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Abuse survivors speak of a 'transformative experience' after apology from religious order

Andy Drozdziak

Eight survivors of clerical abuse at the hands of the Comboni Missionaries religious order have described receiving a full apology for their treatment as a "transformative experience". The apology came after members of the Comboni Survivors' Group, accompanied by Bishop of Leeds, Marcus Stock, and Cardinal Vincent Nichols, travelled to Rome to address members of the Comboni Institute's leadership and General Council, at the order's invitation. The visit included a private meeting with Pope Francis, whom

they first met in June 2022. In a statement, the members of the Comboni Survivors' Group said that, while they were previously met with silence and scepticism over several years from the Comboni Missionaries, the atmosphere has 'started to change for us over the past several months' after meeting with the leadership. In several meetings, which included one with Pope Francis, the Survivors' group shared with the leaders 'painful histories of abuse' and 'the devastation brought on by the dreadful response we received from the London Province

when we looked for help.' The leaders 'not only heard, but believed us' the group – a change in attitude that was truthful to reconciliation. "The atmosphere of fear and re- crimination began to change as we have met with and been welcomed by the Comboni Missionaries' leadership," the Survivors' group said. "We feel that we were now not only heard, but believed by the Comboni leadership. This is something that has brought us a sense of calm. "This has been a transformative experience. With goodwill and a com-

mon commitment to dialogue and action, the frustration and hurt we have carried for so many years can be channelled into making things different not only for ourselves but all those who face similar experiences to us." St Peter Claver College in Mirfield, West Yorkshire, where the abuse took place, operated between 1960 and 1984 as a 'Junior Seminary' – a boarding school for boys discerning a vocation to the priesthood.

Continued on page 2

Pope's health 'fine' despite enforced stay in hospital

Pope Francis has spent a "comfortable" two nights in Rome's Gemelli hospital after he was diagnosed with a respiratory infection that required treatment, the Vatican said, but there is no sign that he has Covid or that the ailment is anything more than minor. However, given the pontiff's age – he is 86 – doctors advised the hospital stay. The Vatican press office moved swiftly to counter rumours the pope was seriously ill, saying the course of treatment was largely routine. "Pope Francis complained of some respiratory difficulties that will require several days of appropriate medical treatment in the hospital." "Pope Francis is touched by the many messages he's received and expresses his gratitude for the closeness and prayer," the press office said. Among those calling for prayers was US President Joe Biden, who asked Catholics "to say an extra prayer for the pope this weekend."

Audiences with the pope scheduled for this week have been cancelled, and the illness threatens his participation in planned Easter services. Several media outlets claimed the alarm was raised after the pope complained of chest pains shortly after his weekly general audience on Wednesday, at which point he was advised to go to the hospital immediately. He was not admitted as an emergency case, however. The Gemelli hospital, part of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, keeps a suite of rooms reserved for the popes on its 10th floor. The pope has long insisted he remains in good health, while admitting his mobility will never return fully after struggling with chronic knee pains. It is now a common sight to see the Holy Father in a wheelchair and being helped by assistants to stand at Vatican events. This latest bout of ill health will further fuel rumours that he plans to retire as pope, however.

Continued on page 2



Members of the Comboni Survivors' Group in Rome with Cardinal Nichols and Bishop Stock of Leeds. The support of the two senior clergy has been vital in the survivors' story being heard in Rome

Inside



Another day, another shooting
– pg 17

JRS report exposes plight of migrants in former barracks
– pg 3

Nicaragua shows off jailed bishop in TV special
– pg 18

Class, not colour or faith, divides Britain
– pg 6

India's Christians face discrimination
– pg 21



See the face of Christ in others
– pg 13

Vatican appeals for faithful to back Good Friday collection for the Holy Land

The desecrated face of a statue of the crucified Christ in a Jerusalem church should move Catholics around the world “to recognise the pain of so many of our brothers and sisters” in the Holy Land, a top Vatican official said as he appealed for the faithful to support a Good Friday collection.

Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for Eastern Churches, urged bishops to ask their flocks to generously support the traditional Good Friday collection for the Holy Land.

Customarily, 65% of the funds collected goes to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, which ministers to Christians throughout the Middle East and is responsible for most of the shrines connected with the life of Jesus, including the Church of the Flagellation where a Jewish tourist attacked a statue of Christ in February.

The remaining cash goes to the Dicastery for Eastern Churches and funds seminaries, advanced education for priests and nuns and Catholic schools in the Middle East.

The Franciscans also minister humanitarian aid in the region, which has come under pressure after the devastating earthquakes that struck the region in February.

“To the drama of the war in Syria, the strong seismic shocks added (to the) devastation caused by collapsed buildings,” Archbishop Gugerotti wrote. “Our brothers and sisters in faith this time no longer fear bombs or for what the invasion of the Plain of Nineveh had meant in Iraq, but because their very houses trembled.”

Franciscans in the region were among the first to offer shelter and aid to victims of the earthquakes, he said, and remain “sources of hope, caring for the youngest, oldest and most vulnerable.”

A Vatican report said just over \$9 million was collected in 2022.

In addition to support of the Jesuit-run Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, the dicastery used its share to support regular church life across the Middle East, as well as assist refugees and residents on the Greek island of Rhodes and help Christians whose incomes were disrupted by Covid when pilgrimages stopped.

Vatican moves to downplay health scare

Continued from page 1

He has made no secret in the past that he believes retirement from the papacy is an option if his health means he cannot do the job properly any more. Pope Benedict “opened the door for all of us in the future, making it possible to step down,” he said last year.

The death of the former pope at the end of 2022 also clears one of the obstacles that may have caused him to not retire, of Rome having effectively three popes alive at the same time. With Benedict’s passing, Francis could follow his predecessor’s blueprint and live quietly in the Vatican grounds while a successor leads the Church.

The pope’s health has been the subject of speculation for some time. In an interview with the Associated Press, Pope Francis had said that the diverticulitis, or bulges in his intestinal wall, had “returned”, but he insisted he was in good health, apart from his troublesome knee.

Pope Francis had spent 10 days in

Gemelli hospital in July 2021 after undergoing a three-hour surgery that included a left hemicolectomy, which is the removal of the descending part of the colon, a surgery that can be recommended to treat diverticulitis.

Three days after surgery, the Vatican said, “the final histological examination has confirmed a severe diverticular stenosis with signs of sclerosing diverticulitis,” a hardening of the tissue. The statement seemed to indicate that the biopsy showed no cancerous cells, although it did not say so explicitly, and rumours began.

Interviewed by the Reuters news agency in July 2022, the pope was asked about rumors that doctors had found cancer.

According to Reuters, Pope Francis laughed and said: “They didn’t tell me about it. They didn’t tell me.”

But, really, he said, “they explained everything to me well – full stop.”

The cancer rumour, he said, “is court gossip. The court spirit is still there in the Vatican. And if you think



A pained-looking Pope is helped down from his popemobile after his weekly general audience on Wednesday

about it, the Vatican is the last European court of an absolute monarchy.”

In 1957, at the age of 20, Pope Francis was hospitalised after being misdiagnosed with the flu. In the book, *Let us Dream*, written with Austen Ivereigh, the pope said, “Straightaway they took a litre and a half of water

out of the lung, and I remained there fighting for my life. The following November they operated to take out the upper right lobe of one of the lungs.”

While the pope can sometimes be heard breathing heavily, he has insisted the surgery had no lasting impact on his health.

‘At last, our stories have been heard’

Continued from page 1

Until September 2022, the survivors had never previously received any “adequate pastoral response” in the form of an unreserved acknowledgment or apology from the Comboni Missionaries – previously known as the Verona Fathers – which ran the College.

Last year, the men attended a one-and-a-half-hour private audience with Pope Francis and in September 2022, the Very Rev. Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, met them at Westminster to issue the Order’s first acknowledgment and apology.

The Comboni Survivors’ Group thanked Pope Francis, who “encouraged us to stay the course of dialogue and encounter, even during the darkest

days”, as well as the Comboni Missionaries, referring to them as “allies on the path to healing and renewal.”

Bede Mullen, spokesman for the Comboni Survivors’ Group, said the group has “achieved our goal” of communicating the abuse they received to the Comboni leadership. “The Order listened to the testimony of survivors

“

We are truly blessed to have been so well supported by the Diocese of Leeds and Bishop Marcus Stock

and learned to accept the shame of their behaviour. We move forward as brothers to repair the damage done,” he added.

Mr Mullen also acknowledged the support of Bishop Marcus Stock, whose apology in 2021, on behalf of the Diocese of Leeds where the abuse took place, was the first time any senior figure in the Catholic Church had acknowledged it. “We are truly blessed to have been so well supported by the Diocese of Leeds,” Mr Mullen said. Bishop Marcus spoke of accompanying the survivors as “a very great honour”. “I pray that this encounter, which they have so longed for, can now bring them healing and peace,” he added.

The Institute of the Comboni Missionaries also issued a statement, say-

ing that they are “truly sorry for the times we have not responded adequately, and we ask once again for forgiveness.”

“Only recently have we come to fully understand the impact of lasting harm this abuse has caused to the lives of those entrusted to our care all those years ago.”

“We deplore and condemn what happened,” the statement said.

“We also regret the misunderstandings and missed opportunities when responding to the Comboni Survivors Group that unfortunately led to more harm and hurt.

