

Praying at Home

Some Forms of Prayer and Reflection
for Lent, Holy Week and Easter

Produced by
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A Prayer for Those Affected by Coronavirus

God of healing and hope,
in Jesus you meet us in our places of pain and fear.
Look with mercy on those who have contracted the new virus,
on any who are vulnerable, and on all who feel in danger.
Through this time of global concern, by your Holy Spirit
bring out the best not the worst in us.
Make us more aware of our interdependence on each other,
and of the strength that comes
from being one body in you.
Through Christ our wounded healer.

Amen.

*The Rev'd Dr Sam Wells
Vicar of St Martin's in the Field*

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Simple Orders for Morning Prayer

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Order for Night Prayer

The material for the Order of Compline in this booklet is taken from The Daily Office SSF, revised edition 2010. The second form of confession is © OSB West Malling. The music, from traditional sources, is edited by Br Reginald SSF.

Collects

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Stations of the Cross

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Lectio Divina

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This booklet contains a simple form of Morning and Night Prayer for use at home, along with the readings for the remaining Sundays of Lent and Easter. Also included are some homilies you may find useful and a way of reflecting on Jesus' journey to the Cross.

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Simple Orders for Morning Prayer and Night Prayer

A Simple Order of Morning Prayer in Lent

O Lord open our lips,
And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Silent prayer/reflection on the coming day.

Early in the morning
my prayer comes before you.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

You speak in my heart and say
'Seek my face';
your face, Lord, will I seek.
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight, O Lord,
my strength and my redeemer.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

**Return to the Lord, who will have mercy,
to our God, who will richly pardon.**

Seek the Lord while he may be found
call upon him while he is near.

Let the wicked abandon their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts;

Return to the Lord, who will have mercy
to our God who will richly pardon.

‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts
neither are your ways my ways,’ says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from above
and return not again but water the earth,

Bringing forth life and giving growth
seed for sowing and bread to eat,

So is my word that goes forth from my mouth
it will not return to me fruitless,

But it will accomplish that which I purpose
and succeed in the task I gave it.’

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Return to the Lord, who will have mercy,
to our God, who will richly pardon.**

*A Bible Reading is read – perhaps using one of the Sunday readings
included in this booklet.*

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel
for he has come to his people and set them free.

The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour
born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies
from the hands of all who hate us.

To show mercy to our forebears
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear
holy and righteous before him all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

Various prayers are offered for:

The Church

The World

The Local Community

Those in particular need

The Lord's Prayer is said.

The Collect for the Day is said (see Sunday Readings in this booklet) or

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The second collect, for peace.

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord,
to know you is eternal life,
to serve you is perfect freedom:
defend us in all assaults of our enemies,
that we, surely trusting in your protection,
may not fear the power of any adversaries;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The third collect, for grace.

Eternal God and Father,
by your power we are created
and by your love we are redeemed:
guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
that we may give ourselves to you
in love and service of one another;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

A Simple Order of Morning Prayer in Holy Week

○ Lord open our lips,
And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Silent prayer/reflection on the coming day.

Lord Jesus, you transformed the tree of the cross
into the tree of our salvation.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you suffered for us, leaving us an example
that we might walk in your ways.

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you embraced the wood of the cross,
burdened with our sins,
that dead to sin we might live in your peace.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Jesus, Saviour of the world,
come to us in your mercy:
we look to you to save and help us.

By your cross and your life laid down,
you set your people free:
we look to you to save and help us.

When they were ready to perish, you saved your disciples:
we look to you to come to our help.

In the greatness of your mercy, loose us from our chains,
forgive the sins of all your people.

Make yourself known as our Saviour and mighty deliverer;
save and help us that we may praise you.

Come now and dwell with us, Lord Christ Jesus:
hear our prayer and be with us always.

And when you come in your glory:
make us to be one with you
and to share the life of your kingdom.

*A Bible Reading is read – perhaps using one of the Sunday readings
included in this booklet.*

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.**

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel
for he has come to his people and set them free.

The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour
born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies
from the hands of all who hate us.

To show mercy to our forebears
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear
holy and righteous before him all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.**

Various prayers are offered for:

The Church

The World

The Local Community

Those in particular need

The Lord's Prayer is said.

The Collect for the Day

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

On Good Friday

Almighty Father,
look with mercy on this your family
for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed
and given up into the hands of sinners
and to suffer death upon the cross;
who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The second collect, for peace.

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord,
to know you is eternal life,
to serve you is perfect freedom:
defend us in all assaults of our enemies,
that we, surely trusting in your protection,
may not fear the power of any adversaries;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The third collect, for grace.

Eternal God and Father,
by your power we are created
and by your love we are redeemed:
guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
that we may give ourselves to you
in love and service of one another;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

A Simple Order of Morning Prayer in Eastertide

O Lord open our lips,
And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Most glorious Lord of life,
whose Son Jesus Christ conquered death
and rose victorious from the grave:
may we walk in his company,
hear the mystery of the Scriptures unfold to us,
and, with burning hearts, know his presence
in the breaking of the bread,
for our Saviour is risen indeed – Alleluia!
Blessed be God for ever.

Christ has been raised from the dead,
the first fruits of those who sleep.

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us
so let us celebrate the feast,

Not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Christ once raised from the dead dies no more
death has no more dominion over him.

In dying he died to sin once for all
in living he lives to God.

See yourselves therefore as dead to sin
and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ has been raised from the dead
the first fruits of those who sleep.

For as by man came death
by man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die
even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Christ has been raised from the dead,
the first fruits of those who sleep.**

*A Bible Reading is read – perhaps using one of the Sunday readings
included in this booklet.*

**God has raised Christ Jesus from the dead,
so that we have a sure hope in him. Alleluia!**

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel
for he has come to his people and set them free.

The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour
born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies
from the hands of all who hate us.

To show mercy to our forebears
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear
holy and righteous before him all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**God has raised Christ Jesus from the dead,
so that we have a sure hope in him. Alleluia!**

Various prayers are offered for:

The Church

The World

The Local Community

Those in particular need

The Lord's Prayer is said.

The Collect for the Day is said (see Sunday Readings in this booklet) or

Almighty Father,

who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples
with the sight of the risen Lord:

give us such knowledge of his presence with us,
that we may be strengthened and sustained
by his risen life

and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The second collect, for peace.

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord,
to know you is eternal life,
to serve you is perfect freedom:
defend us in all assaults of our enemies,
that we, surely trusting in your protection,
may not fear the power of any adversaries;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The third collect, for grace.

Eternal God and Father,
by your power we are created
and by your love we are redeemed:
guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
that we may give ourselves to you
in love and service of one another;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

An Order for Night Prayer (Compline)

The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night
and a perfect end. **Amen.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Silent prayer/reflection on the past day.

**Holy God,
we confess to you before the company
of the faithful in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned against you,
against one another
and against your creation.
Forgive us in your mercy,
help us to forgive each other
and to hold in reverence
all that you have made. Amen.**

OSB West Malling

The following hymn may be said or sung.

**Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That you, with steadfast love, would keep
Your watch around us while we sleep.**

**From evil dreams defend our sight,
From fears and terrors of the night;
Tread underfoot our deadly foe
That we no sinful thought may know.**

**O Father, that we ask be done
Through Jesus Christ, your only Son;
And Holy Spirit, by whose breath
Our souls are raised to life from death.**

Psalm 139, or another suitable Psalm, is read.

O Lord, you have searched me out and known me; ♦
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

You mark out my journeys and my resting place ♦
and are acquainted with all my ways.

For there is not a word on my tongue, ♦
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

You encompass me behind and before ♦
and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, ♦
so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦
Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I climb up to heaven, you are there; ♦
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

If I take the wings of the morning ♦
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Even there your hand shall lead me, ♦
your right hand hold me fast.

If I say, 'Surely the darkness will cover me ♦
and the light around me turn to night,'

Even darkness is no darkness with you;
the night is as clear as the day; ♦
darkness and light to you are both alike.

For you yourself created my inmost parts; ♦
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I thank you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; ♦
marvellous are your works, my soul knows well.

My frame was not hidden from you, ♦
when I was made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my form, as yet unfinished; ♦
already in your book were all my members written,

As day by day they were fashioned ♦
when as yet there was none of them.

How deep are your counsels to me, O God! ♦
How great is the sum of them!

If I count them, they are more in number than the sand, ♦
and at the end, I am still in your presence.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

One of the following short passages of Scripture are read.

