

A gathering of grief – pg 23

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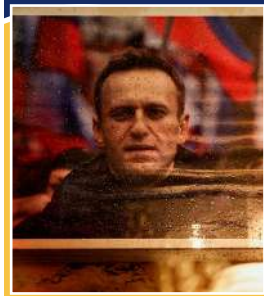
Friday, 8th March 2024

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Mob rule forces student pro-lifers to cancel events

University's free speech claims labelled a joke as police called to rescue meeting organisers after violent attack

Andy Drozdziak

A pro-life student group has accused the University of Manchester of failing to protect its students and staff after the university instructed a new pro-life society to cancel all future in-person events.

Hundreds of pro-choice supporters shouted intimidating language and spat at members of the Manchester Pro Life Society after its first meeting on 29th February.

Chants of "stay in there and die", "you should be aborted" and vile expletives were heard during the protest, while members were threatened with rape and violence and eggs were thrown at the window.

Following the scenes, which were widely shared on videos on social media, the *Universe* can reveal that the University of Manchester has now instructed the pro-life society to cancel future in-person events indefinitely because it cannot guarantee the safety of attendees. The society's latest in-person event on Monday 4th March was cancelled as per the university's instructions.

Madeline Page, the director of the Alliance of Pro-Life Students, condemned the university's actions. "While the university acknowledges there was serious disruption and intimidation during the protest, it fails to indicate the steps that are being taken as a result of this," she



A police officer is confronted by the mob. Below, scenes outside the meeting as a crowd gathers
Photos: Right To Life UK. The Universe has chosen to block out expletives on some placards

told the *Universe*.

"The university has failed to protect its own students and staff on campus. It has told the pro-life society to cancel all in-person events for the foreseeable future because it cannot guarantee safety.

"This is not supportive of free speech and seems instead to be punishing the pro-life group, which has actively engaged and co-operated with all of the SU and University policies and procedures."

On 11th January, Manchester Student Union confirmed the new society's right to exist, stating that that it was 'officially' acknowledged as a society in accordance with its 'society registration processes.'

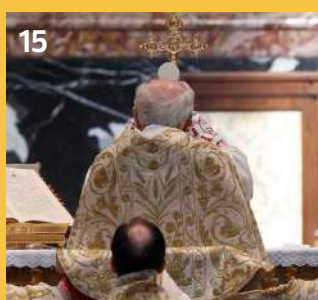
The Student Union also issued a reminder that, according to the 2023 Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, student unions are

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Bishops back MPs' view on assisted suicide

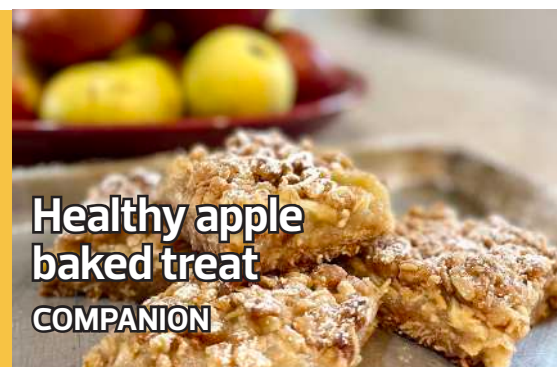
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COMPANION

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Students told to be brave and stand up for beliefs

Andy Drozdziak

Pro-life students are being urged to “be brave” following the incidents of intimidation and abuse at the new pro-life society event in Manchester last week.

The incident covered on our front page report underlines a recent trend. Since 2017, student representative bodies at universities in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Nottingham and Strathclyde have tried to prevent student pro-life groups from being affiliated with their universities.

In each of these cases, the students’ unions had to reverse their decision after the groups threatened legal proceedings against them. Students at Birmingham University also had significant difficulties becoming affiliated with the university but eventually won out against significant opposition.

Madeline Page, the director of the Alliance of Pro-Life Students, is now encouraging students to be bold in sharing the pro-life message.

She told the *Universe*: “Be courageous. While what has happened is absolutely horrendous, it is unusual – this is not the norm.”

“As Catholics, as pro-lifers, we are on the side of truth and people don’t necessarily like to hear that. I would like to share the truth with people, and sometimes the truth is hard to hear.”



Madeline Page

Right To Life UK showed that, in a 2020 survey undertaken by Surveillance for legal advocacy group, ADF International, 27 per cent of university students have ‘hidden’ opinions that they believe may be at odds with those of their university.

In the same survey, 44 per cent of students believe that their lecturers would treat them differently if they made their views known on pro-life

issues, and 38 per cent believe that their future careers might be adversely affected if they openly expressed their true opinions.

Madeline Page encouraged students to always be charitable and not stay quiet.

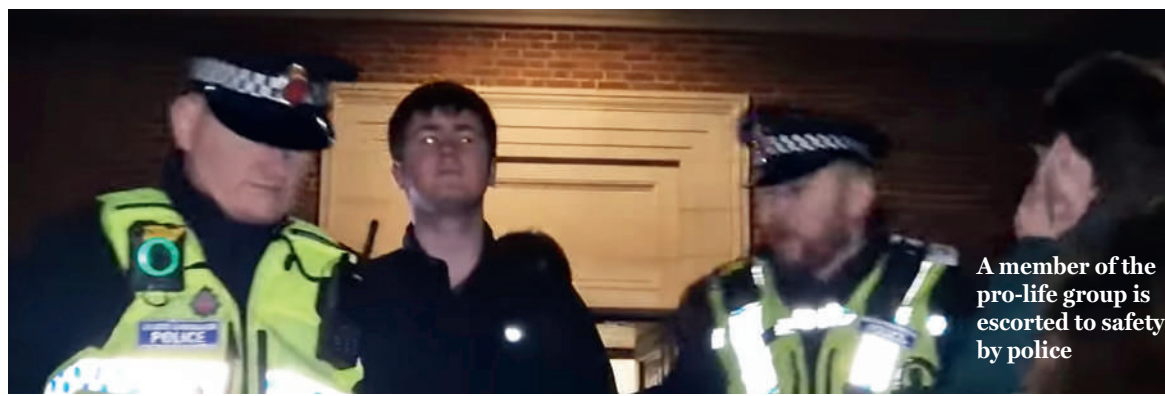
“Always be charitable, but say something, do something,” she said.

“The real danger is self-censorship. Because of how toxic the culture can become, especially around distressing issues like abortion, students don’t need to be censored by someone else because they censor themselves because of the potential reaction and I think that is dangerous. We should be bold and share the truth.”

Spokesperson for Right To Life UK, Catherine Robinson, urged students to continue to share the pro-life view, adding that their words should not be prevented by violence and threats.

“Student pro-life groups are often the first opportunity people have to hear the pro-life view and this should not be denied by the chilling effect brought on by threats of violence”, she said.

“Parliament passed the Higher Education (Free Speech) Act in 2023 to alleviate censorship on campus and restore the freedom to express and exchange ideas openly in universities.”



A member of the pro-life group is escorted to safety by police

Continued from page 1

obliged to promote freedom of speech. The row erupted after a petition was signed by 16,000 people in protest against the previously male-led society.

Protest organisers Stop Manchester Pro Life movement called their protest ‘safe and passionate yet still peaceful’ in an Instagram post. The movement did not respond to the *Universe’s* request for comment. However, the University of Manchester told the *Universe* that the protests amounted to ‘serious disruption and intimidation.’

It said in a statement: “While we respect the right of students to peaceful protest, there were instances of serious disruption and intimidation at this event. This affected staff and students going about their normal business, and police and campus security involvement

was required.

“As well as the right to peaceful protest, we also have a legal obligation to support free speech within the law.”

Madeline Page described the university’s response as “unacceptable”. She said: “As the university has rightly stated, it has a legal obligation to proactively support free speech.

“This is unacceptable and far from enabling civil debate, discussion and challenge – a key pillar of our higher education institutions.”

“They (the university) are using the free speech laws as an excuse to the student body that don’t want the pro-life society there, but they’re not abiding by the laws because the new law (the 2023 Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act) says they have to be proactive (in promoting free speech).

“That would involve them organising security so that events can go ahead, meeting regularly with students. I don’t see that happening.”

Other pro-life groups joined a call for appropriate action to be taken against the protestors and for the pro-life society to be allowed to hold in-person events.

Executive director of SPUC, Michael Robinson, told the *Universe*: “Students of all opinions must be protected. SPUC expects the University of Manchester to hold those to account for such unacceptable behaviour.”

Spokesperson for Right To Life UK, Catherine Robinson, said: “The treatment these students received is appalling. These students should be allowed to discuss serious moral issues like abortion free from such vile verbal threats and physical intimidation.”

Conference calls on employers to protect faith in the workplace

Christian MP and Minister admits: 'I struggle to see enough examples of faith at work'

The Catholic Union was among the delegates invited to the UK's first Faith at Work Summit on Monday, 4th March.

The event was a business-led discussion about promoting freedom of religion and belief at work, with the Catholic Union acting as one of the partners for the event. It was also involved in the planning stage from summer last year.

Over 100 business leaders, policy experts, and faith representatives gathered in the Heron Tower in the London for the event, which was jointly organised between consultancy firm, Baringa, and software experts, Salesforce.

Last year, a Catholic Union survey found that one-in-three people

had experienced disadvantage at work because of their faith, and almost half of responders found it difficult to talk about their faith in the workplace.

Catholic Union deputy director, James Somerville-Meikle, attended the event which also saw the results announced from the first UK edition of the corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Index and Monitor, which tracks corporate attitudes to freedom of religion or belief.

Cabinet Office Minister, John Glen MP, presented prizes to Baringa and Rolls-Royce who were announced as the two most faith- and belief-friendly workplaces in the UK.



John Glen MP

In his remarks, Mr Glen reflected on his own life as a Christian in politics and business. "I struggle to see enough of faith in the workplace" he admitted, adding that "our economy and society flourish when we are at one with God and at peace."

He also rejected claims that faith was a purely personal matter. "You cannot go to church on a Sunday, then turn up at work on a Monday and be a completely different human being."

Catholic Union Deputy Director, James Somerville-Meikle, said: "We know that for too many Catholics going to work is made harder on account of their faith."

"We see that particularly in areas such as healthcare and education.

"Despite legal protections for freedom of religion and belief, it has not always been taken seriously by employers.

"We have worked hard alongside many other groups and individuals

to raise the profile of these concerns. The idea of there being a major summit in London on this issue even just a few years ago would have been hard to imagine. It shows the progress that has been made, but clearly there is a lot more to do as the evidence shows that these problems persist."

He added: "The Catholic Union will continue to champion religious freedom at work until we see real progress."

Barclay criticised for ignoring animal bill

Andy Drozdziak

A leading Catholic lawyer has criticised Environment Secretary Steve Barclay's "silence" after a popular animal act stalled.

The Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act became law in September 2023, but no action has been taken since to enact the law. Supported by Bishop John Arnold and celebrities including Chris Packham, Ricky Gervais and Dame Joanna Lumley, the Bill will protect endangered and vulnerable species across the world from exploitation, harm and death in tourism.

Duncan McNair, CEO of Save The Asian Elephants, was the co-or-

verse. "Nearly six months on and silence from Steve Barclay.

"He should by now have consulted stakeholders and drawn up 'activity regulations' listing cruel overseas animal tourism activities to be banned from domestic advertising."

At the time of the Act's passing, it was hailed by then Animal Welfare Minister Lord Benyon as "an important step in our commitment to ensure high animal welfare standards both here in this country and abroad."

Angela Richardson MP, who tabled the original Bill, said it was 'a world first and will work towards greater protection of vulnerable animals in low welfare settings from being exploited as tourist experiences.'

Mr McNair said that he has contacted Steve Barclay with necessary resources to advance the act and called for the Government to take action, or risk losing its reputation as a 'pro-animal administration.'

"Steve Barclay is aware we have compelling evidence demonstrating the horrors to endangered species and the deadly dangers to tourists that these activities involve," Mr McNair said. "We expect action now if the Secretary of State is to discharge his constitutional obligation to enact the law and if our government is to retain a shred of credibility as a pro-animal administration."



Steve Barclay's lack of action to implement this Bill is worrying, say campaigners

dinator of the original law on behalf of around 200 charities. He has now written an open letter to Steve Barclay, signed by 102 organisations and individuals, to query why no action has been taken.

"This landmark Act was passed by Parliament last September amid overwhelming public support but has stalled in the Government's hands," Mr McNair told the *Uni-*

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www.jrsuk.net/universe

In Brief

Lockdown boost for cigar smoking

Young adults are now the most likely to smoke cigars after the tobacco product saw a revival in popularity during lockdown. Sales have also been boosted by celebrities such as American sports stars and musicians being pictured with them.

The number of adults in England using non-cigarette tobacco products increased from around 210,000 in February 2020 to a peak of almost one million adults in May 2022.

The rise in the proportion of adults using cigars, cigarillos, pipes and shisha over the last decade is a public health concern, cancer experts said.

Judge pledges to end victims' wait

Lord Justice Edis said he aims to clear the backlog of rape cases delayed more than two years by the end of this summer – and then ensure no rape victim has to wait more than two years after that point.

He described the court delay as a “serious stain” on the criminal justice system and “unacceptable” for victims, witnesses and defendants. Some victims wait more than five years before a trial is held.

Historical figures ‘not inclusive’

A private school is to remove Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake from its building names in an “inclusivity” drive.

Parents at Exeter School in Devon were told that the Elizabethan naval heroes no longer “represent the values and inclusive nature” of the school.

Louise Simpson, the head teacher, said they had “less than positive connotations” in modern times.

Bishops back MPs as they reject new assisted suicide proposals

Andy Drozdziak

The Catholic Bishops' Conference has welcomed a Government report which recommends that the laws on assisted suicide remain unchanged, and calls for improved palliative care.

Bishop John Sherrington, Lead Bishop for Life Issues at the Catholic Bishops' Conference, welcomed the report by the Health and Social Care Select Committee on Assisted Dying/Assisted Suicide, and issued a reminder of Catholic teaching on assisted suicide.

“Assisted suicide violates the dignity inherent to every person's life, which is to be cherished and cared for at all stages until natural death,” he said. “The Catholic bishops oppose its legalisation out of concern for the good of every person in society, the protection of this good in law, and the spiritual and pastoral care of the sick and dying.”

He added: “Given that Parliament has already rejected any changes to the law on assisted sui-



Bishop John Sherrington

cide in 2015 and 2021, I welcome the Select Committee's decision not to recommend its legalisation.”

The report underlined the importance of ‘providing equal access to high-quality palliative and end of life care (PEoLC) all who need it.’ Bishop Sherrington commended this point for the benefit of sick and

vulnerable people.

He said: “I welcome the Committee's recommendation that the accessibility and provision of palliative and end of life care needs to be improved – something the Catholic Church has consistently called for.”

The report explored the effects of legalising assisted suicide in differ-

ent jurisdictions, highlighting a series of associated problems, such as people wishing to access assisted suicide for non-medical reasons such as financial concerns, poverty and isolation.

However, pro-life group Right To Life UK criticised some omissions, such as a failure to mention a 2020 Canadian report ‘Cost estimate for Bill C-7, Medical Assistance in Dying’, which estimated that \$149 million was saved in healthcare costs from euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada in 2021.

Right To Life UK's Catherine Robinson warned that “It is inevitable that cost-saving calculations will come into play when considering implementing assisted suicide, and MPs in England and Wales should be under no illusions about this”.

She also criticised the report for failing to mention an Isle of Man Medical Society poll, which revealed that 73.8 per cent of its members oppose the legalisation of assisted suicide.

Scotland's politicians unite in praise of SCIAF

Politicians from all of Scotland's main parties put politics aside to give their backing to SCIAF's (Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund) WEE BOX appeal for people in Rwanda.

First Minister Humza Yousaf, Labour Leader Anas Sarwar, Conservative Leader Douglas Ross, Liberal Democrat Leader Alex Cole-Hamilton, and Ross Greer from the Scottish Greens joined forces to support SCIAF's annual appeal, which raises funds for its work in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Each year generous Scots up and down the country give up a favourite treat such as coffee, chocolate, wine or crisps during Lent and put the money they save into a SCIAF

WEE BOX. They then donate it at Easter to provide a hand-up to vulnerable communities worldwide, struggling to survive due to hunger, poverty and the climate emergency.

First Minister Humza Yousaf said: “I am immensely thankful to SCIAF for their continued work in not only highlighting but also supporting those affected by some of the most unjust atrocities that still plague this world.”

“Their WEE BOX campaign is known globally and this year their focus is on the ongoing impact of violence against women and girls specifically in Rwanda, a country that has already had to overcome so much.”

This year, SCIAF's appeal focuses

on the people of Rwanda, 30 years on from the genocide which left around one million people dead.

Lorraine Currie, SCIAF's Chief Executive said: “We welcome this support from our political leaders in Scotland. Some things are too important and should transcend party politics.”

“It's great that they have put their differences aside to unite in support of some of the poorest people in the world.”

“Our Lent appeal this year focuses on Rwanda, where 30 years since the genocide people are still suffering from the scars that it left. Driven by donations from the people of Scotland, our work in Rwanda focuses on supporting women and

girls who have suffered abuse and discrimination. Working through local Rwandan organisations, SCIAF is supporting projects which help women and girls rebuild their lives, change social attitudes, and build a better future for themselves and their families.”

Humza Yousaf encouraged people to make a ‘big change’.

“I encourage anyone who is able to donate to do so and use your WEE BOX to make a big change,” he said.

“Your contributions will mean that SCIAF can continue supporting projects to help vulnerable women and girls rebuild their lives and create a better future for the generations who follow them.”

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Football must take lead on gambling misery

The North West Gambling Service (NWGS) has launched a new initiative to address gambling addiction, and tackle the “hundreds of deaths it causes each year”.

Dr Matt Gaskell, the head of NWGS, describes the gambling sector as creating a “perfect storm” for addiction, and said that football plays a large part.

The gambling industry in the UK is valued at approximately £15 billion.

NWGS offers support for those struggling with gambling addiction and related mental health conditions.

At the opening of a new clinic in Liverpool, Dr Gaskell pointed out

football’s negligence towards the dangers of gambling.

He said: “Gambling is killing people; there are hundreds of gambling-related suicides every year, there’s misery and desperation across our communities.

“So we want football to take that a lot more seriously and for them to stand up and say ‘no, that’s not ok’, and pull out of sponsorship deals with betting firms.”

Stories of those who have taken their own lives as a result of a gambling addiction are common, including that of 27-year-old Ryan Myers who committed suicide in 2014.

“This thing seemed to be some-

thing that he couldn’t control, and something that was taking over his life” his father, John Myers, shared at the NWGS launch event.

Tranmere Rovers FC is one club that will not take gambling advertisements, with executive chairman Mark Palios advocating for football to be a “part of the solution” by creating safe environments in which people could seek help.

Dr Gaskell noted that gambling primarily affects younger, employed men in relationships, engaging in online gambling.

However, he recognised the recent increase in women now facing gambling addiction, suggesting this is due in part to targeted advertising

and the allure of slot machines. He said between 25-30 per cent of service users were women, and that percentage is increasing.

He criticised the industry’s profit-driven motives and called for stronger regulations and laws.

Premier League clubs have agreed to phase out gambling sponsorships on match shirts by the 2025-26 season, while a spokesperson for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport said: “The gambling White Paper we are introducing outlines a balanced and proportionate package of measures, delivering greater protections for those at risk, while having minimal impact on the freedoms of the punters.”



Dr Matt Gaskell



France condemned for abortion move

Andy Drozdziak

Lord Alton has joined pro-life groups in condemning France’s decision to include the right to abortion in their constitution as a “huge step in the wrong direction.”

Lord Alton told the *Universe*: “The enshrining of abortion as a constitutional right in France is a huge step in the wrong direction.

“The French Parliament has bought into the lie that the interests of mothers and their babies are in conflict with one another, that each competes in a false ‘zero-sum game’ that can only be ‘won’ at the expense of the other. This is a deeply sad and ultimately false view, which this constitutional change reinforces”.

Daniel Frampton from SPUC warned that the move would impact future generations.

“By shutting down pro-life voices of the future, French politicians diminish their own democracy, and they will no doubt be viewed unkindly by future generations whose opinions on abortion have been discounted,” he said.

However, Daniel Frampton pointed to the move as revealing a ‘profound insecurity’ in the light of the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States in June 2022

He said: “While it is disappointing that France has made abortion a constitutional right, it should be considered in the broader context of the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, a great victory that shook anti-life politicians out of their complacency. As the pro-life movement in America has shown, this is not the end.”

Catherine Robinson from Right to Life UK also believes that the move is ‘largely symbolic’ and will not affect France’s current law which has a 14-week time limit on abortion.

However, she warned of the reality of the dangers posed in the UK. Dame Diana Johnson is currently proposing an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill which aims to exempt women who terminate their own pregnancies from being prosecuted by law.

Catherine Robinson told the *Universe*: “This extreme change to the law would remove current offences that prevent women from performing their own abortions throughout all nine months of pregnancy.

“This would allow babies to be aborted for any reason, including sex selection, up to and during birth”.

World spotlight: see pg 18

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Mon 14th – Sun 20th October at Oblate Centre, Crewe

Mon 28th Oct – Sun 3rd Nov at Mullaghmore, Ireland

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UNIVERSE
COMMENTLaws have no
meaning without
enforcement

The Government is facing a backlash over plans for a new definition of extremism following Rishi Sunak's Downing Street denunciation of extremism last week.

Michael Gove has been tasked with devising a form of words that would allow public funds to be withdrawn from groups that refuse to conform to British values or which promote an ideology undermining them.

Organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain and Palestine Action are among those that could be affected. But some Conservatives fear the net will be thrown wider to ensnare gender-critical feminists or Christians opposed to gay marriage.

The obvious danger is that, in failing to address head-on the threat posed by Islamism, the Government will end up targeting legitimate differences of opinion in order to avoid charges of 'racism' or Islamophobia.

Miriam Cates, the Tory MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge, said any attempt to define extremism or fundamental British values was "very risky" because one person's extremism is another person's sincerely held and lawful belief.

There already is a definition of extremism described as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.'

A task force set up by the Coalition Government 10 years ago devised this but it has had little obvious impact. The task force said that governments had previously been "too reticent about challenging extreme Islamist ideologies ... in part because of a misplaced concern that attacking Islamist extremism equates to an attack on Islam itself."

As Lord Frost, the former Cabinet minister has observed: "What we need is proper enforcement of the laws we have against, for example, incitement to violence."

Indeed so. A new definition of extremism will not make any difference as long as there is a reluctance to tackle the real issue.

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Galloway's win forces Labour to look again at its Muslim vote

Parveen Akhtar and Timothy Peace

The Rochdale byelection should have been a straightforward win for Labour. The late Sir Tony Lloyd served as a Labour member since 2017, with a majority of nearly 10,000. And yet the contest, triggered by Lloyd's death in January, descended into chaos and controversy.

Now, nine years after his most recent term in parliament, the controversial former Labour and Respect MP George Galloway will represent the seat for his own Workers' Party of Britain.

In an all-male list of candidates, both the Labour Party and the Green Party withdrew support for their candidates following allegations of antisemitism and Islamophobia, respectively. On the ballot paper, Azhar Ali still appeared as the Labour candidate and Guy Otten as Green because it was too late to make any changes.

Labour's decision to withdraw its support for Ali came after leaked recordings revealed him saying that the Israeli Government knew in advance about the attacks by Hamas on 7th October 2023, and that they "deliberately took the security off [to allow] that massacre that gives them the green light to do whatever they bloody want".

By dropping Ali, Labour's standing among Muslim voters, in Rochdale and beyond, took another battering. Since the start of the war in Gaza, Labour's position on the conflict has been seen as too lenient towards Israel by many Muslim voters and Labour Muslim politicians. Across the country, more than 60 Labour councillors have resigned in protest. In November 2023, 56 Labour MPs defied the party leadership to back the SNP's call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

The Rochdale byelection was the first where the issue of Gaza was explicitly raised on the campaign trail. Clearly, many of the area's Muslim voters (and others) used this chance to express their anger. And Galloway, who stood on a platform of 'For Rochdale. For Gaza', did too.

