard and that it would be best to avoid visiting it.

We drove up to the vessel with a view to taking photos of the vessel. When some of the crew onboard spotted me from the deck, they came down to invite us onboard. Several of the crew had met me previously when they were on other vessels. The Messman had also messaged me a couple of weeks ago, asking if he could buy something online and have it sent to my address. He explained to me, when I met him in the galley, that he was not able to reveal the name of the vessel to me in his message. He said it was because it was not meant to be publicised before their arrival at Felixstowe Port.

My manager and I were warmly welcomed onboard. We were invited to join the crew for a lovely lunch in the crew Mess Room.

After lunch, we spent time chatting with them. One crew member asked for prayers for a friend and colleague suffering from pancreatic cancer. He explained the difficulties and expense of falling ill in the Philippines when not working. I prayed for them, for his sick friend and offered a blessing to the crew and ship.

We were so privileged to be the first to be welcomed onboard this very impressive container vessel. It was certainly one of the highlights of the year.



Visiting MSC Michel Capellini, currently the world's largest container ship

A week later, on 5th October, I boarded the world's current largest container vessel, *MSC Michel Capellini*. I was warmly welcomed and, in the galley, I met the friendly Indian chief cook, who made me a tasty Masala tea.

Collecting and handing out clothing for the cold weather

With the cold weather now upon us, items like woolly hats, scarves, gloves and warm clothing (small and medium size) are greatly welcomed for these seafarers. I am also collecting items for their Christmas parcels and so would welcome any donations of suitable items such as chocolates and calendars. If you are a knitter then see the website for patterns: <https://stellamaris.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Stella-Maris-knitting-patterns.pdf>

Parish contact: Mrs Mary Watkins

CAFOD Update

Nora Darby

The small Parish CAFOD group is looking to urgently recruit new volunteers and find new leadership, perhaps 3–4 people taking on the role, rather than one person. If you are interested please contact: Office@saintlaurence.org.uk

Fast Day Appeal was a success due to some lovely parishioners coming forward to help on 30th Sept/1st Oct and the following 7th/8th October. Thanks to Ursula, Melanie, Mary, Michanne and Roberta, with special thanks to Jane Crone, CAFOD Diocesan Co-ordinator who journeyed up from her home in Suffolk to help. Our final total was over £1,000. St Laurence's, once again, Came Up Trumps! As Fr Simon said in his Homily, "you are a Giving Parish".

Many thanks to all of you for your generosity.

The Friends of St John's Cathedral, Norwich, AGM Oct 2023

Anne Maddocks

Our Bishop Peter invited me to the AGM which was followed by a lovely lunch. It all went well. Several matters came to the Bishop's attention. Some good, some not possible.

We elected the officers for the coming year. Luckily, no one was standing down this year, so it will be good for the committee to carry on the good work. The Cathedral looked beautiful as usual, and was full. So many people made the effort to attend the Mass. I have been a member now for several years. My only wish would be to have more friends join us across the Diocese to spread the workload.

The Bishop was on good form and thought that I was amazing to come all that way from Cambridge at my age. I am the only one, which makes me sad, out of all the parishioners in Cambridge.

So, I am hoping that some of you out there may read this article and join me next year. It is a short meeting followed by a lovely lunch and meeting up with other friends from across the Diocese. If you need any other information, don't hesitate to contact me (T:01223 .351499) and I'll be happy to try and help.

Discussing the Synodal Church with Sr Gemma Simmonds CJ

Kay Dodsworth



On Saturday 30th September, we had a very stimulating and entertaining afternoon with Sr Gemma. Pope Francis invites all members of the Church to become involved in the Synod in ways that are relevant to our own parishes and Sr Gemma came to help us initiate the process. She explained the importance and aim of the Synod for the Church, and told us about her role in collating the responses to the questionnaire from Religious communities across the world. It was really interesting to hear that the responses from many countries were very similar, despite their very different cultures. She then taught us how to follow the process of reflective listening in small groups: it sounds easy but can be quite a challenge!