In Lent

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of
injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the
oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to
share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless
poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover
them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Isaiah 58. 6,7

In Passiontide

I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the
house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that,

when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Zechariah 12.10

In Eastertide

The servants of the Lamb shall see the face of God, whose name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night: they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22.4,5

Between the Ascension and Pentecost

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. The old shall dream dreams and the young shall see visions.

Joel 2.28

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

For you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth.

I commend my spirit.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

The Nunc Dimittis.

**Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.**

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: ♦
your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation ♦
which you have prepared in the sight of every people;

A light to reveal you to the nations ♦
and the glory of your people Israel.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.**

Various prayers are offered, which may include this short litany.

That you will give us a quiet night and a perfect end:
we pray to you, O Lord.

That you will have mercy upon us and grant us your
salvation:
we pray to you, O Lord.

That you will keep us this night without sin:
we pray to you, O Lord.

That you will guard us and give us your blessing:
we pray to you, O Lord.

That you will bring us with all your saints to
glory everlasting:
we pray to you, O Lord.

Let us commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Our Father, who art in heaven...

The appropriate Collect is said.

Lent

Almighty God,
may we, by the prayer and discipline of Lent,
enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings;
that by following in the Way,
we may come to share in the glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Passiontide

Almighty God,
as we stand at the foot of the cross of your Son,
help us to see and know your love for us,
so that in humility, love and joy
we may place at his feet
all that we have and all that we are;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Easter

Almighty God,
by triumphing over the powers of darkness
Christ has prepared a place for us in the new Jerusalem:
may we, who have this day given thanks for his resurrection,
praise him in the eternal city
of which he is the light;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

From Ascension to Pentecost.

Come, O Spirit of God,
and make within us your dwelling place and home.
May our darkness be dispelled by your light,
and our troubles calmed by your peace;
may all evil be redeemed by your love,
all pain transformed through the suffering of Christ,
and all dying glorified in his risen life. **Amen.**

In peace we will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, Lord, make us dwell in safety.

Abide with us, Lord Jesus,
for the night is at hand and the day is now past.

As the night watch looks for the morning,
so do we look for you, O Christ.

The Lord bless us and watch over us;
the Lord make his face to shine upon us
and be gracious to us;
the Lord look kindly on us
and all for whom we pray
and give us his peace.
Amen.

An Act of Spiritual Communion

It is an ancient practice of the Church that, when people are prevented from attending the Holy Eucharist, they are invited to express, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament and a loving embrace as though we had already received Him.” Therefore, during this time you are invited to pray one of these prayer, which may be said as often as you desire, but is most appropriate when you would normally be attending the Eucharist:

My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament.

I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul.

**Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.**

**As though you have already come,
I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you;
never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.**

Or

**Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the bread of life and the one true vine.
I believe that you are truly present
in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.
I seek you. I worship and adore you.
Since I cannot receive you
in the eucharistic bread and wine,
I pray that you will come into my heart and soul,
that I may be united to you,
by your all-powerful and ever-present Holy Spirit.
Let me receive you, and be nourished by you.
Become for me the manna in my wilderness,
the bread of angels
for my very human journey through time,
a foretaste of the heavenly banquet,
and solace in the hour of my death.
I pray all this, trusting that you yourself are
our Life, our Peace, and our everlasting Joy. Amen.**

Copied from the Pray Tell Blog (<https://www.praytellblog.com/index.php/2020/03/15/seeking-to-encounter-the-eucharistic-christ-in-digital-bread-and-wine/>)

The Sunday Readings

The Liturgy of the Word | Lent III [15th March]

The Collect

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Romans 5.1-11]

A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Gospel [John 4.5-42]

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.' Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

Post Communion Prayer

We beseech you, almighty God, look upon the heartfelt desires of your humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of your majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Lent IV (Mothering Sunday) [22nd March]

The Collect

God of compassion,
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,
and on the cross drew
the whole human family to himself:
strengthen us in our daily living
that in joy and in sorrow
we may know the power of your presence
to bind together and to heal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Colossians 3.12-17]

A reading from the Letter to the Colossians.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Psalm 127

R/ The Lord shall keep watch over you.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord keeps the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. **R/**

It is in vain that you hasten to rise up early and go so late to rest, eating the bread of toil, for he gives his beloved sleep.
Children are a heritage from the Lord
and the fruit of the womb is his gift. **R/**

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy are those who have their quiver full of them: they shall not be put to shame when they dispute with their enemies in the gate. **R/**

Gospel [John 19.25-27]

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Post Communion Prayer

Loving God,
as a mother feeds her children at the breast
you feed us in this sacrament with the food and drink of eternal life:
help us who have tasted your goodness
to grow in grace within the household of faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Passion Sunday (Lent V) [29th March]

The Collect

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Romans 8.6-11]

A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Gospel [John 11.1-45]

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about

their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you: give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all, and gave up your life and died for us, but are alive and reign, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Palm Sunday [5th April]

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his
patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Palms:

Gospel [Matthew 21.1-11]

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

The Liturgy of the Passion:

First Reading [Philippians 2.5-11]

A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Philippians.
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Psalm 22

R/ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All who see me scoff at me;
they mock me with parted lips,
they wag their heads:
"He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him,
let him rescue him, if he loves him." **R/**

Indeed, many dogs surround me,
a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;
They have pierced my hands and my feet;
I can count all my bones. **R/**

They divide my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.
But you, O LORD, be not far from me;
O my help, hasten to aid me. **R/**

I will proclaim your name to my brethren;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you:
"You who fear the LORD, praise him;
all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him;
revere him, all you descendants of Israel!" **R/**

The Passion Gospel

This can be found in your Bible, Matthew 27. 11-54

Post Communion Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you humbled yourself
in taking the form of a servant,
and in obedience died on the cross
for our salvation:
give us the mind to follow you
and to proclaim you as Lord and King,
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Easter Sunday [12th April]

The Collect

Lord of all life and power, who through the mighty resurrection of your Son overcame the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him: grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ, may reign with him in glory; to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be praise and honour, glory and might, now and in all eternity. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 10.34-43]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Psalm 118

R/ This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever.

Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever." **R/**

"The right hand of the LORD has struck with power;
the right hand of the LORD is exalted.
I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the LORD." **R/**

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes. **R/**

The Gospel [John 20.1-18]

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Post Communion Prayer

Living God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection have delivered us from the power of our enemy: grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his risen life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Easter II [19th April]

The Collect

Almighty Father, you have given your only Son to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification: grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 2.14a, 22-32]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

‘You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover, my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, “He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.” This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

Psalm 16

R/ Lord, you will show us the path of life.

Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge;
I say to the LORD, "My LORD are you."
O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot. **R/**
I bless the LORD who counsels me;
even in the night my heart exhorts me.
I set the LORD ever before me;
with him at my right hand I shall not be
disturbed. **R/**

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
my body, too, abides in confidence;
because you will not abandon my soul to the
netherworld,
nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo
corruption. **R/**

You will show me the path to life,
abounding joy in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever. **R/**

The Gospel [John 20.19-31]

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God our Father, through our Saviour Jesus Christ you have assured your children of eternal life and in baptism have made us one with him: deliver us from the death of sin and raise us to new life in your love, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word | Easter III [26th April]

The Collect

Almighty Father, who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord: give us such knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life and serve you continually in righteousness and truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 2.14a, 36-41]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.' Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

The Gospel [Luke 24.13-35]

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who

was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Post Communion Prayer

Living God, your Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: open the eyes of our faith, that we may see him in all his redeeming work; who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Good Shepherd Sunday (Easter IV) [3rd May]

The Collect

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ
is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 2.42-47]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Psalm 23

**R/ The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
in verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me in right paths
for his name sake. **R/**

Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage. **R/**

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows. **R/.**

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
for years to come. **R/**

The Gospel [John 10.1-10]

'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

Post Communion Prayer

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ
to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us
to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Easter V [10th May]

The Collect

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us
the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 7.55-60]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

Psalm 31

**R/ Into your hands, O Lord,
I commend my spirit.**

Be my strong rock,
a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold.
Guide me and lead me for your name's sake. **R/**

Into your hands I commend my spirit.
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.
As for me, I trust in the Lord:
let me be glad and rejoice in your love. **R/**

Make your face to shine upon your servant
and save me for your mercy's sake. **R/**

The Gospel [John 14.1-14]

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

Post Communion Prayer

Eternal God,
whose Son Jesus Christ
is the way, the truth, and the life:
grant us to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.
Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word | Easter VI (Rogation Sunday) [17th May]

The Collect

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us
he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 17.22-31]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring." Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

Psalm 66

R/ Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Sing joyfully to God, all the earth;
sing praise to the glory of his name;
proclaim his glorious praise.
Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!" **R/**
"Let all the earth worship and sing praise to you"
Come and behold the works of God,
his wondrous deeds among mortals. **R/**

He has changed the sea into dry land;
through the river they passed on foot.
Therefore let us rejoice in him.
He rules by his might for ever. **R/**

Listen all you who fear God,
while I declare what he has done for my soul.
Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer
nor withheld his loving mercy from me. **R/**

The Gospel [John 14.15-21]

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.
And I will ask the Father, and he will give you
another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is
the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive,
because it neither sees him nor knows him. You
know him, because he abides with you, and he will
be in you.
'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.
In a little while the world will no longer see me, but
you will see me; because I live, you also will live.
On that day you will know that I am in my Father,
and you in me, and I in you. They who have my
commandments and keep them are those who love
me; and those who love me will be loved by my
Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to
them.'