Muslims make up 30 per cent of Rochdale's population. It is therefore unsurprising that Galloway decided to court this constituency in his bid to return as an MP. He successfully won elections in east London and Bradford, both of which have significant Muslim South Asian electorates, and has long advocated for the Palestinian cause. In 2009 he led the Viva Palestina



convoy that travelled to Gaza to provide humanitarian aid during the blockade of the strip. A later investigation by the Charity Commission found "little if any evidence that humanitarian aid was distributed to those in need" by Viva Palestina, although Galloway always disputed the inquiry's findings.

Labour and the 'Muslim vote'

There is no such thing as a cohesive "Muslim vote" in the UK. For decades, Labour remained the party of choice for many British Muslims, but this had more to do with other factors including class and race. The Muslim Council of Britain has, for many years, encouraged Muslims to vote and be part of the political process, but does not back particular candidates or parties.

Within Muslim communities, there is often a political divide between generations. Research has revealed widespread disillusionment with electoral politics, among young Muslims in the UK.

Despite this, many remain politically engaged outside of formal elections, for example through local community organisations, and calling for substantive representation which addresses mainstream and often national political issues. The older generation, in contrast, is seen as

prioritising local issues and representation much more closely tied to kinship and ethnic identity.

Despite these caveats about the absence of a Muslim vote, history shows that Muslims will use the ballot box to send messages on both domestic and foreign policy issues. This occurred most famously in the 2005 general election, when the Muslim protest vote against the Iraq war helped to swing several constituencies against Labour. Many Labour MPs, including the then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, had to fight tooth and nail to retain supposedly "safe" seats.

The major upset in that election was George Galloway winning the seat of Bethnal Green and Bow in east London at the expense of Labour's Oona King, who voted in favour of UK involvement in the Iraq war. Galloway managed to overturn King's majority of 10,057 by campaigning on an anti-war stance. Nearly two decades later, Galloway has used another war in a different constituency with a significant Muslim population to do the same.

Looking to the general election

In his acceptance speech, Galloway warned Starmer: "This is for Gaza. And you will pay a high price, in enabling, encouraging and covering for, the catastrophe presently going on in occupied Palestine in the Gaza Strip." In

classic Galloway oratory, he declared "all the plates have shifted tonight", and that Labour has "lost the confidence of millions of their voters".

Concern about Labour losing votes from its Muslim electors should not be overstated. Opinion polls still record the party's support as high – and during a general election voters are less likely to vote on a single issue.

Still, Labour will now fear losing ground to independent candidates standing in constituencies with significant numbers of Muslim voters, especially in seats where MPs abstained from or voted against the SNP motion for a ceasefire in Gaza in November 2023.

For years, Labour has taken the support of Muslim voters for granted. Galloway's win will certainly put pressure on Starmer and the Labour party to take voters' concerns about Gaza seriously. The result in Rochdale may not indicate more electoral consequences for the party but it does suggest moral ones.

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Enough war, try peace, Irish bishops tell Israel

The Catholic Bishops of Ireland have made a passionate plea for peace in the ongoing Israel-Gaza war.

The bishops said: “As the Catholic Bishops of Ireland, we echo Pope Francis’ heartfelt appeal for a complete ceasefire in Gaza - ‘Enough, please! Let us all say it: enough... Stop!’”

The call comes as the World Health Organisation stated that children are dying of starvation in the north, and humanitarian agencies say they are struggling to meet enormous needs.

The bishops urged the Israeli Government to enable humanitarian aid for basic human needs.

“We call on the Israeli Government to comply with basic human and international standards in ensuring that Palestinians have full and unimpeded access to food, water and basic safety requirements. At the same time, we call on Hamas to release all hostages and to end missile attacks on Israel.”

They added that the war affects those of ‘all faiths’ and beyond.

“The current aggression is not a war between Jews and Arabs; people of all faiths, including many of the Jewish tradition, oppose what is happening and the effect it is having not only on Israel and Palestine but



Archbishop Eamon Martin pictured on a visit to Gaza

throughout the wider Middle East and further afield,” they said.

“There is no future in the perpetuation of conflict and human suffering. This is especially so when one considers the intensity of what is happening in the Holy Land.”

The bishops ended with a call for ‘dialogue’ and a sustainable plan for peace, along with a ceasefire.

“The only future is one of dialogue and the putting in place of a sustainable plan for a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis and that brings to an end the occupation that

has for far too long denied Palestinians their rights and freedoms,” they said.

“International efforts to secure a ceasefire are welcome. However, as the death toll continues to rise all possible pressure should be applied to prevail upon Israel to desist from military operations that impact so horrendously on innocent civilians. Equally, any international support for Hamas terrorism is utterly unacceptable.”

Netanyahu’s plan - pg 10
Pope demands ceasefire - pg 16

Pact cites Wetherby case as need for prison reform

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic prison charity Pact is calling for a new approach in caring for children and young people in young offender institutions after a report revealed that a teenage girl was restrained and stripped by male prison staff at HMYOI Wetherby.

Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor said he was “deeply shocked” by the report, which said officers had to intervene several times a night to prevent girls self-harming.

Wetherby has the “highest rate of self-harm of any prison in the country”.

“We were deeply shocked to find adult male officers restraining and stripping an incredibly vulnerable girl not once but twice,” Mr Taylor said, adding that the officers’ presence and actions will have caused the girl further trauma.

“The fact that a small number of very damaged and behaviourally challenging girls are held in Wetherby and are being ‘manhandled’ speaks to a far wider problem,” Pact CEO Andy Keen-Downs said.

“HMPPS has been starved of resources for decades. Women and girls are all too often held in establishments which were built and designed for adult men. There are well-reported issues with recruitment and retention, and so many establishments lack sufficient front-line officers and healthcare staff.”

The report also discovered that

children spent too much time languishing in their cells, and education was poor.

Mr Keen-Downs said the report was a list of failings from the Government. “It is clear we need a fresh approach to how we care for young people who are a risk to others and themselves,” he said.

“This Government promised a reform of mental health legislation. It didn’t happen. It promised a Royal

‘We need a fresh approach to how we care for young people at risk’
Andy Keen-Downs



Commission on prisons. That didn’t happen either. It promised to deliver the female offender strategy. Instead, it promised to build more prison cells. If all politicians have to say about prisons is that we need more of them, we are at a dead end.”

Mr Keen-Downs urged politicians to avoid “cheap point-scoring headlines on getting tough on crime” and to think longer term to provide for prisoners and prison staff alike. “We desperately need a long-term vision and strategy for our justice system,” he said.

“We need to think differently about our justice system and invest properly in it. We need a strategy that gives people in prison and the staff who work with them hope.”

Cardinal asks faithful to pray for ceasefire

Cardinal Nichols is encouraging Catholics to have a special focus to pray for peace for the people in the Holy Land and Gaza today (8th March) “as a vital part of our observance of Lent.”

In his call, addressed originally to those in his own Diocese of Westminster and since extended to the whole Church, the cardinal is urging Catholics to use the Lenten season to focus on the suffering people who have been “scarred by war and conflict.”

He said: “As we are all aware, the situation in the Holy Land has not improved, with failed negotiations, increasing humanitarian distress and a rising death toll.

“And so I ask that, on Friday 8th March, there is a special focus of prayer for the Holy Land across the diocese. This could take the form of a dedicated time of prayer, perhaps before the Blessed Sacrament, for peace in the Holy Land. It could be as simple as making any regular Lenten devotions you may be having on that day for this intention.

“Let us pray insistently for relief for those who face multiple dangers, for an immediate cessation of armed conflict and for every serious



attempt at a lasting ceasefire to be sustained.

“Please do join in praying for peace in the Holy Land this Friday in any way you can.”

He asked priests to “encourage parishioners to make a special effort to take part.”

In calling for the day of prayer, Cardinal Nichols also issued a statement echoing Pope Francis’ call for a lasting ceasefire, the release of all hostages, for humanitarian aid to be allowed through to help those most in need in Gaza, and for hospitals, schools and places of worship to be protected. People are being urged to use these themes as key intentions for prayer.

Resources can be found at:
<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/prayer-day-for-peace-in-the-holy-land/>

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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good

COMMENT

Editorial: Andy Drozdziak – news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Spare a prayer for Sudan

Sir John Battle



As the fasting seasons of the Christian Lent and Muslim Ramadan this year now coincide, should we ask how socially effective is our own fasting?

Can it make any impact other than on our own slightly improving health and lifestyle?

The daily news diet of war and refugees on our doorstep has meant little focus on famine still scarring our world and crucifying some 339 million people, the most ever. At the current time, funding for the UN's World Food Programme has only reached 58 per cent of its needs target since 2016. "The needs are rising much faster than the actual money coming in" the UN co-ordination office said, meaning in practice that rations and surplus have been cut back. Yet droughts in the Horn of Africa and Sahel, floods in Pakistan, South Sudan and Libya have magnified conflicts and post-Covid effects.

In the words of Catholic Relief Services, "when you add all this up it's just exploding... and we can't keep up".

On 26th March 1963 a shockingly disturbing photo appeared in the *New York Times* of a famine-stricken child collapsed naked on a dusty desert floor with a hooded vulture behind him waiting for him to die. The boy was trying to get to a feeding centre half a mile away in Aged South Sudan, a region known in the 1990s by relief agencies as 'the hunger triangle'. Today thousands have been killed in a civil war in Sudan (now separate from South Sudan) and 18 million people are acutely food insecure, with 3.8 million children seriously malnourished. In the refugee camps in Darfur a child dies every two hours. Yet as global attention is focused, certainly in our media, on the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, the starvation in Sudan doesn't get a look in and the UN relief agencies have too little support to cope.

As half a million refugees spill over into Chad and Egypt, the region is once again becoming the world's hunger triangle.

And as politicians in UN affiliated countries fail to acknowledge this hunger crisis it is left to charitable aid agencies to do what they can.

Now is the time to spare a prayer for Sudan again and make real our own fasting and make sure our own limited efforts go to organisations such as CAFOD and Christian Aid, if nothing else to make the point that the hunger crisis is not ignored.

Plans for new extremism labels threatens anyone who doesn't back the socially-liberal agenda

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow


Last Friday night, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak treated us all to a homily on political extremism, as he stood at the podium outside of Downing Street. His stern lecture about how the dangers of extremism posed a threat to the hard-fought for democracy and freedom we enjoy here in the United Kingdom, weren't exactly incorrect, but they nonetheless left me with a distinct sense of unease.

One of the themes that bothered me was the way in which the Prime Minister compared the extremism of the Far Right with that of Islamic extremism, stating that they were both the same sides of a coin, who both feed off and embolden each other, trying to pretend that their violence is somehow justified.

Sunak isn't exactly wrong, but the problem is the way in which the term 'far right' or 'extremism', is automatically and loosely applied as a label to anyone who has what others feel to be a strong socially conservative view on anything, such as, for example, pro-life views.

As Catholic *Universe* weekly readers will be aware, last Thursday night, members of Manchester University's student pro-life association faced appalling intimidation and abuse when they attempted to hold their first meeting. As he interviewed one of the pro-life students about her ordeal, GB News host Patrick Christys commented that it ought to be acknowledged that her views were 'extreme'.

Christys, was not of course suggesting that the pro-life students deserved to be subject to physical intimidation but he was nonetheless implying that the students should understand and be prepared to accept that they will encounter hostility as a result of holding such strong views.

Believing that unborn life is worthy of protection, including in exceptional circumstances such as incest and rape, is these days deemed to be 'extreme' and thus loaded with negative political connotations.

I've lost count of the times that I have been derided as having 'extremist views on abortion', simply for advocating that an unborn child's life is as worthy of protection as their mothers, but if



Rishi Sunak makes his speech outside No 10 Downing Street

you believe that human life begins at conception, then it doesn't make sense to value some lives as being more important than others, simply because of the way in which they were conceived.

I'm regularly labelled as being 'a far right extremist', a 'krypto fascist' and even a 'stochastic terrorist' for advocating and publicly holding Catholic teaching on sex and sexuality, because, it is said, my words that point out biological truth or defend the Catholic view of marriage, are designed to incite hatred and violence.

Like many others, I am therefore, extremely concerned about the 'far right' being labelled a threat to this country, not because genuine members of the 'far right' are not a threat, but because that label is given to anyone who is not a social progressive.

The 'far-right' tag is also liberally applied to anyone who dares to express any concern about multiculturalism, such as, for example, a resident of Rochdale, or

indeed any large town or city, that has high levels of immigration and had issues with grooming gangs.

The people who expressed views on the grooming gangs were not xenophobic, nor fuelled by an inherent dislike or distrust of Muslims, but rather reacting to a problem that they had seen unfolding around them, but which nobody dared to address for fear of being thought of as racist.

Funnily enough, nobody has any problem openly discussing or condemning cases of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, for fear that they might be accused of stoking hatred, and rightly so, but any mention of the grooming gangs is treated as an indicator of disgusting bigotry.

In order to tackle the rising levels of intolerance, the Government has proposed a revised definition of extremism, which defines extremism as the 'promotion or advancement of an ideology based on intolerance, hatred, or violence that aims to undermine the rights

or freedoms of others'. This definition encompasses those who intentionally create a permissive environment for extremist ideologies, and the change would mean that groups or individuals deemed to be extremist can be excluded from government and council funding and barred from working with public bodies.

That all sounds well and good, but the terms 'intolerance or hatred', are extremely flexible. Christians in the public eye are well used to being called 'hateful or intolerant'. Same-sex marriage has been deemed a 'right' and also a 'British value' by various civil servants since its introduction, and just this week France has tragically enshrined abortion as a 'human right'. Even J K Rowling is called extreme, for her trenchant opposition for gender ideology and rejection of men being able to enter into women's intimate facilities or male participation in female sports.

This redefinition of extremism is an absolute gift to the progressive politicians hoping to gain power in the forthcoming election and must be strongly rejected.

When it comes to the issue of extremism, politicians need to realise that legislation and harsh rhetoric only serve to increase polarisation, causing both sides to become more defensive and entrenched.

The 'far-right' tag is liberally applied to anyone who dares to express any concern about multiculturalism, such as, for example, a resident of Rochdale, or indeed any large town or city, that has high levels of immigration and had issues with grooming gangs.

Bishop John rallies Catholics to join fight to save the Earth

Andy Drozdziak

Bishop John Arnold is calling on Catholics to join an environmental movement and secure our common home for future generations.

Bishop Arnold of Salford, who is also the lead bishop for the environment at the Bishops' conference of England and Wales, will be speaking at a webinar on the importance of prayer, discussion and action to tackle the environmental crisis.

The webinar, which will take place on 21st March at 6pm, will be presented by Catholic Action for Animals and hosted by the Animal Interfaith Alliance. Its theme is 'Introduction to animal rights from a faith perspective: new insights into animal agriculture.'

"This webinar for Catholics on animal agriculture will provide sound reasoning on what needs to be done with urgency if we are to care responsibly for our common home and

our brothers and sisters in our global family," Bishop Arnold said.

Bishop Arnold leads the Guardians of Creation initiative in the Salford Diocese, which offers guidance and resources to help the Catholic Church tackle the environmental crises, and he has transformed his home, Wardley Hall, into the Laudato Si' Centre.

He said: "We are a generation that is facing great challenges but also many opportunities.

"In environmental concerns, we have so much evidence of climate change events that are affecting all continents and the oceans, destroying biodiversity, disrupting agriculture, and warming our world to a point where irreparable damage will soon be done.

"But, at the same time, we have the knowledge and means to repair the damage and secure our common home for future generations."

Bishop Arnold will be joined by US Jesuit

Daniel Mascarenhas SJ, who will speak on the Biblical imperative for caring for animal rights, and Maureen Villanueva, who will present the Laudato Si' Action Platform, an initiative of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development that equips institutions, communities, and families to take practical steps towards total sustainability in the spirit of integral ecology.

Other speakers include Virginia Bell, the founder of Catholic Action for Animals and member of the Laudato Si' Animators' Network, Sarina Farb, a vegan educator, TEDx speaker, and lecturer on ethical and sustainable living, and Lisa Levinson from In Defense of Animals.

• To register for the webinar, email: Barbgard.aia@gmail.com putting 'WEBINAR 21-3-24 REGISTRATION' in the Subject line.



Bishop John Arnold at the Laudato Si Centre in Manchester. Photo: Simon Caldwell

Get your boots on for a great cause this September

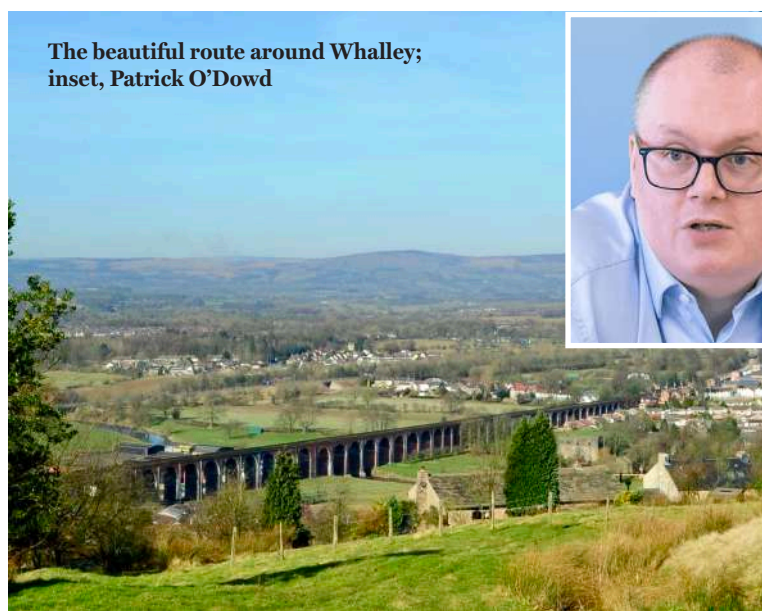
Andy Drozdziak

A charity supporting individuals and families experiencing poverty and homelessness in the North West is appealing for walkers to help them raise money for vital services as the cost-of-living crisis continues to bite.

Caritas Salford, which provides services in Lancashire and Greater Manchester, has seen a significant increase in demand for its services as people face acute crisis. To help ease its funding needs, the charity is asking hikers to join them on a special fundraising walk.

The sponsored walk, which will take place around Whalley, Lancashire, on Saturday 14th September, covers a moderately challenging route of 14km, with a shorter option available for those who prefer.

Patrick O'Dowd, director of the charity, said: "Many people are almost becoming immune to hearing the words 'cost-of-living crisis' on



The beautiful route around Whalley; inset, Patrick O'Dowd

the TV or online, but for many in our communities it's something that is all too real."

A recent report by the Joseph

Rowntree Foundation (JRF) showed that six million people were in very deep poverty – described as households below 40 per cent of the

median income after housing costs – in 2021/22. This is 1.5 million more than 20 years ago. Caritas Salford supports thousands of adults, children and young people who are experiencing homelessness, poverty, food crisis, and discrimination.

Mr O'Dowd underlined the severity of the situation faced by many. "It's not an exaggeration to say that hardworking people in our area are literally having to make decisions every day on whether they can feed their children or keep a safe, secure roof over their heads," he said.

"As a charity we're not immune to the rises in costs either, and it's increasingly difficult to fundraise at the moment so we can continue to support people when they need us most.

"We need to be able to keep the doors open on our day centres, the

food available for those who need it, the heating on in the accommodations we provide people who are experiencing homelessness."

The walk is part of the charity's Every Step campaign, backed by Salford Bishop John Arnold, which is asking people to take on a challenge in 2024 that pushes them out of their comfort zone.

As well as the Whalley walk, there are a range of other activities on offer, while people are also free to choose their own sponsored challenge.

• For more information, or to sign up to take part in the walk, [CLICK HERE](#)

To download the free pack with details of the Whalley Walk, [CLICK HERE](#)

Monks save cash and help the planet with major solar power investment



Carthusian monks at St Hugh's Charterhouse in Parkminster, West Sussex, have made a significant commitment to green energy by investing in 500 PV panels to power their 240 hectare site with free, clean, and silent electricity.

The move could lead to a carbon saving of an enormous 2,307 tonnes of CO₂ over a 20-year period.

Parkminster is a place of incredible beauty and serenity, and the Carthusians have long shown a commitment to the natural environment by growing their own food and following sustainable practices.

As well as installing 500 solar panels, the community is also investing in a battery which will store any excess electricity that can be used when the

panels are not generating power.

The organisation helping the monks, OHM Energy, is one of the South Coast's most experienced renewable energy consultants.

Brother Hesychios, a monk at St Hugh's, explained how the monks worked with OHM. "Initially, we were complete beginners, so we were hoping to be able to rely on a solar panel installer who had the ability to put themselves in the shoes – or sandals, as the case may be – of the novice solar panel user, and could explain to us in layman's terms step-by-step the process involved.

"I am very glad to say that the OHM team did this," he said.

Jason Lindfield, director at OHM

Energy Solutions, said the system will pay for itself in under seven years.

"The new system is not only silent but will transform operations, helping St Hugh's financially as well as environmentally. The projected energy yield is 231,650 kWh with an annual saving of £27,196," he said.

"At current energy prices, the entire system should pay for itself within six years and seven months, which makes a very sustainable investment for the community."

There are 26 monks living at St Hugh's, who commit to a life of solitude, spending much of their day praying, reading and chanting. They also support the community by cooking, gardening and working in the monastery's library.

In Brief

Controversial BBC drama is ratings low

A Michael Sheen drama which imagined civil uprising in Wales over the future of the Port Talbot steelworks has become one of the BBC's biggest flops.

Only 697,000 viewers watched the third and final episode of *The Way*, which was hailed by the corporation as "ambitious, powerful and surprising".

It is believed to be the lowest ever rating for a prime time BBC One drama finale and comes amid criticism of its storylines.

Complimentary sachets banned

Sachets of sauce and small bottles of shampoo will be banned from European restaurants and hotels after a deal was struck to ban single-use plastics in the EU.

Belgium, negotiating on behalf of EU member states, reached provisional agreement with the European Parliament on the law to cut packaging waste late on Monday.

Negotiators agreed on packaging waste reduction targets of 5 per cent by 2030, and 15 per cent by 2040, with a commitment that all packaging should be recyclable by 2030.

Chancellor's office vandalised

Police have opened an investigation after Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's constituency office was vandalised on Monday evening.

The front door and windows of the Chancellor's local office in Hindhead, Surrey, were defaced with graffiti in white spray paint that read: 'Die Tory scum.'

The attack is the latest in a series of aggressive acts or criminal incidents at Tory MPs' offices and homes.

10,000 steps a day is a life-saver

Walking 10,000 steps a day is enough to lower the risk of early death by almost 40 per cent – even if the rest of the time is spent on the sofa, research shows.

Studies have found that those who spend a lot of time sitting while awake, such as at their desks or watching TV, are more likely to suffer an early death and develop heart disease.

But, until now, it has been unclear whether walking can offset the effects of sitting for most of the day. New research suggests two walks a day, adding up to 10,000, is a real boost to health.

Netanyahu remains the hawk with an eye on Gaza's demise

What is Benjamin Netanyahu's plan for a post-conflict Gaza, and does it rule out a workable ceasefire?

In recent days US President Joe Biden has been promising that a deal for a ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza conflict is very close to agreement. Last week it seemed tantalisingly close before numerous civilian deaths at an aid station in Gaza angered Palestinians enough to pour cold water on the concept. But it still feels close to Biden.

But at the same time the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has revealed his vision for Gaza once the fighting stops, which appears to rule out Palestinian sovereignty on the strip.

We spoke with John Strawson, an Middle East expert at the University of East London, who has been researching and publishing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for several decades, for his view.

After weeks of wrangling, Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, recently published his vision for a post-conflict Gaza. How compatible is it with the idea of a two-state solution? To what extent is his tough line influenced by the more hawkish members of his government who take a hardline attitude to Palestinian sovereignty?

Netanyahu's plan for a post-war Gaza is simply not practical and does not rise to the political challenges of the times. It is based on two principles: Israeli security control over Gaza and a civil administration run by non-Hamas officials.

But there has been Israeli security control over Gaza in one form since 1967 and it has not brought security for either Israel or Palestinians. There is no reason to think that the Israel Defense Forces can do better now, especially after this catastrophic war.

At the same time, it is difficult to see where the non-Hamas Palestinian officials will come from. Hamas has had a tight grip of Gaza since 2007 and anyone with any experience of administration is likely to be a member of Hamas, a sympathiser or someone used to working with Hamas.

While there is opposition to Hamas in the Gaza Strip, there is little organised political opposition that could replace them.