“We have heard their experiences and we believe their stories of pain and disappointment and we want to make things better as much as we can.”

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JRS report shames state over use of barracks for migrants

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) UK has released an in-depth report into the experiences of people held in asylum camps in Napier Barracks.

As the Illegal Migration Bill progresses at haste through Parliament, the report shines a unique light onto the asylum system, particularly Napier Barracks.

Interviews with men held at Napier Barracks, a disused army base on a hilltop in Kent, show the reality inside a system which threatens to expand exponentially if the Illegal Migration Bill legislation is passed.

Erfan, a former resident of Napier Barracks, is quoted in the report. "I was in Napier barracks for more than two months. I am now looking back at what I have been through and think how traumatising that experience was. The whole asylum process was traumatising, and Napier barracks was emblematic of that."

JRS UK Director Sarah Teather pointed to the "inappropriate" facilities at Napier and similar places.

"Disused military barracks are especially inappropriate as asylum ac-



commodation. The military barracks are prison-like and institutional," she said. "In this report, men have shared how the conditions at Napier are reminiscent of conditions they fled.

"These quasi-detention conditions expose people to significant re-trauma.

This serves no good purpose. It is ghettoising. It must not be the new normal for asylum accommodation in the UK. It is not too late to turn back."

Backing the research of JRS, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on

Immigration Detention reiterated calls for the closure of the 130-year-old military site, which has been dogged by allegations of poor conditions.

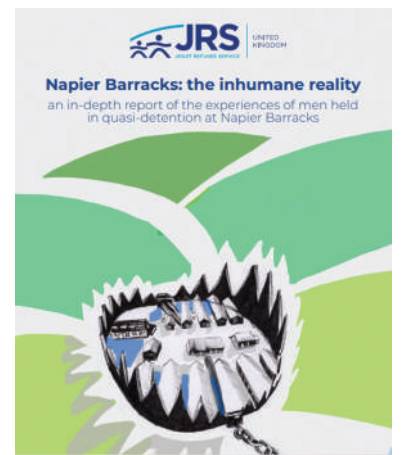
APPG chairwoman Alison Thewliss, the SNP MP for Glasgow Central, said: "Residents in the barracks are living in the most dreadful of circumstances, and this must end."

Two watchdogs previously described parts of the barracks near Folkestone in Kent as "filthy" and "decrepit", highlighting "fundamental failures" in housing asylum seekers there.

JRS UK worked with people placed at Napier barracks in Kent for two years from when it was repurposed as asylum accommodation in autumn 2020. In September 2021, the Government deployed emergency powers to extend the site's use for this purpose for another five years.

Despite significant criticism of facilities at the site, including a judgment from the High Court declaring them inadequate and the Home Office guilty of employing unlawful practices.

Furthermore, the use of emergency powers circumvented consultation



The cover of the JRS report

with local community that such an extension would normally require.

A Home Office spokesperson referred to Napier Barracks as 'contingency accommodation', adding that "a search has been carried out to identify alternatives, with the use of redundant RAF bases at Scampton in Lincolnshire and Wethersfield in Essex and the conversion of private land in Bexhill, East Sussex set to provide rudimentary accommodation for several thousand asylum seekers."

But JRS criticised this approach as "profoundly destructive."

"The Government plans to make sites like Napier the new normal for asylum accommodation, and this report demonstrates how profoundly destructive that would be for all those involved," JRS said.

New Bill set to harm trafficking victims

CARE have joined campaigners in blasting the UK Government's immigration plans as a danger to trafficking victims.

Unseen, a charity that helps people escape exploitation, is calling on MPs to oppose aspects of the small boats bill.

At present, the plans would make anyone entering the UK illegally subject to arrest, detention and deportation and unable to claim asylum.

Illegal immigrants also face being barred from accessing support offered to modern slavery victims under existing legislation.

This despite the fact people coming to the UK can be coerced and exploited, both before and after making the journey.

Andrew Wallis, Chief Executive of Unseen, told *The Guardian*: "I'm hugely concerned that we have legislation going through Parliament that will deny modern slavery victims access to support and protection that has not a shred of evidence behind it."

"There has been a deliberate conflating of immigration, smuggling and trafficking by this Government, who are now saying that victims of serious crime will not have access to justice or the support they need purely based on the way that they entered the country".

The CEO added that this is dangerous because trafficking victims are often brought to the UK by "force or coercive, deceptive or fraudulent means."



James Mildred from Christian justice charity CARE believes changes and amendments to the Bill are "badly needed."

"While the small boats legislation assumes victims will still be identified, they will not be entitled to support or prevention from deportation unless they are helping the police or prosecutors with their enquiries," Mr Mildred said.

"In other words, if you're trafficked into the UK via a small boat, you're identified and unless you decide there and then to help the police, you'll be deported. The whole point, however, of long-term support is to give victims the time they need to make those sort of decisions."

"Pioneer of the Modern Slavery Act, Theresa May, said the UK Government had agreed to meet with her to discuss her concerns around modern slavery. Perhaps at committee stage, we'll see some changes and amendments made. They are badly needed."

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In brief

Record low NHS satisfaction

Public satisfaction with the NHS has fallen to a record low, a new survey has found.

The latest British Social Attitudes survey found that just 29 per cent said they were satisfied with the NHS in 2022, seven percentage points down on last year and a drop from the 2010-high of 70 per cent.

After a winter of unprecedented strikes in the NHS, waiting times and staff shortages were the biggest concerns among the public.

Responding to the findings, Healthwatch said “the public is clear that they support the principles of the NHS” and “services need to work hand in hand with people to create a healthcare system that is... designed around patients’ needs”.

Tributes paid to ‘unique’ O’Grady

Popular broadcaster and comedian Paul O’Grady has died at the age of 67, his partner Andre Portasio has said. In a statement, he said the star died “unexpectedly but peacefully” on Tuesday evening.

In a career that spanned more than three decades, he hosted *The Paul O’Grady Show*, *Blind Date* and *For The Love Of Dogs*, as well as a number of shows in his drag queen persona of Lily Savage.

His long-time radio producer Malcolm Prince posted on Twitter that “we have lost a unique talent – and I’ve lost a dear friend”.

Migrants ‘to be moved to barge’

Migrants will be moved from hotels to an ‘accommodation barge’ under government plans to deter people from coming to the UK. Ministers have acquired a barge capable of holding hundreds of people which will be moored in a port rather than at sea.

The Home Office intends the barges to be a “deterrent, not a magnet” a spokesman told *The Sun*, while *The Times* said the barge is “of a kind usually used for offshore construction projects” and it is “unclear how the Government would deal with matters such as the safety of those on board”.

Alongside this, the immigration minister is expected to confirm plans to transfer about 3,000 migrants from hotels to RAF bases.

A spokesman for a migrants advocacy group said the plans “showed the need for safe avenues through which asylum seekers could gain entry to the UK and settle in our communities, rather than being imprisoned at sea.”

Big William Hill fine shows betting reform needed now

Andy Drozdzak

A long-delayed gambling White Paper is “desperately” needed, according to Catholic MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith and Christian justice charity CARE, after bookmaker William Hill was fined a record £19 million by the gambling regulator for “widespread” failures of measures meant to protect gamblers from falling into debt and to prevent money laundering.

The Gambling Commission said that three gambling businesses owned by William Hill will pay a fine totalling £19.2 million – the largest in the Gambling Commission’s history – for “widespread and alarming” social responsibility and anti-money laundering failures.

Sir Iain, the vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling-Related Harm, said he was optimistic that the Government was now open to tougher reform of the gambling industry.

“The fine is a good idea and I am pleased, but it does beg the question why we need the White Paper desperately now,” he told BBC Radio 4’s *World At One* programme.

Social responsibility failures at William Hill businesses included allowing one customer to open a new account and spend £23,000 in 20 minutes, allowing another to open an account and spend £18,000 in 24 hours, and a third able to spend £32,500 over two days – all without any checks.

The Government’s gambling White Paper, a review of the Gambling Act 2005, remains on hold with its release consistently delayed.

Speculating on the reasons for the delay, the senior Tory MP suggested



that the Government had been “uneasy about greater regulation” and there were “debates and arguments” about the White Paper “going too far”.

But, “I think those have ended now,” Sir Iain said, adding his hopes that the White Paper will mean that “we are at last on our way to getting a better regulated – not overregulated, but better regulated – gambling industry.”

Tim Cairns, CARE’s gambling policy lead, said the William Hill fine highlights a “shocking culture within the British gambling industry.”

“The business model operated by bookmakers like William Hill depends entirely on British people making financial loss.”

He added: “There is strong evidence, over many years, that companies exploit the vulnerable, and ignore signs

of compulsive behaviour,” Mr Cairns said.

“These kinds of reports are yet another reminder that tougher regulation is needed. The betting industry is out of control.”

CARE has campaigned for the introduction of the White Paper for several years, which Mr Cairns repeated.

“We again urge the UK Government to bring forward its gambling white paper so parliament can approve vital changes,” he said.

Responding to the fine, a spokesman for 888, which owns William Hill, said:

“The entire group shares the Gambling Commission’s commitment to improve compliance standards across the industry and we will continue to work collaboratively with the regulator and other stakeholders to achieve this.”