Post Communion Prayer

Bountiful God,
whose Son Jesus Christ
gives the water of eternal life:
may we thirst for you,
the spring of life and source of goodness,
through him who is alive and reigns,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Easter VII (The Sunday after Ascension Day)

[24th May]

The Collect

O God the King of glory,
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us
and exalt us to the place
where our Saviour Christ is gone before,
who is alive and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 1.6-14]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.' Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Psalm 68

R/ Sing to God, sing praises to his name.

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered;
let those who hate him flee before him!
As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;
as wax melts before fire, let the wicked perish
before God! **R/**

But let the righteous be joyful;
let them exult before God;

let them be jubilant with joy! **R/**

Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds;
his name is the Lord, exult before him! **R/**

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation.

God gives the desolate a home to dwell in;
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity;
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land. **R/**

The Gospel [John 17.1-11]

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Post Communion Prayer

Eternal Giver of love and power,
your Son Jesus Christ
has sent us into all the world
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:
confirm us in this mission,
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word | Pentecost Sunday [31st May]

The Collect

God, who at this time
taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit:
grant us by the same Spirit
to have a right judgement in all things
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort;
through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading [Acts 2.1-21]

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs - in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall

dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Psalm 104

R/ Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Bless the Lord, O my soul!
O Lord, my God, you are great indeed!
How manifold are your works, O Lord!
The earth is full of your creatures. **R/**

If you take away their breath, they perish,
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth. **R/**

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord be glad in his works! **R/**

The Gospel [John 20.19-23]

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Post Communion Prayer

Faithful God,
who fulfilled the promises of Easter
by sending us your Holy Spirit
and opening to every race and nation
the way of life eternal:
open our lips by your Spirit,
that every tongue may tell of your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Homilies and Sermons

Homily | For Lent

Until I came here as your Curate, I had always lived either with family or in community with others in University or College. The new-found freedom of my little house on a quiet street is wonderful and I have enjoyed making a home there. I try to keep the house tidy and welcoming but, despite my best efforts, there remains one cupboard where all my unsightly rubbish and no longer needed junk seems to end up. Instead of living in the debris of my life as I could get away with as a teenager, I have now shoved it all in one cupboard. I'm sure most of us have that one cupboard or perhaps a whole room in our house which we'd rather our visitors didn't see and which we're never quite sure what to do with!

Just as it's true of our houses, I suspect this is also true of our lives. We are very good at presenting the best version of ourselves – even subconsciously – we put on a face and pretend everything's OK; but we rarely open up the doors of that messy room where we store our guilt, where we hide the aspects of our character or our history which we'd rather not open up to anyone – even to God. Yet God longs for you to be a temple of his Holy Spirit and the place where he may come and abide. God wants to abide in you, even in that messy room that we hide because of our shame.

The slow and uncomfortable process of opening up that messy room of guilt and shame to God, of opening our lives and hearts more and more to him, is a key part of the discipline of Lent. In the earliest centuries of the Church, newcomers to the Christian community were baptized at Easter - that time when the Church celebrates the conquest of death and the beginning of new life. But of course, believers had to be prepared for this great event, prepared by study, and prayer, and self-denial.

It was believed that self-denial; fasting and extra prayer was something that, as it were, clears the way for God to make his home in you – like clearing space in your flower bed for bulbs to break through.

This is how Lent began. A period where people were thinking about baptism and the beginning of new life, whether literally as new converts to the Christian faith or – for the rest of the Church – people wanting to strengthen and renew their commitment.

This period of preparation quickly became associated with Jesus' forty days in the wilderness where, through fasting and praying, he discovered what God was asking of him. During this earliest period it became more and more common for churches to tidy-up and strip away some of their decoration, to make themselves look a bit simpler – an outward manifestation of the inner stripping and inner austerity that this season entailed. Vestments were made either of sack-cloth, simple coarse fabric, or purple, associated with judgement and the season began with Ash Wednesday – where believers were reminded of their mortality and called to turn again to Christ.

All this simplicity and stripping away is important – in fact it's vital in that process of clearing a space in our lives to experience Jesus afresh at Easter. However, it's also important to remember that the word Lent itself comes from the middle English word for 'spring'. This season is not about feeling gloomy for forty days; it's not about making yourself miserable; it's not even just about giving things up. Lent is springtime. It's our annual spring-clean as we prepare for that great climax of springtime which is Easter - new life bursting through death and flooding the world afresh with hope.

And Spring is exactly how this season should feel. In this season, we are confronted by the universal subjection of humanity to sin and death, and that's an important part of the story. But, whenever we reflect on our own sin; we are reminded again of the abundance of Christ's grace and mercy. Sin is wintry but like the flowers of spring, the forgiving love of God in Christ abounds and gives life to all. Death and sin are destroyed by an opponent who utterly overwhelms evil with the abundance and generosity of his love. In Lent, we return again to Christ the fountain of mercy, and seek to

make room in our hearts to know and experience his extraordinary love for us.

If you would permit me, much out of character, I'd like to offer a couple of concrete suggestions for keeping a holy Lent this spring.

Firstly, find some regular time to encounter Christ in Holy Scripture. I suggest reading Luke's Gospel from beginning to end – it's not that long – taking it in small manageable chunks and asking yourselves two basic questions about each bit you read: 'what is this passage saying to me?' and 'how am I going to respond to it?'. With prayer and patience, this engagement with the words of Scripture is a vital part of clearing a space for the risen Lord when he comes.

Secondly, and more practically still, I believe a good Lent always flows out in generosity. There are innumerable ways to try to be more generous in this season – whether with money, time or prayer – but I would like to suggest one that is often neglected. In this season, I would encourage you to attend to the relationships in your life and especially those you have neglected over the past twelve months. Is there someone who really irritates you or who you struggle to love, befriend them, pray them and try to restore that relationship? Is there a sick or elderly friend or relative you've neglected to visit in the last few months, make time to rebuild that relationship in the weeks ahead. Perhaps, harder still, there is a relationship in your life that remains damaged – a relationship that haunts that inner room of guilt. Allow the new life offered to us in this season to flow through you – cross over barriers of pride and reach out to say you're sorry; work to be reconciled and begin to make your life evermore a place where God would be pleased to dwell.

And so as we prepare ourselves for Easter during these Lenten days, by prayer and self-denial, we must remember that what motivates us and fills the horizon of this season is not self-denial as an end in itself but trying to sweep and clean the room of our own minds and hearts so that new life really may have room to come in and take over and transform us when Easter dawns.

Homily | Lent III

Leaving Judea and heading to Galilee, Jesus and his disciples take the short cut through the land of the Samaritans, reducing their journey by half. On their way they pass by Jacob's well. The disciples, against all social custom, go and buy food from a local village – Sychar, half a mile away from the well. Jesus is tired. It is noon when the heat is at its height, when everybody is indoors except mad dogs and Englishman as that song goes; and he decides to rest.

As we were reminded in our Lent group this week, Jesus may be the Son of God, but he is also fully human. And in our Gospel reading today he is tired; he needs to rest from the heat, and he is thirsty. While Jesus is resting another very human character turns up. Through his humanity, Jesus will reach her humanity and move it to share the joy and beauty of his divine life.

The Samaritan woman goes to the well half a mile away from her village to fetch water. She goes at an ungodly hour, again breaking all social customs. Woman usually went to get water together and to keep the communal washing of clothes first thing in the morning when the heat was mild. The fact that she comes at a time when everyone with any sense is indoors shows that she was an outcast, most probably because of her sketchy back story. She goes there with a heavy heart, lonely and cast out, she knows that her life is not in order but it's too late now – she has given up, this is who she is now, and what she should be doesn't matter any longer.