The Synod document (*Instrumentum Laboris*) poses questions for consideration which emerged from the first phase. We used some of them as we learned the process. Sr Gemma asked us to reflect on what stayed with us after our listening exercise, sleep on it and then send Fr Simon a paragraph about it. She emphasised we should not include, 'Someone should...' but think about and include, 'what can I do?'

The document says that a synodal church should be characterised by:

- A communion that radiates
- Co-responsibility in mission
- Participatory governance

There is a challenge, then, for us all to reconsider our baptismal calling and be open to what the Holy Spirit might be calling us to do in order to bring about renewal in the Church in these challenging times.



The document stresses that the aim of the process is not to implement huge changes in the Church but to enable us to listen to each other and the Holy Spirit, which speaks to and through the Body of Christ. It says that some of the questions that emerged in the process, which some people find disturbing and contentious, are matters about which there already exists magisterial/Church teaching. 'These matters should still be addressed as there might be a need in that area for further teaching, acceptance, or openness to a further outpouring of grace and leading by the Spirit.' I was reminded of how the first Christians approached discerning how to move forward in mission in the Early Church; for example, whether to include Gentiles or not. I have to admit it felt exciting to be invited to take part in a process followed by the likes of St Paul, Timothy, Barnabas, Lydia and co.

We hope to continue engaging with the Synod questions over the coming months and hope many people will be interested in taking part.



The afternoon with Sr Gemma was great fun as well as giving us much to think about and we hope the meetings which follow on will be equally enjoyable and stimulating.

CWL Update

Janet Scally

At the Catholic Women's League, we continue our second Friday of the month lunches and are delighted to say that numbers of parishioners attending is rising.

We recently donated to the Macmillan Coffee Morning and the Muscular Dystrophy Society; the latter to support the Cambridge race as most of us are definitely not runners!

All are welcome to our lunches and ladies are welcome to come to our meetings which start at 11am on the same second Fridays. Contact: Janet Scally 01223 365330.

Personal Stories and Experiences

Bênção das Fitas @ St Laurence's

Miriam Santos Freire



In a vibrant celebration of academic achievement and cultural diversity, on 8th October, St Laurence's Parish hosted a special gathering to honour a cherished Portuguese tradition – the Blessing of the Ribbons – as we celebrated the graduation of four resilient Portuguese 'veteran' students. Join me in congratulating them and thanking Fr Simon for making this celebration extra special.

This journey began during the COVID-19 pandemic, as my husband, Pedro, reignited a dream from his Lisbon medical school days. Despite a change in plans, he graduated in Applied Languages with a major in Business Administration from the esteemed Portuguese Open University (Uab, Universidade Aberta).

At the heart of this celebratory occasion lies a cherished Portuguese tradition – the 'Bênção das Fitas' or Blessing of the Ribbons – part of a much larger event called 'Queima das Fitas' (Burning of the Ribbons), a captivating ritual that traces its roots back to the 19th century in Coimbra, the cradle of Portugal's university tradition. At that time, university students wore coloured ribbons on the folder where they kept their notebooks to identify the college and the course they were attending. At the end of the school year, they burned the cotton ribbons that were used to tie up the folder in a large bonfire, symbolizing the liberation of the 'Sebenta' (the notebooks), i.e. the end of their studies, and the beginning of their professional lives. Nowadays, outside of Coimbra, the black ribbon is the only ribbon that is burned.



The current academic tradition is for the coloured ribbons to be handed out to the students' academic godmother/godfather, family, friends, teachers, colleagues, coworkers, i.e. whoever the students consider may have had a relevant role in their academic life, and people write good luck and success wishes or simply sign them. On the black ribbon, students write everything that didn't go well during their degree.

The ribbons Pedro received held profound significance, with the dark blue and white colours representing his university and degree, the red ribbon symbolizing love and support, the yellow ribbon to be dedicated to the Cardinal Patriarch (in this case, our own Fr. Simon), and the black ribbon acting as a symbolic 'lucky charm', to be burned, signifying the release from academic struggles.