Iain Duncan Smith

JK slams gender recognition reform as ‘one of UK’s biggest medical scandals’

Andy Drozdzak

Harry Potter author JK Rowling has joined Scotland’s Catholic bishops in blasting a controversial Gender Reform Bill, calling society’s openness to allow children to change gender “one of the worst medical scandals in a century”.

“We are watching one of the worst medical scandals in a century,” she said. “Those that should have known better – the medics and those who have unquestionably cheered this on – are creating a climate in which those trying to raise red flags have been intimidated and silenced.”

Rowling has been a fierce critic of the Scottish Government’s Gender Recognition Reform Bill, under which it will become easier to change gender via a process called ‘self-ID’. It has been blocked by the UK Government over concerns that it adversely impacts UK wide legislation, namely the Equalities Act.

Like Rowling, Scotland’s eight

Catholic Bishops have also previously registered their concerns about the legislation.

“Together with a growing number of voices in society, the Church believes that sex or gender cannot be reduced to a mere construct of society that is fluid and changeable. Denying the biological reality of sexual difference and redefining something as fundamental as male and female is not within the purview of government or parliamentarians. Like marriage, it is part of the natural law: an unchanging principle of human existence,” the bishops said.

Rowling pointed to most major studies suggesting that children who experience gender dysmorphia will grow out of it as she spoke on the podcast *‘The Witch trials of JK Rowling.’*

She also cited a *Sunday Times* poll which suggested that 88% of sexual assaults take place in shared spaces,



JK Rowling

adding that female confidence to challenge a man entering a female lavatory is eroding.

CARE for Scotland spokesman Michael Veitch highlighted the charity’s “strongest possible opposition” to the law, while emphasising the need for vulnerable women and children to be protected.

“Allowing any person to self-declare their legal sex without any medical consultation or other oversight opens vulnerable women and children up to new safeguarding risks and erodes sex-based rights and protections. Making 16-year-old children eligible is also highly controversial,” Mr Veitch said.

“Ultimately, by reducing the meaning of male and female to a matter of personal preference, the legislation in question is built upon an objective falsehood, and thereby threatens to cause significant harm, to young people in Scotland in particular.”

Liverpool's favourite son Bishop Tom so proud of his time serving his city



A popular Liverpool bishop has submitted his resignation to Pope Francis following his 75th birthday after declaring his ministry “the happiest days of my life.”

In accordance with Canon Law, Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Tom Williams on 25th March from the office of Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool upon reaching the age of 75. Bishop Williams will now be known as Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus.

Bishop Tom said: “I give thanks for the many blessings of my ministry as Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool. The happiest days of my life have been spent in chaplaincy work in hospitals, schools and prisons and I now look forward to focusing on and continuing that pastoral ministry as Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus.”

Commenting on this milestone for Bishop Tom, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon paid tribute to the ministry of ‘one of its own.’

“20 years ago, the then Canon Tom Williams of St Anthony of Egypt, Scotland Road, was called by Pope St John Paul II to be an auxiliary bishop. Two decades on, we give thanks for so much accomplished and for God’s blessing on the years ahead,” Arch-

bishop McMahon said. “Today is an opportunity for the entire archdiocese to thank God for the long, dedicated ministry of one of its own as deacon, priest, and bishop.

“Bishop Tom, very much a son of the city of Liverpool, and granted the Freedom of the City recently, is well known and loved by many and has



Bishop Tom has been an inspiration, a guiding light, a listening ear and a community leader.

made valuable contributions to the civil and ecclesial life of the city and region.”

Bishop Tom received the city’s highest civic honour – the Freedom of the City of Liverpool – during a special ceremony at Liverpool’s Town Hall in September 2021, in which he was praised by religious and civic leaders alike. Mary Rasmussen, who was Lord Mayor of Liverpool at the time, referred to Bishop Tom as “an inspiration, a guiding light, a listening ear and a

community leader.”

Bishop Tom’s pastoral ministry spans more than 50 years since his ordination in the Metropolitan Cathedral on 27 May 1972. He served in the parishes of St Francis of Assisi, Garston; Sacred Heart, Liverpool; Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Liverpool and St Anthony, Scotland Road.

He became Chair of Project Jennifer, a local initiative to re-generate the north end of Liverpool which resulted in a £160M new-build housing and retail park which opened in 2017 and is still progressing.

He also worked, with Monsignor Michael McKenna, to establish the clergy healthcare scheme in the archdiocese and gave long service over many years to the archdiocesan finance committee and the archdiocesan George Andrew Fund.

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon said: “Today marks a point in his ministry when, freed from the administrative burdens of being a vicar general and civil trustee, he can focus more on what he enjoys so much; that is the pastoral ministry of being a priest and bishop.

“I look forward to his continued help as the Auxiliary Emeritus.”

Warning as new FM plots ‘extreme’ abortion laws

Andy Drozdziak

Pro-life groups are warning that the pro-abortion pledges of new First Minister Humza Yousaf could lead to Scotland having ‘the most extreme abortion legislation in Europe.’

Mr Yousaf, who won the race to be the next First Minister of Scotland on Monday, has committed to removing abortion from the criminal law.

During the leadership campaign, when asked by campaign group, Back Off Scotland – which is run by BPAS, the UK’s largest abortion provider – whether he supported a law change to remove ‘abortion from the criminal law,’ Mr Yousaf said he would support “bringing forward decriminalisation proposals in current parliament term.” He is also committed to buffer zones around abortion facilities.

Grace Browne from SPUC Scotland spoke of the “extreme” impact Mr

the most extreme abortion legislation in Europe.”

The change in law proposed by Mr Yousaf would scrap the current 24-week time limit for abortion – and abortion would be available on demand, for any reason, up to birth. He is also in favour of introducing sex-selective abortion.

Right To Life UK spokesperson, Catherine Robinson, noted that such “extreme” proposals are not supported by women, with only 1% wanting the abortion time limit to be increased right through to birth.

“What decriminalisation is really about here is making radical changes that would allow abortion up to birth, a change in the law that polling shows the general public, and women in particular, are totally against,” she said.

“Rather, Yousaf should commit to sensible new restrictions and increased support for women with unplanned pregnancies. This would ensure we were working together as a society to reduce the tragic number of abortions that happen each year.”

Grace Browne also called on Yousaf to “protect and uphold” the rights of unborn children.

“Scotland deserves a life affirming leader, who is unafraid to stand up and speak in defence of unborn babies and mothers,” she said.

“SPUC hopes that Humza Yousaf will work to protect and uphold the rights of all Scottish people, including...unborn children.”



‘Under Yousaf’s pro-abortion pledges, Scotland could have the most extreme abortion legislation in Europe.’

Yousaf’s appointment could have on the pro-life movement.

“Scotland is already facing soaring abortion rates, with 13,758 unborn children killed in Scotland last year alone and countless mothers and families hurt,” she told the *Universe*.

“Under Yousaf’s pro-abortion pledges, Scotland could end up with

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— **COMMENT** —
‘Yousaf’s victory in Scotland brings with it UK-wide repercussions’

Humza Yousaf’s narrow victory in the SNP leadership election suggests he has much to do to heal the divisions that have opened up in the party. He campaigned as the “continuity candidate” to succeed Nicola Sturgeon, but received just 52 per cent of the vote in the second round, indicating that continuity is not what a large proportion of nationalists want.

Kate Forbes, the runner-up, ran him close with 48 per cent and she has been highly critical of the direction the SNP has taken in recent months. In particular, she rejected its stand on trans rights and other social policies.

The fact that she picked up almost half of the votes would appear to demonstrate that her views are shared by a good many members.

Mr Yousaf, a republican, has recommitted the party to a referendum on independence within five years even though the courts have ruled another cannot be held unilaterally without the say-so of the Westminster Parliament.

In Scotland, Mr Yousaf is not regarded as an especially competent minister, having presided over several offices, from health to transport, that have singularly failed to deliver any improvements for the people of Scotland. Moreover, the SNP’s inability to achieve another separatist vote and its poor record in government are likely to dent its support in heartland areas where Labour hopes to recapture some of its lost territory.

Under Mrs Sturgeon, the SNP supplanted Labour as the main party in Scotland, taking 80 per cent of the seats. Conservatives must be hoping Mr Yousaf does not trigger a complete collapse of the SNP vote into the hands of a resurgent Labour Party. The seats that Sir Keir Starmer can capture in Scotland could be the difference between winning and losing the next general election.

It isn’t colour or faith that divides us; it is still class

Parveen Akhtar & Timothy Peace

Humza Yousaf’s appointment as First Minister of Scotland is a historic moment for the UK. It means that, for the first time in history, the country has a Hindu Prime Minister in Westminster (Rishi Sunak) and a Muslim First Minister in Scotland.

In his victory speech, Yousaf said: “We should all take pride in the fact that today we have sent a clear message, that your colour of skin, your faith, is not a barrier to leading the country we all call home.”

On the face of it, these two men, whose families came to the UK as immigrants looking for a better life, embody the dream that, through hard work, immigrants and their children can make it to the top of society.