And then Jesus looks at her, approaching the well, in her eyes he can see that she has given up, he sees eyes not loved, eyes that are becoming incapable of loving. Like his disciples and the Samaritan woman, Jesus also departs in a big way from social custom. Jesus speaks to a woman while there is no one around. Jesus engages a foreign woman in conversation, something unthinkable to the Jews

of Jesus' time. The woman, rather than doing the done thing, ignoring the Jew and leaving as quickly as possible, engages with him. Well she has nothing to lose, she's probably desperate for some human company. Perhaps she sees more in him; maybe she recognise love in his eyes, is he already quenching her hidden thirst for love, acceptance and belonging?

Jesus starts from the known to move to the unknown. He starts with ordinary water before he moves on to living water. The living water is the water of redemption, the water that saved the just in the story of Noah, the water that guaranteed the freedom of the chosen people from the Egyptians in the Red Sea. The water that washes us and refreshes us; the water of baptism. The Samaritan knows that there is a big hole in her existence, that there is dryness in her life, perhaps she recognised that this was her is this her moment.

Jesus recognises that, through all her verbal play, there is a genuine need. He unlocks the secrets of her heart making her come face to face with the darkness and ugliness of her past; she acknowledges that, she knows her sin is great. The first stage of our conversion is acknowledging our need for forgiveness.

The Samaritan is clearly bright; she doesn't wait for Jesus to give her the next step. She knows that she needs to turn to God, but she has a cultural problem. Her people insist that true worship of God happens on Mount Gerizim; the Jews hold that it happens in the Temple. She asks for help. I am confused, she seems to say; where do I find God? Jesus tells her not to go far, as God is already there in her heart. Wherever we are God is there. All we need to do is worship him in spirit and truth. If God is spirit, then he is not confined to designated places - he is everywhere. God's love for us gives unlimited access to him. We need to turn to him in love, humility, loyalty and genuinely – that's what it means to worship in truth.

Suddenly, the woman is given a new lease of life – acknowledging her sin face to face she is able to find and turn to the God of all mercies there and then, and her genuineness makes her see more than all the Pharisees and Sadducees put together – she is being healed inwardly and she knows that here is the Messiah.

This story is the model of conversion. In the ordinary situations of life the Holy Spirit moves us through ordinary circumstances to acknowledge ourselves, our humanity and our failures and to turn to God in spirit and truth to receive healing and wholeness. This is what we receive when we turn to Jesus, who is the Way to the Father. This is the moment when those heavy chains we carry are destroyed and we are set free.

What happens then to the Samaritan? She becomes a witness; she goes and tells everyone sharing her joy and new life. Those who considered her as an outcast see that her life is changed. The witness of our lives is always the most powerful witness, because how we live speaks of what we believe, more than mere words ever could. Even her social situation is dramatically changed as a result of her conversion. She is a witness – like the twelve, like us.

Jesus comes to us, often hidden in the ordinary circumstances of life, just as he comes to us in this Eucharist veiled in ordinary bread – and, when he comes, he unlocks the secrets our hearts, eases the burdens we carry, and gives us the gift of himself – the living water – to cleanse and refresh us.

Jesus says ‘anyone who comes to me today, will never thirst again. My Spirit becomes within them a fountain that wells up to unimaginable Life’.

Homily | Mothering Sunday

On this Mothering Sunday, we are asked to think about Jesus' mother, Mary. Now, most of us are familiar with the beginning of Mary's story – when, as a young girl, she receives a message from an angel and becomes the mother of God's Son. However, today we turn towards the end of the story – Mary standing near Jesus' cross as he dies.

Mothers, have you every wished that your child was better behaved? You might have thought something along the lines of, “If they were better behaved it would make my life easier”. Well, look at Mary – her Son was perfect, and he still caused her problems!

Motherhood was not easy for Mary. When Jesus was born she was young, inexperienced and ostracised because of his conception. Her baby was born far from home in difficult and dangerous surroundings. When she took her son to the temple, only days old, Simeon's prophecy for his future was both ominous and exciting. He prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul. She then lived as a refugee in a foreign land because the King wanted to kill her child. Jesus was different as a child. At 12 year old he stopped behind in Jerusalem to discuss theology.

When he was older and his peers were getting married and having children, which was obligatory, Jesus did not. It could not have been easy for Mary to have Jesus being single and still living at home. His public ministry alienated him from his family as well as the religious leaders. Mary had to learn to put her own feelings to one side to support him in his mission. Finally, she suffered the worst thing that can happen

to a mother, she had to watch her son die a long, painful, tortuous death. For a Jew there was no more shameful way to die than to be on a cross. Men were crucified naked, a sign of their shame.

But Mary was there. Supporting her son, no doubt with many emotions and thoughts racing around. And there was Jesus. Jesus was on the cross because humankind couldn't cope with God's amazing love, so they resorted to violence and murder. Jesus endured the suffering of the cross and was watched by those who loved him.

When we suffer we can concentrate on ourselves. Jesus didn't. Even in pain on the cross he is thinking of others. All those who he died for. But also two people in front of him. He asks Mary to adopt John as her son, and John to adopt Mary as his mother. They obeyed, and John took Mary into his home. Through Jesus' death new relationships are created.

And the amazing thing is that God has adopted us to be his children and to be part of his new, world wide family as well. You see, on the Cross, Jesus gives birth to the Church – he enters into the depths of human suffering and thereby makes life and love possible in a new way.

Jesus conquered sin, injustice, violence, hatred and death on the cross through love. This is the foundation upon which his family is built upon. The Church is God's family, a family where all are called to care for one another.

Indeed, for Jesus, this new family called 'the church' is even more important than those nuclear families in which we find ourselves as a result of an accident of birth.

On this Mothering Sunday, when we thank God for all those who are our biological mothers, let's not forget that there is a wider family to which we belong.

For some Mothering Sunday can be a sad day. If this is how you feel, let me remind you that there is a bigger and more important family to which you belong by baptism - a family in which we all can feel ourselves loved and affirmed.

To the members of this new family Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13.34)

Paul writing to the church at Corinth states that in the body of Christ all the members should have "the same care for one another. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness". (*1 Cor 12.25,26*)

In this new family we are called to care for one another. With our text in mind, let's not forget that this means that we are called to care, for the sick, the bereaved, the young, old and those in between. We are called to care for all, to reflect the love of God that has been poured into our hearts (Romans 5.5).

Homily | Maundy Thursday

In nomine...

When I was a student I had the job of ‘Chapel Clerk’, a bit like being a Church Warden. One day, I got a call from the Porters telling me to get to Chapel as soon as I could. Someone had broken in – a sad but routine event for us, the sort of thing we became used to seeing. But nothing had prepared me for what I saw that morning.

Not much had been taken, they had broken open a collection box – but, the door of the Tabernacle on the high altar had been ripped open. They had taken the silver ciborium and, scattered over the chapel floor and outside, on the pavement and the pristine grass, were about 20 pieces of the Blessed Sacrament.

The thieves had taken the ciborium and thrown away the Body of Christ. Thrown it away like it was nothing, like it was worthless, like it was just some non-descript bits of white cracker that can be tossed aside. So, I got down on my hands and knees and gathered up every single tiny piece, every fragment of the Blessed Sacrament that I could find. I was joined by the Dean – and between us we picked up every fragment we could find from the dusty floor and the grass, and put it back in a ciborium and consumed it.

And we prayed and prayed “Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord, I am so sorry that this has happened to you. Here. In this holy place”.

You see, God’s problem, which I realized so clearly that day, is that he chooses to come to us in ways that are just so *ordinary*! It offends us, it disappoints us, it underwhelms us. You see that disappointment when people who are unfamiliar with the Eucharist kneel at the altar

rail and are given a Host – they look at it as if to say, ‘What? Is that it?’

On this night, the night before he died, Jesus tried one last time to tell his disciples what his ministry was all about, what he had been trying to do and say – but nothing seemed to be getting through. So, he stopped talking and did two things.

First, he knelt down and washed the feet of the men and women who were with him – something only the lowliest person in the house ever did. ‘This is what I’ve been trying to tell you, this is how we’re going to be’ said Jesus.

And then, he said, ‘this is what my death means’. And he took, in his ordinary peasant, working man’s hands, a lump of ordinary flatbread and a cup of wine, and he said: ‘this is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you’. This is my Life. Take and eat. Take and drink. Do this. ‘Do this to re-member me, to make me present’

In this world, God always comes to us disguised. Disguised in the most vulnerable, in the lowliest, in the most over-looked and least important of people, and places and ways. That’s how Jesus came 2000 years ago, the power and wisdom of God revealed in a carpenter from Nazareth; and that’s how Jesus comes to us in the sacraments that he has given us.