The Blessing of the Ribbons is a moving religious ceremony, traditionally observed as a Mass celebrated by the Cardinal Patriarch (in Lisbon) or Bishop, symbolizing the closure of the academic journey. It is a moment of joy, gratitude, and reflection as students seek blessings for their future professional endeavours after years of hard work and dedication.

Pedro, along with his fellow graduates Andreia, Isabel, and Nádia — affectionately known as P.A.I.N. from their WhatsApp group – met and studied online for two and a half years, choosing Cambridge as their graduation trip; an experience filled with four intensive days of celebrations, exploration, and adventure, spanning across London, Windsor, and Oxford.



Let us come together to applaud the extraordinary effort and unwavering dedication displayed by our 'veteran' students who, amidst the demands of daily jobs and family responsibilities, successfully balanced their academic pursuits. We extend our heartfelt wishes for a bright and prosperous future to all of them. Well done!

For more information on the whole Portuguese academic tradition, visit: <https://atlanticbridge.com.br/artigos/en-queima-das-fitas>

Death at the Monastery

Rosemary Burdess

This may sound like another mystery for Cadfael to solve but, almost unbelievably, it was a holiday. Yes, a holiday! Who goes on a holiday to discuss old age, dying and the afterlife? Staggeringly, the venue, the Monastery of Our Lady of Hynning, run by nuns not monks, was fully booked. It was a Catholic People's Weeks' adults-only event and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the youngest participant was sixty-nine. All had come hoping to find some sort of answer to the questions, 'How will my life end?' and 'How do I want it to end?'

There were three speakers. The first, Vin Allerton, looked at ageing, dying and beyond through poetry, music and art in a similar way to Radio 4's *Something Understood*. So, we contemplated Rembrandt's honest portraits, Emily Dickinson's 'Because I could not stop for Death' and Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius.'

The second speaker, Fr Tim Redmond, gave a priest's eye-view of ministry in the final years. He began with the evolution of Extreme Unction and its previously sometimes alarming connection with approaching death. Nowadays, the Sacrament of the Sick is there to comfort and support all who are feeling unwell.

He spoke next of the dying process and started by showing [Br Mickey O'Neill McGrath's picture, 'St Joseph and Jesus,'](#) where St Joseph is seen cradling baby Jesus beside Jesus holding the dying St Joseph. St Joseph is the patron saint of a happy death.

Nowadays, death is unfamiliar. So many die in hospital where death is considered a failure by, and of, the medical profession. Dr Kathryn Mannix had wanted to come in and speak herself about her everyday working experiences on a hospital ward at the end of life, but as she was unable to be present, we listened to a recording, "What Happens As We Die". She explained that it did not matter what illness was the cause of death, the manner remained the same. This TED talk can be accessed by anyone wanting to demystify the process or needing to know what to expect.

Fr Tim also spoke of the afterlife and this was more challenging as 'Eye has not seen and ear has not heard...' It is often portrayed in three ways as enhanced earthly life or as an eternal benediction or as a banquet. However, anyone choosing Isaiah 25:6-9 for a funeral reading because of its description of sumptuous heavenly feasting:

'of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined'

should beware the curtailed Catholic version, which is

limited to only 'a banquet of rich food.' Fr Tim thought of death as an unseen companion at every step in life and so this might be a time of homecoming. Indeed, we might go to bed as usual only to wake up dead the next morning.

Our third speaker, Sr Teresa Britain, took as her three themes: acceptance, discernment and abandonment. She spoke of the insignificance of a lifespan. She warned of the dangers of using the language of banking to give a false impression of the importance of time: for time can be invested, wasted or spent. Yet people are too transitory to have any real impact and so can be free to accept and enjoy the now. Jews believe that God will finally ask, "And did you enjoy my creation?"