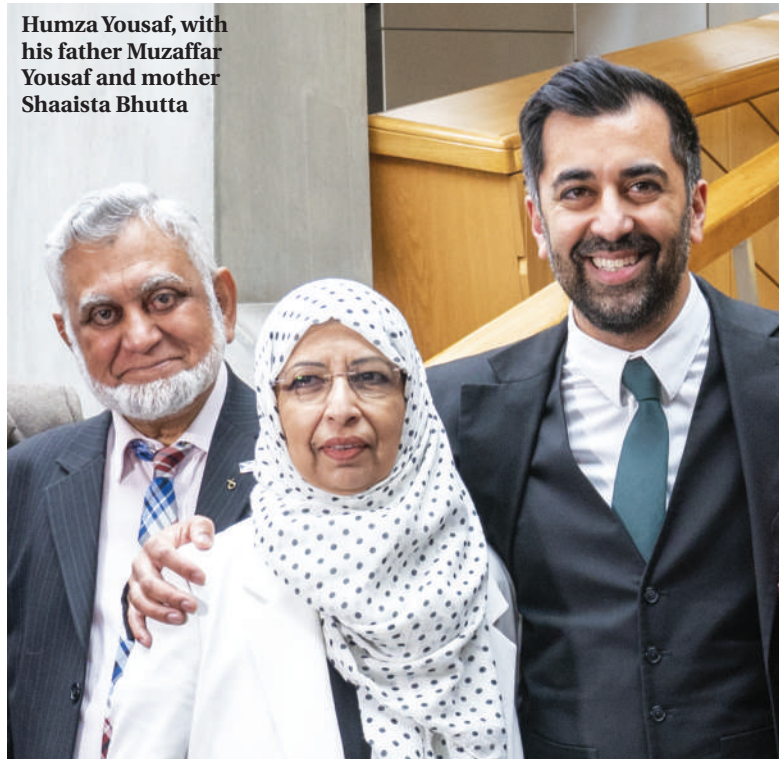
Similar stories are playing out elsewhere at the top level of British politics, too. Scotland’s main opposition party Labour is led by Anas Sawar, a man who is also of Pakistani Muslim heritage, as is Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London. The Westminster cabinet also has unprecedented ethnic diversity.

Many of these politicians are the children and grandchildren of immigrants who came to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s, economic migrants from former colonies like India, Pakistan and the nations of east Africa and the Caribbean, who came with little money and limited English language. This first wave of postcolonial migrants often worked in the great British industries, in factories and in mills, settling in large town and cities.

Scotland is the only western European nation to have a Muslim leader and the UK the only democracy where the children of formerly colonised people are running the country that colonised their parents’ and grandparents’ nations. The moment is monumental. The UK, Scotland and indeed Ireland are all led by people from the south Asian diaspora.

Both Yousaf and Sunak have credited their grandparents and parents for their work ethic, which they say has enabled them to move

Humza Yousaf, with his father Muzaffar Yousaf and mother Shaaista Bhutta



up Britain’s social and political hierarchy. It’s an inspiring story but perhaps one they should both reflect on now they are in power. It is perhaps harder for arrivals in today’s Britain to replicate this journey.

The ultimate stress test awaits

Though Yousaf has stated he is a practising Muslim, he is also clear that he does not believe that legislators should be led by faith in their decision-making. That said, at an event we organised at the Scottish Parliament on Muslims and the political process in Scotland when Yousaf first became an MSP, he revealed that his faith had been part of his motivation for getting into politics in the first place.

His political awakening had taken place a decade earlier in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. As he sat watching the images of the Twin Towers with classmates, they turned to ask him why Muslims hated America. That, he states, is when he realised politics mattered.

Yousaf’s faith and ethnicity had previously been rarely commented on in Scottish politics. Indeed, it is rare to hear him described as a ‘Muslim minister’ or ‘British Asian MSP’. The same applies to others who have preceded or followed him and is a measure of how far the UK has come with regards to minorities in public life.

During the SNP leadership contest, however, Yousaf’s absence from a vote on equal marriage for same-sex couples was questioned and linked to his faith and standing in the Glasgow Pakistani community. The allegation was that he did not want to vote in favour of this legislation for fear of alienating that community.

A spokesperson for Yousaf’s campaign responded by saying that he “unequivocally supports equal marriage” and that his absence from the vote was due to “an extremely important engagement which involved trying to secure the release of a Scottish national sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan”.

It is important to note that neither Yousaf or Sunak have yet faced the real stress test. They both became leaders on the back of a closed party selection process so have not yet had to stand as a leader in a public election.

That will be the real measure of how accepting the wider British public is of the changing face of national politics. It remains to be seen whether their ethnicity becomes a factor in the public debate around their politics.

Both Yousaf and Sunak seem keen to keep their faith in the private sphere, which is expected in British politics. Former prime minister Tony Blair’s team famously lived by the mantra “We don’t do God” when it came to avoiding discussions about his Christianity.

The class caveat

Yousaf’s politics couldn’t be more different from Sunak’s. He is firmly left of centre on immigration, welfare and taxation. This reminds us that the ethnic minority political identity is not uniform, although for years parties on the left took the minority vote for granted.

Today ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is reflected across the political spectrum. It is possible to reach the top whatever your political identity.

But it should be noted that less has changed when it comes to educational and social background. Yousaf’s father was an accountant. Sunak the son of a doctor and a pharmacist. Both men went to private school. They were part of a generation of immigrants who were able to come to the UK and make a better life for themselves.

Politics continues to be dominated by the privately educated. Class is the true divide in British politics, whatever colour rosette a candidate wears.

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Bishop delighted as Catholic schools' RE is best in country

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic schools are celebrating after new data confirmed that their GCSE Religious Education (RE) exam results are the best in the country, as Bishop Marcus Stock shared an Easter message of encouragement to Catholic schools.

Analysis by the Catholic Education Service (CES) of GCSE RE attainment for 2022 has shown that results from Catholic schools have overtaken the national average for the exams.

Last year 75.2% of Catholic school RE GCSE candidates scored a C+ or grade 4, compared to 68.3% nationally.

The results at A Level were more comparable, however, with 66.9% achieving A* or B in Catholic schools, compared to 67.7% in all schools.

Just over a quarter (25.6%) of all pupils who sat GCSE RE exams last year were from Catholic schools, while the proportion was 9.8% at A Level.

Across England and Wales, there are 2,175 Catholic schools, colleges and academies, which educate more than 849,000 pupils. This represents 9% of the state sector in England and 6% in Wales.

Philip Robinson, CES RE Adviser, welcomed the statistics and underlined the "essential role" of RE in schools. "This is good news, and tes-



tament to the hard work of RE teachers and students in Catholic education," Mr Robinson said.

"In a society both increasingly secular and religiously pluralistic, RE has an essential role in enabling respectful

dialogue on contentious issues like faith and science; refugees and asylum seekers; war and peace."

The Catholic Education Service (CES) acts on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference to support

Catholic education.

In his Easter message to schools, CES Chair Bishop Marcus Stock noted that, for young people taking exams, this time of year in the run-up to May and June can be "a time of hope but can be a time of anxiety."

"What is most important, though, is that their time in school is a time when they can flourish: in mind, body and spirit," Bishop Marcus said.

"Christ came that we might have life and have it to the full. The flourishing of young lives through Catholic education is indebted to the years of dedication and commitment given by school leaders, teachers, learning assistants, chaplains and by all the staff and governors of our schools."

Bishop Marcus also pointed to the "new life in Christ" which will be celebrated at Easter and is anticipated in schools.

"On the threshold of Holy Week, we catch sight of the new life in Christ which his death and resurrection holds out to us and to the world. It is a vision which we glimpse in the prayers and liturgy taking place in schools and churches up and down the land," he said.

He ended his message by thanking God "for the noble vocation of all of you who work and serve in our schools."

In brief

Danger to health over oil leak in Poole

A major incident has been declared after around 200 barrels of reservoir fluid including oil leaked into the water at Poole Harbour, Dorset. Members of the public were urged not to swim at the site or its surrounding area until further notice. Perenco, a gas company, said a "small" amount of the fluid escaped from its pipeline and that, as of late Sunday evening, some of it had already been recovered. Poole is a Site of Special Scientific Interest which is home to a variety of wading birds, said the BBC.

Long Covid 'risks new inequality'

Two-thirds of workers with long Covid have faced unfair treatment in the UK, according to a new report.

The Government must act to ensure long Covid sufferers receive the support they need from employers, said the TUC and the charity Long Covid Support, or it will risk creating "new, long-lasting inequalities".

In the latest analysis based on responses from more than 3,000 long Covid sufferers, people report harassment, not being believed about symptoms or threatened with disciplinary action.

One in seven said they had lost their job, with others saying their employment was at risk.

Campaigners blast plans to introduce assisted suicide

Baroness Finlay and Baroness Hollins led pro-life criticism of assisted suicide in the first evidence session of the Health and Social Care Committee inquiry on introducing the practice in the UK.

Baroness Finlay, a doctor, professor of palliative medicine and past president of the Royal Society of Medicine, said diagnosing terminal illnesses was challenging, citing one example from her career where a man expected to live for only a matter of months is alive today, 11 years on.

Baroness Hollins, professor of the psychiatry of learning disability, past president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and past president of the British Medical Association, also shared important information about the disproportionate effect that assisted suicide can have on individuals with learning disabilities and autism. She said that assumptions are being made about the quality of life of individuals with disabilities.