But here, we glimpse through the disguised. Here in St Martin’s/Christ Church, and in all the Churches throughout the world, we bow; we genuflect; we kneel; we adore; we light candles; we burn incense.

In the world, he might be thrown away like he’s nothing. But here, we hold him and receive him with reverence and tenderness and love.

Homily | Easter Sunday

In nomine...

It isn't often you hear people complain about the commercialisation of Easter: talking about all the Easter shopping; the hundreds of cards to be written; the huge number of parties; not to mention the endless stream of Easter adverts and cheesy films on our televisions. For some reason, Easter, despite being the most significant festival of the liturgical year, has stubbornly resisted the commodification that has swallowed up Christmas and left the season one more of dread than the joyful celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord. I was wondering about this question a lot this year how has Easter - with the exception of ever-expanding baskets of eggs - maintained its relative religious purity? The answer, I would say, is the subversive message it carries with it: three simple words, *Christ is risen*.

'Christ is risen' is the most extraordinary declaration of the Christian faith and it is also a pretty easy one to understand, whether you believe in it or not. Jesus of Nazareth, the man whose followers claim that he healed the sick, stilled storms, raised people from the dead and made the poor the centre of his ministry, was crucified under the orders of Pontius Pilate and died an agonising death in Jerusalem. Then, as his followers believe - including many of us here - after three days in the tomb, he rose from the dead.

If you don't believe in the resurrection, you can go on living your life while perhaps admiring the example of Jesus, even practicing some of his teachings. But, at the same time, you can set aside those teachings that you disagree with or that make you uncomfortable - you don't *have* to forgive your enemies, pray for your persecutors, live simply or risk death for Christ's sake. If you don't believe the sentence, 'Christ is risen' you can set all these demands aside because Jesus is just another great teacher among many.

But, if you believe that Jesus rose from the dead everything changes. If this simple claim is true, you cannot set aside any of his teaching

because a person who rises from the grave, who demonstrates his power over death, and who has definitively proven his divine authority needs to be listened to, he demands to be followed. What that person says demands a response.

The Resurrection makes a claim on you.

The Easter story is both appalling and astonishing: the cruel betrayal of Jesus by one of his closest followers, the triple denial of his best friend, the gruesome crucifixion and the brutal end to his earthly life. Then, of course, there is the stunning turnaround today, three days later. Easter isn't commercialised like Christmas because it's so much harder to swallow - anyone can be born in a snowy stable with lambs and funny visitors - not everyone can rise from the dead.

Yet the Easter story, essential as it is for Christian belief, can be a confusing one, even for us who believe. To begin with, the Gospel accounts of Jesus' appearances after the Resurrection can seem confounding, they are even sometimes contradictory. They are mysterious in the extreme. In John's Gospel alone this morning, we have Mary Magdalen who mistakes the Lord for a gardener and only knows him when he speaks her name. What is going on? How could Mary not recognise the person that she has been following for so long? More confusion follows in John - on one hand, Jesus appears as an almost ghostly figure, apparently able to walk through locked doors; but this morning he sits and eats breakfast. Ghostly and yet physical, recognisable but unrecognisable. Which is it? How could Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have presented the details of such an important story with such seeming contradictions? The agnostic or atheist will point to this as proof that it never happened. But I think it's quite the opposite.

Most likely, I would claim, the narratives reflect the struggle of the eyewitnesses and the evangelists to understand and communicate what they had experienced. After all, no one had ever encountered what theologians call the "glorified body," the appearance of Jesus after the Resurrection. So, they naturally struggled to explain it.

It was him, but more.

It was his body, but something else.

It was like this, but not like this.

If the Gospel writers were intent on getting their stories straight and providing airtight narratives with no inconsistencies, each would have made sure to agree with the others, so as not to give rise to any doubt or confusion (a process partly visible in the accounts of the Crucifixion). Instead, the Gospel writers, composing their accounts at different times and for different communities, simply reported what they had experienced and what they had been told. And what they had been told was beyond all telling.

The risen Christ bursting from the tomb is so beyond the language and experience of those first witnesses that, instead of systematising the stories into something coherent, they preserve for us those first stories - stories which so set ablaze a group of Palestinian nobodies and one violent Pharisee called Saul that they carried the story to the ends of the earth. There may not be one coherent account of what Jesus was like when he rose from the grave, and God only knows what we'd see if there was a CCTV camera in the tomb - but the resurrection of Christ was so certain to those first women and men that they left their fishing nets and set out, many to their deaths.

What difference does Easter make in the life of the Christian? The message of Easter is, all at once, easy to understand, radical, subversive and life-changing.

Easter means that nothing is impossible with God.

Moreover, that life triumphs over death.

Love triumphs over hatred.

Hope triumphs over despair.

And that suffering is not the last word.

For Paul and the disciples, it means a complete transformation of life: Paul, a persecutor of Christians, becomes their greatest apostle; the disciples, fishermen and tax collectors from this backwater province of the Roman Empire, travel across the world and many meet their deaths.

Easter reminds us, as it reminded Paul and the disciples, that Jesus Christ is Lord. And if he is Lord then what he says has a claim on you. His teachings are invitations, to be sure, but they are also commandments: Love your neighbours. Forgive. Feed my sheep. Care for the poor and the marginalised. Live a simple life. Put the needs of others before your own. From this day on, the universe has changed and whoever wants to keep their life must lose it for Christ.

Jesus' message still has the power to make us feel uncomfortable, as it did in first-century Palestine. It was no easier to hear Jesus' judgment against the excesses of the wealthy during a time of degrading poverty for so many. It was just as subversive a message to be asked to pray for your persecutors as it is now.

By walking out of the tomb on Easter morning and embracing Mary Magdalen with hands which still bear the fatal scars of the Cross, Jesus declared something life-changing, something subversive and something that cannot be overcome by any commercialisation. It is a message that refuses to be tamed. The Resurrection says not only that Christ has the power of life over death, but something more subversive – the resurrection says, 'Listen to Jesus'.

Homily | Easter 4 (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Jesus' words in the tenth chapter of St John's Gospel, which he heard some verses from this morning, have shaped the Church's understanding of priesthood for centuries. Priests are called to work as 'servants and shepherds', says the ordinal, and so it is that, as ordination to the priesthood approaches – and as a brother of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd - I spend a lot of time pontificating about shepherding.

Of course, I know next to nothing about actual shepherding. I can opine about the importance of listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd yourself; of knowing the flock, and of them knowing you; about the need to know where good pasture is and the skills and character needed so that the sheep will follow you. I can talk about what it might mean to exercise a ministry that is life-giving to others and the sorts of sacrifices that might involve. But I would fall into a blind panic if you put me in a field full of actual sheep and asked me to gather them all together and lead them to another pasture.

My rather romantic, bucolic view of shepherding was, in any case, spoiled a couple of years ago when I was out walking near the village where I'm from. The fields around Sychdyn are dotted with sheep and most of the routes I walked when I lived there take you through fields where sheep graze. It was when I was walking along late one afternoon, thinking pious and holy thoughts about sheep and shepherding and how lovely it was to live with these surroundings to contemplate my vocation, that I was rudely brought back to reality with the loud blaring of the horn on a quad bike. It was feeding time, and this particular shepherd roared into the field at about 20 miles an hour, the blaring horn announcing that dinner was ready.

The sheep were a lot less startled than I was, having got used to this rather intrusive calling sound. I confess to feeling rather deflated that contemporary shepherding seemed to owe more to *Top Gear* than to the New Testament!

My sheep 'will listen to my voice', says Jesus. 'I know my own and my own know me'. It is a metaphor that makes sheep of us all, but attuning ourselves to the voice of this shepherd takes practice. He doesn't always announce his presence with the blare of a horn. Sheep, it turns out, have more asked of them than mere obedience. Discernment matters: distinguishing between voices, and learning whose to trust. Sheep will not respond to any old voice or call: they learn to distinguish the voice of their shepherd: its tone, its inflections, its accents.

Someone else, even if they use the same words to call to the sheep, will be met with blank indifference. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd.

In a noisy world, we are surrounded by voices. Seductive voices promising happiness and wealth if we buy the right things. Ambitious voices promising success and admiration if we will work hard enough, achieve a bit more. Political voices conjuring fear and promising security in return for your vote; voices of doubt that say you're not good enough. We will know, probably, which voices we are most attuned to; which voices have the capacity to shape us and drive us. But amid the cacophony it can be so very hard to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

This is where discernment comes in. Occasionally, the voice of the Good Shepherd is heard with such clarity that no discernment is needed: it is so obviously the voice of Christ that it admits of no doubt. This is the sort of situation that Saul found himself in on the

road to Damascus, or Peter by the Galilean shore. But for most of us, most of the time, the voice of the Good Shepherd is not heard so clearly. We have to tune our ears, learn to distinguish the tone and accents with which he speaks, filter out the other voices that crowd his out.