Obviously, older people need to consider the future carefully. It is important to leave peace and love for family and friends. The calm Monastery of Hynning, with its bell regularly ringing to halt work and call to prayer, its good food and its beautiful grounds ablaze with mature rhododendrons, provided a safe space to contemplate possibly the most difficult questions. Every day there was time to go out perhaps to Carnforth, with its train station preserved as a film set for *Brief Encounter* and wonderful second-hand bookshop, or to Arncliffe, to witness the treacherous waters of the bore. At the end of these challenging few days, people left determined to make a good ending, to discuss this with their loved ones and with a prayer:

Song for Hospices

By Paul Ayres

When my life is finally measured in
Months, weeks, days, hours,

I want to live free of pain,
Free of indignity,
Free of loneliness,

Give me your hand,
Give me your understanding,
Give me your love,
And let me go... peacefully

And help my family understand.

Catholic People's Weeks is a 73 year old organisation run by the laity to support lay people in their experience, understanding and knowledge of God. Breaks are for families or child-free, of varying lengths, always themed and are often located in stunningly beautiful areas of the country. If you would like to find out more, go on the Catholic People's Weeks' website.

Lisbon – a city to remember

Joe Tucker

Our bus from Porto to Lisbon took over three hours, which gave us plenty of time to reminisce about the many reasons we had enjoyed Porto so much. Also, we had a slight worry that Lisbon could turn out to be just another capital city – busy, expensive and full of tourists. Might the last two days of our fortnight in Portugal be less memorable than what came before?

What we discovered, while exploring on foot for a little over ten miles each day, is that Lisbon captures the essence of nearly every aspect of Portugal.

The contours of Lisbon's old centre are extreme by any standards and it's no surprise that the majority of visitors get around by tram or tuk tuk.



There are a few roads which go in a straight line from the waterside to one of the hilltops (seven to choose from) which is handy if you want to gain/lose 200m in one go.

The remaining roads form a labyrinthine game of snakes and ladders which make a nonsense of any attempt to find the 'direct' route from A to B.

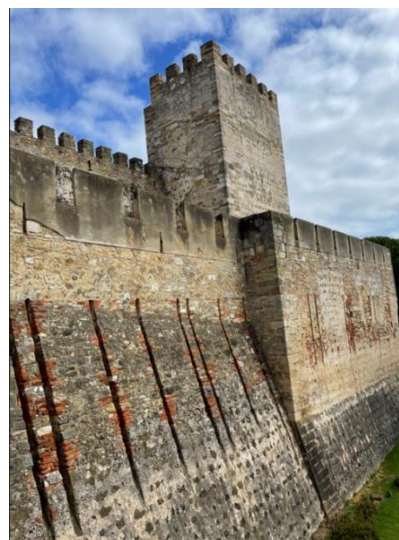
Portugal is surely the world champion for surfacing streets, plazas and pavements with cobblestones, a good proportion of which are loose or uneven. Anyone who is vexed by potholes and/or narrow pavements in Cambridge should spend a day walking around Lisbon, where it is entirely normal for pavements on a busy street to be less than 1m wide. I did see one worker repairing a patch of wonky cobblestones – he will never be short of work!

One of my strongest memories are the contrasts between new and old, particularly the gigantic cruise ships laden with technology and luxury which dominate the harbour as compared with the famous yellow trams, some of which are 85 years old, which glide serenely around the town centre, jam-packed with tourists.

For anyone with a sweet tooth, the main temptation is surely the custard tarts (*pastel de nata*) which are on display everywhere – from the grandest party shop (*pastelaria*) to the humblest newsagent. The size varies so if your heart is set on a biggie then you may have to shop around for your next fix.

There are plenty of grandly named churches and it is normal to queue (and pay) to look inside. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between a working church and a museum, not least with the main cathedral which appears to have one Mass on a Sunday morning.

Portugal is a country of fabulous castles and Castelo de São Jorge (naturally halfway up a steep hill) is a fine specimen with a full set of ramparts, towers etc. It also provides one of the best viewpoints in the city.



All this exertion in the Portuguese sunshine requires regular hydration, which is not a problem as you are never more than 100 metres from a café, where you are instantly recognised as being English and the staff are super friendly. The most we paid for two beers was €4.50 and you can sit for as long as you like.