In response to a question from Chris Green MP and comments from other panellists, Baroness Finlay explained that defining terminal illness is a very difficult task, pointing out that, under

a previous Bill brought forward by Baroness Meacher, an 18-year-old girl suffering from anorexia could be eligible for an assisted suicide, as would a diabetic individual dependent on insulin.

She also noted that diagnostic error is quite common, saying that examples from Canada showed people had been euthanised but never had an illness.

She also noted that, in a survey undertaken by British Medical Association (BMA), "the highest opposition was amongst those clinicians who deal with these patients, look after these patients all the time".

She went on to cite concerns about the drugs being used for euthanasia and assisted suicide, saying that "nowhere in the world have these drugs been approved by any authority for repurposing".

Right To Life UK spokesperson Catherine Robinson said: "The warnings from the Baronesses point to the dangers of euthanasia, and must be taken seriously. Introducing assisted suicide would be very dangerous for those who are vulnerable and would place a significant burden on doctors expected to be involved in deaths."

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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good

People no longer the problem

Sir John Battle



For decades since the first major Club of Rome Report on international development, there has been a strong lobby insisting that over population is the principal cause of the world's problems, not least poverty. In 1968 the biologist Paul R Erlich of Stanford University published *The Population Bomb*. It was really a rehash of Thomas Malthus's 1789 *Essay on the Principle of Population* setting out the thesis that population would outpace agricultural growth unless it was controlled, leading to social breakdown disease and famine. The key issue for both was their projected exponential population growth and the arithmetic growth of the food supply. Predicting that millions would die of starvation in the coming decades, Erlich's proposed solution was the immediate need for population control including 'various forms of coercion'. He even suggested eliminating tax benefits for having additional children if voluntary methods were to fail, a policy that, perhaps surprisingly, Ian Duncan Smith put in the Universal Credit system when he restricted Child Benefit to the first two children.

But now the latest Club of Rome Report suggests there is no population bomb to fear. Rather, the world population will peak soon and lower than predicted, reaching a high of 8.8 billion (it is currently 8.2 billion) before the middle of this century and then decline rapidly to about 6 billion in 2100. The peak could even come earlier if governments work to raise education levels and average incomes. In other words, the predicted pessimistic pressure on population is off.

This, of course, does not solve the huge environmental challenges of over-consumption of resources which is driving the climate crisis, and to be fair to Erlich, he presciently suggested that the human population was moving rapidly towards complete environmental collapse as the richer world used up resources such as water. Today, clean water shortage is increasingly the challenge of many people. As Pope Francis spells out in his seminal encyclical *Laudato Si'*, both care for the poor and care for the earth have to be worked for together.

And rather than panic and press for population control as a magic bullet, now, in our own context, as elsewhere in the world, the issues of both a shrinking workforce and an ageing population demand a radical rethinking of growing, production, consumption and taxation policies.

Get walking: there's a pilgrim route in your neighbourhood

Andy Drozdziak

A new collection of Catholic walking pilgrimage routes in England and Wales can now be found online.

'Hearts in Search of God' is a three-year project to encourage people of all faiths and none to experience a pilgrimage walk in their own locality. It is aimed at people of all faiths and none, for those who wish to rediscover long-hidden history, for faith, fitness or simply for fun.

The combination of ancient and modern ways are mini versions of the long and arduous journeys across Europe which mediaeval and more recently celebrity pilgrims have trodden. The Ways start at each of the 22 Catholic Cathedrals in England and Wales and strike out through town and countryside to one or more the local shrines.

The project has been organised by retired GP Dr Phil McCarthy, former CEO of Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN). Dr Phil walked from Canterbury to Rome in 2008 and from Rome to Istanbul in 2015. Despite suffering from sciatica, he has so far walked seven of the Ways and plans to complete the rest over the next two years.

Dr Phil said he hoped the new routes would encourage a new wave of pilgrims. "I hope the Ways might be useful to Catholic charities for fundraising walks, but you don't have to be formally religious or be walking as a part of a big group to follow these Ways. Walking allows us all to pay attention, to notice small things and to enjoy ordinary places," he said.

"I hope the new Pilgrim Ways will be an opportunity for Christians to deepen their faith, but also for people of all faiths and none to experience a pilgrimage in a Catholic context and with the minimum of financial and environmental cost."

The shortest distance is just 10 miles, while the new routes are greener too. Walking to some of Christendom's



Phil McCarthy (in red with flat cap) joined pilgrims on the 2022 St Wilfrid's Way between Leeds Cathedral and Ripon, via the mediaeval Shrine of Our Lady of the Crag, Knaresborough.

holiest sites can mean beginning or ending the journey with an inter-continental flight – but local pilgrims leave much smaller carbon footprints

A website listing the new routes has been launched and can be found at pilgrimways.org.uk, providing walking guides, GPX files, prayers and other resources, including a downloadable 'Pilgrim Passport', and a certificate at the end of a walk, similar to the 'testimonium' available at the end of the Camino di Santiago de Compostela and the Via Francigena.

The idea was inspired by the fol-

lowing words by Pope Francis about pilgrims: "Whoever they may be – young or old, rich or poor, sick and troubled or curious tourists – let them find due welcome, because in every person there is a heart in search of God, at times without being fully aware of it."

Dr Phil McCarthy said: "To go on pilgrimage is to participate in a practice which is ancient and universal. Walking pilgrimages are slow, humble journeys in constant contact with the Earth. They encourage awe at the magnificence of creation."

"As pilgrims, we are marginal people, always on the move, vulnerable to the elements and dependent on the kindness of strangers. We make these 'covenantal journeys' because we walk where others have trod in the hope that many will follow."

Want to know more?

Full details of the new Pilgrim Ways can be found by clicking here



Animal lover O'Grady mourned by charity

Andy Drozdziak

A Catholic animal charity has hailed comedian, entertainer and animal lover Paul O'Grady as 'an unparalleled advocate for animals' after his death at the age of 67.

The TV star died "unexpectedly but peacefully" on Tuesday evening, with many people immediately responding with sympathy and paying tribute.

O'Grady was a popular animal lover and presented several TV programmes on the subject, including ITV's multi-award-winning *For The Love Of Dogs* and Paul O'Grady's *Animal Orphans*. His contribution to animal welfare was also recognised with an RSPCA animal hero award.

Catholic Concern for Animals shared their appreciation for

O'Grady's work with animals in a tweet following his death.

"Catholic Concern for Animals would like to express our sorrow and sadness for the death of Paul O'Grady. O'Grady was an unparalleled advocate for animals, particularly rescue dogs, and he is a great loss to animal advocacy. Our thoughts are with his partner and his loved ones," the charity said.

Last year, O'Grady was joined by the Queen Consort in a special one-off episode of *For The Love Of Dogs* to mark 160 years of Battersea Dogs and Cats Home.

The Queen Consort was "deeply saddened" to hear of his sudden death at the age of 67 and highlighted O'Grady's "warm heart and infectious humour" which "lit up the lives of so many."

The pair shared a special bond over their love of dogs, met many times and worked closely together in support of Battersea Dogs and Cats Home.

The royal family's official Twitter account paid tribute to the star by posting an image of the Queen Consort smiling alongside O'Grady after they took a rescued West Highland Terrier for a walk during a visit to a Battersea centre in Kent last year.

A source said that the Queen Consort would be sharing her sympathies with O'Grady's family privately.

Right: Paul O'Grady and his dog Buster arriving for the National Television Awards
Photo by: Steve Parsons



Catholics lead calls for UK to act against cruel animal tourist traps

Andy Drozdziak

Former Catholic MP Ann Widdecombe and Bishop John Arnold have joined other faith and secular leaders in condemning the “extreme suffering” of baby Asian elephants used for tourism after a Bill to enforce such a ban cleared the Commons.

The Animals (Low Welfare Activities Abroad) Bill has received an unopposed third reading and it will now undergo further scrutiny in the House of Lords.

The Bill would make it illegal for travel companies in the UK to sell and advertise cruel animal activities that take place abroad.

Duncan McNair, CEO of Save the Asian Elephants (STAE), handed a petition to No. 10 Downing Street, signed by 1.2 million people, which called for a ban on UK firms marketing holiday venues that specifically exploit elephants, and this petition was supported by former politician and popular Catholic Ann Widdecombe.

“The extreme suffering of baby and calf Asian elephants broken for use in so much tourism is appalling,” Ann Widdecombe said.

“So is the shocking heartlessness of numerous travel companies sending customers to venues where such vio-



Elephant trainers often use vicious methods to force the animals to play their part in tourists' 'fun' experiences

lence is routinely committed. I join millions in wholeheartedly supporting the campaign to outlaw advertising of such places.”

Duncan McNair explained the origins of the Animals (Low Welfare Activities Abroad) Bill. “I conceived the notion and framework of a new UK law to ban the advertising and sale of

access to overseas venues where Asian elephants, their babies and all other vertebrate species are brutalised in tourism, so much generated by the UK market, and STAE has pioneered it ever since,” Mr McNair told the *Universe*. “That now constitutes the above Bill which though it differs in some ways from the Bill the UK government

asked me to draft in 2018, is by its reach, scope and promise of adoption across the world regarded as extremely important. This is a law of which this country and in time every country can be proud.”

Bishop John Arnold, Lead bishop for the Environment at the Catholic Bishops' Conference, underlined his

opposition to “the abusive commercial exploitation of Asian elephants.”