For the Good Shepherd does speak. And there are places where his voice is reliably heard: in the Scriptures, where we hear and read not only his own words, but the faithful witness of those who have listened to the voice of God down the centuries. We hear his voice in the sacraments: speaking words of absolution in confession, of thanksgiving and self-offering in the Eucharist, of love and belonging in baptism. We hear his words through those who know him best: the witness of the saints, the counsel of those who are close to him. And we hear his voice in prayer.

So, the first stage of discernment is to want to hear Jesus' voice; to desire to know what he wants, and not just ask him to bless what we want. Think of the sons of Zebedee, who are more attuned to the voice of ambition than they are to the voice of their Lord, and who ask him for the best seats in the kingdom. At this point, they don't really want to know what Jesus wants: they are more interested in what he can do for them. If we are to hear aright, it needs to matter to us what Jesus wants. I can usually tell, in my own life, when I'm avoiding his voice, because I find myself reluctant to pray about something – a decision or a situation – because I know that to pray about it is to open myself up to God's will and desire rather than my own, and I am not always sure I welcome the challenge or disruption that can bring.

So from the desire to hear Jesus' voice flows openness to what he

might say. Think of the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospel, who were so certain that they knew God and his ways that they couldn't recognise that Jesus was the longed-for Messiah. They listened to him speak, but they couldn't hear properly, because their preconceptions and desire for power and control got in the way. And by contrast, think of St Peter, a good Jew, who has a vision of a sheet full of unclean animals being lowered from heaven, and hears a voice telling him to eat. Everything in his background tells him that this is contrary to God's law. But he has learnt to discern the voice of the Shepherd, and he obeys it, opening the way for the mission to the Gentiles.

So knowledge of God is important, too, in discerning the voice of the Shepherd. Who is this God who speaks? How do we recognise his voice? This is where testing our discernment against scripture and tradition helps: God does not contradict himself, and nor, as the source of all goodness, does he ask of us that which is not good. So we will not find Jesus telling us to have an affair, or to engage in gossip, or to exploit someone to get what we want. But it is not always straightforward: Peter would have had plenty of scriptural warrant, for example, in refusing to eat the unclean food, but his experience of being with Jesus, who came eating and drinking and mixing with the wrong sort of people, taught him to trust the voice that included the Gentiles.

It is easier, in discernment, to resort to the simple tropes of 'the Bible says' or 'the Church teaches', but we don't always face situations that are straightforward. 'Should I marry this person?', 'should I leave my job?', 'how should I care for my elderly parents?', 'how should we bring up the children?', 'what should I do with my money?' – we can't just lift a verse out of the bible to tell us exactly what to do in such situations. The bible and the Church's teaching

can inform what we think and believe about marriage and families and money and work, but how we use that knowledge in our own lives takes discernment, listening for the voice of the Shepherd. So we take time to pray, to read the bible and to talk to those whose counsel we trust. And as well as listening for the voice of the Shepherd, we listen to ourselves. Does the decision bring peace, or turmoil? Does it lead us to God, or away from him? Does it lead to an increase in faith and hope and love, or to anxiety, distress, an absence of faith and hope and love?

The Shepherd whose voice we listen for always wants to draw us to him, to make us more fully his own. For the sheep, discerning the voice of the shepherd is a matter of life and death: get it wrong, and you find yourself responding to the hired hand, or the thief, or the butcher. For us, too, discerning the voice of the shepherd is a matter of life and death: to hear and respond to his voice is to live into the abundant life he promises. To ignore it shuts us off from the life and love for which we are made. 'My sheep hear my voice', says Jesus, I know them and they know me. The sheep follow because they are known; because the shepherd is trustworthy. For even when we get it wrong: when we listen to the wrong voices, or fail to discern the voice of the shepherd, he will come and find us and call us home. For nothing can snatch us out of his hands.

Homily | Pentecost

The events of our reading from the Acts of the Apostles begin in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. After the crucifixion, this upper room was a refuge, a place of hiding, of safety, a place for keeping the world out, with its political turmoil, its murderous plots, its ugliness. Scattered by the events of Good Friday, who knows how the disciples made their way back there, filled with fear that they may be recognised as friends of the crucified scoundrel.

But on the third day, into that room thick with sorrow and fear and guilt and recrimination walks Jesus. And those four walls become a container for joy, though in Luke's account it will take the disciples 40 days and more to catch up with what's happening. The risen Jesus who stands among them on the far side of death rewrites the story they'd been telling, of hopes dashed, justice perverted, and salvation snatched away.

And his presence rewrites their stories too: denials and desertions are forgiven. Relationships are restored. The hollow feeling in their chests fills with hope. Maybe Peter can be the rock after all. Mary Magdalene need not go back to being shunned by others but can find her place in the community of disciples. Thomas now carries in his body the memory of that very tactile encounter, of the wounds that made him believe. Mary gets her son back: the decades-old promise of the angel is true.

And just as they're beginning to get accustomed to this new reality, to lives shaped by the resurrection, Jesus takes them away, to Bethany, where he tells them that they are to be his witnesses, and that they should remain in the city until what he's promised is sent upon them. And then he ascends into heaven.

So back they go to the same upper room, with a new promise to make sense of, and a new gift to wait for. For nine days they wait and they pray. And then early in the morning a wind from heaven gusts through the house, blowing open the shutters and freeing their tongues and their minds. And, propelled by the Spirit, they come out

of the upper room, into the streets of this city thronged with pilgrims for the festival of Pentecost, which commemorates and celebrates the giving of the Jewish Law.

The Spirit sends them out. The risen Jesus had brought them together and united them in prayer and worship; had given them back their identities as chosen and called by God. Now, his Spirit sends them out, from the safety of the familiar upper room, from this place of encounter, of revelation, of prayer, of community. Not because these things don't matter, but because these are gifts to be shared and enlarged. There are more encounters to have, more revelations to come, more people to draw into the community of Christ. And this isn't made possible through the disciples developing a strategic plan but through responsiveness to the Spirit. The initiative here, as always in the Christian life, is God's.

Not very long ago, Peter had denied ever knowing Jesus. Now, through the power of the Spirit of God, the words of testimony spill out of him. And so the first gift of the Spirit at Pentecost is proclamation.

And what Peter proclaims is that God is doing a new thing, but in complete fidelity to what he has done before. It is both predicted and unexpected – as God's ways so often are. Peter uses Joel's prophecy of a time when the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh to announce that this time of universality has arrived. And we see this in the way the gospel is announced in so many different languages. When God took on flesh in Jesus he took on the language of an Aramaic Jew in first century Palestine. Through the outpouring of the Spirit we learn that God also speaks English and Mandarin and Polish and Welsh and Yoruba and sign language and Arabic. Through the gift of the Spirit the life of Jesus is translated into millions of lives.

Without the Spirit, the disciples numbered around 100 – about the number of people we usually get across our three churches on a good Sunday. And they are being faithful: waiting and united in prayer, in obedience to Jesus' command. But the love of God, made flesh in Jesus, is not just for them, but for the ends of the earth. At

Pentecost, when the time of waiting is over, faithfulness to God compels them to leave the upper room, and take the good news onto the streets, into homes and families and workplaces and communities. It overflows, from them, from the upper room, and finds a way through time, through space, to the ends of the earth – even to us. By the gift of the Spirit we are directly linked to those first disciples. We would not believe if they had not proclaimed.

And they can't share what they haven't received. In the beginning, the wind of the Spirit moved over the face of the deep, says the book Genesis. Then the Spirit breathes life into dust, in the creation of humankind. Now that same creator Spirit breathes new life into Peter and the other disciples, making of them a new humanity, in the likeness of Jesus Christ. 'When you send forth your Spirit, we are created', says the Psalmist. That's what the disciples discover in that upper room.

And then this new creation overflows from them. They know the gospel to be good news because in the midst of despair and guilt they have been forgiven; from being outsiders and nobodies they have been loved and called; because a courage and a love that they know isn't theirs propels them out to share the good news that God's love and forgiveness and freedom is there for all people.

And the way this message gets out is by being told – person to person, translated into the vernacular of hundreds of thousands of different lives. And the same Spirit still acts. The wind from heaven still blows open closed windows and doors, preparing the way for new life, new opportunities. The flame of fire still dances upon those whom the Spirit empowers.