Like the US and Britain in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, when they banned officials from the



Ba'athist party from the administration, chaos will follow. The only realistic option is to extend the power of the Palestinian Authority – presently based in Ramallah – into Gaza. But Netanyahu and his far-right allies think it will advance pressure for a two-state solution – something they are opposed to.

To what extent is this a starting point for Netanyahu? Has he left himself the political space to manoeuvre given pressure from the US and other international allies?

The plan was provided mainly due to international pressure – especially by the Americans. It should be noted that the US secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, has been raising the issue of post-conflict Gaza with the Israelis since November and it still took months to produce this flimsy document.

This gives us an insight into how difficult it is in practice for the US administration to use its apparent power over the Israeli government. Netanyahu has much experience of dealing with American politicians and plays the system very well. He knows that Biden needs a calmer Middle East as a background to his re-election bid in November. As a result, the bargaining relationship is quite complex.

Netanyahu clearly thinks he has

time on his side. The nearer it gets to the US election the more difficult it gets for Biden to please the progressive Democrats who want a ceasefire and the more traditional Democrats who have Israel's back. What Netanyahu is doing is the minimum in the hope of hanging on hoping for a Trump win.

Does Netanyahu's vision reflect the feelings of the Jewish community in Israel? What about Arab voters? The prime minister appears deeply unpopular among most voter groups – is his intransigence more about maintaining his hold on power than on seeking a workable long term solution?

While Netanyahu is deeply unpopular with all sections of the Israeli public, we have to be careful in reading the public mood on policies for a post-war dispensation. Polling suggests that support for a two-state solution is declining. Israelis have been so traumatised by 7th October that there is little support for Palestinian empowerment.

To some extent this is the result of the way that the Israelis view their country's disengagement from Gaza in 2005. It is often presented as an example of what happens when Israel ceases to occupy Palestinian land. In this account Israel leaves Gaza and Gaza becomes an armed

encampment with the aim of destroying Israel – and indeed this remains Hamas's policy, despite the group releasing an amended charter in 2017.

But the 2005 disengagement which included dismantling all Israeli settlements in the strip was not the result of negotiations, but a unilateral act.

The then prime minister, Ariel Sharon, did not want to hand over power to the elected Palestinian Authority, thinking it would boost the PA's for statehood. Instead, Israel just left – and that allowed Hamas, the major political force in Gaza, to claim that Israel has "retreated under fire".

Hamas then capitalised on the situation and went on to win the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006.

The lesson of this is that Israel needs proper negotiations that can lead to a sustainable future – and that can only mean a Palestinian state alongside Israel. That is not merely right for the Palestinians but essential in any plan to defeat Hamas. It's not only a military operation but a political one and Palestinians need to be offered a peaceful and just alternative.

The US president, Joe Biden, has recently been talking up the idea of a ceasefire. But Netanyahu's plan seems to make the deal brokered in Qatar an impossibility. Is Netanyahu serious about bringing an end to the conflict?

Or is talk about a possible deal more about Israel's need to be seen to be playing the game as well as optimism from a US president who needs to be able to show to his own voter base that he is getting results?

Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert argues that Netanyahu is dragging Israel into a long-term war to save himself. Olmert draws some drastic conclusions from his analysis, suggesting that Netanyahu and his far-right allies want a permanent war that would see Palestinians driven out of the West Bank, too. That might seem too apocalyptic – but it does convey a sense of the mismatch between US aims and the Israeli political dynamic.

Talks are going on in Qatar, in Paris and in Cairo. It is evident that the formula for a 40-day ceasefire has been agreed but there is now wrangling over the details.

Much of this focuses on the grizzly trading over how many Palestinian prisoners will be exchanged for which Israeli hostages – both those still alive and those dead.

"Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert argues that Netanyahu is dragging Israel into a long-term war to save himself ... suggesting that Netanyahu and his far-right allies want a permanent war that would also see Palestinians driven out of the West Bank..."

Actor Sophie gives big thumbs-up to different Mother's Day gift

Andy Drozdziak

Actor Sophie Thompson is partnering with Mary's Meals to celebrate Mother's Day differently this year.

Sophie – the sister of fellow actor, Emma Thompson – is encouraging people to purchase a Mary's Meals gift card instead of a traditional gift this Mother's Day, 10th March, to help feed hungry children.

She said: "The life-changing impact the charity has on millions of children and their families is won-

derful. Every child deserves to have the best start in life and, by supporting Mary's Meals, you can help make this a possibility."

Sophie Thompson has appeared in several award-winning films, including *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part One*, as well as TV soaps *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*. Sophie is also a mother to two sons, and shared about the challenges of motherhood.

"Being a mother is so rewarding, but it can come with its challenges, and I know from my own experience that it can be difficult to juggle everything all at once," she said. "The gift cards are such a thoughtful present for a loved one this Mother's Day and you'll help make a real impact to the lives of children and their families."

Feeding more than 2.4 million children in 18 of the world's poorest countries, including Liberia, Malawi and Syria, Mary's Meals serves hungry children a daily nutritious meal in their place of education.



Town turns out to honour David on namesake's day

Anne Uruska

Saint David was celebrated all over Wales last weekend with concerts, eisteddfodau and feasts of cawl followed by bara brith and welshcakes.

In Aberystwyth, a well-known Catholic parishioner, David Greaney, was chosen to lead the town's 2024 Parêd Gŵyl Ddewi (Saint David's Day Parade), with parish priest, Fr Matthew Roche-Saunders, as its chaplain.

It is a great honour reserved for a local person who has done much to help their community.

David has been an active parishioner in Aberystwyth since moving back to his local community some years ago following a period of working as a teacher in London. Within the parish, he is Chair of the governing body of Ysgol Gynradd Gatholig Padarn Sant (St. Padarn's RC Primary School), President of the SVP Conference, and a founding member of Gweithgor Padarn Sant (Saint Padarn's Working Committee), a group that works to increase awareness of the history of Saint Pa-



Parish priest, Fr. Matt Roche-Saunders and parishioner David Greaney lead Aberystwyth's parade, preceded by the Bagad Sblot traditional pipers. Photo: D. Alun Jones

darn who brought Christianity to the western region of mid-Wales c.517 AD.

Internationally, David is Chair of 'Y Gyngrs Geltaidd' (The Celtic Congress) and has recently been recognised for his work in fostering inter-Celtic relations.

As the participants processed, they were buoyed up by the music of Bagad Sblot, Aberystwyth Silver Band, and the Samba Agogo drummers.

Introducing David at the culmi-

nation of the Parêd, Siôn Jobbins, one of the organisers of the event, said: "His contribution in promoting the Welshness of the Aberystwyth area and the myriad works for the language and culture of Wales, the Celtic nations and within the Catholic Church, as well as among people from all walks of life in Aberystwyth, is testament to his activity."

Fr. Matt and David then addressed the hundreds who had processed through the town.

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Lord Deben says Gospel has links to tackling climate change

Former Chair of the Committee on Climate Change, Lord Deben, has said that there is a clear Gospel imperative for looking after our natural environment and moving away from fossil fuels.

Speaking at the Catholic Union Ampleforth Lecture, Lord Deben said that “we are supposed to be stewards of what we have been given” and yet he claimed that Britain had seen the biggest decline in biodiversity of any country in the world.

Lord Deben, who previously served as Environment Secretary before being appointed a Conservative peer, praised the contribution of the Catholic Church to the discussion around climate change. He described Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si*, as a “remarkable document.”

He encouraged the audience of school pupils and guests to consider the individual actions they could take to reduce energy consumption, including only boiling as much water as they needed and turning the heating down.

In an election year, he also encouraged people to contact their MPs and parliamentary candidates to ask them to make action on climate change a priority. He stressed the urgency of this action, saying “one day the tipping point will come and we won’t be able to recover it.”

Catholic Union Deputy Director, James Somerville-Meikle, said: “It was a great joy to hear from Lord Deben on this important subject.

“His remarks were not only based on experience, but clearly grounded in his Catholic faith.

“We are extremely grateful to Ampleforth College for hosting the event and to the Ampleforth Society for their support.”

Family to get ‘quick decision’ on inquiry

Scotland’s First Minister has promised the family of murder victim Emma Caldwell a “quick decision” over whether to order a public inquiry into police handling of the case.

Humza Yousaf met Margaret Caldwell, Emma’s mother, on Tuesday and heard her demand a judge-led probe into the police blunders, which meant Iain Packer escaped justice for almost two decades.

Packer, 51, was sentenced last week to at least 36 years in jail for the murder of Emma and a litany of other violent and sexual offences, many of which were committed after the 2005 killing.

Letters to the Editor

The Universe Catholic Weekly welcomes letters from our readers. Send your thoughts to Michael Winterbottom, at michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk. Please endeavour to keep your letter short and provide a name and address with all letters, though we are happy to anonymise your thoughts in print. We reserve the right to edit all correspondence for length when space is at a premium.

Catholics need a collective response to the election

Caroline Farrow makes a valid point in her column (*Universe*, 23rd February) when she bemoans the lack of choice ahead of us at the next election.

While I would like to see shot of the current administration, for its lack of control of the economy and what I see as total destruction of our public services, the thought of actively backing a Labour Party that seems enthralled to the abortion industry makes me shudder. As for the Lib Dems, they are arguably worse, and the far right has too many links to Reform UK to make it a palatable choice.

What, then, is a Catholic to do? I would suggest we take a leaf out of the American ‘Silver voters’ playbook.

In short, in the 1980s, the feeling grew out of elderly communities living in Florida – long the retirement village of the United States – that neither Republican or Democrat parties truly had the interests of older people at heart. There was a lack of clarity between the two main parties’ policies, and it was impossible to gauge, on a national scale, which would work best for older citizens.

It was also true that such was the wide brush of political hues covered by ‘Red’ and ‘Blue’ in US politics (interestingly, the opposite way round to the way the the colours work in the UK), that while the Republican Party as a whole might not seem the best choice for a pensioner, some individual congressmen/women or senators might be a good bet to actively look after older voters once in office.

So what the ‘silver voters’ did was interview each candidate in their constituencies and then put out a recommendation to their fellow old ‘uns, basically saying, ‘we don’t know how you usually vote but we think Candidate X is the best option for older citizens, for these reasons...’

This recommendation was then circulated around all care homes and retirement villages. In marginal constituencies the thought that a few thousand older voters could switch from one candidate to another on the back of this recommendation soon exercised politicians’ minds. Hey presto, they started to take the ‘silver vote’ seriously.

If, once in office, the politician ‘forgot’ their earlier promises, then come re-election time, the recommendation was withdrawn, with evidence provided as to why, and the recalcitrant politician found himself/herself up against a determined opposition.

Could Catholics do the same at the next election? Perhaps you could look at the boundaries of your constituency, see how many Catholic parishes it covers and pull together a committee representing them. Appoint two or three representatives, draw up a list of questions and put them, as a collective group, to each candidate before the General Election.

Once the answers are back with you, circulate them to churches with a recommendation as to which is more sensitive to Catholic concerns. It could be their view on abortion, assisted suicide, treatment of migrants, climate change, housing – whatever you think is important.

It may not make a huge difference but remember this: of the 650 parliamentary constituencies contested in 2019, 67 were won by a margin of 5% or less of votes cast. And



this is fewer than 2017, when 97 seats were won by such a narrow margin.

Based on a seat having 75,000 potential voters, and a turnout of 67%, that would mean 50,000 votes are polled. A win of 5% of less is just 2,500 people. In other words, it doesn’t need a huge number of people to swap sides to back a more favourable candidate to Catholic causes, to make a huge difference to the outcome of an election.

**Terry Davies
Stockport**

God is talking – and listening – in prayer

I disagree with Michael Caine describing prayer as always a one-way conversation with God (*Our special prayers are a one-way conversation*, *Universe*, 23rd February). The word ‘conversation’ implies that two people are involved in both speaking and listening.

Yes, we talk to God in prayer, but just as important is the need for us to be silent, so that we can listen to what God might be saying to us through that prayer. (We have two ears, but only one mouth!)

Therefore, prayer is always (or should be) a two-way conversation with God.

**Margaret Dimambro,
Leamington Spa**

TV sci-fi classic is coming to pass

There was a TV series some years ago called *Logan’s Run*. It was set in a dystopian society where the people lived until 30 and then had to ‘make room’ for the next generation and were forcibly euthanised.

Of course in those days it was just a TV programme; doctor assisted dying or assisted suicide was quite unthinkable.

Not any more; in an interview recently a Canadian doctor said she had ‘dispatched’ 300 people so far under her country’s doctor assisted dying programme. No serial killer

could get near such a tally without being apprehended. Worse, she found her work to be quite ‘satisfying’ – the state bestowing its compassion on the vulnerable sectors of the population.

Others in Canada, particularly the old, disabled and infirm, are finding the policies lacking in compassion, however. One was a military veteran in need of a ramp to leave their house in a wheelchair; they were offered euthanasia as an alternative. Others who have run up large medical bills or were taking up bed space in hospitals are also frequently ‘nudged’ in that direction.

So a combination of withholding the assistance needed for a good quality of life or the pressure to not become a financial burden has sent many to an early grave under the veil of ‘state compassion’.

Often, as people age or are afflicted with illness or disability, their external identity diminishes. This is due to loss of jobs, finances, or apparent usefulness. Their roles shrink as their families grow-up and leave and they retire, perhaps living alone when spouses die. And a God-less society is not capable of seeing true worth or dignity anymore. But the reality is so far from this as we know as believers. Because despite the losses we take in life, despite deterioration of body and mind we are and will always be children of God, sons and daughters, co-heirs of the kingdom of God. We have immortal souls with a dignity far greater than we can possibly imagine; destined to an eternity of joy.

Our old age is often a time of the greatest growth as human beings, and our sufferings are that final purification to ready us to meet a Holy God.

We are not garbage to be thrown out, nor meat to be butchered. To truly die with dignity is to do so in the manner and time that God provides for, regardless of how it looks to anyone else.

**Stephen Clark,
Manchester**

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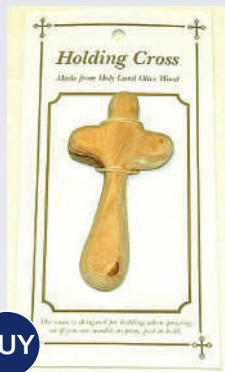


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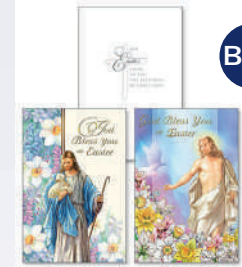


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... and St Patrick's Day



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Pope Francis makes a playful gesture to a child during a meeting with members of the tribunal of Vatican City State at the Vatican

Pope reassures children, we can make the world better

Making the world a better place for everyone starts with prayer and little steps like saying hello, sorry or thank you, Pope Francis said in a letter to the world's children.

'Our world will change if we all begin with these little things, without being ashamed to take small steps, one at a time,' he wrote in the letter that was released 2nd March.

The letter included an invitation for the youngsters to participate in the first World Children's Day meeting in Rome, which is taking place on 25-26th May. 57,000 children from 60 countries have already signed up to attend, the Vatican said, and they hoped 100,000 children ages 6-12 would attend the opening event at Rome's Olympic Stadium and Mass with Pope Francis the next day in St. Peter's Square.

In his letter, Pope Francis told children that they are 'a source of joy for your parents and your families, but also for our human family and for the Church, in which each of us is like a link in a great chain stretching from the past to the future and covering the whole earth.'

Children also remind everyone of their need and desire 'to grow and flourish,' and that all people are someone's sons and daughters and are brothers and sisters, he said. 'We would not be alive unless others brought us into this world, nor could we grow without having others to love and from whom to receive love.'

'The fact that we are small reminds us that we are also frail and need one another as members of one body,' the pope wrote.

Pope Francis explained to the children that he chose the Bible passage, "Behold, I make all things new," as the theme for World Children's Day because it is a reminder that to make the world a better place, people need to be united with Jesus and with others.

'With Jesus, we can dream of the

renewal of our human family and work for a more fraternal society that cares for our common home,' the pope wrote.

Sharing "a special secret" with the children, Pope Francis told them that if they really want to be happy, they need to pray every day 'because prayer connects us directly to God' and 'fills our hearts with light and warmth.'

And even the youngest people can understand that they cannot be happy all alone 'because our joy increases to the extent that we share it,' he said. 'Joy is born of gratitude for the gifts we have received and which we share in turn, and it grows in our relationships with others.'

'When we keep the blessings we have received to ourselves, or throw tantrums to get this or that gift, we forget that the greatest gift that we possess is ourselves, one another: all of us, together, are God's gift,' the letter said. 'Other gifts are nice, but only if they help us to be together. If we don't use them for that purpose, we will always end up being unhappy; they will never be enough.'

'Think of your friends and how great it is to spend time with them: at home, at school, in the parish and the playground, everywhere,' Pope Francis wrote. 'Playing, singing, discovering things, having fun, everyone being together and excluding no one.'

'Friendship is wonderful and it grows only in this way: through sharing and forgiving, with patience, courage, creativity and imagination, without fear or prejudice.'

In preparation for World Children's Day, the pope asked them to pray the Our Father every morning and every evening with their families and to think about the words.

Jesus, he said, "is calling us and he wants us to join actively with him, on this World Children's Day, to become builders of a new, more humane, just and peaceful world."

Bishops should be pastors, not climbers with an eye on progress

Pope Francis asked the Armenian Catholic bishops responsible for selecting their episcopal colleagues to choose bishops who are more interested in the people they serve than in advancing their Church careers.

Meeting with the Armenian Catholic bishops' synod, the pope asked them to select bishops who are "devoted to the flock, faithful to pastoral care and not driven by personal ambition."

Church law gives the Eastern churches autonomy and decision-making power over the territory of their traditional homelands, including to elect bishops, but gives the pope power over their dioceses in the rest of the world.

He warned against selecting bishops who see their eparchy as "a stepping-stone" before reaching another, more prestigious posting. Such bishops, risk committing "pastoral adultery."

"The children of your dear

people need the closeness of their bishops," Pope Francis said. "I know that they are in diaspora throughout the world in great numbers and sometimes in vast territories, where it is difficult for them to be visited, yet the Church is a loving Mother and she cannot fail to seek every possible means of reaching them and offering them God's love in their own tradition."

The pope added that although their Church may be small in numbers, "God loves to work wonders in those who are small," and he asked them care for the poor "by exemplifying an evangelical life far removed from the pomp of riches and the arrogance of power, by welcoming refugees and by supporting those in the diaspora as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters."

They need to take "pastoral care of vocations" by ensuring that seminarians and others formed in religious life "be solidly grounded

in an authentic Christian life, far from any 'princely pretensions.'"

Seminarians must learn how to be docile to the Holy Spirit and serve the people of God "with joy born of charity, not with the unbending and insensitive attitudes of bureaucrats," he wrote.

The pope also recalled the people fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan that was taken back by the local military in September 2023, causing more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians to flee.

"Let us all take up the cry for peace, so that it may touch hearts that have been untouched by the sufferings of the poor and lowly," he said.

Pope Francis asked the bishops to pray with him "in anticipation of the day when, God willing, we will be able to celebrate at the same altar with our brothers and sisters of the Armenian Apostolic Church," an Oriental Orthodox Church.

Vatican publishes full papal schedule for Holy Week, Easter

Justin McLellan

Pope Francis' calendar for Holy Week and Easter is just as full as in previous years despite a mild illness which has caused him to cancel meetings in the days leading up to the release of his liturgical calendar for March.

The pope cancelled meetings on 24th and 26th February because of "flu-like symptoms," the Vatican said. Although he held his general audience two days later,

an aide read Pope Francis' prepared remarks, and the Vatican said he briefly visited a Rome hospital after the audience for medical tests (see pg 15).

The pope is scheduled preside over all the major liturgical celebrations of Holy Week.

As is customary when first publishing the pope's calendar for Holy Week, the Vatican did not provide the time or place for his celebration of the Mass of the

Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, March 28. Pope Francis has made it a tradition to celebrate the Mass and foot-washing ritual at a prison or detention center, refugee center or rehabilitation facility; last year he did so at a prison for minors in Rome.

Here is the schedule of papal liturgical ceremonies and events for March:

- March 24, Palm Sunday, morning Mass in St. Peter's Square.
- March 28, Holy Thursday, morning

Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

- March 29, Good Friday, afternoon liturgy of the Lord's passion in St. Peter's Basilica.
- March 29, Way of the Cross at night at Rome's Colosseum.
- March 30, Easter vigil Mass in the evening in St. Peter's Basilica.
- March 31, Easter morning Mass in St. Peter's Square, followed at noon by the pope's blessing 'urbi et orbi' (to the city and the world).

Genders' unique skills should be cherished

The gifts of men and women are “fruitful” together, and to erase the difference between men and women “is to erase humanity,” Pope Francis said.

“Today the worst danger is gender ideology, which erases differences,” he said, underlining that he has asked for studies to be done “about this ugly ideology of our time, which erases differences and makes everything equal.”

“To erase difference is to erase humanity. Man and woman, on the other hand, stand in fruitful ‘tension’ with each other, he said.

The pope made his remarks as he opened an international congress in the Vatican Synod Hall titled, ‘Man-Woman: Image of God. For an Anthropology of Vocations.’

The congress was sponsored by the Center for Research and Anthropology of Vocations, which was founded in 2020 by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, retired prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, to promote and support research in the social sciences on vocations in society.

The pope greeted the attendees and told him that Mgr Filippo Ciampanelli would read his prepared text because “I still have a cold and I get worn out from reading.”

However, he continued speaking off-the-cuff, saying, “I would like to emphasise one thing: It is very important that we have this meeting between men and women, because today the worst danger is gender ideology, which erases differences.”

As he often has done in the past,



Pope Francis with Cardinal Marc Ouellet

the pope referenced the dystopian science fiction novel, *Lord of the World*, written in 1907 by Mgr Robert H. Benson, a former Anglican vicar, encouraging his audience to read it. He reiterated that he considers the novel to be “prophetic because it shows this trend of erasing all differences.”

In his prepared remarks, the pope said that a basic truth needs to be rediscovered “in all its beauty: the life of the human being is vocation.”

Every person needs to discover and express himself or herself “as called, as a calling, as a person who finds fulfillment in listening and responding, sharing his or her being and gifts with others for the common good.”

People today sometimes “forget or obscure this reality, with the risk of reducing the human being to his or her material needs or basic needs alone, as if he or she were an object

without a conscience or will, simply pulled along by life like a gear in a machine,” he pointed out.

“Instead, men and women are created by God and are the image of the Creator; that is, they carry within themselves a desire for eternity and happiness that God himself has sown in their hearts and which they are called to realise through a specific vocation. We are called to happiness, to the fullness of life, to something great for which God has destined us.”

“We are part of a plan of love, and we are invited to go outside of ourselves and realise it, for ourselves and for others.”

Pope Francis told participants to “not be afraid during these rich moments in the life of the Church.”

“The Holy Spirit asks us for one important thing: fidelity. But fidelity is being on a journey, and fidelity often leads us to take risks,” he said.

Vatican remains silent on pope's health after CT scan

The Vatican has remained tight-lipped over the pope's health, apart from a simple statement that he had gone into Rome's Gemelli Isola Hospital for “diagnostic tests.”

Concern was raised at the end of February after he missed meetings on two separate days, including a meeting with bishops from Italy's Emilia Romagna region making their *ad limina* visits to the Vatican.

The bishops, including Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna, had their meeting three days later.

Pope Francis held his weekly general audience on 28th February but began the gathering by telling visitors, “I'm still a bit sick,” and having aides read most of his

prepared remarks. Immediately after the audience, “Pope Francis went to the Gemelli Isola Tiberina Hospital for some diagnostic tests. Afterward, he returned to the Vatican,” said a statement from the Vatican press office.

The Reuters news agency reported that the pope underwent a CT scan at the hospital on Rome's Tiber Island; the Vatican press office did not respond to a request for confirmation.

While the 87-year-old pope cancelled appointments at the end of February, the Vatican has offered no updates on his health apart from to say he intends to cover a full diary of events over Easter.

Make the vulnerable your priority

Jesus did not teach his disciples to organise agencies to help vulnerable people, but gave the example of encountering them, listening to them and helping them as individuals and not as “categories” of people in need, Pope Francis said.

“Jesus wanted to form his disciples in a style of living in contact with the vulnerable,” the pope told a group of Italians attending a four-day seminar on ‘Vulnerability and Community: Between Welcome and Inclusion.’