“The species is highly sentient and susceptible to pain and feelings of fear, loss and grief in many ways akin to humans. Furthermore, it is widely recognised as environmentally very important to the nourishment and sustenance of the forests it inhabits in the wild, themselves essential to the welfare of the planet,” Bishop Arnold said.

“I strongly support attempts to gain legal protection for Asian elephants through a ban on promotion in the UK market of venues where abusive practices are happening to the elephants.”

Many religious leaders have registered their support for the Bill, including Barbara Gardner, founder and CEO of the Animal Interfaith Alliance, former Jain monk Satish Kumar and Mart Layton from Quaker Concern for Animals. Popular cultural figures and academics such as Ricky Gervais and Dame Jane Goodall also backed it.

Environment minister Trudy Harrison underlined Government support for the Bill. “I hope that the introduction of this Bill will emphasise that we should not exploit animals for human entertainment.”

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In brief

Concern over NHS shortages

NHS staff shortages in England could exceed 570,000 by 2036, a leaked document has warned. The 107-page internal document says the health service needs a massive injection of homegrown doctors, nurses, GPs and dentists to avert a recruitment crisis.

It is already operating with 154,000 fewer full-time staff than it needs, and that number could “balloon” to 571,000 staff by 2036 on current trends.

However, Jeremy Hunt is playing a “key role” in moves to “water down” NHS England’s proposals to increase staff, claimed *The Guardian*.

‘Appalling’ sewage figures revealed

New official data will show raw sewage was dumped into rivers and coastal areas across England more than 300,000 times last year, *The Times* has said. The Environment Agency found that the number of times sewage pollution was spilt from storm overflows reduced by almost a fifth in 2022 from the year before but the total of 300,953 has been labelled “appalling” by campaigners. It is equivalent to 824 spills a day.

Feargal Sharkey, the singer-turned-activist said there must be a “full flush” and “total restructuring of the industry”.

University Challenge ‘rigged’ for Oxbridge

A professor at University College London has accused the BBC of “rigging” *University Challenge* in favour of Oxbridge by allowing each college to enter separately. “Each of the 70-plus Oxbridge colleges, even those with only 300 or 400 students, is allowed to compete in University Challenge, but huge civic universities like Manchester and Birmingham with upwards of 40,000 students are allowed only one entry each,” wrote Frank Coffield.

A BBC spokesman said: “All education institutions that design and deliver teaching towards university-level qualifications are welcome to apply to University Challenge independently”.

Middle-classes ‘like Sunak’

Middle-class voters are beginning to return to the Tories because they like Rishi Sunak, said a polling expert. Lord Hayward said Labour has become “overconfident” in recent months and the poll leads enjoyed by Sir Keir Starmer’s party are “overestimated”. He added that there were signs of voters in affluent areas being won over by the “competency” of Sunak.

Crimea could be next in eye of the storm as Ukraine looks to recover land lost in 2014

WORLD NEWS SPECIAL

Chris Morris

To paraphrase the words of the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, everything began with Crimea, and everything will end there as well. When Russia first occupied Crimea in 2014, it was a major win for Putin, who successfully called the west’s bluff by proceeding to annex the peninsula with minimal international opposition.

Now, as Ukrainian forces consider how to “de-occupy” Crimea, the Russian high command needs to think about how to prevent the recapture of the one territory that they cannot afford to lose.

Ukraine watchers are reporting that Russia is digging in along the northern edge of Crimea, actively recruiting labourers to help fortify the area around the Isthmus of Perekop, the narrow strip of land connecting Crimea to the rest of Ukraine.

Russia has been continuously reinforcing the area since its initial occupation back in 2014, more recently redoubling defences each time Ukrainian forces move closer. As a result, both the narrow land bridge and the adjoining coastline of the Syvash Bay are now hardened against attack. Taken together with rumours of forcible evacuation of any remaining civilians, it is fair to say Russia is gearing up for something to happen in the area.

Why Crimea matters

Zelensky has always maintained that the war in Ukraine must end with the liberation of Crimea. In his nightly address, in August 2022, he said: “Russia has turned our peninsula, which has always been and will be one of the best places in Europe, into one of the most dangerous places in Europe. Russia brought large-scale repression, environmental problems, economic hopelessness and war to Crimea.”

Correspondingly, this has drawn harsh rhetoric from Moscow, most recently from former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev who warned that Moscow would use “absolutely any weapon” if Ukraine attempted to retake the peninsula – which many take to mean nuclear weapons.

Crimea is incredibly significant at the strategic level. It is a base for Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, and provides critical access to trade

Russian soldiers on the march in Perevalne, Crimea.



through ports such as Sevastopol. But in terms of the narrative of the conflict, Putin and his allies have woven Crimea into the Russian national myth, framing it as a vital part of the nation. Losing the region would be humiliating and costly for the regime.

For years, the idea of Ukraine reclaiming Crimea has appeared more than remote. But Kyiv’s military successes at the back end of 2022 have since changed this perception, and the recapture of Kherson back in September has put Ukraine within striking distance.

So far the threat of a nuclear response has appeared to be a bluff, with Russia failing to follow through, despite a series of attacks by Ukraine on Russian military installations there. And Kyiv’s narrative of needing to liberate all territory occupied by Russia since 2014 is gaining international support. A spring offensive to the south has been all but confirmed, with a stated objective of cutting off Crimea from Russian support.

But the battle for Crimea itself is still a way off. Significant groundwork needs to be in place before any direct offensive can take place. Nevertheless, an operation that once seemed impossible is now being seriously considered by both sides.



Kyiv’s narrative of needing to liberate all territory occupied by Russia since 2014 is gaining international support. A spring offensive to the south has been all but confirmed ...

The fight for Crimea

Should it come to a military operation, Crimea is not going to be an easy fight. Options such as an amphibious or airborne assault are too risky, given that Russia still has serviceable naval and air defence assets. A direct approach would see a massive Ukrainian offensive down the Isthmus of Perekop. This could result in Ukrainian forces being funnelled into the area Russia is currently reinforcing, which is far from ideal.

If there is a place to stop a Ukrainian land force, this would be where it happens. The isthmus is an ideal choke point, with little room to manoeuvre. This latest round of defensive construction is turning the area into a formidable position – the narrow space is ideal for Russian massed artillery.

An attacking land force would be at a major disadvantage, even if they possessed naval and air superiority, which unfortunately for Ukraine, cannot be assumed. With the isthmus effectively defended, Crimea becomes an island. This type of challenge will require different skills and equipment to address, being unlike any of the operations it has conducted so far.

It is no coincidence that its name – Perekop – roughly translates to trench. The isthmus has been

fortified by many great powers down the centuries and history tells us it will be hard to retake with a direct assault.

By the time Ukraine launches its counter-offensive in the south, the reality on the ground should look different. Russia’s winter-spring offensives in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts have faltered and the invasion force has taken significant losses in months of heavy fighting in Bakhmut. Russian military morale is reported to be close to breaking point with reports of friction between regular army and Wagner Group mercenaries.

The first aim of any Ukrainian southern offensive would be to isolate the peninsula from resupply completely. Despite repairs to the Kerch bridge, the one road link between Crimea and Russia, it has been shown to be vulnerable and closing it again would mean Russia needing to resupply by sea or air, which is unsustainable for any length of time. If the peninsula can be cut off, the Russian presence in Crimea becomes unsustainable.

The fortifications reportedly being prepared in advance of a possible Ukrainian assault show that Moscow, at least, is taking this prospect seriously. But a great deal will depend on Kyiv receiving superior weaponry in sufficient quantities to launch an attack.

One thing seems certain though – the outcome of the battle for Crimea will be a decisive moment in the course of this conflict.

Christopher Morris is a Teaching Fellow, School of Strategy, Marketing and Innovation, University of Portsmouth

Catholics must play key role in public life, says ex-Minister

The latest Catholic Union 'Pub Talk' took place on 27th March with Rt Hon Ruth Kelly as guest speaker.

The former Labour MP and Government Minister spoke about her work on Pope Francis's Council for the Economy. Established at the beginning of his Papacy to bring order and oversight to the Vatican's finances, the Council reports directly to the Holy Father.

Ruth Kelly, who is also a Catholic Union Vice President, was appointed to the 15-member Council in 2020 as one of seven lay members, six of whom are women.

The former treasurer to the then Prince of Wales, Leslie Ferrar, also serves on the Council.

Ruth spoke about her most recent meeting with Pope Francis in December 2022 where he addressed in great detail and without notes the challenges facing the Vatican's finances. He is someone who "knows his own mind", Ruth said.

An audience of around 40 people put questions to Ruth on the need

for the Church to make ethical investments, the importance of lay leadership, and the need for Catholics to get involved in public life.

The talk, which was sponsored by the *Universe Catholic Weekly*, was the second in a new series of 'Pub Talks' being hosted by the Catholic Union. The events aim to bring together people with an interest in politics and the common good. Details of the next event will be announced shortly.

Ruth Kelly said she was encouraged by the gathering. "It was a pleasure to take part in this event and to see the Catholic Union in such good shape," she said.

"I'm always encouraged by the number of Catholics I meet who are involved in politics at the national or local level. I know just how important it is to have a support network in politics as it can be tough being a Catholic in public life.