And the Spirit's impetus is still the same, here in Llay/Rossett/Isycoed today: to send us out to live what we have received. That is the mission of the Church; to share the gift of salvation which we have received – to draw others into the company of Jesus, where they can experience a love, a forgiveness and a freedom which is beyond their imagination. There are many examples of how our Church is trying to reach out to this community in the last year alone we've had the

Experience Easter event in Llay, the Rogation walk and Evensong in Rossett and our animal blessing service and thanksgiving for creation at the Isycoed Horse Show.

Given we do so much, you may wonder why we need to do anything new at all, you may think we're doing just fine here at Christ Church/St Martin's/St Paul's. But what we've received isn't just for us, just as the new life of the risen Christ wasn't just for the small number of the first disciples. We are a church blessed in so many ways, chief among them are you, the congregation. And that blessing is needed not just in here but out there.

The Holy Spirit is at work in our midst. We see it in all sorts of different ways: in people coming to faith and growing deeper in faith, indeed a young woman will be confirmed by Bishop Gregory later who came to faith on our 'Start' Course. We see the Holy Spirit at work in the many acts of love and care that happen quietly and often unremarked; in the huge variety of different ways people engage with those in need. It seems to me that 'there's something crackling under the surface' in our church communities. And I think that's the Holy Spirit – renewing us, inspiring us, challenging us to share more fully and more boldly what we have received so that others may come to know the love and power of God.

This is daunting but exciting. I have tangled enough with the Holy Spirit to know that it won't allow me, and it won't allow us, to remain unchanged. Nor should it. What it will do is beckon us into a growing life together in Christ, a deeper knowledge of God, a more engaged love for God's world.

Over this coming year, I really hope that we can open ourselves more to the Spirit's leading and join in more with the Spirit's work. I've been very conscious in my own ministry that there are times when the Spirit works through me, times when the Spirit works round me, and times when the Spirit works despite me. And what's true for me is, I'm sure, true for us as a church community. Our challenge for this coming year should be to constantly ask the question, 'how does this event help us to share the good news of

Jesus that we have received?’ How does this event contribute to the growth of our Church, in numbers and in holiness? I want us to ask this about every single thing we do as a Church – from our Sunday services to our fundraising events; from our work with children to our services in nursing homes. How does this event help us to share the good news of Jesus that we have received? How does this event contribute to the growth of our Church, in numbers and in holiness?

If we are continually asking this question, we will be a Church community that follows where the Spirit leads, a church that goes where the Spirit sends. Pentecost needs to come with a health warning: if we are going to pray ‘Come, Holy Spirit’, we have to be ready for the ways in which God will use us as he answers our prayer. He might just set us on fire.

Walking the Way of the Cross

With the Sonnets of Malcolm Guite
Included with kind permission of the author.



You may find these readings and poems helpful as Holy Week approaches, they would be especially appropriate on Good Friday.

*Sonnets for the Stations of the Cross
are © Malcolm Guite, Sounding the Seasons (2012)*

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Reading from Matthew's Gospel.

Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.' Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Sonnet

The very air that Pilate breathes, the voice
With which he speaks in judgment, all his powers
Of perception and discrimination, choice,
Decision, all his years, his days and hours,
His consciousness of self, his every sense,
Are given by this prisoner, freely given.
The man who stands there making no defence,
Is God. His hands are tied, His heart is open.
And he bears Pilate's heart in his and feels
That crushing weight of wasted life. He lifts
It up in silent love. He lifts and heals.
He gives himself again with all his gifts
Into our hands. As Pilate turns away
A door swings open. This is judgment day.

The Second Station: Jesus Receives his Cross

Reading from John's Gospel

They took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.

Sonnet

He gives himself again with all his gifts
And now we give him something in return.
He gave the earth that bears, the air that lifts,
Water to cleanse and cool, fire to burn,
And from these elements he forged the iron,
From strands of life he wove the growing wood,
He made the stones that pave the roads of Zion
He saw it all and saw that it is good.
We took his iron to edge an axe's blade,
We took the axe and laid it to the tree,
We made a cross of all that he has made,
And laid it on the one who made us free.
Now he receives again and lifts on high
The gifts he gave and we have turned awry.

The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

Reading from the Prophet Isaiah

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

Sonnet

He made the stones that pave the roads of Zion
And well he knows the path we make him tread
He met the devil as a roaring lion
And still refused to turn these stones to bread,
Choosing instead, as Love will always choose,
This darker path into the heart of pain.
And now he falls upon the stones that bruise
The flesh, that break and scrape the tender skin.
He and the earth he made were never closer,
Divinity and dust come face to face.
We flinch back from his via dolorosa,

He sets his face like flint and takes our place,
Staggers beneath the black weight of us all
And falls with us that he might break our fall.

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets his Mother

Reading from John's Gospel

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Sonnet

This darker path into the heart of pain
Was also hers whose love enfolded him
In flesh and wove him in her womb. Again
The sword is piercing. She, who cradled him
And gentled and protected her young son
Must stand and watch the cruelty that mars
Her maiden making. Waves of pain that stun
And sicken pass across his face and hers
As their eyes meet. Now she enfolds the world
He loves in prayer; the mothers of the disappeared
Who know her pain, all bodies bowed and curled
In desperation on this road of tears,
All the grief-stricken in their last despair,
Are folded in the mantle of her prayer.

The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to Carry His Cross

Reading from Matthew's Gospel

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.

Sonnet

In desperation on this road of tears
Bystanders and bypassers turn away
In other's pain we face our own worst fears
And turn our backs to keep those fears at bay
Unless we are compelled as this man was
By force of arms or force of circumstance
To face and feel and carry someone's cross

In Love's full glare and not his backward glance.
So Simon, no disciple, still fulfilled
The calling: 'take the cross and follow me'.
By accident his life was stalled and stilled
Becoming all he was compelled to be.
Make me, like him, your pressed man and your priest,
Your alter Christus, burdened and released.

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Reading from Matthew's Gospel

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Sonnet

Bystanders and bypassers turn away
And wipe his image from their memory
She keeps her station. She is here to stay
And stem the flow. She is the reliquary
Of his last look on her. The bloody sweat
And salt tears of his love are soaking through
The folds of her devotion and the wet
folds of her handkerchief, like the dew
Of morning, like a softening rain of grace.
Because she wiped the grime from off his skin,
And glimpsed the godhead in his human face
Whose hidden image we all bear within,
Through all our veils and shrouds of daily pain
The face of god is shining once again.

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls for the Second Time

Reading from Matthew's Gospel

Jesus said, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate.

Sonnet

Through all our veils and shrouds of daily pain,
Through our bruised bruises and re-opened scars,
He falls and stumbles with us, hurt again
When we are hurt again. With us he bears
The cruel repetitions of our cruelty;
The beatings of already beaten men,
The second rounds of torture, the futility
Of all unheeded pleading, every scream in vain.
And by this fall he finds the fallen souls
Who passed a first, but failed a second trial,
The souls who thought their faith would hold them whole
And found it only held them for a while.
Be with us when the road is twice as long
As we can bear. By weakness make us strong.

The Eighth Station: Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem

Reading from Matthew's Gospel

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

Sonnet

He falls and stumbles with us, hurt again
But still he holds the road and looks in love
On all of us who look on him. Our pain
As close to him as his. These women move
Compassion in him as he does in them.
He asks us both to weep and not to weep.
Women of Gaza and Jerusalem,
Women of every nation where the deep
Wounds of memory divide the land
And lives of all your children, where the mines

Of all our wars are sown: Afghanistan ,
Iraq, the Cote d'Ivoire... he reads the signs
And weeps with you and with you he will stay
Until the day he wipes your tears away.

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls for the Third Time

Reading from I Corinthians

We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Sonnet

He weeps with you and with you he will stay
When all your staying power has run out
You can't go on, you go on anyway.
He stumbles just beside you when the doubt
That always haunts you, cuts you down at last
And takes away the hope that drove you on.
This is the third fall and it hurts the worst
This long descent through darkness to depression
From which there seems no rising and no will
To rise, or breathe or bear your own heart beat.
Twice you survived; this third will surely kill,
And you could almost wish for that defeat
Except that in the cold hell where you freeze
You find your God beside you on his knees.

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of his Garments

Reading from John's Gospel

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top.