Participants work with the poor, with migrants, with incarcerated people and with those who have mobility issues or different forms of disability. Christians today, like Jesus' disciples 2,000 years ago, need to

see how he encountered people and welcomed them— “his closeness, his compassion, his tenderness,” the pope said. But, “before anything else, in order to welcome my vulnerable brothers and sisters, I must feel vulnerable and welcomed as such by Christ.”

The list of Catholic saints is filled with men and women who became saints by “loving vulnerable people like Jesus did,” he added. But that list is not exhaustive. In every community there are people who attained holiness by caring for “the little ones, the poor, the fragile and the marginalized. And it is important in our communities to share, with simplicity and gratitude, the stories of these hidden witnesses of the Gospel.”

Pope reaffirms right of order to celebrate Latin Mass

Pope Francis has told the superior general of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) that recent restrictions on the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass don't apply to his order.

Fr Andrzej Komorowski met the pope after the FSSP requested clarification on the rules.

The FSSP was established in 1988 as a society of apostolic life, a canonical status that was granted by Pope John Paul II. At the heart of its charism is the celebration of the extraordinary form of the Roman rite – or Tridentine, or Traditional Latin Mass.

Pope Francis' 2021 *motu proprio Traditionis Custodes* severely curtailed the use of Traditional Latin Mass. Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2007 apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum*, had previously allowed all priests to say Mass using the Roman Missal of 1962 without having to seek their bishop's permission.

But in *Traditionis Custodes* Pope Francis reversed this, stating that it was the “exclusive

competence” of the bishop to authorise Traditional Latin Masses in his diocese.

The following year the pope, at an audience with the FSSP, made it clear that institutes such as it were not affected by *Traditionis Custodes*, “since the use of the ancient liturgical books was at the origin of their existence and is provided for in their constitutions,” the Vatican said at the time.

The FSSP requested this week's meeting after the order said it had found “difficulties” in applying the decree addressed to the fraternity, in which the pope confirmed the right of the order to celebrate the Mass “according to the typical editions of the liturgical books, namely the Missal, the Ritual, the Pontifical, and the Roman Breviary, in force in the year 1962.”

“The pope was very understanding and invited the Fraternity of St. Peter to continue to build up ecclesial communion ever more fully through its own proper charism,” a statement from the order said.

Previously the pope is said to

have been “very impressed by the approach taken by its founders, their desire to remain faithful to the Roman Pontiff, and their trust in the Church.”

The FSSP was founded in 1988 by 12 priests and 20 seminarians who were formerly part of the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), a canonically irregular traditionalist priestly society established by French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1970. Lefebvre, one of the most influential leaders in the traditionalist movement, was excommunicated by Pope John Paul II in 1988 when he ordained four bishops for the SSPX, which was against the expressed prohibition of the Holy See.

Since then the FSSP has grown to become the largest of the *Ecclesia Dei* communities, with 368 priests, 22 deacons, and 179 seminarians. It is present in 146 dioceses, celebrates Mass in 246 locations, and counts 48 personal parishes.

The average age of their members is 39.



WORLD

Editorial: Andy Drozdziak – news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Bishop calls for talks as Kenya takes tough line on LGBTQ

A Catholic bishop in Kenya has called for wider discussions on homosexuality, as some religious leaders demanded a crackdown on LGBTQ activities in the East African nation.

Christian and Muslim leaders urged Kenya's president to take a strong stand against homosexuality, to protect the people's "religious, cultural, and traditional ideals," the statement said.

Anti-LGBTQ laws are common across Africa, with Ghana's parliament passing a bill on 28th February that imposes a prison sentence of up to three years for anyone convicted of identifying as LGBTQ, and a maximum five-year jail term for forming or funding LGBTQ groups.

Growing opposition to same-sex groups in African culture also may give a glimpse into why the Vatican declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*, allowing informal, non-liturgical blessings for Catholics in irregular or same-sex unions, was so widely rejected on the African continent.

Religious leaders in Nairobi protesting increased efforts to promote an LGBTQ "agenda," pointed to the Kenyan president saying that Uganda and Tanzania had "shown the way in their unequivocal stand against these evils."

Homosexuality is illegal in Kenya, but Kenyan Bishop Peter Kihara Kariuki of Marsabit urged public participation and consultations to gauge the people's feelings and stand on the issue before any further actions are taken or any new laws are made.

"There should be an amicable understanding of what is wanted, what is acceptable and what is not," he said.

World leaders have a 'moral duty' to find a path to peace

Pope Francis has repeated his call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, saying that the international community has a "moral duty" to pursue disarmament worldwide.

The pope encouraged "the continuation of negotiations for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza so that hostages may be freed immediately and return to their anxiously waiting loved ones, and the civilian population can have safe access to urgently needed humanitarian aid."

"I carry daily in my heart, sorrow, to see the suffering of the populations in Palestine and in Israel," he said, lamenting the "thousands of dead, wounded, displaced" and the immense destruction and suffering.

"I ask myself: Do we really think we can build a better world in this way?" he asked. "Do we really think we can achieve peace? Enough, please!"

The pope repeatedly has called for an end to violence in the Holy Land since 7th October last year, when Hamas attacked Israel and Israel retaliated by invading Gaza.

He also asked people to not forget about the conflict in Ukraine, "where so many die every day."

Pope Francis also drew attention to the celebration of International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness, which was on Tuesday. "How many resources are wasted on military spending that, as a result of the current situation, sadly continues to increase," he said. "I sincerely hope that the international community understands that disarmament is first and foremost a duty: disarmament is a moral duty."

Disarmament, he said, "requires the courage of all members of the great family of nations to move from



Displaced Palestinian children wait to receive food in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip. Children are at risk of starvation, the UN has said, and 25 have died of malnutrition in recent days
Photo: Mohammed Salem, Reuters)

a balance of fear to a balance of trust."

Pope Francis has often taken aim against the arms industry. At his general audience on 23rd November he said, "everyone loses" due to war except for arms manufacturers who "earn a lot from the death of others," and in his message on Christmas Day 2023 he criticised the vast amount of public spending on weapons.

The pope's call came as peace hopes took a setback after what patriarchs and heads of the Churches in Jerusalem described as a "wanton attack" by Israeli soldiers on Palestinian civilians in Gaza City who were waiting for a delivery of humanitarian aid last week. Gaza authorities said the attack left more than 100 people dead.

In the aftermath of "horrifying events" and their "cruel context," Christian leaders condemned the attack "against innocent civilians," and called "for the warring parties to reach an immediate and lengthy" ceasefire that "allows for the speedy disbursement of relief supplies" throughout the Gaza Strip. They also called for "a negotiated release" of all prisoners.

The war has now claimed the lives of 30,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, and 1,500 Israelis. Around 100 Israelis are still believed to be being held captive by Hamas, though their whereabouts and condition is unknown.

International aid organisations have warned about increasing dangers of infectious disease spreading and starvation, with the World

Health Organization (WHO) chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, saying visits to Al-Awda and Kamal Adwan hospitals had revealed "grim conditions". 25 children being cared for in the two hospitals had died of "severe levels of malnutrition and dehydration", he said.

Dr Tedros also reported "severe levels of malnutrition, children dying of starvation, serious shortages of fuel, food and medical supplies" in northern Gaza, where an estimated 300,000 people are living with little food or clean water.

The UN warned last week that famine in Gaza was "almost inevitable". At least 576,000 people across the Gaza Strip faced catastrophic levels of food insecurity, and one-in-six children under two were suffering from acute malnutrition.

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No joy in US as candidates confirmed

Donald Trump's predicted romp to becoming the Republican candidate in November's US presidential elections was confirmed on Wednesday after he took 12 out of the 13 states up for grabs on 'Super Tuesday.'

Only the strongly Democrat state of Vermont rejected him, opting for his only rival in the contest, Nikki Haley.

It means the election will be a rematch of 2020's, with the outspoken right-winger taking on the current president, Joe Biden.

While Trump continues to inspire his core support, however, the thought of the two running off against each other again in November doesn't appear to be inspiring voters. The pair – at 80 for Biden and 77 for Trump – will be the oldest to contest the election, and if Trump wins he would be the second oldest President ever; only Biden



would beat him to top spot.

It's perhaps not surprising, therefore, that younger voters are dismayed by the choices available, but the malaise goes deeper than that.

A group of swing voters interviewed by the BBC offered a glimpse of how many in the USA view this year's election. One said 'if I were to consider voting Democratic, my candidate choice would not be Biden,' while another said 'a second Biden term means a new world war against China over Taiwan.'

A third – perhaps tellingly – said

'I am saddened that the Democrats are staunchly supporting a very elderly man with apparent cognitive issues,' but at the same time said he was 'disgusted' that his Republican challenger would be Trump.

A minority American said she was scared 'Trump will stock the Supreme Court with more conservatives who will threaten women's rights and minorities,' while another said, with all the wars in the world at the moment, 'I don't approve of how Biden has been handling those situations, but I am certainly not willing to add fuel to the fire by electing Trump. He's a loose cannon.'

But the final comment possibly encapsulates what many voters think: 'Whoever sits in the White House next needs to be at the top of their game, not in their last inning.'

'I wish younger candidates in both parties had a chance this time.'

Church is always there for us, says Ukrainian priest

A Ukrainian Catholic priest has praised the Church's support for his nation's heroic stand against oppression as it faces its third year of war.

Fr Leszek Kryza said the Catholic Church has "saved millions of people" since the invasion by Russia.

A million people have been helped by Caritas Poland, with aid in 2023 alone valued at \$37 million. Another 1.6 million have been helped by the Knights of Columbus, with \$22.3 million raised for Ukraine since 2022.

CNEWA rushed \$5.8 million in emergency funds over the past year to Church-led relief efforts, while the Vatican sent 240 trucks with supplies to Ukraine over the past two years, with \$2.2 million of its charity funds dedicated to Ukraine just in 2022.

Asked what percentage of help for 17 million Ukrainians, including five million of those internally displaced, comes from the Catholic Church, Fr Kryza said, "I tried to calculate it once, but it's impossible! Because it's not that you'll gather data from Caritas, Knights of Columbus, the Vatican and other 'big actors.' It's the orders, female and male congregations, individual priests, volunteers spread across Ukraine, it's just one big Church on the front lines."

Polish Dominican Sister Mateusza Trynda, who is working in the western Ukraine city of Zhovkva, was another full of praise for the Church's efforts. Sr Mateusza was on the front pages of Polish media when the war started, pictured with a ladle and huge pot of soup, standing in the middle of a field next to the road leading to the Ukrainian border with Poland.

Now she said the help looks different – but the needs are just as

great. "We distributed aid packages to 700 people in February, but in the war's peak moment we handed aid to a group of 2,500 internally displaced people regularly," she said.

"We distribute everything that's needed. So there's food, clothing, furniture, mattresses, pillows, quilts, dishes, heaters, irons," she said.

"In one of our trucks we had thousands of jeans. One was full of chairs. And in one we sent hundreds of electric shavers," Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity and papal almoner, said.

"The war is not ending. The needs are huge. I am told by Ukrainians all the time, 'We need everything.' Everything," he said, adding that the shavers were sent to soldiers and that he recently received a picture of a female sergeant cutting the hair of her colleagues somewhere on the front line.

Papal almoner Cardinal Krajewski has visited Ukraine seven times since the start of the full-scale invasion, including Zaporozhzhia, where had to escape gunfire in September 2022.

He emphasised that the Church won't stop helping as it's the "pure Gospel" to stand with those that suffer, but that discussions in the West regarding whether to send or not to send aid to Ukraine are worrying him the most.

"Being divided never helps, it doesn't help any country, it doesn't help any church, and it doesn't help Ukraine," he said.

"I know so many people who still dedicate all their free time of the year to go to Ukraine and distribute help as volunteers – the world needs to learn how to be compassionate from them," he said.

Residents of Avdiivka in eastern Ukraine pictured in January holding aid packages delivered by members of the Knights of Columbus to the town, which was under heavy bombardment at the time. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Knights have assisted those affected by Russia's full-scale invasion.

In early February, Avdiivka fell to Russian troops, and by Feb. 18 Russia said it had full control of the city in Ukraine's Donetsk region. Photo: Knights of Columbus



An emergency responder is pictured slowly winching the female driver of an articulated lorry to safety after she had crashed through railings on a bridge in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. Police say the driver was stuck in her cab for 40 minutes before a rope system could be set up and a specialist officer was able to rappel down to the cab and hook her up to a safety harness and bring her out safely. Louisville Fire Chief Brian O'Neill praised the officer who led the rescue, adding that the driver was taken to hospital as a precaution, but was reportedly fine, though in shock. Photo: Louisville Metro Police Department



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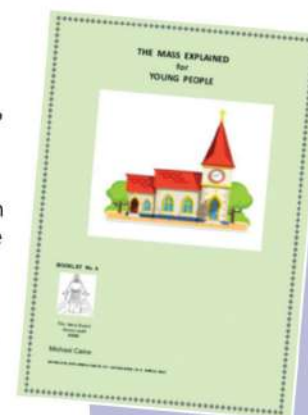
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- Why do we go to Confession – and Mass?
- Why do we say Amen?
- What's Communion about?
- What's God's Grace?

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Deputies celebrate but bishops call for fasting and prayer as France makes abortion a constitutional right

Caroline De Sury

French bishops called for fasting and prayer as abortion was enshrined in the constitution by an overwhelming 780-72 vote, accompanied by a standing ovation when the result was announced as the parliament met in Versailles.

After several months of legislative process, the French Congress, a special body composed of both chambers of parliament, revised the country's 1958 constitution to enshrine women's 'guaranteed freedom' to abort in Article 34, making France the first country in the world to explicitly include the right to abortion in its constitution.

French bishops called for "fasting and prayer" in a statement with the Pontifical Academy for Life releasing its own communique on the same day, saying, "There can be no 'right' to end a human life."

Academy members lamented the debate over the bill in France "did not touch on support mechanisms for those who wish to keep their child" and added that the "protection of human life is humanity's primary objective, and can only develop in a world free of conflict, where science, technology and industry are at the service of the human person and of fraternity."

In a statement signed by Archbishop Éric de Moulins-Beaufort of Reims, president of the French bishops' conference, and vice presidents Archbishop Vincent Jordy of Tours and Bishop Dominique Blanchet of Créteil, the bishops cried out that "of all European countries, even Western Europe, France is the only one where the number of abortions is not decreasing and has even increased over the last two years," and that France "would have honored itself by instead promoting the rights of women and children."

French President Emmanuel Macron had said in October 2023 that "in 2024, the right of women to choose abortion will become irreversible." This followed an earlier promise Macron made on International Women's Day last year on abortion, which was seen as a response to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Supreme Court in 2022.

In the wake of Congress's move that French media called "historic," French bishops said that abortion "remains an attack on life from the very beginning," and "cannot be seen from the sole angle of women's rights," regretting that "the debate initiated did not mention support measures for those who would like



French Deputies stand and applaud as the right to an abortion is enshrined in the constitution



to keep their child" – an argument repeated in the statement issued by Pontifical Academy for Life as the decision was confirmed.

Several French bishops additionally stressed their anger and expressed the danger for freedom of expression about abortion in their country.

Archbishop Olivier de Germay of Lyon pointed out that constructive debate is no longer possible in France on the issue of abortion. "It is becoming difficult to express oneself on this subject without running the risk of becoming a media target," he said.

With the bill, Archbishop Germay said, France put "the equal dignity of all human life – a principle with constitutional value – and freedom of access to abortion on the same level. How to explain such a contradiction?" he asked.

Abortion is free of charge, allowed up to 14 weeks of

pregnancy and is far from being called into question in France.

In 2022, there were over 234,000 abortions for 723,000 births in France, the highest number of abortions since 1990 and the highest number among European Union countries. It's a "sad record," said the bishops. "This dramatic reality goes beyond the mere question of a right for women" and "is not progress."

Lucie Pacherie, a lawyer for the Jérôme Lejeune Foundation, which continues the research of geneticist Jérôme Lejeune on Down syndrome, said: "The freedom to have an abortion was in fact already constitutionally recognised."

The threat, she said, is that the Congress has now "placed it at the rank of a supreme constitutional value."

"This elevated it to a higher level than other freedoms – such as freedom of conscience or freedom

of expression – which are only recognised by (statements issued by) the Constitutional Council or in other texts with constitutional value," she said. Pacherie warned "this will put a greater pressure on those who seek to understand and remedy the often dramatic causes which can lead women to have an abortion."

In 1958 – the same year when the now-updated constitution was passed – Lejeune and two other scientists, Marthe Gautier and Raymond Turpin, discovered the chromosomal anomaly responsible for trisomy 21, known as Down syndrome.

Dismayed to see his discovery used in prenatal diagnosis, and leading to abortions, he campaigned throughout his life for the defence of human life from conception until natural death. St. John Paul II asked Lejeune to become the founding president of the Pontifical Academy for Life. He died in 1994. In 2021 Pope Francis approved a decree on his heroic virtues, declaring Lejeune 'venerable'.

"I am concerned about the taboo that now exists on this issue," Pacherie added. "The deputies were unable to raise the ethical questions that the medical act of abortion poses, to propose amendments or evoke the conscience clauses for doctors, without being booed. The number of abortion is increasing in France, and it is impossible to debate on this subject," echoing the concerns of the bishops.

Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris, speaking on Catholic-run Radio Notre Dame, expressed his "sadness" at seeing "the fact of not transmitting life" promoted as a

positive value.

"We guarantee the freedom not to carry a pregnancy to term. But what guarantees do we have that women will have the freedom to make another choice? What support will they have?" he asked.

Since 1975, women have had a legal right to terminate their pregnancy in France. The late Simone Veil, who served as France's health minister in several governments and is considered a godmother of French abortion rights called the Veil Act, always claimed that "no woman resorts to an abortion with a light heart" and that it is "always a tragedy." Since 2012, abortion procedures have been fully reimbursed by social security.

Macron described the latest decision as "French pride" that had sent a "universal message."

However, some claimed Macron had played a cynical game by making abortion a constitutional right. A French political observer said: "His government has been moving more to the right in the past two years, and this has created tensions in his centrist Renaissance (En Marche!) movement.

"By making abortion rights a big issue he is keeping those on the left of his party on side."

He added: "I think he was also hoping Marianne le Pen of the Front National would make a big thing in opposing this and create ground on which Macron could attack her as conservative and against women's rights. That didn't happen though, as le Pen refused to walk into his trap."

Following the vote, the Eiffel Tower in Paris was lit up in celebration with the message: 'My Body My Choice.'

"This constitutionalisation of abortion is the constitutionalisation of a lie," Pacherie said. "This lie hides the objective reality of abortion, which regards an unborn child, and a woman in a situation of distress."

The Pontifical Academy for Life appealed to "all governments and all religious traditions to do their best so that, in this phase of history, the protection of life becomes an absolute priority."

The French bishops added in their statement, "As Catholics, we will always have to remain servants of the life of each and every one, from conception to death," and they prayed that "our fellow citizens will rediscover the taste for life, for giving it, for receiving it, for accompanying it, for having and raising children."

Venezuela's indigenous demand help after mine disaster claims many lives

Manuel Rueda

The collapse of a gold mine in Venezuela that killed 16 workers and left dozens more trapped has cast a new light on the way the country treats its indigenous people as well as the country's failing industrial sector.

Local Church leaders said the mine had been working illegally since 2016 having been opened in an area allegedly controlled by indigenous people in Venezuela's remote southern border.

They also criticised the bishops' conference who they accused of remaining silent over the tragedy, which left the local community devastated and angry.

Fr Alexander Cranes, from the village of La Paragua, said that around 700 people were still waiting to be evacuated on boats from the Bulla Loca gold mine.

However, Fr Cranes noted that many villagers want the mine to be reopened again by the government, which shut it down after the tragic accident. He said some of those who were still at the site were resisting calls to evacuate.

"Mining is the main economic activity in this part of Venezuela," Fr Cranes explained. "And now people are upset that the government has taken over the mine. They want to form groups to reclaim it."

Bulla Loca is an open-pit mine where hundreds of people worked without wages, selling whatever gold they could find at the mine.



"Do you know what forces us to get in there?" Margara Sanchez, whose family all work at the mine. "The need that the people of La Paragua are experiencing. The only livelihood that the town has is mining. Help is needed!"

It is believed undermining left one of the mine's walls weak until it disintegrated, sliding onto dozens of miners at the bottom of the pit.

Fr Cranes said rescue workers were still searching for bodies that could be buried under several tons of rocks and sand, and estimated that the death toll could be higher than what the government has reported. "I know people who are providing security there and they say they counted 22 dead," he said.

The mine has no road access. It is located near a river, seven hours

upstream from La Paragua.

Lower than usual rainfall has made the river less navigable and complicated access to the mine.

The collapse of Bulla Loca is the third fatal accident in Venezuela's gold mines since November. Sixty people were killed in 18 mining accidents in Venezuela last year, according to a report by the nongovernmental organisation SOS Orinoco, including one in December that caused 13 deaths.

It has prompted calls from NGOs and some Church leaders for stricter regulation of these mines, which also have polluted rivers and led to deforestation.

Fr Arturo Peraza, the rector of Venezuela's largest Catholic University, the Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, said that

mining has already polluted, or destroyed 38,610 square miles of land in Venezuela, including large tracts in Indigenous reservations.

Fr Peraza, who is one of Venezuela's leading Jesuits, called on Catholic groups in the country to ramp up efforts to help Indigenous people protect their lands.

"Mining in the south (of Venezuela) is seriously threatening the rights of Indigenous people that have been recognised by the Constitution and other treaties" Fr Peraza said. "We need to accompany Indigenous people in the defence of their rights."

Bram Ebus, an expert on environmental crimes at the International Crisis Group, said that informal gold mining has been

The aftermath of the disaster, which claimed at least 16 workers' lives, possibly many more

growing in Venezuela as the administration of President Nicolás Maduro looks for ways to replace oil revenues that have diminished greatly due to years of economic mismanagement and US trade sanctions.

In 2016, Maduro issued a decree that opened a large swath of land around the Orinoco River to gold mining, hoping to attract international investors. But few bought into the plan, due to the Venezuelan government's previous decisions to nationalise mining companies with little warning.

Meanwhile, rebel groups from neighbouring Colombia and criminal syndicates started to 'colonise' the south of Venezuela, Ebus said, and set up their own gold mines.

Today most of the gold mines south of the Orinoco River have been built without proper permits and without consultations with Indigenous people.

Ebus said they are run by criminal groups that "pay kickbacks in gold to state authorities to allow these illicit activities to continue."

"These informal gold mines are built by people who are not mining engineers, and they haven't been designed well," Ebus said. "So they are prone to collapse with the movements of the earth, or when the miners wash away the sides of the pits. That is what happened in Bulla Loca, and it is likely to happen again."

Russia's Catholics told to keep speaking up as Navalny buried

Mourners gather to watch the funeral procession in a Moscow suburb



Prominent Russian Catholics have urged Church members to continue condemning human rights violations after the funeral of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, despite warnings people who attended could face police reprisals.

"Although I wasn't a great fan of Navalny, he was capable of mobilising large groups wishing to classify themselves as liberal opposition – and he also had courage to highlight theft and corruption among the power elite," said Daria Drozdova, a philosophy professor.

"Navalny was declared an extremist, so people inside Russia cannot speak in his defence unless they're ready to be imprisoned themselves. But Christians abroad must show how his premature death lies on the conscience of those who made his life unbearable."

The Moscow-based lay Catholic spoke after joining mourners at the funeral of Navalny, whose death, aged 47, at a strict-regime arctic penal colony, where he was serving a 19-year sentence, was attributed to 'sudden death syndrome' by the state.

Russia's Catholic bishops' conference has remained silent on Navalny, as has the country's Nuncio, Archbishop Giovanni d'Aniello.

Navalny's brief funeral at the Orthodox Mother of God church in Moscow was attended by a restricted number of family members and Western diplomats, with thousands of mourners on the streets of Moscow and other cities.



Visitors are pictured looking at Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' on a refectory wall at Santa Maria delle Grazie Church in Milan.
Photo: Stefano Rellandini, Reuters

'This is my body': The Last Supper in art

Corine Erlandson

It is a scene immortalised in the Gospels: Jesus – knowing he is about to be betrayed, arrested and executed – sits down to eat with his Twelve Apostles. At this meal he institutes the Eucharist, changing the Passover bread and wine into his very body and blood.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each tells the story in his own way, presenting his own impression of the events that took place on that Holy Thursday night.