"I hope these events will inspire more people to get involved in politics or the life the Church.

"We need good men and women



Catholic Union members gathered to hear Ruth Kelly in the latest of the Pub Talks series

to serve at all levels and all places." Catholic Union Deputy Director James Somerville-Meikle believes all those gathered were "inspired" by Ruth Kelly's words.

"I first met Ruth many years ago when I was a student. I had travelled down to London for Mass in the chapel in Parliament and she gave one of

the readings. It made a lasting impression on me seeing Ruth and other Catholic politicians come together for Mass," Mr Somerville-Meikle told the *Universe*.

"I was delighted that Ruth was able to join us and to be able to introduce her at the start of the evening.

"Her public service and actions have

inspired many people over the years, and I'm sure many more will have been inspired after her talk."

Details of future Pub talks, organised by the Catholic Union, can be found on its website, at www.catholicunion.org.uk



Ruth Kelly with Catholic Union Deputy Director James Somerville-Meikle



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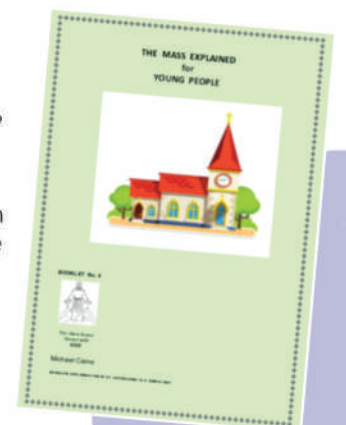
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Catholic Union

Forbes' desire to stay true to her faith sent the world of politics a powerful message

The results are in from the contest to become Scotland's next First Minister. Humza Yusef takes over from Nicola Sturgeon this week, having secured 52 per cent in the ballot of SNP members.

While the contest was seen as a referendum on Nicola Sturgeon's time as leader of the SNP and her work to advance the cause of independence, it also became something of a referendum on whether Christians could serve in the highest of public offices.

In the early stages of the campaign, Kate Forbes was written off by sections of the press and social media for holding fast to traditional Christian teaching. In spite of this, she managed to secure 48 per cent in the membership vote.

While Ms Forbes may not be heading to Bute House, the closeness of the result is a victory for faith in politics. Given her opposition to a number of policies pursued by Nicola Sturgeon, not least on gender identification, the result should be a wake-up call to the leadership of the SNP.

Earlier this week, former Labour MP and Government Minister, Ruth Kelly, addressed a packed room in the Windsor Castle Pub for the Catholic Union's latest Pub Talk. If anyone knows about the pressures that can face Christians in public life, it is her.

Commenting on the outcome of the SNP leadership race, Ms Kelly said that Kate Forbes' performance in the contest speaks of the desire for authenticity in politics. Certainly, nobody could accuse the 32 year-old MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch of not being true to her conscience during the campaign.

It has at times felt that there is something of a glass ceiling when it comes to Christians in public life. They are often seen as good people, well intentioned, but not really up to the top jobs in politics where cut and thrust and difficult decisions are needed.

Kate Forbes may not have broken the glass ceiling, but she has certainly cracked it. Where she has gone, hopefully others will follow.

It is possible to be the King's good servant, but God's first.



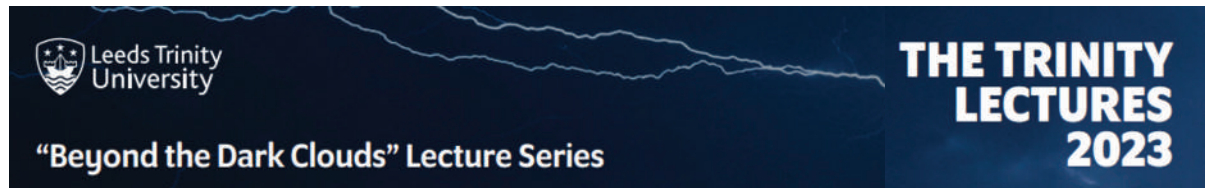
Leeds Trinity series to shed a Catholic light on big issues

Rehumanising a world of post-pandemic volatility is a theme running through a new, free online lecture series launching soon from a Catholic university.

Beyond The Dark Clouds, hosted by Leeds Trinity University from 24th April, will see 12 lectures from UK and international contributors including a former government minister, centred around justice in contested issues such as the police, law enforcement, business ethics, spirituality, the arts and more.

The title is drawn from 'dark clouds over a closed world', a phrase used by Pope Francis in his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. In the encyclical, the Pope refers to the 'desensitised human conscience' as among the chief causes of global crises, that 'local conflicts and disregard for the common good are exploited by the global economy in order to impose a single cultural model...the advance of this kind of globalism strengthens the identity of the more powerful.'

Positioning Catholic higher education as a platform to return religious tradition and thought to public debate, the series features talks on policing, from the internationally renowned Dr Tobias Winright, Professor of Moral



Theology at St Patrick's Pontifical University, Ireland, and from former Chief Superintendent Tony Blockley, now Head of Criminology and Policing at Leeds Trinity University.

Economics, justice and Catholic social teaching will be addressed by Philip Booth, Professor of Public Policy at St Mary's University; and former Labour government Trade and Industry, and Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs minister, and current *Universe* columnist, Sir John Battle, will discuss the Church in the wider, secular, world.

Professor Charles Egbu, Vice Chancellor of Leeds Trinity University, said: "We are pleased to have the participation of such a prestigious line-up of speakers for our lecture series, and look forward to discussing some key social issues affecting communities today and how the Catholic university can be a vehicle for change and progress."

Dr Ann Marie Mealy, Director of

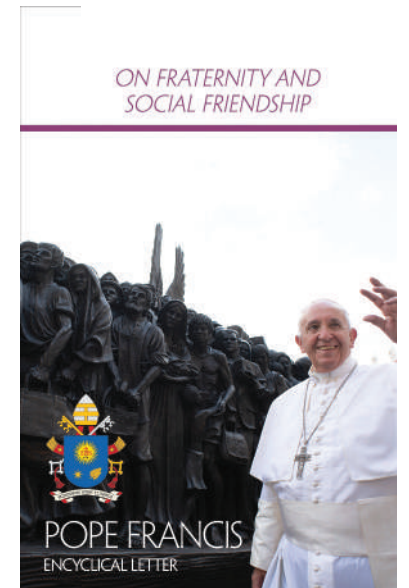
Catholic Mission at Leeds Trinity University, said: "Much of the suffering and alienation that people felt during lockdown has not yet been acknowledged fully or discussed openly, and we should acknowledge the need for healing more."

"Many of us at Leeds Trinity share the Church's desire to get involved in public discussions about how to humanise our world, and to bring about the conditions that enable the flourishing of all individuals and groups – please join us."

To register for attendance, contact a.mealey@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Want to know more?

Click this panel for details of the full programme of lectures



The front cover of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on Fraternity and Social Friendship

I'll always be a friend to CAFOD says bishop as he recalls 'special memories'

Andy Drozdziak

Bishop of Salford John Arnold has spoken of his "special" and "extraordinary" experiences with CAFOD after leaving his role as chair.

Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham Stephen Wright will replace Bishop John at Easter, who steps down after 13 years of service.

Having travelled the world in his role as chair, Bishop John chose a visit to the Philippines in 2013 in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan as a powerful memory.

"The devastation I saw was utterly shocking. Hardly any building remained standing without significant damage, whole communities had been lost," he said.

"At first, I felt that the damage was too severe for rebuilding. But then I spoke to the local people, the ones who had seemingly lost everything. They greeted me with positivity. They had a plan. They had hope and a steely determination to rebuild.

"I thought, 'how do you do that in the face of losing everything?' It suddenly became so obvious; their sense of solidarity was shining through. It was extraordinary; the people had a real sense of agency, of ownership of their lives, despite the apparent desperation of their situation."

Bishop John vowed to "remain a



Bishop John said his time as CAFOD chair had been extraordinary, creating special memories

committed friend of CAFOD" and highlighted Pope Francis' vision of "solidarity and generosity he has found in the face of difficulties."

"People do still love their neighbour and are wonderfully generous to each other, even in the face of utter devastation," he said.

"This is what makes CAFOD so special to me. Solidarity never seems like an abstract concept or value, but something CAFOD, with their generous supporters and the communities with whom they work, are proud to

live and embrace day in and day out."

"I see this sense of human solidarity, this sense of community with our sisters and brothers, every time CAFOD launches an appeal or raises the plight of injustice around the world."

He also praised the "extraordinary" contribution of ordinary Catholics to CAFOD's mission.

"Even when things are as tough as they are here at home, ordinary Catholics up and down the country do whatever they can to help. Their generosity is expressed each and every

time there is need," he said.

"They donate money, give time in speaking at Mass, attend campaigning rallies or just by including those in need in their prayers. People will show the most extraordinary generosity to their sisters and brothers in need."

CAFOD director Christine Allen paid tribute to Bishop John's contribution. "It is... a great sadness to say goodbye to Bishop John, who has served us tremendously well for over a decade. I know he will continue to be a lifelong friend of CAFOD," she said.

Easter Gifts

Universe Catholic Weekly readers' offers

Get ready for Easter – with our great Universe gift collection

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Easter Cards

Easter Card pack – Last Supper/ Good Shepherd (Pack of 12)

Pack of 12 small Easter Cards, Gold Foil, Embossed, featuring 2 Designs: Last Supper and Christ the Good Shepherd. Inside Text:- May the Peace and Blessings of this Easter Season remain with you through the year.