Finally, you may wonder if walking around Lisbon involves dicing with impatient drivers or reckless motor bikers, similar to London for example (or dodging e-scooters on the pavement as in Cambridge). Not at all, since there are zebra crossings at nearly every junction and drivers/riders seem to take a pride in showing maximum courtesy to pedestrians. It is all very relaxed and taking a little extra time is just part of their culture.

Fighting for the Unborn: a personal experience

Teresa Brett

When I was 33yrs old, I found out that I was pregnant, despite having taken the pill for nearly a year (same as my sister – funny things family hormones). That was 1984. There were no pre-natal tests or check-ups. I just carried on as usual until a doctor gave me my annual diabetes check-up. I have had type 1 unstable diabetes since I was about 20yrs old, diagnosed in 1973 or so.

The consultant said I would hear a little heartbeat inside me. I could feel it fluttering around. Only when I was eight months pregnant did Addenbrooke's call me in for an emergency examination. There were childbirth, heart, diabetes and neurology consultants there. Frightening but, thanks be to God, I am not a worrier. They all prodded, looked, poked, and then one of the consultants said, "Have you a history of diabetes in your family?"

I remembered my mother telling me that her mother may have had diabetes, and her grandmother had died of it. So, I said yes and gave details.

They conferred, and one said, "The chances of this child being normal are about 10%." He recommended an immediate termination. I said, "I don't know what normal is supposed to mean, but I will not kill it. It is alive, kicking, somersaulting inside me. I will not kill it."

One of the doctors said, "Ah, I see from your notes you are RC, so you feel guilt, full of guilt."

I said, "I feel full of love. I believe in God, Jesus Christ, the King of Love. Like Him, I think killing is wrong. If termination is reaching in and gassing a foetus, pulling it out and chopping it up, then burning it, I call that murder."

"Please keep your voice down", said the doctor. "We don't call it killing, only termination."

I said, "Call it what you like; I won't do it. This child is a gift of God."

They left for a few minutes, then came back to say that I should have the baby induced, to keep the damage to a minimum. I did not mind that. He told me that eight-month babies only get fat; they are fully formed. So, I agreed and had the baby later that day. No space between contractions when you have an induction. It is only one big pain-push.

I was fine, more or less. But when the birth was almost complete, suddenly, there was no sign of life – not a

breath. Then after three motionless minutes, a young doctor pointed at the screen he was watching and said, "Look, it's breathing. It's moved. It's alive again."

Hooray for God! Our son was born soon after that, fine and well and hungry. They made me stay one night in hospital, then I could go home.

My husband is an Anglican, whose first wife had died. He had three children, teen-aged rebels, when Peter was born. They all get on well.

Never give up. Never give in. One doctor came in to see me the next day, a Saturday, on his way to a round of golf. He saw me contentedly feeding and holding my precious gift from God, came over and said, "I am so pleased. I just wanted you to know that". I thanked him, thanked God and went home.

We didn't have a crib, or anything, but the hospital lent us a shoebox, and we tucked him in there in a hospital cloth. God loves the underdogs, as we hear all through Scripture.

Tonne up Joe!

Mary Watkins

In the last year, Joe Tucker has collected one tonne of litter in the local streets of Cambridge as a volunteer litter picker. He started volunteering twice a week last year, triggered by the road improvement project in his neighbourhood of Histon Road. Although the project caused a lot of inconvenience at the time, it left the area looking good.

Then, Joe noticed that the littering spoiled what had been improved. Then the challenge to collect a tonne of litter came along and spurred him on! He collects around Arbury court and Aldi and elsewhere but often responds to people who tell him where there is a need.

By far the most common item he collects are beer cans followed by crisp packets and vaping refill boxes. There are sometimes more unusual finds including a discarded shoe in a bush and even welcome, if rare, ones – a dirty £5 note – fortunately of washable plastic!