Since that time, where the evangelists relied on words, great artists have used colour and shape, shadow and light, to present their own interpretation of that fateful meal. They have frozen the scene in a single image, filled with nuance and symbolism.

With artistic license and genius, they have challenged others – including us – to reexamine and reconsider what happened that evening.

Leonardo da Vinci

(Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan; between 1495-1498)

Any discussion of Last Supper paintings must begin with

Leonardo da Vinci's famous rendition, a masterpiece of the Italian High Renaissance.

Da Vinci, who painted his well-known work for the dining hall of a Dominican church, didn't want to work quickly, as must be done with the *al fresco* method. (To paint *al fresco* means to apply fresh plaster, then quickly sketch and paint on the wet surface.) Instead, the artist took his time, using a dry wall and *tempera* paint.

Unfortunately, this led to disastrous results: Bubbles and scales began to appear on the surface of the painting as time passed. Then the overpainting and inept restorations that followed in subsequent centuries added to the mess. From 1977 to 1999, the wall was painstakingly restored, inch by inch.

Even without restoration, da Vinci's painting is the definitive interpretation of the Last Supper. Subsequent artists were inevitably influenced by his version.

The Italian master paints Jesus and the Twelve Apostles all seated on the same side of a long table. Christ is the centre in a mathematically ordered room. The only curved architectural element

is a rounded pediment over Jesus' head, which serves as a halo.

The apostles are positioned in groups of three, all responding in different ways to Jesus' startling statement, "One of you is about to betray me" (Mt 26:21).

They are aghast and agitated at what their Lord has just told them, asking one another, "Surely, it is not I?" Three persons to the left of Jesus is Judas, his face cast in shadow. While one hand clutches a money purse, the other reaches forward to fulfill Jesus' description: "The man who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will hand me over" (Mt 26:23).

Da Vinci broke with the tradition of placing Judas on the opposite side of the table from Jesus and the

other apostles. He also veered from the custom of depicting the moment Jesus breaks the bread, instituting the Eucharistic sacrament. Rather, he chooses a more complex and psychological moment, when Christ prophesises the ugly truth about the apostle who will betray him.

The result is a highly charged moment: Jesus at the calm centre of the painting, flanked by his agitated followers.

Titian

(Galleria Nazionale delle Marche; Urbino, Italy; 1544)

Titian's version of the Last Supper draws in part from da Vinci's, but the perspective – the "camera angle," in modern terms

"Da Vinci veered from the custom of depicting the moment Jesus breaks the bread, instituting the Eucharistic sacrament. Rather, he chooses a more complex and psychological moment, when Christ prophesises the ugly truth about the apostle who will betray him. The result is a highly charged moment: Jesus at the calm centre of the painting, flanked by his agitated followers..."

– has changed.

Titian paints a vertical painting; the table is on a slant and not all the apostles are clearly visible. Those who can be seen are responding to Jesus' startling prophecy of betrayal. But we don't see how each and every one reacts. Again, Judas is cast in shadow – he is the disciple beneath the pyramid viewed through the window.

There is something slightly off-centre about this Last Supper. Unlike da Vinci, Titian paints Jesus a little to the right. The pyramid and rotunda viewed through the window also lend a certain asymmetry to the work, reflecting the agitated response of the apostles.

Even so, there is also a closeness in this scene with Jesus and his chosen followers. We can imagine him telling the Twelve, "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15). And, only a short time later, "The hand of my betrayer is with me at this table" (Lk 22:21).

Titian is known as a supreme colourist, and here he uses warm reds, yellows and peaches. His version includes a dog, a traditional symbol of fidelity, to highlight the



Top, 'Tintoretto's Last Supper is markedly different from da Vinci's. Jesus is actively standing up, giving Communion to one of his apostles. The table is on a diagonal. There is movement and action... the Twelve talk and gesture as servants offer platters of food. This Last Supper is a dramatic stage play. With the swirl of angels and the fire from the oil lamp, it is a ghostly drama'

'Above, Dali paints a limpid background of blue sky, mountain cliffs and a setting sun. A physical but also translucent Jesus is at the table with his Twelve Apostles, all wearing priests' robes and in attitudes of deep prayer and contemplation. Judas is likely two people to the right of Jesus because that figure is the only one wearing yellow, the colour of treason...'

Left, there is something slightly off-centre about Titian's Last Supper. He paints Jesus a little to the right. The pyramid and rotunda viewed through the window also lend a certain asymmetry to the work. Even so, there is also a closeness in this scene with Jesus and his chosen followers. We can imagine him telling the Twelve, "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15). Titian's Last Supper shows an intimate moment, but one that also conveys an agitated foreboding of what is to come'

fact that Jesus, at this moment, knows the trust between Judas and himself will be broken within hours.

Titian's Last Supper shows an intimate moment, but one that also conveys an agitated foreboding of what is to come once this meal is over.

Tintoretto
(*San Giorgio Maggiore Church, Venice; 1592-1594*)

Jacopo Robusti, known as Tintoretto, painted a remarkable Last Supper in the final two years of his life.

It's interesting to compare this work with *The Gathering of Manna* (1592- 1594), a companion piece he did for the same church. *Manna*

shows Moses leading a group of Israelites collecting the bread Yahweh has sent to relieve their physical hunger.

The Last Supper also shows a group gathered for a meal but this time, there is the Bread of Life given to them by Jesus for their spiritual hunger.

Tintoretto's Last Supper is markedly different from da Vinci's. Jesus is actively standing up, giving Communion to one of his apostles. The table is on a diagonal.

There is movement and action in this banquet hall. The Twelve talk and gesture as servants offer platters of food. This Last Supper is a dramatic stage play. With the swirl of angels and the fire from the oil lamp, it is a ghostly drama.

Tintoretto relies on *chiaroscuro* (the Italian term for a dramatic use of light and dark), drama and movement to recreate his unique scene. The focus is on Jesus, with a bright halo emanating from his body, even as the busy banquet takes place all around him. The painting's emphasis is on the one who gives the bread that truly satisfies our deepest hunger.

Salvador Dali
(*National Gallery of Art; Washington, D.C.; 1955*)

In some ways, *The Sacrament of the Last Supper* by 20th-century Spanish painter Salvador Dali is literal and straightforward, unlike much of his earlier surrealistic paintings, which explored the

subconscious and dream worlds.

In the 1950s, Dali departed from his previously espoused atheism and began to examine religious subjects.

In this Last Supper, Dali paints a limpid background of blue sky, mountain cliffs and a setting sun. A physical but also translucent Jesus is at the table with his Twelve Apostles, all wearing priests' robes and in attitudes of deep prayer and contemplation.

Judas is likely two people to the right of Jesus because that figure is the only one wearing yellow, the colour of treason. But Judas' betrayal is not central in Dali's Last Supper.

Instead, the focus is on the institution of the Eucharist.

Dali doesn't paint a dinner table but an altar. He doesn't depict an everyday meal, but rather "the bread and wine which will be given up for you." His Jesus underscores the significance of this moment by gesturing to himself and pointing to the image that hovers above this scene: Jesus' chest and arms. Clearly, "This is my body to be given for you" (Lk 22:19).

In this version of the Last Supper, Dali paints a transcendent, Eucharistic moment.

As with the work of da Vinci, Titian and Tintoretto, this is not meant to be a snapshot of an event, but the artist's interpretation of it. It is meant to challenge as well as comfort, to confront as well as console.

Eucharistic adoration: A treasure of the faith

F. Douglas Kneibert

Suppose you were told that Jesus wanted to meet with you personally for an hour at your parish. Who would say no to such an invitation?

Me, for one. When Eucharistic adoration was inaugurated at our church several years ago, I politely declined to be an adorer, as I didn't feel the devotion suited me. I had come into the Catholic Church late in life and with a lot to learn in a short time, including the finer points of Eucharistic theology.

While I believed in the Real Presence, it was mainly an intellectual assent. Its profound implications had yet to settle in my soul.

As an evangelical Protestant, I had been quick to quote John 3:7 – “You must be born again” – yet skipped right over the astounding things Jesus said to his disciples only three chapters later about eating his body and drinking his blood. But Jesus made the blind see, and that included spiritual blindness, as I was about to learn.

Mainly to get some very persistent women off my back, I finally consented to put in my hour every Thursday in the chapel that had been set aside for Eucharistic devotion. At first it was just another hour in the day for me, with wandering thoughts and frequent checks of my watch. But as the weeks went by, I gradually began to use my Holy Hour more productively. I prayed. I read the Bible. I meditated. And, in time, I began to adore.

The list of notable Catholics devoted to Eucharistic adoration is a long one. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen saw it as essentially an act of obedience: “The only time our Lord asked the Apostles for anything was the night he went into agony. Not for activity did he plead but for an hour of companionship.”

Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist with his disciples in the upper room. I had often thought of the privilege enjoyed by those who were there that night. Then, while I was praying in the chapel one Thursday, it struck me: There is no difference. The Jesus who was in



the upper room is the same Jesus who is in the chapel with me. The Church makes no distinction. He is fully present – body, blood, soul and divinity – in the monstrance. Yes, he is in his Eucharistic disguise, but he is one and the same Jesus nevertheless.

As Pope Pius XII put it, “A Holy Hour of adoration testifies to the fact that the Jesus who died on the cross, is present in the Eucharist and reigns in heaven, are identical.”

This understanding constitutes the very heart of the Catholic faith, the distinctive dogma that sets us apart. It should be the treasure of every Catholic. Sadly, it is not. According to opinion surveys, which can vary widely, Catholic belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is on the decline, with an average of only around half or fewer holding it to be true.

Much has been written about ‘cafeteria Catholics’ who go down the Church line and pick and choose what to believe and what to pass up. But not believing in the

Real Presence isn't the spiritual equivalent of choosing the apple pie over the cherry. The late Jesuit Father John Hardon, writing on the centrality of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, stated: “If we believe this, we are Catholic. If we do not, we are not, no matter what people may think we are.”

If we lack physical strength or stamina, we can join a gym and begin working out. For those Catholics whose faith is weak in this area, I would recommend spending some time with Jesus in Eucharistic adoration, even if you are among the doubters. Look upon it as a spiritual gym. I discovered that you can be theologically challenged and still reap great spiritual benefits from simply being in his presence one hour a week. Jesus meets us where we are. If we persist, he will deepen our understanding.

Two virtues that are especially needed by those beginning Eucharistic adoration are humility and patience. Set aside all pride

and preconceived notions. You are in the presence of the living Lord; conduct yourself accordingly.

The blessings I have received from Eucharistic adoration are many and varied. Some I can define, and others remain more elusive, such as the growing sense that I am changing for the better in some important respects. I began to perceive this change only after I became involved in adoration.

Pope Benedict XV called Eucharistic adoration “the queen of all devotions,” a view shared by numerous popes and saints. However, the practice largely fell into disuse following Vatican II.

No one is more closely identified with its revival than Pope St. John Paul II. Here is just a sampling of his observations on the subject:

- “Jesus himself is calling you to spend one special, specific hour with him each week.”
- “The love of God and neighbor, the greatest commandment, is expressed in, and the fruit of, Eucharistic worship.”

• “Priestly, religious and missionary vocations will stem from your Holy Hour.”

The personal spiritual blessings that proceed from Eucharistic adoration are rich and abundant.

Do you wish to deepen your prayer life? The same Jesus who taught his disciples how to pray is there to help you as well, and what better place to contemplate Jesus – the highest form of prayer – than in his presence?

The same holds true for scripture reading. Jesus is the living word, and a finer tutor could not be imagined, as the two men who walked the road to Emmaus with him testified.

Praying the rosary, meditating or simply resting in the quiet of his presence, Eucharistic adoration enhances them all. Jesus also is there to hear your petitions, but we should guard against making it all about ourselves. Keep the focus on him and you can't go wrong.

Fr Hardon saw this practice as the centerpiece of devotion, saying that we “should build the whole edifice of our spiritual life around adoration.”

Of course, one does not need to be engaged in sacramental adoration to have access to Jesus. He is always available to those who come to him in faith. But the church teaches that the manifestation of Jesus in the Eucharist is “unique” and “in the fullest sense,” and therefore worthy of special devotion (CCC, No. 1374).

Just as his disciples were transformed by being in Jesus' presence, it's impossible to spend an hour with him in Eucharistic adoration and leave the same person we were when we walked in.

So consider giving it a try. If your parish has adoration, sign up to take a time slot. If the devotion is not in place, look into what can be done to obtain it. You have absolutely nothing to lose and a treasure trove of spiritual riches to gain.

I will give St. Teresa of Kolkata, a daily recipient of the Eucharist, the final word: “Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is the best time you will spend on earth.”

Initiating Eucharistic adoration in your parish

1. Along with one or two supporters, speak to your priest about your intentions. His support is essential, so make no further plans until you find out where he stands.

2. If the pastor gives the OK, form a committee to handle the various tasks involved.

As much as possible, try not to add to your priest's workload.

3. Use the parish bulletin and short talks at Masses to solicit adorers, at least two for each time slot. Consider bringing in an outside speaker to encourage interest in Eucharistic adoration.

4. Determine how many adorers you will have and then set the number of hours you can cover each day. Expand the hours as new adorers sign up.



A VIEW FROM THE PEWS

MICHAEL CAINE

ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE



The Eucharist: the greatest gift of all

At the Consecration during Mass, bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ by the priest using the powers given to him at his ordination.

This changed bread and wine is The Eucharist. It's how it can be used that makes it such a wonderful gift.

There are various ways in which we can use it, but there are three that I use when I want to pray, that is have a quiet and private conversation talking to God, or others such as the Holy Spirit, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lady and Saints.

Always remember, our ability to pray means we are never alone.

I say 'quiet and private' because this is how it is when I have a serious conversation with friends about our concerns, we tend to do it in a very quiet and private place away from interference.

I find praying in this way a very satisfying way of making me think about my concerns, knowing that my earnest requests will always be answered one way or another, and always in my best interests by whoever I'm praying to.



The benefit the Eucharist gives me is that it allows me to pray to Our Lord Jesus Christ quietly and privately, in three special ways:

1) In a church, knowing the Eucharist is in the Tabernacle if the Sanctuary Lamp is lit.

2) During an Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament when the Eucharist is exposed in a Monstrance for us to venerate.

3) After receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion during Mass.

These three situations always present me with the conditions I need to pray to Christ. They are great gifts Our Lord Jesus Christ had given me, but why do I consider them great ones?

The power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ for us to use in the ways

mentioned above leaves me with no doubt that I have special access to Christ and his great compassion whenever I need it. What a great gift.

With 1) above, I can go into any Catholic Church in the world, and if the Sanctuary Lamp is lit, I get a warm feeling knowing that the Eucharist is present in the nearby Tabernacle. This means that whenever I have any concerns, wherever I happen to be, I can go into a church and talk to Christ quietly and privately in prayer, asking for his divine help.

I need never be alone.

With 2) above, whenever there is an exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in a church, I can see the monstrance on an altar where sacrifices are made, and with a crucifix nearby, all showing his love for us. I use this time to ask him for forgiveness, help with any concerns and thank him.

It is always an uplifting experience.

With 3) above, the whole process and experience at each Mass is one of asking God to forgive us our sins and then listening to parts of the

Bible being read out so that we are reminded of how God wants us to live our lives.

This is a magnificent way of preparing us to receive the Eucharist after the priest has changed bread and wine into his body and blood of Christ at the Consecration.

When the Eucharist is offered to members of the congregation, it means that the body and blood of Christ are within us. He's not part of us because he's so much greater than we are. We become part of him. What a wonderful position to be in.

Being part of Christ through the Eucharist makes it so easy to talk to him, again in prayer quietly and privately. It's like sitting with a friend and discussing all my concerns to see if I can be helped. To me, these three ways of using the Eucharist make praying easy.

Never despair, although there is more to the Eucharist, these three situations enable me to talk quietly and privately to Christ whenever and wherever I have serious concerns.

The Eucharist is such a great gift.

JOURNEY IN FAITH

CHRIS MCDONNELL



How a funeral becomes a gathering time...

It is often said that a good meeting place for friends and family is the funeral of one of them. People make a special effort to attend, sometimes travelling long distances in order to be there.

It's a time to catch up, a time to remember, a time to laugh, a time to cry the tears of love and loss.

Last Friday, a very large crowd gathered at the gates of the church of the Icon of the Mother of God, a church in Moscow.

Wrapped against the chill wind of winter, many carried flowers. Sporadic applause broke out, accompanied by the chanting of his name.

They had come to celebrate the courageous life of a husband, a father and political opponent of Vladimir Putin, the Russian president.

Alexei Navalny had been killed a few days earlier in a Gulag in the arctic circle where he was being held as a political prisoner prior to the presidential elections due to be held shortly.

Many thousands of words have been written and spoken to mark Navalny's courageous stand on behalf of the freedom of his country.



The few that follow were written during his funeral last Friday.

May he rest in the peace of the Lord.

A Russian funeral
Alexei Navalny March 1, 2024
"You were not afraid.
We are not afraid."
At the closed gates of the church

- the Icon of the Mother of God -
the crowds gathered, occasionally
chanting,
now and then clapping, attended by
police.

"no to war",
"we will never forget",
"murderers"

then rippled into silence.
And the mourning continued.

"We won't forget you."
A circle of people holding lit candles
Surround the coffin, quietly
chanting.
According to a notice

"No photography is allowed."

A peeling bell accompanied
the coffin to the black van,
Parents. Lips pursed, followed.
His wife and children abroad, in
exile.

"Navalny
"Navalny
"Navalny

Thrown flowers litter the ground,
tears are shed
as the journey to the Borisovskoye
cemetery
concludes by an open casket
blessed with the Sign of the Cross
by numerous followers.

Later the Burial.

‘You cannot serve God and money’

The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6:24

There’s a saying that you cannot have it both ways; you cannot be married and single at the same time; you must choose between one or the other if you want to fulfil your obligations in life properly.

In today’s scripture, the Lord says you cannot serve two masters for you will either be devoted to one and despise the other. The two masters the Lord is referring to are God and money (or possessions) which he calls “mammon”.

People who make money or possessions their god are not free. They are controlled, not by the inner voice of conscience within, but by things outside of themselves. You must never forget that you are

more important than material possessions that decay and corrode and do not last. You have been chosen to follow a higher purpose, to lead a life where the beauty of character, the love of truth and the pursuit of justice for all is what defines a person, not what one possesses.

You cannot take your possessions with you when you die or, as they say, you never see a security van following a funeral to the cemetery.

There is a story about a billionaire who stipulated in his will that he wanted to be laid to rest in the newest Rolls Royce model, seated at the steering wheel and with the most expensive cigar protruding from his mouth. As the Rolls is being lowered into the

grave, one of his old friends remarks, admiringly: “Man, this is really living.”

That’s an example of how silly it could get if money or possessions become your god. The story about the billionaire is not entirely far-fetched. Think about the Egyptian pharaohs! They tried to amass every sort of material possession in this life, and to take them with them into the after-life; their bodies, their slaves, and their gold. In their ignorance, they didn’t realise that their wealth and possessions would become the prize possessions of grave robbers.

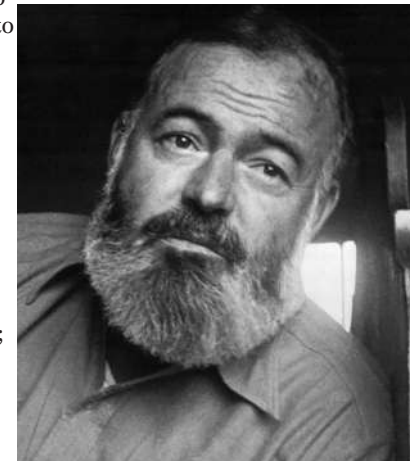
Ernest Hemingway had an interesting custom of giving everything he accumulated each year away, for he did not want to be

controlled by things. He wanted to be free in spirit to devote himself to art.

You have a greater gift than an artist’s craft. It is the gift of faith: the unmerited gift to appreciate God’s providence in your lives; to put your trust in Him who clothes the wild flowers of the field with greater splendour than even King Solomon in all his glory.

Your heavenly father, Jesus reminds us, knows what you need; so do not worry. “Every hair on your head is numbered.”

If God is on your side, who can be against you.



Ernest Hemingway had an interesting custom of giving everything he accumulated each year away, for he did not want to be controlled by things. He wanted to be free in spirit to devote himself to art.

The temple moneychangers were the opposite of Jesus

In scripture, few episodes stand out as poignantly reflective of moral and spiritual fervour as Jesus’ expulsion of the moneychangers from the temple.

The image of Jesus driving out the moneychangers is a powerful one, etched into the minds of believers across generations. It encapsulates Jesus’ vehement denunciation of corruption within the sacred precincts of worship itself, and stands as a stark symbol of his unwavering stance against the exploitation and commodification of faith.

This act, documented in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), transcends its immediate context. It has become a timeless message against the perversion of worship – a practice meant to uplift the soul and connect it with the Divine, not to line pockets or accumulate earthly riches. It invokes the prophecy of Isaiah 56:7, which Jesus reiterates: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

This biblical narrative resonates with unsettling familiarity in today’s religious landscape. Certain Churches and affluent pastors, masked by the patina of piety but mirroring the mercenary zeal of the ancient moneychangers, are criticised for repurposing worship and the devotion of their followers for financial prosperity. They preach what is colloquially termed a “prosperity gospel,” promising material blessings in exchange for unwavering loyalty and financial contributions. This approach, with roots in a capitalistic culture obsessed with profit, contradicts the very essence of worship.

The critique levelled against contemporary churches and their leaders, it seems, parallels the indignation Jesus exhibited. True worship, as revealed in scripture, is a deeper, internal experience. It doesn’t reside in ostentatious displays or the grandeur of physical structures. It is an introspective act, a communion between the individual and the divine that transcends physical spaces and ritualistic offerings. Jesus himself, in Matthew 6:6 underscores this personal dimension of worship, emphasising its privacy and



sincerity: “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret...” Similarly, St Paul’s exhortation in Romans to present one’s self as a “living sacrifice to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him” emphasises the personal nature of worship. It is not an external exhibition but an internal offering,

whereby the faithful align themselves with God’s will through reflection, renewal, and acts of love.

The modern-day moneychangers often mimic worldly trends in their approach to worship. They borrow heavily from the entertainment industry, technology, and advertising, creating a spectacle that distracts

“The image of Jesus driving out the moneychangers is a powerful one. It encapsulates Jesus’ vehement denunciation of corruption within the sacred precincts of worship itself, and stands as a stark symbol of his unwavering stance against exploitation and commodification of faith”

from the core purpose of worship – communion with God. This outward focus, devoid of introspection and genuine connection, misses the mark. It exemplifies the conflation of spiritual and material aspirations, advocating a gospel of wealth that is antithetical to the essence of Christian worship; namely, the renewal of the person through the power of God’s word.

Jesus explains, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:23–24), that true worship is devoid of the trappings of worldly influence. It transcends physical locales and structures. It’s about connecting with the Divine “in spirit and in truth” within the depths of one’s own heart.

Let us, therefore, take to heart the message etched in the story of the moneychangers. Let us not allow our worship to be corrupted by worldly influences or personal agendas, but strive for heartfelt worship, not divorced from life, but centred on a living connection with Christ.

When you realise what worship is, your whole life will become a successive act of worship in the way you follow Christ, in the way you treat one another: at work, at home, in school, in the gym, on the playground and during meals.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



When you know the value the Lord puts on us, you understand what true love is

10th March 2024 – 4th Sunday of Lent, Year B

2 Chronicles 36:14-23

For their sins the people were exiled to Babylon. But God's mercy will bring them back

All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abomination of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy.

They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up."

Responsorial: Psalm 137)

Response: Let my tongue be silent, if I ever forget you!

By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept remembering Zion.

On the willows that grew there we hung up our harps. (R./)

It was there that they asked us our captors for songs, our oppressors for joy.: "Sing for us" they said "the songs of Zion!" (R./)



How could we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten! (R./)

May my tongue cleave to my palate if I remember you not, If I place not Jerusalem ahead of my joy. (R./)

Ephesians 2:4-10
We are saved not through our own efforts but through the mercy of God

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-by grace you have been saved- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Gospel: John 3:14-21
God sent his only Son, not to condemn but to save us

And just as Moses lifted up the

serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Love lifted up

Have you noticed the types of phrases we use when describing something wonderful? I catch myself saying things like being 'over the moon' or 'on cloud-nine.' A friend talks about being in the 'seventh heaven!' Now, that admission may say a lot both of us, but I can't help thinking that our deepest experiences are those that have a power to lift us up. Such experiences take us out of

ourselves. They uplift us and we perceive things differently.