Sonnet

You can't go on, you go on anyway
He goes with you, his cradle to your grave.
Now is the time to loosen, cast away
The useless weight of everything but love
For he began his letting go before,
Before the worlds for which he dies were made,

Emptied himself, became one of the poor,
To make you rich in him and unafraid.
See as they strip the robe from off his back
They strip away your own defences too
Now you could lose it all and never lack
Now you can see what naked Love can do
Let go these bonds beneath whose weight you bow
His stripping strips you both for action now

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Reading from Luke's Gospel

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

Sonnet

See, as they strip the robe from off his back
And spread his arms and nail them to the cross,
The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns black,
And love is firmly fastened onto loss.
But here a pure change happens. On this tree
Loss becomes gain, death opens into birth.
Here wounding heals and fastening makes free
Earth breathes in heaven, heaven roots in earth.
And here we see the length, the breadth, the height
Where love and hatred meet and love stays true
Where sin meets grace and darkness turns to light
We see what love can bear and be and do,
And here our saviour calls us to his side
His love is free, his arms are open wide.

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Reading from Luke's Gospel

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last.

Sonnet

The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns black
We watch him as he labours to draw breath
He takes our breath away to give it back,
Return it to it's birth through his slow death.
We hear him struggle breathing through the pain
Who once breathed out his spirit on the deep,
Who formed us when he mixed the dust with rain
And drew us into consciousness from sleep.
His spirit and his life he breathes in all
Mantles his world in his one atmosphere
And now he comes to breathe beneath the pall
Of our pollutions, draw our injured air
To cleanse it and renew. His final breath
Breathes us, and bears us through the gates of death.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

Reading from John's Gospel

Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.

Sonnet

His spirit and his life he breathes in all
Now on this cross his body breathes no more
Here at the centre everything is still
Spent, and emptied, opened to the core.
A quiet taking down, a prising loose
A cross-beam lowered like a weighing scale
Unmaking of each thing that had its use
A long withdrawing of each bloodied nail,
This is ground zero, emptiness and space
With nothing left to say or think or do
But look unflinching on the sacred face
That cannot move or change or look at you.
Yet in that prising loose and letting be
He has unfastened you and set you free.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

Reading from Matthew's Gospel

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Sonnet

Here at the centre everything is still
Before the stir and movement of our grief
Which bears its pain with rhythm, ritual,
Beautiful useless gestures of relief.
So they anoint the skin that cannot feel
Soothing his ruined flesh with tender care,
Kissing the wounds they know they cannot heal,
With incense scenting only empty air.
He blesses every love that weeps and grieves
And makes our grief the pangs of a new birth.
The love that's poured in silence at old graves
Renewing flowers, tending the bare earth,
Is never lost. In him all love is found
And sown with him, a seed in the rich ground.

LECTIO DIVINA – LISTENING WITH THE HEART

Your Word is a Light for My Steps

Lectio Divina (Latin for godly reading) is a simple yet profound method of prayer found in many traditions of Christian spirituality. Sometimes it is called 'meditative reading' or 'spiritual reading', but could perhaps better be described as praying with a listening heart. The 'lectio' of Lectio Divina is a listening with the heart, as you tend to do quite naturally when you are struck by the beauty of a sunset, as you are mulling over a treasured memory, or as you pay attention to someone you love.

In praying this way you hear a scripture passage or other sacred text and you let God guide your heart. You read slowly, with pauses, and relish or drink in the words you are hearing. A natural process takes place: heartfelt listening moves naturally into a deep reflection upon the words and the silences between them; and that deep reflection leads you to some kind of heartfelt response. You find yourself speaking from the heart to the God who has spoken to you.

Let the ease and rhythm of this approach to prayer carry you deeper into God.



Jesus Christ is revealed to us through His holy Word, whenever we read the Scriptures or hear them proclaimed at Mass. Through Him we come to know the Father. (T-07136A-CW-VZ)

Beginning

Choose your scripture passage and become comfortable with it. Read it over a few times to get past any questions that arise about meaning. Invite God to speak to you through the text. Ask for openness. Let yourself settle into an expectant stillness.

This kind of prayer has three 'phases' that you move between as you feel drawn: lectio (reading), meditatio (meditation) and oratio (prayer).

Lectio

Read slowly and gently, listening with your heart to the words. There is no need to rush. No need to get to the end of the passage. When a particular word or phrase strikes you and seems to have some savour, linger with it ...

Meditatio

... let it into you. Pause with it. Let the word or phrase resonate. Repeat it to yourself, relish it, let it echo and soak into you until the 'flavour' begins to go, then ...

Oratio

... let yourself respond in prayer, in words from the heart, or a space full of silence, or spontaneous, unspoken feeling. Whenever the moment feels ripe, begin to read again ...

Ending

When you are ready, mark the end of your time of prayer with some closing gesture or words of prayer. Afterwards you might want to make a note of anything that seemed significant.

PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH THE IMAGINATION

God often seems to speak to people in prayer through the imagination. This can move beyond what I feel I ought to say and think in God's presence and what I think the correct ideas ought to be. Instead the imagination helps me to understand what it is I really want from God, what it is God is calling me to or what it is that God is offering me at this moment in my life.

'But,' many people say, 'I have no imagination.' They tend to mean they don't have the kind of imagination that comes up with vivid, technicolour images. But imagination works in different ways for different people. Some see images with the detail of a film director. Others get a sense of the 'feel' of a place, without picturing it in the same way. Others again will build up a mental scene detail by detail.

Everyone has imagination! Take a moment now to get a sense of a place you are fond of, or a person you love. The power that enables you to know what that feels like is the imagination. And the following exercise can help you to use that same power in prayer.

This prayer works well with any gospel or Old Testament scene where there is action taking place (so don't choose passages that are simply teaching or poetry). One or two examples of suitable passages are given below.

Take a few moments to become still and quiet, and invite God to work through your imagination as you pray with the passage. Ask God for what you want, perhaps 'To know you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly'.



Read through the text two or three times until you are thoroughly familiar with the story. Then let the scene gradually build up in your mind's eye. Take your time, see everything that is around, hear, feel, taste, and smell.

Where are you? Take your own place in the unfolding scene. You may start as a bystander, or one of the central characters, or simply enter into the action as yourself.

Let yourself be drawn naturally into conversation with Jesus or another participant. Stay in the scene for as long as you have chosen to, and then draw the prayer to a close.

Some passages suitable for imaginative prayer

Matthew 14:22-33

Mark 10:46-52

Luke 5:1-11

John 13:1-17

Exodus 3:1-6

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Peter walks on the water

The cure of Bartimaeus

Call of four disciples

Jesus washes the disciples' feet

Moses and the burning bush

The call of Samuel

Further Resources

You can access a daily form of Morning and Evening Prayer on the Church of England's website, here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-daily-prayer>

Or by downloading the 'Daily Prayer' App through

You can listen to Choral Evensong on Radio 3

At 3pm every Sunday and at 3.30pm every Wednesday
[also available online at any time]

Songs of Praise is broadcast on BBC1 at 1.15pm every Sunday
[also available on iPlayer]

You can listen to the Sunday Sermons given at Canterbury Cathedral by following this link: <https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/worship/listen-to-our-services/>

A word from Bishop Gregory

I am delighted to send you my greetings at this special time of year, together with my hope that you will be blessed by God in this sacred season, with good wishes for you and all that are dear to you. Christians believe that Easter is a time of good news when Jesus conquered the powers of death and evil.

Taken from the Diocese of St Asaph, 'Invitation to Easter 2020'



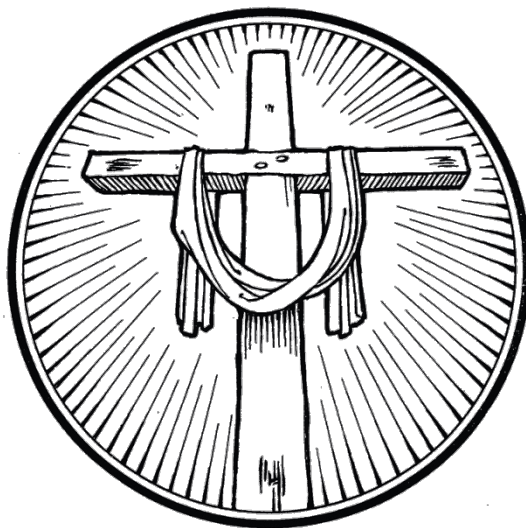
The Good News of Easter

On the first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb and discovered that it was empty. Jesus then appeared to his friends, still bearing the scars of the cross, and said, **'peace be with you!'**

He gave the gift of peace; a peace that isn't a human invention but which flows straight from the heart of God. Even today, Jesus is alive and offers to his followers that same gift of peace.

On Good Friday, Jesus sank to the very depths of what it is to be human – he experienced grief, hatred, pain and death – but now he stands among us and declares that hatred and grief and death can never have the final word. He has won the victory; love has triumphed, Christ is risen, and he offers the gift of peace to all who follow him.

By Fr Dominic Austin OGS for the Diocesan Invitation Card



Please feel free to contact one of the clergy if you need pastoral support over this period.

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