Joe is provided with protective clothing and equipment by the city council. Once at least two bags of rubbish are collected, it is weighed, placed by a council bin and collection requested. Although not paid, Joe gets time credits which he can part-exchange for cinema tickets and swimming pool entrance. He says he enjoys being outside, getting exercise and meeting the public, many of whom express appreciation.

So, what can parishioners do? Joe pointed out that the paid employees of the council understandably concentrate on the city centre, so it makes sense for us to look out for the litter around the areas we live in and do what we can to pick it up. The area outside the church itself is not always litter free! Joe says his goal is to find his usual paths and routes litter free and surely we can all agree with that?

We are also a *LiveSimply* Parish. Part of that original campaign was to encourage us to take care of our environment and use its resources with care.

Where I live, one of my neighbours, an elderly lady, used to pick up litter at the entrance to the road every day. I think I shall invest in some plastic gloves and follow her and Joe's example.

If interested in volunteering, visit cambridge.gov.uk/streets-and-open-spaces-volunteers



If you have a hobby, interest or volunteer activity and think others would be like to hear about it let us know at pilgrim@saintlaurence.org.uk

Poetry and Creative Writing

All Hallows

Nick Corcoran

In rising wind and fitful rain
Beneath the brown and glistening boughs
I plucked the last pears from my tree
It was upon All Hallows Eve.

The heavy clouds flew dark as slate
The grass was grey and old
But the leaves that whirled in the stormy gusts
Blazed yellow red and gold.

All that my piece of land can give
Is safely stored for winter's need.
O that my hoard were elsewhere
And dwindle not by Spring's return.

As flowers fade, as fruit's consumed
As days scarce blest by good deeds pass
I think upon the hallows all,
Whose treasures neither fade nor fail.

They in their turn like you and me
Have spun and delved here
With evil strove, and justly did,
And now are wise and free.

Not far apart from us they dwell,
A step, a breath, a thought, no more,
But far from chill October blast
From dread of storm, and Winter's bane.

The hallowed ones like lilies live
That flower their single endless day
And in the light of that fair land
Gaze on the face I long to see.

O King of all the harvests past
Of years and seasons yet to come
O count us with your hallows all
On that great day which endeth all. ©JNC

Autumn: some thoughts from abroad

Karen Rodger

'And Joy with pinions light
Roves round the gardens
Or sits singing in the trees'

From *Ode to Autumn* by William Blake

What do you love about Autumn?

The great classical poets have spoken so movingly on this theme. Keats with his 'seasons of mists and mellow fruitfulness', R.S Thomas with his sense of wonder:

'Let the mind take its photograph
Of the bright scene,
something to wear
Against the heart in the long cold.'

and dear John Clare: 'Burning hot is the ground, liquid gold is the air; Whoever looks round sees Eternity there.', all connect with something timeless, deep and beautiful about the interaction of the natural world and the human spirit, and the opportunity the season affords for reflection.

It would be unfortunate if we let such apparently effortless expressions of the beauty of the season dull and overwhelm our own. How many of us have golden memories of the autumns of former years, each earlier memory overlaid and given greater depth and resonance by the next one, 'til the whole glows with inner fire like well-varnished oak?

Who does not look forward each year to the great pleasures of sharing seasonal vegetable soup and pumpkin or fruit cake with friends and family, looking out a favourite woolly jumper to snuggle in or planning a rustle through the red, golden leaves at a local park?

Who among us, I wonder, would envisage writing about such things in a language other than our mother tongue, say in Mandarin Chinese, Turkish or Polish?

Every Tuesday in term-time, in the Parish Room here at St Laurence's, there is a pleasant buzz of cheerful chatter and much laughter and companionship. Speakers of Other Languages from all over the world meet with enthusiastic and dedicated local teachers to improve their English at what is known as the ESOL Café, because tea and cake are also on the agenda, alongside all the sharing of resources, themes and ideas.

Our fifth session of term was focussed on Autumn; we shared thoughts, memories and poems connected with the turn of the year. As the culmination of the morning's

activities, several members of the group delighted us all with the reflections that they had been inspired to compose. We thought them too good not to share and so they are copied here with kind permission of the authors. You will see a poster of these written on paper leaves, in the Parish Room by the hatchway, adorning an autumnal scene.