Jesus is always inviting us to see things differently. When Nicodemus sought out Jesus, he was in the dark, both really and symbolically. He couldn't see clearly. In the years that followed this late night conversation, Nicodemus became a follower of Jesus and, step by step, was drawn to see things differently. At last he finally did see.

When at the end, Jesus was really and truly lifted up, Nicodemus was not too far away.

"When we meditate on the crucifix and participate in the Eucharist we also see Jesus lifted up. Perhaps today as I lift my eyes to see him, I might ponder on the mystery of suffering and exaltation and wonder at the love that is lifted up and draws us ever closer, uplifting us as well," said Kathryn Williams.

God's work of art

A grimy painting hung for decades in the dining room of a Jesuit house in Dublin. Nobody paid it much attention until a visitor, an art expert, recognised it as a work of great value. Under close investigation, it turned out to be the work of the great Roman painter, Caravaggio. His painting of the arrest of Jesus now hangs in Ireland's National Art Gallery, and is one of the Gallery's great treasures. All those years when it hung in the dining room, it was no

The old fresco of Crucifixion in the Basilica di San Abbondio by unknown artist
Maestro di Sant Abbondio
1315 - 1324

less a masterpiece, but its real value went unrecognised.

In today's reading Paul says that "we are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life." Like that Caravaggio painting, our worth can go unnoticed even to ourselves.

We hardly think of ourselves as works of art; yet God sees us as works of art, in progress. Like the person who spotted the painting's value, God knows our true worth, and through the inspired words of Isaiah says, "You are precious in my sight, and I love you."

If we know ourselves as precious in God's sight, it gives foundation to our hope. We can think of others as works of art too, in this way. These are people whom we value, whom we treasure, whose worth to us is beyond price. When someone is precious to us, we don't treat them as customers or clients. We will do anything we can for them. We will travel a distance to see them; we will stay up half the night with them if they are ill; we will defend and protect them as best we can. We keep faithful to them, even at cost to ourselves. We value them, simply, for who they are.

Our experience of loving others gives us a glimpse of how the Lord relates to us. God loves us in a way that does not count the cost. The gospel says it wonderfully: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." Or as Paul puts it, "God so loved us that he was generous with his mercy."

We are so valued that God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to save us all. So it is not surprising that the cross became Christianity's dominant symbol. It is not that we glorify suffering, but that we recognise in the cross just how far God is prepared to go for love of us.

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Good Friday might sound horrible but it was the ultimate win over sin and death

Q. Why do we call the day Jesus was crucified 'Good' Friday? Christ was made to suffer horribly, so this has always bothered me.

A. A fair number of people agree with you, and some have suggested that 'Black Friday' would be a more appropriate designation. Interestingly, in the Greek Orthodox Church, the day is known not as 'Good' but as the 'Great and Holy Friday.'

Certainly, if you had asked the friends of Jesus on that day itself, they would have seen nothing good in what transpired. Christ had been tortured, executed as a common criminal, and his followers had begun to scatter. But less than 48 hours later, all that changed. The tomb of Christ was now empty, Jesus had risen from the dead and had already begun to appear to those who had been close to him.

One theory, supported by the Oxford English Dictionary and some other linguists, is that the word 'good,' as applied to the day of Christ's death, comes from an antiquated meaning of the word, meaning 'holy'. I prefer, though, the more traditional Christian explanation – namely, that we call the day good because, through it, Jesus has won victory over sin and death, both for himself and for us as well. It is 'good' news for us all, as this is the day on which Jesus' sacrifice opened the gates of heaven and enabled us all to experience new and eternal life, free from fear, sin and death.

Q. I am a Catholic and live in a care home. The non-Catholics here have said in discussions that we do not need to do penance – that Jesus did it all for us. They have gone so far as to claim that our doing penance is an insult to Christ, as if to say that all he did for us was not enough.

A. The Catholic Church has always recognised the fact that Christ's life, death and resurrection was more than enough to cover the debt of our sins. Penitential practices, far from downplaying the dimensions of Christ's redemption, show our profound gratitude for all that Jesus went through.

The penance that the Church has consistently counselled is based in the scriptures, links us to Christ in his suffering, shows sorrow for our sinfulness, strengthens us to resist temptation, opens us to God's spirit and gives new energy to perform works of charity.

The Jews of the Old Testament often fasted as a sign of their



repentance (Dan. 9:3: "I turned to the Lord God, to seek help, in prayer and petition, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes"), and personal sacrifice was endorsed by Jesus, who fasted for 40 days before beginning his public ministry and who once said: "when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ... and your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you" (Mt. 6:17-18).

Q. The Gospel that is read on the feast of the Assumption has always puzzled me. How are we to know that these words were actually spoken by Mary? Did she relate them to Luke at a later time? To further my confusion, my St. Joseph Sunday Missal says that Mary's song of thanksgiving, often called the Magnificat, has been put together from many Old Testament phrases. Can you please shed some light on this?

A. Luke was a careful historian. Much more than the other Gospel

writers, he intertwines the life and ministry of Jesus with events in the wider world. At the start of Chapter 3, for example, he begins his account of the preaching of John the Baptist by identifying the political leaders at the time in five different jurisdictions.

Luke also focuses more than the other evangelists on the experiences of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke alone tells of Mary's surprise at the message of the angel Gabriel, the visit to her cousin Elizabeth, the presentation of the Lord in the temple and the anxious time of separation in Jerusalem when Jesus was 12.

Mark and John begin their Gospels at the start of Christ's public life. Matthew, though he includes an account of Christ's birth, uses far less detail than Luke. Luke even includes a glimpse into Mary's thinking (Lk 2:19): "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

Where did Luke get all of this

information? Well, right at the outset he explains (in Lk 1:2) that he is relying on the testimony of "those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning." Might one of those witnesses have been Mary herself? Though no one knows for certain, that is a possibility.

Luke was a gentile, a physician from Antioch in Syria. He was a companion of Paul on his missionary journeys and arrived in Jerusalem about the year 57. Mary might still have been alive, though by then she would have been in her 70s.

Another possibility is that Luke took his information about Mary from James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem. (James is described in Galatians 1:19 as "the brother of the Lord," perhaps the son of Joseph from an earlier marriage.)

As for your concern about the use of Old Testament phrases in Mary's Magnificat, Mary would have been steeped as a child in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it would have been no surprise for her spontaneous song of praise to incorporate words from Scripture.

In fact, Mary's Magnificat bears striking parallels to the hymn of Hannah (1 Sam. 2) when Hannah learns that she will bear a child.

Q. According to a pamphlet I received from our parish, confession was not made obligatory until the Lateran Council in AD 1215. Since this was decided by man on earth and not by God, how can it be a serious sin if we don't go to confession at least once a year?

A. The Lateran Council in 1215 did establish that Catholics should confess their sins at least once a year. But notice how that obligation is worded in the Church's Code of Canon Law (in No. 989): "After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year."

Notice that it says 'grave sins', and here I would use grave, serious and mortal interchangeably. So, technically, one only has to confess when conscious of a mortal sin—although certainly I would recommend regular confession even for venial sins, as a way to stay focused on the path to holiness. But beyond that, I think that I disagree with your major premise, which seems to be that only a direct oracle from God can determine what is objectively grave.

I don't remember Jesus ever using the specific words, "Missing Mass on Sunday is a serious sin." But I've always understood that it is a serious sin because Jesus did say, "Do this in memory of me" and because I believe that the Church, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, has the right to establish basic teachings on faith and morals.

Q. I don't understand why, over the last couple of years, I don't see people bowing at the name of Jesus. It doesn't seem to matter whether they are parishioners, priests or nuns. Is there some new rule on this, or am I just too old-school Catholic?

A. The custom of bowing at the name of Jesus is a worthy one, and it has a long tradition in the church. It takes its origin from St. Paul, who wrote in his Letter to the Philippians (2:9-10): "God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

The practice was reinforced at the Second Council of Lyons, convened in 1274 by Pope Gregory X, which highlighted the special honour due to the sacred name of Jesus and noted that "whenever that glorious name is recalled, especially during the sacred mysteries of the Mass, everyone should bow the knees of his heart, which he can do even by a bow of his head."

Pope Gregory followed up with a letter to the Dominican Order, which became the foremost promoters of devotion to the Holy Name. In that letter, Pope Gregory said: "We wish that at the pronouncing of that name, chiefly at the holy sacrifice (of Mass), everyone would bow his head in token that interiorly he bends the knee of his heart."

I agree with our letter-writer that, over the past several decades, this practice is followed less widely. I also agree that more people should observe it; it serves as an important reminder of the reverence we owe the divine and reflects an interior desire to honour Jesus, who died on the cross to redeem us, loving each of us and giving himself for us.

Unfortunately, this column cannot accept questions from readers

Partnership, planting, protest and prayer

James Trewby,
Columban Education Worker

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis taught us that everything is connected (#16). So-what links the Higaonon indigenous people of Mindanao, Midland mud deep enough to scuba dive in, flipping pancakes, people seeking sanctuary in the UK, prayers from around the world and the Houses of Parliament?

The Philippines are on the front line of the climate crisis, suffering from increasingly frequent extreme weather events, rising sea levels and devastating impacts on sea life. Mining and other extractive industries have led to deforestation and biodiversity loss. Pope Francis has noted the importance of indigenous peoples, saying: “The contribution of indigenous peoples is essential in the fight against climate change.”

In July 2023, Columbans in the Philippines approached the Mission Office in Britain with the idea of UK communities supporting their tree growing partnership with the Higaonon indigenous people of Mindanao, in the south of the Philippines. An invitation was put out to Catholic primary schools in the archdiocese of Birmingham. We were looking for 20 schools to commit for five years – and were massively encouraged by 25 schools saying yes. The programme goes beyond fundraising as we aim for education, faith formation and solidarity through resources, retreat days and online encounters.

The Columbans are known for their commitment to caring for creation. We can often be found engaged in and encouraging prayer, protest, liturgy and education. But over the last couple of years we've been working on our 'creation



covenant', and, in particular, how we walk the talk here in Britain. So far this has involved electric cars, bee hives in the gardens and making friends with a local ecologist. A big step forward came from our developing relationship with our local council's 'Planting our future' project, and the (free!) promise of trees being planted in the gardens of our regional headquarters in Solihull.

And here is the first connection. During February, over 2,000 trees were planted at St Columban's. The first day involved over 20 schools from those signed up to the partnership with the Higaonon, each bringing two or three young people plus staff to join an incredible day of action for our common home. The children wrote prayers for creation and stuck them to a 'tree' made from recycled materials in our conference room, learnt about the rationale for tree planting, were blessed in the 'Peruvian style' by our director, Fr John Boles, and then set off into the mud! Trees were planted, yes, but we'll remember children's plastered faces, joy and laughter.

A couple of days later, on Shrove Tuesday, our next connection – during half term, we had a day of tree planting for the community around St Columban's. Columban missionaries, co-workers and their families were joined by members of a local parish who we recently led on a *Laudate Deum*-themed retreat day. A Columban Lay Missionary from Chile brought a group of refugees she accompanies and a Columban sister joined us from London. People added prayers to our paper tree. And, of course, we couldn't gather on that day without pancakes – a tradition it



was joyful to share with our new friends from around the world.

A week later all the prayers written on leaves joined prayer intentions sent from Columbans in Japan, China, Pakistan and Australia as part of the Columban contribution to the 10 day, 24 hour Lenten climate vigil outside parliament. For six hours our team of co-workers, friends, a Columban priest, previous Faith in Action volunteers and members of the Columban Justice, Peace and Ecology Team kept vigil at the foot of Big Ben, lamenting the slow

action of our Government, engaging with the public, and praying for climate justice. By the end of the night, the prayer intentions were slightly soggy, but all had been remembered.

So, what links the Higaonon indigenous people of Mindanao, midland mud deep enough to scuba dive in, flipping pancakes, people seeking sanctuary in the UK, prayers from around the world and the Houses of Parliament? Partnership, planting, protest and prayer – all aspects of Columban mission in Britain.

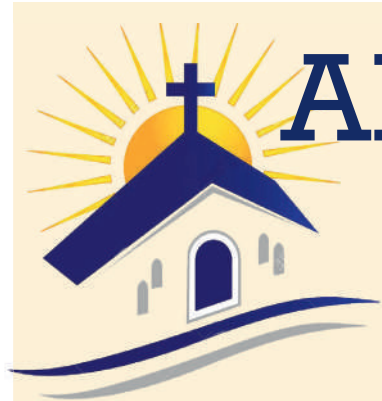
Pictures: Columban Missionaries

Top, a school presentation on the theme Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor

Above left, Midlands mud didn't deter our team from planting trees in Solihull

Above right, our vigil outside the Houses of Parliament

Far left, pancake tossing as part of the Columbans' school day of action during half term



AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION

The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to Catholic life in your neighbourhood



First-year students of St Ambrose College, Hale Barns, recently undertook a sponsored row “across” the English Channel, to raise funds for Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

Their efforts not only tested their physical endurance but also showcased their commitment to helping others in need.

The pupils didn't get their feet way

during the fundraiser, using the school's rowing machines to cover the distance, but it was a remarkable example of teamwork, built on a spirit of camaraderie and solidarity for what is an excellent cause.

They raised the impressive sum of £523, which ACN received “with grateful thanks; every penny is precious to our projects.”

Conference brings CST into RE lesson planning

Over 120 teachers of Catholic RE attended the fifth ATCRE (Association of Teachers of Catholic RE) National Conference on Saturday, 2nd March at Maria Fidelis Catholic School in London.

The theme was ‘Rethinking Catholic Social Teaching’, with keynote addresses by Susan Elderfield and Raymond Friel.

Susan spoke about the incarnational nature of Catholic Social Teaching which is grounded in relationships, while Raymond Friel talked about the importance of Catholic social teaching being “translated into reality” and not just remaining as a social doctrine.

A number of seminars were delivered on themes covering CST and the new Religious Education Directory (RED), prayer leading to action, spiritual development of students, CST in the classroom, and LGBT+ Inclusion for Catholic schools through the lens of human dignity.

The conference brought together a range of people involved in all areas of Catholic RE and provided an opportunity to network and engage with exhibitors. The conference was sponsored by Magister Resources for Catholic Education.

Helen Bridges and Dave Legrand, co-chairs of ATCRE, said: “We are delighted that so many busy teachers spent a day over the weekend to engage and reflect on the importance of Catholic social teaching. It was such a positive and vibrant atmosphere.”



Raymond Friel and Susan Elderfield

“Teachers were grateful for the insights provided by Raymond Friel and Susan Elderfield on Catholic social teaching and how Catholic RE teachers can embed CST in their schools and classrooms.

“Our national conferences are always the largest gathering of Catholic RE teachers in the country, and a great opportunity to network with colleagues. Along with the excellent seminar programme and exhibitors, this was a real feast for all those involved in Catholic Education”.

Zak takes the Catenians win – now for Manchester!

Students from five schools in the Thames Valley/West London area took part in the Catenian Schools Public Speaking Competition (Province 8), on Monday, 26th February at St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School, Slough.

The winner was Zak Smith from Blessed Hugh Faringdon School, Reading, whose topic was ‘Things are seldom what they seem’.

As well as students from St Bernard's and Blessed Hugh Faringdon School, students from St Joseph's College, Reading, Gunnersbury School, Brentford and St. Michael's Catholic High School, Watford, also competed.

Zak will now go through to represent Catenian Province 8 at the National Final, which will be held on 1st September in Manchester.

While the judges were deliberating, Gerry McCormack gave a short video presentation on the Catenian Bursary Fund which provides sponsorship for young Catholics helping at Lourdes or on a beneficial project.

Thanks to the judges: Richard Kellaway (former Mayor of Windsor & Maidenhead); Seema Goyal (President, Maidenhead & District Chamber of Commerce); and John Diffenthal (President, Catenian Province 8).

Also thanks to the MC for the night, Gerry

Photo: Gerry McCormack



McCormack (National Director, Catenian Province 8) and the event organiser, Jonathan Holder (Youth Officer, Catenian Province 8).

Above, all eight speakers, with Seema Goyal, having received their participation certificates. From left to right they are:

Zak Smith (Blessed Hugh Faringdon School, Reading); Dennis O'Connell (St Joseph's College, Reading); Joelle Ibrahim (St Michael's Catholic High School, Watford); Alex Ball (St Joseph's College, Reading); Naeema Chowdhury (Blessed Hugh

Faringdon School, Reading); Nimal Ben Tomelden Dissanayaka (Gunnersbury Catholic School, Brentford); Daena-Paige Morris (St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School, Slough); and Petar Pavlov (St Michael's Catholic High School, Watford).

Jimmy's parents deliver a powerful message to school

Andy Drozdziak

St Bonaventure's school in Forest Gate, London, welcomed Margaret and Barry Mizen from the Mizen Foundation to share their story with students.

Head of RE Andy Lewis, who organised the visit, explained that the visit was designed to 'challenge' Year 11 students. "We always get them to speak to our Year 11 students in the lead up their exams as a reminder - partly as a reminder that anger can lead to anger, and that our challenge is to live a life of forgiveness, peace, and hope," Mr Lewis told the *Universe*.

Margaret and Barry Mizen were visiting to share their story of forgiveness following the loss of their son, Jimmy, who was killed in a bakery in 2008. Mr Lewis explained that the relationship goes back a long way.

"Barry and Margaret have been good friends to St Bonaventure's for a long time, and have been speaking to our students for many years," he said.

"Jamie Halliwell, of our school council, was awarded the Jimmy Mizen Award from Million Minutes in 2015 for his work on the City Safe Haven scheme, which is something we relaunched in Newham in 2020 and are currently working with the council on the updated scheme. Their mission to bring good to the world is close to our hearts."

During the visit, Barry Mizen shared a message of God's love with the young people, telling them: "You are loved, you are valued, you matter – and don't let anyone tell you otherwise."



The message impacted year 11 student Danylo, who said: "It was really eye-opening and meaningful to hear this powerful story and witness the courage of Margaret and Barry Mizen. After such a tragedy, their commitment to help bring forgiveness, peace and hope into today's world is one we all heartily endorse and pray for."

Mr Lewis vowed to continue to support the Mizen foundation, which includes the Walk For Jimmy fundraising event.

He said: "Last year, I personally did the Walk for Jimmy with my wife and two young boys, raising £650 for their work sponsored by many staff at St Bonaventure's. We will continue to support their work as a school, as we know the value it brings."



Five dads do themselves proud as they complete the St Chad's run

Five dads from St Nicholas Catholic Church in Boldmere, Sutton Coldfield, have successfully run the St Chad's Way for charity.

Team St Nicholas – Chris, Stephen, Matteo, Andrew and James – completed their challenge on last Saturday, and in doing so smashed their initial fundraising target of £500, with almost £1,500 pledged so far (which doesn't include Gift Aid).

The team were waved off from St Chad's Cathedral, the diocesan Mother Church, by Monsignor Timothy Menezes, cathedral dean, following a blessing. They also had chance to hold the relics.

They then took in a refreshment stop at St Nicholas before finishing at Lichfield Cathedral.

The challenge was organised to generate funds for the St Nicholas World Development Group (WDG), the parish charity dedicated to enhancing the lives of those in need.

The famous five are pictured left



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Welcome to Portsmouth, Fr Samuel

Bishop Philip Egan has welcomed a missionary priest to the Diocese of Portsmouth.

Bishop Philip said: “We are happy to welcome Fr. Samuel Alabi, a Missionary of St. Paul, to the Diocese. He is serving in English Martyrs parish in Reading as an assistant priest to Fr. Gaston Afah. Please pray for him and make him welcome.”

Originally from Nigeria, Fr Samuel was incardinated into the Missionary Society of St Paul in 2007 and ordained priest on 21st June 2008. After his ordination, he served in Abeokuta Diocese (Nigeria) from 2008 to 2009.

Subsequently, he was appointed to assist in the MSP Mission Development Office in Nigeria from 2009 to 2014. He was later assigned to the MSP UK Region in 2014, and served in Scotland until 2021.

Most recently, he has served in the Archdiocese of Southwark as Rector of the MSP Regional House and parish priest of Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church, Brixton, South London.

Let's see your parish and school news in the Universe Catholic Weekly. Send them to andy.drozdziak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Archbishop discusses merger plans at youth conference

For the second time in two months, young people from across the Archdiocese of Cardiff and the Diocese of Menevia came together for a Youth Retreat.

It took place at Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School in Bridgend, a lovely, modern school, and the spaces for Mass, discussions, food and stalls was excellent.

Good music and prayer got the retreat off to a great start.

Archbishop Mark spoke to young people about the Proposed Union of the two dioceses of Cardiff and Menevia, adding that he thought it was now the point where he would like to look at uniting the two dioceses into one. There would be listening sessions where he would make note of people's thoughts and that this would then form the basis of a report which would be submitted to Pope Francis, who would have the ultimate say as to whether the union would go ahead.

Archbishop Mark then invited the Catholic youth to ask questions, and they were very good and thoughtful. Here is a sample: “What would be the name of the new diocese?” “How would it effect the youth?” “What are the advantages and disadvantages?”

Archbishop Mark then asked for a show of hands as to who was in favour, against or weren't sure. The overwhelming majority were for but a good number were unsure, which was also positive as it could indicate that they may need more information.

The feedback we had from the previous event which Fr Matt Roche-Saunders and Fr Benny led was excellent; this time round it was Fr Matt and Deacon Christian Mahoney's chance to step up to the plate. They both got to lead the



Archbishop Mark discussed, among other things, the possibility of merging the diocese of Cardiff and Menevia in the future, with the young people at the conference

sessions for both the 13-18 year olds and the 18+ groups (they switched over in the afternoon).

Fr Matt started by discussing extreme sports and then provided us with a definition of the word 'extreme' derived from the Latin *extremis*, meaning 'outermost'.

He emphasised that the desert is an extreme place and asked the audience what came to mind when they thought about the word 'desert'. Fr Matt highlighted the desert's connection to the concepts of isolation and wilderness, both considered 'outer places'. Entering the desert means losing all of our securities, making us aware of our material poverty. However, spiritually, God is present, becoming the security we can rely upon.

During Lent we can develop the spirit of the desert through the spirit of penance in our everyday life leaving us as children of God.

God who said to his beloved son, you are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. And we can experience that, too.

Archbishop Mark celebrated a lovely Mass and the young people took an active role with the readings.

After a more than satisfying meal, the afternoon discussion sessions commenced. Deacon Christian's discussion started by delving into a topic that might seem unexpected – gangs. He shared insights into the lives of young people in Los Angeles who, having been associated with gangs, found themselves in a cycle of imprisonment and gang violence. However, the narrative took a transformative turn when a Catholic priest entered the scene, significantly impacting the lives of these gang members. He set up an organisation called Homeboy Industries which has become the

largest gang intervention, rehab and re-entry programme in the world.

Deacon Christian recounted a powerful story of someone Fr Greg had assisted. This individual proudly showed Fr Greg his first paycheck, saying that one person was responsible for this – “the Lord.”

Deacon Christian then prompted the audience to reflect on their own childhood experiences, recalling bedtime stories read by parents or guardians that instilled a sense of security. He encouraged them to close their eyes and immerse themselves in a story – a tale reminiscent of the Prodigal Son, who initially turned away from his Father but, upon realisation, returned to seek forgiveness.

The day ended with Adoration, which was wonderful and uplifting. Young people were also invited to go to confession.

Southwark sees welcome increase in new Catholics turning to the Church



The number of people being welcomed into the Catholic Church in South London and Kent by the Archdiocese of Southwark is at its highest number for over a decade.

This year there are 450 people completing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) – an increase of 164% on 2023.

Under Archbishop John Wilson's leadership, the archdiocese has had a firm focus on evangelisation and the efforts are paying off.

St George's Cathedral in Southwark was full on Saturday 17th February, with both catechumens and candidates to mark the start of their final preparations as they seek fully reception into the Church at Easter.

Archbishop John said: “It is a wonderful thing to be on the journey towards full reception into the Catholic Church.

“We are so privileged to have the gift of faith. There are people who have it, but let it go. There are people who want it but cannot

find it. But you my dear brothers and sisters, because of the openness of your heart, you have heard the Lord call your name and invite you to know His love. That for me is such a tremendous joy.”