As I reread them, I can dream of autumn days and companionship and who knows... maybe one day some of us will even attempt something similar in Mandarin or Polish. On Tuesdays, life seems full of glowing possibilities.

As Oksana reflected, it is time indeed 'to feel cosy and renewed under Autumn's vibrant trees.'

'Colourful autumn...changing times, misty mornings, new clothes to wear... a new season that will bring us happiness... Being drawn to a hidden sun and the best warmth of the year, I feel cosy and renewed under Autumn's vibrant trees. The Beginning of the End' Oksana

'In Autumn I stay at home by the fireplace to drink red wine and to eat chestnuts... the autumn is important for your soul! You can find yourself, love your home and your family.' Michele

'Autumn makes me feel sad. I like Spring because warm weather is coming. I like banana. Banana gives us lots of energy.' Sufia

'Some people happy, some not when lengthen nights and shorten days.' A golden season which brings harvest to cheerful farmers. Crops are safely gathered into the barns. Ready for Winter' Yan

'Turning into autumn is like wearing the most wonderful, beautiful dress in the world' Yang Hee

'Autumn is when I have time to rest and learn to crochet' Natalia

'When it comes to autumn, I am enjoying the variety of delicious seasonal food available' Jiyan

'Autumn – the best season for mushroom-hunting' Zoya

'I like conkers in their spikey cases' Alex

'I love kicking through crisp russet leaves just like a child' John

White Cliffs

Wally Moscuza

His bed was in a shell
Attached tightly to the rocks
Under a blazing red sunset sky
There Napoleon was exiled
Alone
As he aimed to rule the Russians and Europe
But he was beaten by frost.
No doubt there is always a Pilate
That washes his hands
In the dark tone of Rembrandt.
He used to live by the sea
In the distant hills across the Channel
Wrinkled hills as an old man's skin
A fisherman's face on the net left to dry
In the salted air of the sea
Not far from the white cliffs
The boundary where Hitler met his defeat.
Bare and flat is the track of waste land
Where the Erica, Heath-Barry grow high
Protected by a healthy sky
Capriciously standing
With orange streaks and blue
A long stretch of heaven on earth
A winter landscape ravaged by frost-
Green fields and winter wheat

Hard to imagine this beauty
Disappearing under the sea.

Tailpiece

An Advent Quiz

Mary Walsh

- 1) On which day of the week does Advent always begin? S - - - - -
- 2) When is the last day of Advent? C - - - - - E - -
- 3) What colour is used in Church to represent Advent? V - - - - -
- 4) Unscramble the first line of the Advent hymn: o mcoe o mcoe Elmannue
- - - - -
- 5) How many purple candles are on an Advent wreath? T - - - -
- 6) What does the pink candle on an Advent wreath symbolise? J - -
- 7) Who does the white candle on an Advent wreath symbolise? J - - - -
- 8) What colour are the vestments on the third Sunday of Advent? P - - -
- 9) What is the third Sunday of Advent known as? G - - - - - S - - - - -
- 10) The word Advent comes from the Latin word "adventus" which means? C - - - - -
- 11) Which angel told Mary that she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus? G - - - - -
- 12) Who was the baby who 'leapt for joy' when Mary visited Elizabeth? J - - -
- 13) Emmanuel means? G - - W - - - U -
- 14) Who said, "My soul magnifies the Lord"? M - - -
- 15) What are the four weekly themes in Advent? H - - - P - - - - J - - - and L - - -

Answers

1) Sunday 2) Christmas Eve 3) Violet
or purple 4) O Come O Come
Emmanuel 5) Three 6) Joy 7) Jesus 8)
Pink or Rose 9) Gaudate Sunday 10)
Coming 11) Gabriel 12) John the
Baptist 13) God With Us 14) Mary
15) Hope Peace Joy and Love

Dear Pilgrim Readers & Contributors

Nora says we are at the end of the year, and technically speaking we are coming to the end of 2023. However, for Church liturgical purposes we are, in fact, starting our new year with Advent! And, with that change, comes new Mass books for Year B!

The Pilgrim Team would like to thank you for all the help and support that you have given us throughout 2023. We hope that you enjoy this edition and wish you a happy festive season as we prepare for Christmas!

The deadline for the next edition is **16 February** for publication on **16/17 March**

Wondering where to send your article, photos or drawings? Our email address is below and you will also find it every week on the front page of the Parish newsletter. Thank you to all who have contributed to this edition. **We welcome interesting and original material for all sections in the forthcoming edition. Anything you send should be your own work in your own words and a maximum of 2,000 words.**

The production team:

Editors: Nora Darby, Sarah Sykes

Sub-editors: Carol Williams, Sarah Sykes, Nora Darby

Commissioning Editor: Nora Darby

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Layout (preparation for printing): Sarah Sykes, Nora Darby

All members of the Pilgrim team can be contacted at pilgrim@saintlaurence.org.uk

Some Regular Events

The Parishioners Open Meeting (is where **ALL** parishioners can come together to discuss and debate Parish matters, and decide when and where things need to be done. The Agenda is planned in advance and the meeting is led by the Chairman and Parish Priest. Meetings commence at 7:30pm and are held in the Parish Room with the option to join online via Zoom.

The Zoom link is published in the Newsletter, Keeping-in-Touch email and on the website. You can raise a topic at the meeting but it helps if you send a short note about 10 days before the next meeting to Stephen Warde at openmeeting@saintlaurence.org.uk.

The Pilgrim by Email

The Pilgrim magazine is available as a paper copy or you can receive a pdf version by email. If you are not already on the distribution list, send a request to pilgrim@saintlaurence.org.uk

Pilgrim on the Web

The most recent back editions are now available on the Parish website
<http://www.saintlaurence.org.uk/pilgrim>

ABLAZE

The St Laurence Youth Mass is known as Ablaze. It is designed to encourage our youth to build their confidence in participating in all aspects of the Mass.

It is held on the first Sunday of the month at 5pm. It is a vibrant and fun Mass. We encourage young Readers, Eucharistic Ministers, budding musicians and singers of all ages, the only requirement is enthusiasm for God. If you are looking for 'perfection' you won't find it here! So, if you fancy it pluck up your courage and join in.

If you are a musician, the Ablaze team would love to hear from you!!

Upcoming Parish Events

SVP Parish Xmas Giving Tree All gifts and hamper items need to be returned to church by the third Sunday of Advent, 17th December	From 2/3rd Dec In the Narthex
Family Advent Activity (Parish Room)	2 Dec 1:30 – 3:30pm
Advent Social Mince pies and mulled drinks	15 Dec 6pm- 9pm
Advent – Parish Carol Service	17 Dec 4pm
Christmas Week Masses Normal Sunday Masses at usual times on 23/24 December and...	
Christmas Eve Family Mass	5pm
Midnight Mass	Midnight
Christmas Day	9am 11am
Boxing Day	11am
ABLAZE Youth Mass (1 st Sunday of the month) 5pm	3 Dec 7 Jan 4 Feb
Parishioners Open Meeting 7:30pm	Thurs 25 Jan
Saturday morning coffee hub	After 9:30am Mass
Sunday morning coffee	After 11am Mass



Follow St Laurence's on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/stlaurencecambridge>



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St Laurence's Parish is in the Diocese of East Anglia, and covers the area of Cambridge north of the river Cam including Arbury, Chesterton and King's Hedges, and also the villages of Histon, Impington, Girton, Cottenham, Milton, Landbeach and Waterbeach.

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Service Times

Saturday 9.30am

6:00pm Vigil Mass (sung)

Sunday 8.00am

9:30am (sung with Children's Liturgy)

11:00am (sung with Children's Liturgy)

Mon, Tues, Thurs 9.30am

Wed 6:00pm

Fri 12.30pm

All Masses are livestreamed. Check the weekly newsletter for changes to the above times

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