Southwark's Agency for Evangelisation and Catechesis (AEC) is working tirelessly to support parishes in the spreading of the Gospel. Dr Mark Nash, the director of AEC, said: “Leading people to Jesus Christ is at the heart of all we do at the agency and it's wonderful to see so many people on their journey to His Church.

“Too often we are pessimistic about the future of the Church but the growing numbers of people seeking to join the Church shows that with commitment, drive and trust in the Holy Spirit, with expectancy and hope, and with collaboration between priests and people, our mission to lead people to the Lord Jesus through His Church will be fruitful.”

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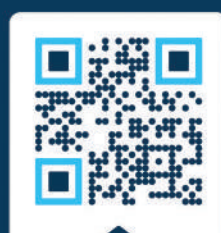
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The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to the more leisurely side of life

GARDENING

The challenges of spring growing!

Spring is the best time to start your vegetable garden! In the cold months of winter, we drool and dream of the gardens we hope to have. By late February, some of us have had enough of seed catalogues and TV! We set out to start our vegetable seedlings indoors, so as not to miss a single day of planting, once the risk of frost has passed.

Sowing seeds

If you want your gardens full of tomato plants, summer squash, peppers, eggplants, cucumbers, peas, bush and pole beans, you need to start making a plan as to when - and where - you are going to plant.

These early days in the growing season are always challenging. One of the hardest things for me to do in the early growing stages of a new seedling (and I suspect for many gardeners) is to pull out perfectly healthy plants from their new home.

Now, I must admit, as a veteran gardener, you'd think I'd get over it, but I still treat these first born seedlings like my children. I want them all to have an equal chance at making something out of their lives. This heart wrenching but necessary process is known as "thinning" and must be done if seeds are planted too close together.

Most vegetable plants need plenty of room to grow. This is so they can receive the most sunlight, air circulation, and nutrients for them to achieve maximum health and productivity. By now, you've likely done this important step of thinning. If not, do so now. Seed packets always provide the spacing information on the back of each package.

Now, you may ask, how about sowing seeds more sparingly, and then you can avoid this thinning process completely? Well, due to the relatively low price of seeds, my preference is to sow more liberally, as not every seed will germinate. Then I have the chance to evaluate and eliminate the inferior seedlings, leaving only the strongest for production in the garden. And it's the strongest plants that will best be able to stand up to the inevitable yet unwanted arrival of pests and diseases.

Uninvited pests

There are a number of ways of reducing



uninvited pests in your garden. First, plant early in the season. Spring is the best time to start. Many of the worst pests aren't out until early summer. By then many of your plants will be past their most vulnerable stages, and will be tough enough by now to withstand some moderate invasions. Some pests have a preference for the young, tender plants, so by the time they get into your garden, the plants are well past this stage.

Another way to battle bugs is to use floating row covers. Row covers are nothing more than a lightweight fabric, used to physically cover the young plants like a blanket. This fabric is available at most nurseries, and garden centres plus seed catalogue companies. This material is light enough to let air, light and water in, but keep

pests out. This fabric is best used from the time you plant your seeds, or seedlings, up until just before flowering. It is very important that row covers be removed for several days at this stage, so bees have access to flowers for pollination. Once adequate pollination has taken place, you may leave the covers off, or replace them. Just be sure that the fabric you choose for this is the lightest you can find, so as not to trap excess heat. Bugs and insects transmit many diseases to vegetable plants. The row covers will help greatly in reducing the spread of disease, simply by reducing the amount of pests on your plants.

Reducing disease

Besides pests, another of the most common

ways vegetable plants get diseases in the summer is through moisture, either by overhead watering, watering at the wrong time of day, rain, or by water splashing up to the plant from the soil. There are a few simple things you can do to reduce the chances of your plants getting soil born, and water related diseases, like leaf spot, and Downy or Powdery mildew. First, mulch, mulch, mulch.

Think of a protective barrier between the diseases and pathogens in the soil and the plant itself. Soak the roots only, if possible. If you do water the foliage, do so early enough in the day so that the plant leaves have time to dry before night.

Your goal is to minimise the length of time moisture stays on the leaf surface.



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HEALTH

Putting COVID vaccinations on sale risks making health inequalities far worse

The 'job market' of private COVID vaccines is a good thing for public health – but not for health inequality, says Simon Williams

COVID vaccines will go on sale privately in England and Scotland from April 1 for all those aged 12 and over. In the US, they have been available to buy commercially since 2023, with the private sector already accounting for a substantial proportion of vaccine sales. It is likely that a growing number of countries will follow suit.

Is offering jabs privately a good thing for public health? Yes. But, would it be better and fairer if they were free for all who want them? Yes.

What are the benefits?

Making COVID vaccines available to more people, even if it means some people will have to pay for them, is a good thing. That's because the more people that are able to keep up to date with COVID boosters, the higher the level of immunity across the population. High booster coverage can help protect against surging cases or potential new variants, and help lower levels of COVID-related sickness across the population.

In turn, this could help reduce COVID-related absenteeism – the UK is currently experiencing a rise in long-term sickness among its workforce and, since the NHS is currently under massive strain, it could ease pressure on the UK's crumbling health services. Crucially, though, increased booster coverage could help reduce rates of long COVID – the risk of which rises with multiple re-infections.

It's important that those at highest risk of serious COVID outcomes – those with clinical conditions and those aged over 65 – continue to be prioritised for free vaccines.

But COVID is certainly not harmless in those under 65. For example, long COVID is found in all ages with the highest percentage of diagnoses in those aged 36–50. It is a shame that more people in 2023 weren't able to reduce their risk of long COVID or sickness by not being able to access a booster vaccine at all.

But will people buy them?

Along with colleagues, last year I conducted research on attitudes to private COVID boosters in Wales. We asked those ineligible for free vaccines – at the time, those aged under 50 and without qualifying clinical conditions – whether they would be willing to pay for a COVID vaccine. We found very mixed views.

However, a large multi-country study suggested that a significant proportion of people asked would be willing to pay for a vaccine if it was available privately – although this study was conducted much earlier in the pandemic, and attitudes could have since changed.

Convenience, or ease of access, is one of the key factors shaping vaccination uptake, as outlined in the World Health Organization's



Behavioural and Social Drivers of Vaccination model. If the private market for the flu jab is anything to go by, then ease of access might give COVID uptake rates a boost. For example, one study found that around a third of patients might not have had a flu jab had it not been for them being able to conveniently pay for it in a pharmacy.

However, uptake of the new 2023–24 COVID booster in the US has been low, with only about 14 per cent of adults taking it, even though many can access it freely through their private health insurance, or for those without health insurance, via the Bridge Access programme.

Ultimately it remains to be seen how much demand there will be for private COVID vaccines.

Private vaccines could worsen health inequalities

Although private jabs would give the general public the choice of having a COVID booster because only certain groups are able to have them at the moment, it would be better if the

vaccines were free, or at least affordable, for all who want them. At a price of £45 per jab, those on low income are much less likely to be able to afford them. As such, the private sale of COVID vaccines will only serve to perpetuate health inequalities.

Unfortunately, those from more deprived communities and on low incomes are at higher risk of more serious COVID outcomes. They are also more likely to be negatively impacted by winter pressures and health service crises.

In spring 2024, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) suggested that the 2024 autumn booster campaign will be smaller than previous campaigns. This is a regressive step for public health. If anything, the eligibility for free vaccines should be more, not less inclusive.

Choice has been a contentious term during the pandemic. Vaccine passports and mandatory vaccination for health and social care workers were strongly opposed by some on the grounds that they took away people's choice to not get

vaccinated. Surely the same arguments made against requiring people to get vaccinated should also apply to excluding people from getting vaccinated?

Motivations behind health choices

Behavioural science theory, and much research during the pandemic showed how actions taken to protect our health relies as much on our capabilities and opportunities as our motivations.

As such, it is important that those who might otherwise be motivated to get a COVID booster are not prevented from doing so by being unable to afford them.

How to make vaccines more available and affordable to all who want and need them is a matter of equity, and is something that should be addressed sooner rather than later – especially as innovations continue in other vaccinations, from RSV and flu to cancer.

Simon N. Williams is a Lecturer in Psychology, Swansea University



Queues for COVID vaccinations at the height of the pandemic, when they were distributed free

You're in the driver's seat:

Tips for healthy sleep and to prevent drowsy driving

We all find ourselves sometimes staying up late on a school or work night, leaving us feeling tired behind the wheel the next morning if we didn't get enough good sleep. But do we ever think about the risks of drowsy driving while we're buckling up?

Drowsy driving is impaired driving – just like drunk, drugged, and distracted driving – and it's a real public health issue. Every year drowsy driving is behind thousands of vehicle crashes each year; according to road safety charity Brake, 10–20 per cent of all crashes are estimated to be caused by driver fatigue.

At 6am, drivers are 20 times more likely to fall asleep at the wheel than at 10pm; and one in eight drivers admit falling asleep at the wheel.

What's really shocking is that while a majority of us say drowsy driving is highly risky, most of us do it anyway.

Getting enough sleep before we get behind the wheel is one of the best ways to prevent drowsy driving.

Taking the right lane to safer driving

Most people say drowsy driving is highly risky, but don't think it is as dangerous as other forms of impaired driving.

New data show that over 95% of teenage and adult drivers both said drowsy driving is risky, but both ranked other forms of impaired driving – like drunk, drugged or distracted – as riskier. In fact, driving with as little as 4–5 hours of sleep is like you were driving with a blood alcohol level akin to drink driving.



Planning your route? Make sleep your first stop

No matter where you're headed, create a sleep game plan before you hit the road and get the recommended amount of sleep the night before your trip. 7–9 hours of sleep per night for adults and 8–10 hours for teens are recommended.

Plan long trips with a companion who can not only look for early warning signs of fatigue but also help drive when needed. And, when on a long trip, schedule regular stops every 100 miles or two hours.

Caution: Warning signs for drowsy driving

Be on the lookout for signs of drowsy driving

when behind the wheel, like yawning repeatedly, rubbing your eyes, and finding it hard to focus on the road.

Drifting from your lane or having trouble remembering the last few miles driven? Those are definitely red flags. If you notice these warning signs, pull over to a safe place and take a quick nap, stretch, or have a caffeinated drink. Only continue driving when you feel alert and refreshed.

New driver? New hazards

Motor vehicle crashes are the second leading cause of death among teenagers. Teenagers are

relatively new to driving, which means they have less experience and fewer driving skills to rely on during emergencies.

Teenagers are also chronically sleep deprived, and early school hours don't always sync up with their internal body clock, also called a circadian rhythm.

Plus, teenagers are busy. With school, jobs and extracurricular activities they might choose to sacrifice sleep. In fact, within their first two years of driving, one-in-six new drivers admitted they have already driven while drowsy, citing school or work activities as the main things that keep them from getting enough of the sleep they need.

Avoid wrong turns and stay on route to being your best slept self

Just three small steps during the day and three small steps at night can make a big difference. During the day, things like spending time in bright, natural light, getting regular exercise and eating meals at consistent times can help your body prepare for sleep.

At night, NSF recommends avoiding things like heavy meals, caffeine, and alcohol, and putting your devices away an hour before bed.

All drivers and passengers should be on the lookout for drowsy driving. Before you get behind the wheel, take a moment to check your alertness and if you're ready to drive. If you are not getting enough quality sleep, you may not be fit to drive a car.

For more sleep health information, visit www.theNSF.org.

FOOD

APPLE PIE OAT BARS

Brother Andrew Corriente

These are really heavenly treat bars!

The crust is earthy, buttery and finishes with a hint of salt. Molasses and a healthy dose of cinnamon give a nice, tasty finish, whilst the apple filling is bright and sweet with a luscious glaze. Feel free to do a mixture of apples but ensure the apples are firm.

Start to finish: 60–70 active minutes and 3-plus hours for cooling

Servings: 12

Dough

1 cup or 220 grammes unsalted butter
1 tablespoon molasses
1 tablespoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg (optional)
2 cups or 200 grammes old-fashioned oats
2 cups or 240 grammes all-purpose flour
1/2 cup or 100 grammes light brown sugar or dark brown sugar
1/2 cup or 100 grammes sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt (1/4 teaspoon coarse kosher salt or table salt)
Powder sugar (for dusting)

Apple mixture


2 pounds (3–5) firm cooking apples
2/3 cup or 140 grammes sugar (or add to taste)
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt (1/4 teaspoon coarse kosher salt or table salt)
2 tablespoon or 20 grammes cornflour
Juice of one lemon

Method

- Preheat oven to 350 F and position rack in the middle.
- Line a 9 x 13 baking dish with foil with enough overhang to help lift out the finished bake.
- In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt butter with the molasses, cinnamon and optional nutmeg. Set aside.
- In a large bowl, whisk oats, flour, brown and white sugars, baking powder and salt.
- Pour in melted butter and stir until combined (the saucepan will be used later for the apples).
- Evenly pat approximately two-thirds of the dough into the foil-lined baking dish; set aside the other third.
- Bake at 350 F for 15–20 minutes until puffy.
- While that's baking, peel, core and slice apples about a 1/4" thick.
- In the used saucepan, cook apples, sugar and salt over medium high heat for 5–7 minutes until sugar is melted and apples start to soften.
- In a small bowl, use a fork to whisk cornflour and lemon juice until dissolved.
- Add this to the apples and stir over medium high heat.
- Cook until a translucent glaze forms around the apples (5–10 minutes); it should adhere to the apples and not be watery.
- Spread hot apples evenly on top of the hot crust.
- Crumble the remaining dough on top.




- Bake at 350 F for 35–40 minutes (rotate pan halfway through baking) until the crumble is browned and the entire bake is bubbling.
- Let cool in room temperature for 3-plus hours.
- Carefully lift out the bake and cut edges with a very sharp knife.
- Slice into 12 squares and sift powdered sugar on top.



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LIFESTYLE

Five tips to help your student thrive

Do you remember how challenging school could be? As a parent, it's easy to forget that studying and homework aren't always easy. Your child needs your support and guidance to help stay on task with studies and achieve at the highest level.

Don't know where to start? Check out these top five tips to help support your student's educational journey so they can thrive.

1. Get organised

Messy and cluttered school supplies are a recipe for frustration. Encourage your student to keep notes and handouts organised to quickly and easily locate what is needed for any assignment.

Encourage them to pick out notebooks, folders and binders in favourite colours and designs. Let your student label or decorate front covers and assign a subject to each.

Take organisation to the next level with a digital tool like the Five Star® Study App. Using the app and Five Star compatible notebooks, folders and academic planners, your student can scan handwritten notes and handouts to access study materials anytime, anywhere.

Once digitised, your student can add, revise and arrange notes as needed, organising materials into digital folders that correspond with physical notebook colours. The free app provides your child with the best of physical and digital studying and even turns notes and handouts into digital flashcards.

2. Create a consistent study routine

It may sound simple, but establishing a consistent study routine can go a long way to



help your student succeed in school. Creating a routine develops time management and prioritisation skills for tasks and projects.

Guide your student to set a time each day for homework and studying, for example right after school, before or after dinner or clubs. If a certain time isn't working, suggest a change to find a time and rhythm that works best.

No matter what time of day they choose, consistency is the most important aspect of a study routine. After a couple of weeks, the study routine will become a habit that provides consistency and stability so your child can focus on tasks with minimal distractions.

3. Set realistic goals

A large project or study packet can be overwhelming and discouraging for anyone, let alone a young scholar. Expecting to finish a large assignment or study for a big test in one sitting can seem daunting and cause undue anxiety.

Help your child avoid panic and stress by helping set realistic and achievable study goals. Demonstrate how to break down big assignments into smaller tasks, and even create a task list to check off as each one is completed.

Using a tool like the Five Star Study App, your child can set reminders for different tasks, tackle them at a steady pace, and meet deadlines,

building a sense of accomplishment. More importantly, this practice fosters a growth mindset and builds perseverance.

4. Encourage handwritten notes

Typing notes may be more convenient, but handwritten notes can give your child an academic edge. Many research studies suggest that writing on paper improves recall and allows notetakers to better understand complicated concepts.

You don't have to sacrifice the power of paper for the convenience of digital. Students can scan handwritten notes from compatible Five Star school supplies into the study app. To learn more about the Five Star Study App, visit FiveStarBuiltStrong.com.

5. Take regular breaks

Nonstop studying can quickly lead to burnout and less productivity. During study sessions, invite your child to take a break. Take a walk together, do some quick stretches, or simply ask them to step away from the study area and go outside to get some fresh air.

When returning to study, your student will feel refreshed and ready to tackle the remaining assignments.

Every child is different, so collaborate with your students to find the best strategies that fit their learning style. However your child decides to study, your support is the most important tool in their arsenal.

Using these five tips and fostering a positive attitude toward learning, you can help set up your child for academic success in 2024.

LIFESTYLE

Maximise your protein intake with these three expert tips

Are you eating enough protein? If you feel hungry after a meal, are often fatigued or have brittle hair and nails, chances are you are protein deficient.

Why protein?

Protein is essential to maintaining your overall well-being. When you eat protein, your body breaks it down into amino acids and uses them to form your muscles, bones, skin, tissues and organs. Without enough protein, your body will be forced to break down your muscles for amino acids to continue functioning.

The recommended daily protein intake is 50 grams. However, this amount is merely a guideline.

"How much protein you need depends on a few factors," said Michelle Ricker, registered dietitian, nutritionist and director of Worldwide Health Education and Training at Herbalife. "Your age, body size, gender and activity level are just a few aspects that determine how much protein you should eat every day."

If you think you're not eating enough, check out these three expert tips that will put you on the right track to a protein-packed diet.

1. Choose a variety of protein sources

When you think of eating protein, you probably picture a plate filled with beef, chicken or fish. But protein comes from many sources. Also, eating various protein-rich foods doesn't just keep you from getting bored with your meal plan. It also ensures you get all the minerals and other nutrients your body needs to function at its best.

The next time you're at the store, make sure to pick up Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, milk and eggs. These are all great sources of protein that you can easily use to make breakfast or as snacks between meals.

2. Play around with plant-based protein

Animal products are not the only way to get protein. You can also power up with protein by eating plant-based meals.

"For many people, a large portion of protein intake comes from meat and dairy," said Ricker. "But there are many plant-based foods you should eat, even if you're not vegetarian or vegan."

Ricker recommends the following plant-based protein sources:

- Buckwheat
- Hummus plus pita

- Soy products (tofu, tempeh, edamame beans)
- Peanut butter
- Beans and rice
- Quinoa
- Hemp and chia seeds
- Spirulina

3. Keep easy protein on hand

When you're constantly on the go, sitting down for a meal can be difficult. However, to keep you fuelled all day, whether at work or school, you need to prioritise protein.

If you have a busy schedule, make sure to keep easy protein foods on hand. Protein snack packs with nuts, cheese or jerky can be helpful in a pinch.

A simple way to ensure you get a protein meal on the go is to add protein shakes to your routine. A product like Herbalife® Formula 1 Healthy Meal Nutritional Shake Mix is a delicious and easy way to treat your body to a nutritious and balanced meal in no time.

Are you ready to power up with protein? Use these three tips to get started on a more protein-fuelled meal plan, so you can feel and do your best every day.



New play puts the role of Black slaves centre stage in the abolition movement

HISTORY

Emily Zobel Marshall



“Cunning better than strong” is a Jamaican proverb; a message of survival and resistance that urges us to use our brain rather than our brawn to overcome oppressors. It’s a proverb that is encapsulated by the Jamaican trickster folk hero Anansi.

Anansi is of West African origin and became central to the oral tradition of the enslaved in the Caribbean. When caught in a terrible situation, Anansi would find his way out through intelligence, disguise, subterfuge and wit.

These tactics of survival and resistance were used by Black abolitionists Ellen and William Craft and Henry ‘Box’ Brown. Disguise and performance were central to their escape from enslavement, political activism and appeal to white audiences. Black abolitionists shared their experiences of enslavement to change the hearts and minds of everyday people on both sides of the Atlantic. However, their work is often obscured in the national narrative of Britain’s role in slavery.

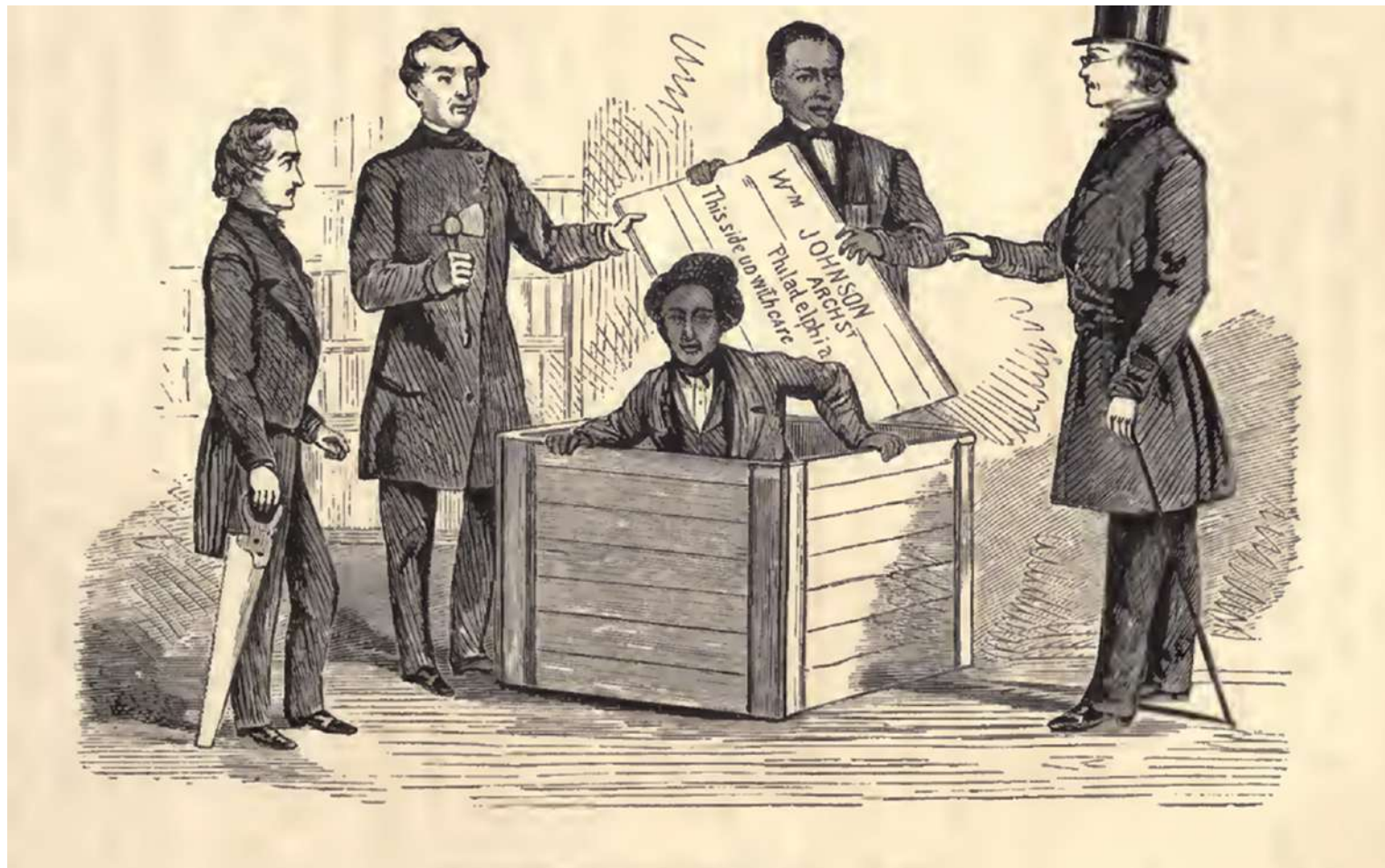
Since the abolition of the slave trade on 25th March 1807, the historical narrative has focused on Britain’s role in abolition – rather than on the depth of Britain’s involvement in the slave trade and plantation slavery. The work of famous white abolitionists has long been applauded and highlighted, in particular that of social reformer William Wilberforce.

Yorkshire was at the heart of the abolitionist movement in the UK, but this focus on Wilberforce and his white peers has also meant that many prominent Black abolitionists that visited the county, lecturing and staging anti-slavery performances, have been long overlooked.

Ellen and William Craft’s cunning plan

Ellen and William Craft were born into slavery in Georgia in the south of the US. They married and, fearing that they would be separated from one another and their future children would be sold into slavery, planned a daring escape in 1848.

As a result of the rape of her mother by a white slave master, Ellen was light-skinned and able to ‘pass’ for white. Their plan involved Ellen posing as a man and William acting as her faithful ‘manservant’.



Ellen would cut her hair and wear men’s clothes and, in this disguise, they would head north to the free states via steamboat and train.

Ellen couldn’t write, as slaves weren’t taught to, so she bandaged her hand to avoid being asked to sign her name. They knew if they were caught, they would be tortured and separated. The plan worked, with Ellen sitting in the ‘whites only’ carriage of a train, undetected.

The Crafts settled in Boston until the passing of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which gave slave owners the power to travel from the south and recapture slaves who had escaped north. American abolitionists helped the Crafts to raise enough money to flee to the relative safety of the UK. There, they created a stage performance to shine a spotlight on the terrors of enslavement.

Activism through performance

As researcher Hannah-Rose Murray explains in the excellent Africans in Yorkshire project, Ellen Craft became a celebrity at anti-slavery meetings because of

her pale skin and because both she and William carefully constructed their performances for the British stage.

Ellen would remain silent on stage, as Black women were not expected to speak in public, and William would describe their escape and the brutality of enslavement.

British audiences were fascinated by Ellen’s pale skin and aghast that she could have once been a slave.

The Crafts learned to read and write, spent over two decades educating the public about slavery and published their autobiography. They returned to America in 1868 and opened a school for Black children in Georgia.

Their story is being told today by Leeds-based performer and historian Joe Williams in his play, *Meet the Crafts*. Ellen and William Craft, he explains, were recorded in the 1851 Leeds Census and registered as staying in the house of abolitionist Wilson Armistead. In the section for ‘occupation’, they are registered as “fugitives from slavery in America”.

Another incredible story of escape through disguise and

subterfuge is that of Henry ‘Box’ Brown, who was born a slave in Richmond, Virginia, in 1816.

He returned from work one day in 1849 to find that his wife and children had been sold. He decided to orchestrate an unbelievably risky escape, a year after the Crafts carried out their own.

Brown paid for a box to be made, measuring 1m by 1m and 0.6m wide. He squeezed himself in and posted himself from Virginia in the south to Philadelphia in the free north. Holes were made in the box so he could breathe, he had some water and biscuits for the journey and was transported via wagon, boat and train. The journey took 72 hours and abolitionists in Philadelphia describe how when they opened the box, “Brown clambered out and sung a freedom hymn: he was finally free.”

On the run

However, like the Crafts, the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act forced Brown to leave for the UK. In England, Brown toured the country, performing his escape, as well as drawing from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s famous anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) to create a panorama of enslavement on stage. Brown toured Yorkshire and performed in the Music Hall in Hull.

Brown was a born showman. A central part of his act was emerging

from the original box in which he had travelled to freedom. He was also known to walk the streets of English towns dressed in traditional African clothing, styling himself as an African prince.

He published the first edition of his autobiography in 1849. After marrying an English woman, he returned to America in 1875 and continued performing until his death in 1897.

The stories of the Crafts and Henry ‘Box’ Brown are examples of people using their intelligence and creativity, as the Caribbean slave trickster hero Anansi would, to survive the most appalling circumstances.

They are key to our understanding of the history of enslavement. Slaves were not passive victims – they were integral to the political processes of abolition in the UK and put their intellectual, creative and artistic weight behind the movement.

In Yorkshire, performers and artists like Joe Williams are carrying that legacy forward through their work. And in doing so they are making a much-needed intervention into our well-worn, Wilberforce-centric abolitionist narratives.

Emily Zobel Marshall is a Reader in Postcolonial Literature, Leeds Beckett University

“Slaves were not passive victims – they were integral to the political processes of abolition in the UK and put their intellectual, creative and artistic weight behind the movement...”

New telescope is changing our ideas about how universe was formed

Carol Glatz

Orbiting the sun nearly 1 million miles from Earth, the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is reshaping the way scientists understand the universe and its origins, a number of astronomers said at a Vatican-sponsored meeting.

“The telescope is able to see things that prior telescopes just could not see,” Jonathan Lunine, a professor of astronomy and department chair at Cornell University, told reporters.

It has such unprecedented power in terms of its sensitivity, wavelength range and image sharpness that it is “doing revolutionary things” and leading to exciting new discoveries in multiple fields, he said.

Lunine, who is a planetary scientist and physicist, was one of nearly 50 experts in the field of astronomy attending a workshop organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to discuss the newest results from the Webb telescope.

Launched on Christmas Day in 2021, NASA’s latest space science observatory is the largest and most powerful space telescope ever built. It began sending full-colour images and data back to Earth after it became fully operational in July 2022.

“JWST data is revolutionising many areas in astrology, from the first galaxies to new worlds,” the academy said.

NASA said on its Webb.nasa.gov page, “Telescopes show us how things were – not how they are right now, which helps humanity understand the origins of the universe.”

“Webb is so sensitive it could theoretically detect the heat signature of a bumblebee at the distance of the Moon,” it said.

The telescope can see points in the history of the cosmos that were never observed before – over 13.5 billion years ago, a few hundred million years after the Big Bang – to search for the first galaxies in the universe, NASA said.

Anna de Graaff, an independent research fellow in the field of galaxy evolution at the Max Planck

Institute for Astronomy in Heidelberg, Germany, said she is working to understand “how galaxies, like our own Milky Way, came to be, how they grew into the structure that we see today in the sky.”

The Milky Way, for example, is a flattened rotating disk, she said, but, like all galaxies, it started out “really messy and kind of clumpy.”

The Webb data “doesn’t really tell you about the Big Bang, because we cannot look that far back in time,” she said, but it should help scientists find out “how you go from basically a very homogeneous gas in the universe, so basically almost nothing, to all these amazing structures that we see in the sky.”

Being able to see these younger galaxies, Lunine said, is changing ideas about how the universe began.

For one thing, there seem to be many young galaxies that are brighter and more developed than it was thought they should be, he said.

“They seem to be growing up too fast. It’s like going into a nursery school and discovering that all of the three-year-olds look like teenagers already. So what is going



An image taken with the near-infrared camera from NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope shows the Ring Nebula in August 2023. Photo: courtesy ESA/Webb, NASA, CSA, M. Barlow, N. Cox, R. Wesson

on?” he said. “Cosmologists have to revise how it is that structures form and grow in the earliest epoch of the universe.”

Karin Öberg, an astrochemist and professor of astronomy at Harvard University, told CNS the Webb telescope “is amazing at observing water and organics around young stars,” which can help them figure out “how planets are forming and how likely planets are to form with ingredients that make them hospitable to life.”

Right now, she said, the Webb telescope has been able to give information about the composition

of larger planets and not Earth-like planets. But they are hoping next-generation telescopes will provide details about the atmospheres and, therefore, the composition of other Earth-like or rocky planets.

De Graaff said, “I think it’s really important to be aware that there is only one Earth and it is a special place. Maybe it’s not unique, but it’s a very special place.”

Lunine said, “The amazing structures and beauty of the universe are an expression of God’s creation and of this tremendous sense of order that comes from the

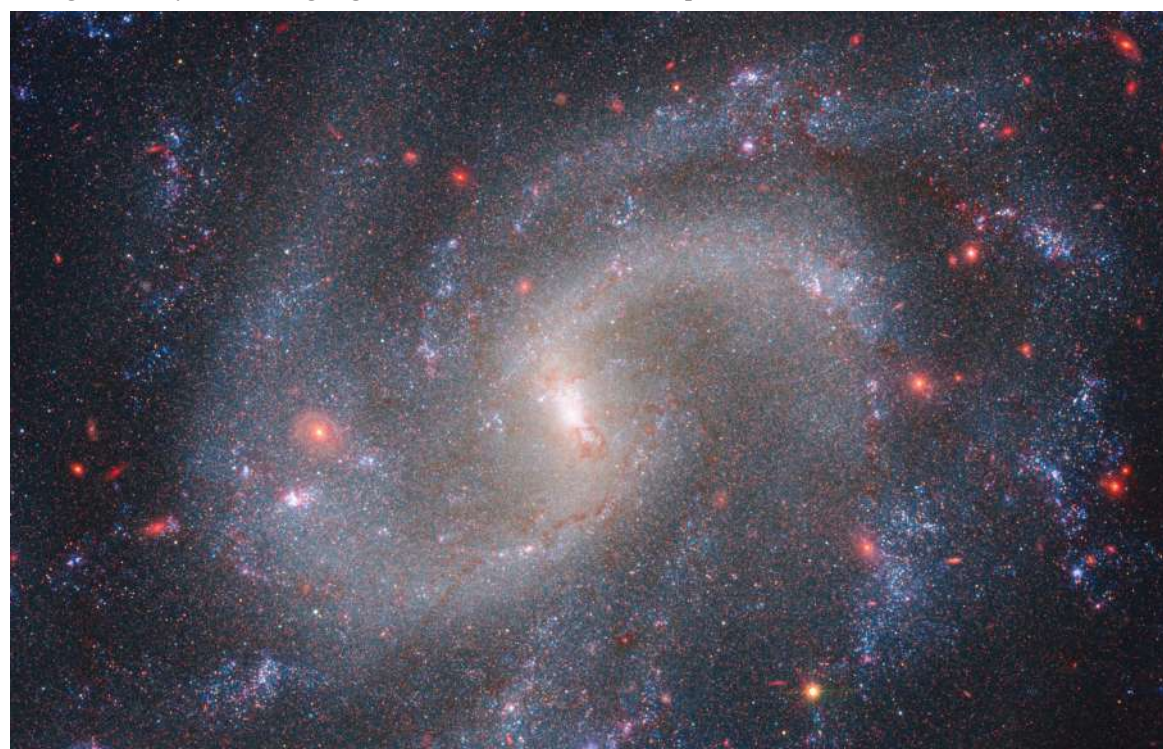
creator. We’re able to see that now in greater detail and greater depth with this wonderful telescope.”

Human beings are a “strange species that span the chasm between the material order and the spiritual, and actually understanding our material origins is really important for understanding who we are,” Öberg said.

Science helps explain “what kind of universe we live in and how, in a sense, the universe is put together -- whether it’s one that’s full of life, or whether we are, in some sense, the sole ark carrying all life through space and time,” she said.

If life is discovered elsewhere in the universe, she said, “whether it’s bacteria or rational animals, (this) will have some different theological consequences.”

“I don’t think it’s a threat to any dogmatic teaching, but I think it would push us to think maybe a little bit differently about why God became incarnate as one of us and how that salvation is worked out both for us and potentially for other creatures,” she said.



Combined observations from NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope’s near-infrared camera and Hubble’s wide field camera 3 show spiral galaxy NGC 5584, which resides 72 million light-years away from Earth. Photo courtesy NASA, ESA, CSA and Adam Riess

Self-discipline remains the secret to success as we focus on our life goals

SPORT

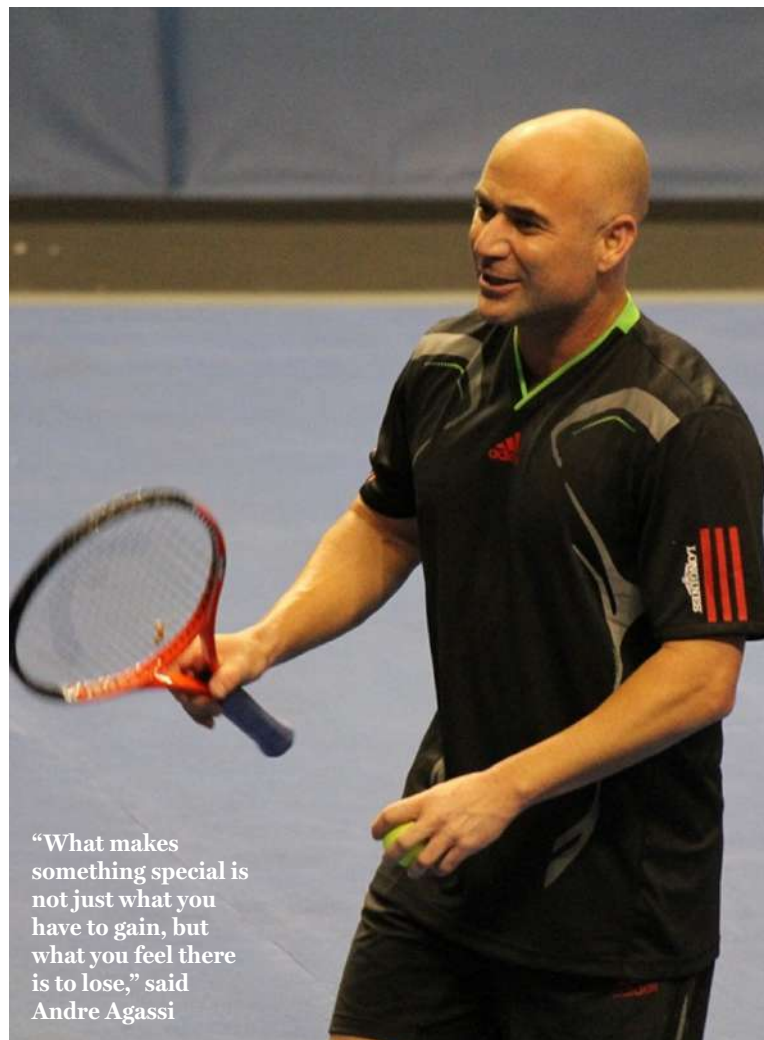
Fr Vlad Felzmann

Self-discipline - the ability to control yourself and to make yourself work hard or behave in a particular way without needing anyone else to tell you what to do - allows you to stay focused on your goals. It enables you to stay in control of yourself and of your reaction to any situation. You are the captain of your ship. How well – and safely for those around you – that ship sails, is up to you; perhaps with help from a mentor or coach.

“It doesn’t matter what you’re trying to accomplish. It’s all a matter of discipline.” stated Wilma Glodean Rudolph (1940-94), an American sprinter, who overcame childhood polio and went on to become a world-record holder and Olympic champion and international sports icon in track and field, following her successes in the 1956 and 1960 Olympic Games.

Keeping myself open to God’s presence fills me with positive energy – *highpaysha* – improving the life of those in my neighbourhoods. “What makes something special is not just what you have to gain, but what you feel there is to lose,” admitted Andre Agassi, an American former world No. 1 tennis player. He is an eight-time major champion and an Olympic gold medallist, as well as a runner-up in seven other majors. Agassi is widely considered one of the greatest tennis players of all time.

“We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort,” stated Jesse Owens (1913-80), an American track and field athlete who won four gold medals at the



“What makes something special is not just what you have to gain, but what you feel there is to lose,” said Andre Agassi

1936 Olympic Games. Owens specialised in the sprints and the long jump and was recognised in his lifetime as perhaps the greatest and most famous athlete in track and field history.

‘God sees all that is done in secret’

I refuse to buckle under the weight of a temptation. God sees all that is done in secret. So, I keep on keeping on. Whatever is on my agenda, I know I have to see it through. I also know that the best costs the most – but is, as the Spanish say, *‘vale la pena’* – it’s worthwhile. In case you wonder,

my commitment to helping God make this word a better place was the catalyst for developing my self-control.

“Mental toughness is many things and rather difficult to explain. Its qualities are sacrifice and self-denial. Also, most importantly, it is combined with a perfectly disciplined will that refuses to give in. It’s a state of mind – you could call it “character in action,” stated Vince Lombardi (1913-70) considered by many to be the greatest coach in American football history.

“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments,” taught Jim Rohn (1930-2009) who spent much of his life advocating for the power of self-discipline. He delivered his seminars for more than 40 years and died with a net worth of more than \$500 million dollars.

“The best school of discipline is home. Family life is God’s own method of training the young, and homes are very much as women make them,” reminded Samuel Smiles (1812 -1904), a Scot whose sports were writing and governmental reform. Although he campaigned on a Chartist platform – to gain political rights and influence for the working classes – he concluded that more progress

would come from new attitudes than from new laws.

“The secret of discipline is motivation. When a man is sufficiently motivated, discipline will take care of itself,” stated Sir Alexander ‘Alec’ Paterson (1884-1947) whose sport was prison reform and encouraged rehabilitation among inmates.

Simpler and more contented

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th and current Dalai Lama, made it clear that “self-discipline is crucial to a simpler, more contented life.” Michael ‘Mike’ Keller Ditka, an American former football player, coach, and television commentator, knew what he was talking about when he made it clear that “success is measured by your discipline and inner peace.”

As we know, and the John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport taught for years, virtues – good habits ingrained over time – make values visible. Or, as John Calvin Maxwell, an American pastor whose sport is writing books, put it: “Small disciplines repeated with consistency every day, lead to great achievements gained slowly over time.”

“All successes begin with self-discipline. It starts with you.” said Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Douglas Johnson, American-Canadian actor, producer, retired professional wrestler. It’s easy to make excuses for the lack of discipline. But excuses don’t get you anywhere “Self-discipline is about controlling your desires and impulses while staying focused on what needs to get done to achieve your goal,” stated Adam Sicinski, professional life coach who founded IQ Matrix in 2008 and has created over 400 self-growth mind maps. He also teaches doodling for personal development and transformation.

“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment,” stated Emanuel James ‘Jim’ Rohn (1930-2009), whose sports were making money, writing and motivational speaking.

“The only discipline that lasts is self-discipline,” declared Oail Andrew ‘Bum’ Phillips Jr (1923-2013), head coach in the National Football League for the Houston Oilers, 1975 to 1980 and the New Orleans Saints, 1981 to 1985. (Great name!)

Helping keep your neighbourhood safe

Clint Eastwood – who needs no introduction – made it clear: “Respect your efforts, respect yourself. Self-respect leads to self-discipline. When you have both firmly under your belt, that’s real

power,” he said. You can do your bit to help keep your neighbourhoods safe.

“Without self-discipline, success is impossible, period,” affirmed Lou Holtz (1937-61) who spent 34 years coaching both college and professional football teams and is perhaps best known for an 11-season stint as head coach at Notre Dame.

“Discipline is the bridge between your fitness goals and fitness success. Choosing a volleyball goal and sticking to it changes everything,” wrote Felicity Luckey, born in 1967, author of the book *Great Minds Think Fit*.

“You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength,” affirmed Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, whose sport was running the Roman Empire from 161 to 180ce; the last emperor of Pax Romana.

Sir Alex Ferguson CBE, who managed Manchester United from 1986 to 2013 and is considered by many to be one of the greatest managers of all time, made it clear that “I always felt that our triumphs were an expression of the consistent application of discipline. Once you bid farewell to discipline you say goodbye to success.”

‘What you do to the least of mine, you do to me’

Sir Clive Woodward OBE, an English former rugby union player and coach of the England team from 1997 to 2004, managing them to victory in the 2003 Rugby World Cup, made it clear that “one of the most important skills for me is discipline. You can win or lose a game based on the discipline of your team or an individual player.”

When tempted to get angry with someone’s absurdity, I call to mind that Jesus said, “What you do to the least of mine, you do to me.” (Mt. 25:40) It helps me calm down and control my temper.

An Icelandic proverb makes it clear: “He – or she – who lives without discipline dies without honour.”

“Motivation may get you started but it takes discipline to keep going,” wrote Bonnie Pfister, a fitness model and columnist who was once named *Club Solutions* magazine’s ‘Most Fit Health Club Professional.’

However, I need motivation to keep me keeping on and staying disciplined. My motivations include pride, fear of putting on weight, ageing prematurely, avoiding dementia by thinking and writing, vanity to control my love of fine food and wine and trying not to let down my best friend Yesh – publicly known as Jesus Christ.

LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Sunday Year B, Weekday Cycle II
Sunday, March 10: 4th Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday) 2 Chr.

36:14-16, 19-23; Ps. 137 r. 6; Eph. 2:4-10; Jn. 3:14-21

Monday, March 11: Isa.65:17-21; Ps.30:2,4-6,11-13; Jn. 4:43-54

Tuesday, March 12: Weekday in Lent Ezek.47:1-9,12; Ps.46:2-3,5-6,8-9; Jn.5:1-3,5-16

Wednesday, March 13: Weekday in Lent Isa.49:8-15; Ps. 145:8-9,13-14,17-18; Jn.5:17-30

Thursday, March 14: Weekday in Lent Ex.32:7-14; Ps.106:19-23; Jn.5:31-47

Friday, March 15: Weekday in Lent Wis.2:1,12-22; Ps.34:16,18,19-21,23; Jn.7:1-2,10,25-30

Saturday, March 16: Jer.11:18-20; Ps.7:2-3,9-12; Jn.7:40-52

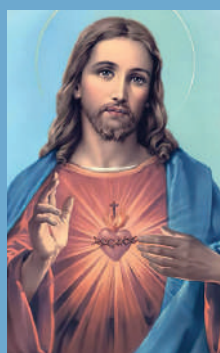
PRAYERS /THANKSGIVING

POWERFUL NOVENA

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be praised, adored, glorified and loved, today and every day, throughout the whole world, now and forever.

Amen.
Say 6 times a day for 9 days.

IMAJ



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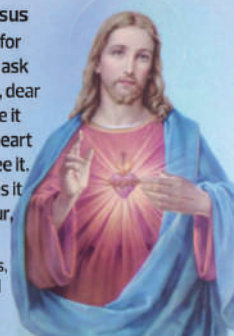
For more details please contact

07867 978558

PRAYERS/THANKSGIVING

Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus
In the past I have asked for many favours, this time I ask for this special one. Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken heart where your Father will see it. Then, in His merciful eyes it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.

Say prayer for three days, promise publication and favour will be granted. Never known to fail



THE MIRACULOUS PRAYER

Dear Heart of Jesus.

In the past I have asked for many favours, this time I ask you for a very special one. (mention favour).

Take it dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken heart where your Father sees it. Then in his merciful eyes it will become your favour not mine,

Amen

Say prayer for three days.



PRAYERS /THANKSGIVING

Grateful thanks to St Jude for favours granted

MCLBEW



Our Lady of Fidelity



The Church needs religious sisters URGENTLY to bring Christ to others by a life of prayer and service lived in the community of Ignatian spirituality.

Daily Mass is the centre of community life. By wearing the religious habit we are witnesses of the consecrated way of life.

If you are willing to risk a little love and would like to find out how, contact Sister Bernadette.

Mature vocations considered.

Convent of Our Lady of Fidelity

1 Our Lady's Close, Upper Norwood, London SE19 3FA
Telephone 07760 297001

UNIVERSE CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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Linking you to the Catholic community

Booking a Classified advertisement in the Universe Catholic Weekly is as easy as 1, 2, 3 ...

- 1 Choose your style - A, B or C below...
- 2 Compose your wording, obtain photos, etc
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CALL Andrea Black on 07918 560608 or email andrea.black@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

We will need your wording, any images, special instructions and dates ad is to run. Payment will be taken over the phone at the time of booking

STYLE A

The best way to remember your loved ones... with personalised memoriam cards, bookmarks and acknowledgements, notelets and other stationery. All styles. Also bespoke funeral Mass cards and Orders of Service, personally designed to reflect your loved one. Contact Kendall Print, on 01234 567890 for free advice on the best style and a free no-obligation quote. Alternatively, call in person for an informal chat at 22 Haig Road, Bolton, Lancs

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- Heading of your choice
- From just £30 per week
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- Include photos, logos
- From just £45 per week

STYLE C

Remember your loved ones in style...

- Personalised memoriam cards
- Bookmarks
- Acknowledgements and notelets.
- Orders of Service
- Funeral Mass cards



Delivered in just 48 hours guaranteed!

Kendall Print, 22 Haig Rd, Bolton. Call us on 01243 624356

- Two columns wide.
- Free design service
- Heading of your choice
- £80 per week. Discounts for multiple week bookings

Best Value, Biggest Impact



Marble statue of St Frances of Rome in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street, London.

St Frances of Rome

Francesca Bussa de' Leoni, known as Frances of Rome Obl.S.B., was an Italian Catholic mystic, organiser of charitable services and a Benedictine oblate who founded a religious community of oblates, who share a common life without religious vows.

Born: 1384, Rome. **Died:** 9th March 1440 in Rome

Canonised: 1608 by Pope Paul V

Feast Day: 9th March

Major shrine: Church of Santa Francesca Romana, Rome.

Patronage: Benedictine oblates, car drivers and widows.