Ref: E0146 price: £4.50



Easter Card pack – Good Shepherd/ Risen Christ (Pack of 6)

Pack of 6 Easter Cards, Gold Foil, Embossed, featuring 2 Designs: Christ the Good Shepherd and Risen Christ. Inside text: Design 1: To wish you peace and happiness at Easter. Design 2: Wishing you every happiness at Easter.

Ref: E0148 price: £6.50



Easter Card pack – Christ

Pack of 12 small Easter Cards with Gold foil. Featuring 2 designs ft. Christ the Good Shepherd, and 1 with Christ knocking. Inside text: 'With Best Wishes at Easter'

Ref: E0121 Price: £4.50



Easter Card pack – Blessings

Pack of 12 small religious Easter Cards with Gold Foil, featuring three Floral Designs. Inside text: Design 1: Wishing you peace and blessings at Easter, Design 2 & 3: With best wishes at Easter.

Ref: E0411 Price: £4.50

Easter Card – Benedictine – Pax Vobis (Pack of 4)

Set of four Easter Cards. Inside: "Easter Greetings". Four beautiful designs, designed and printed by English Benedictine monks.

Ref: P0419 Price: £6.50



Easter Card pack – Easter Blessings (Pack of 6)

Pack of 6 Easter Cards, Gold Foil, Embossed, featuring 2 Designs: Christ the Good Shepherd and Christ Knocking with Blessing Prayer. Inside text: Design 1: To wish you peace and happiness at Easter. Design 2: Wishing you every happiness at Easter.

Ref: E0147 price: £6.50



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Greek wooden carved icon crucifix – 16 x 23 cm

Orthodox Icon Crucifix, with carved frame. Lithographic image of crucifixion on sturdy composite wood, with hand-painted detail, frame gilded with imitation gold-leaf with antiqued effect, with hook for wall hanging. Handmade in Greece, with certificate of authenticity on back. Size 16 x 23 cm (6.25 x 9 inches). See range on website

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Wood Crucifix – narrow – 8 inch wall mounted

Beech wood crucifix, 8" (20 cm) narrow wooden cross, with oxidised metal corpus, for wall mounting. In presentation box.

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Holy Land Olive Wood Holding Cross – 3.5 inches – with prayer card

Holding cross made from Holy Land olive wood, unvarnished. Dimensions: 9 x 4.5 x 1.5 cm (3.5" x 1.75" x .5"). Supplied with prayer card.

Ref: S0325 Price: £10.25



In brief

Vatican aid on way to quake region

Pope Francis sent a new batch of aid to victims of February's earthquakes in Turkey.

Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, and Turkey's Embassy to the Holy See coordinated the latest round of aid from the pope, which included some 10,000 units of unspecified medicines.

Previous vatican aid runs have included canned food, diapers and other supplies that were urgently needed. It also sent about 10,000 thermal shirts in mid-February to be distributed between Turkey and Syria.

Two 7.8 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes devastated the region on 6th February, killing more than 55,000 people.

AI must work for benefit of people

Pope Francis asked tech leaders to measure the value of their innovations not in processing power or profit potential, but in their capacity to promote human dignity.

In a meeting at the Vatican with scientists and engineers working across the tech industry, the pope reflected on the social and cultural impact of artificial intelligence. Its benefits will be realised only if developers act in an "ethical and responsible way" that respects the intrinsic dignity of each person, the pope said.

But he expressed concern that such respect is missing when, for instance, artificially intelligent software is used in producing legal sentences by analyzing an individual's criminal record and generalized data. "An individual's past behavior should not be used to deny him or her the opportunity to change, grow and contribute to society," he said.

Dioceses to consider seminary sizes

Pope Francis has asked bishops in Italy to consider further consolidating their seminaries, saying that a student body "of four, five or 10 is not a seminary."

However, he insisted the Vatican would not force dioceses' actions: "We give ideas, guidance and advice, but you have the charism, you have the Holy Spirit for discerning what to do," the pope told the bishops from Calabria.

"If Rome started making the decisions, it would be a slap in the face to the Holy Spirit, who works in the particular churches."

There are currently 29 seminarians in Calabria, divided between four seminaries.

Pope Francis said he knew deciding to move or close a seminary would not be easy, especially if the bishop and many of his priests have an emotional attachment to the place.



EU bishops urged to strive for peace

While promoting dialogue and building relationships with leaders of the European Union contribute to peace, bishops in EU countries also must be prophetic in denouncing war and encouraging all possible efforts to restore peace, Pope Francis said. "One principle should be shared by all with clarity: war cannot and should no longer be considered a solution to conflict," the pope said during a meeting with bishops participating in the plenary assembly of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of

the European Union. "If the countries of today's Europe do not share this ethical-political principle, then it means they have strayed from the original dream of the EU," the pope said.

"If, on the other hand, they do share it, they must commit themselves to implementing it, with all the effort and complexity that the historical situation requires."

The war in Ukraine has shaken Europe, the pope said. "Neighbouring nations have done their best to welcome refugees," and Europeans

have shown tremendous solidarity with the Ukrainian people, donating massive amounts of food, clothing and emergency equipment. "This choral response on the level of charity should be matched by a cohesive commitment to peace, but it is clear that this is neither easy nor obvious," Pope Francis said, because with the countries of the European Union being "involved in multiple alliances, interests, strategies," a single response to ending the war has been difficult to find.

Jesus's call to Lazarus proves that hope is always possible

"Let yourself be pulled out by Jesus during these bad moments that happen to us all," the pope said before praying the Angelus with some 35,000 visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square last Sunday.

He said Christ's message of hope stems from the Gospel reading from St. John in which Jesus weeps and prays at Lazarus' tomb then calls to him to "Come out," bringing him back to life.

"The message is clear: Jesus gives life even when it seems that all hope has gone," the pope said.

Like the stone sealing shut Lazarus' tomb, he said, there are "moments when life seems to be a sealed tomb: everything is dark and around us we see only sorrow and despair."

But Jesus' miracle at the tomb teaches "this is not the end, that in these moments we are not alone; on the contrary, it is precisely in these mo-

ments that he comes closer than ever to restore life to us," the pope said.

Even though Jesus wept for his friend's death, he also asked that the tomb be opened and that Lazarus, "Come out!" showing that Jesus "invites us not to stop believing and hoping, not to let ourselves be crushed by negative feelings.

"Jesus says this to us, too. Take away the stone: the pain, the mistakes, even the failures, do not hide them inside

you, in a dark, lonely, closed room. Take away the stone: draw out everything that is inside without fear," the pope said.

Jesus "will not be outraged," he said, because he always says, "I am with you, I care about you, and I want you to start living again by getting back on the right path with renewed confidence."

The Gospel message is that there is always hope in every life.

Five women and priest moved closer to sainthood

An Englishwoman is one of six people to have their sainthood causes advanced by Pope Francis.

He signed decrees recognising that each of the six candidates heroically lived the Christian virtues. Beatification will require a miracle attributed to the candidate's intercession, and canonisation will require an additional miracle.

Mother Catherine Flanagan was born in London, England, in 1892 and died in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1941. She became a member of the first Bridgettine community in Rome and later served as mother superior of communities in Switzerland, England

and Sweden.

The others are:

Maria Domenica Lazzari was born in Italy in 1815 and worked in the family's fields and mill. She was diagnosed with anorexia after contracting a serious infectious disease that swept through the area and after experiencing a traumatic event. In 1835 she received the stigmata on her hands, feet and the right side of her torso then blood appeared on her head every Friday in the same places where it would have appeared with a crown of thorns. She died in 1848 at the age of 33.

Teresa Enríquez de Alvarado was

born in Spain sometime around 1456 and was a lady-in-waiting of the future Queen of Castile, Isabella I. She married a man who ruled over several estates and held important offices in the Kingdom of Castile until his death in 1503. She dedicated the rest of her life to prayer and charity and died in 1529.

Salesian Father Carlo Crespi Croci was born in 1891 in Italy and died in 1982 in Cuenca, Ecuador. He earned a doctorate in natural sciences and a diploma in music before heading to Ecuador where he opened a number of educational establishments, including a college for Salesians and a

sewing workshop for young women. He received the gold medal of merit from the president of Ecuador.

Sister Leonilde di San Giovanni Battista, born Amelia Rossi, was an Italian who was born in 1890 and died in 1945; she was a member of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and sought to unite her will with God's through an intense prayer life.

Sister Maria do Monte Pereira, born Eliza de Jesús, was Portuguese. Born in 1897, she was a member of the Congregation of Sisters Hospitaliers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and spent her life helping people in need.

Pope moves to strengthen abuse rules for lay bodies

Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis has updated the procedures for investigating allegations of sexual abuse or the cover up of abuse, specifying that the leaders of Vatican-recognised international Catholic lay associations and movements have the same responsibilities over their members that a bishop has over the priests of his diocese.

The updated version of *'Vos Estis Lux Mundi (You are the light of the world)*, also expanded the categories of victims covered by the regulations to include vulnerable adults.

The original text spoke of the crime of 'sexual acts with a minor or a vulnerable person.' The updated text read, 'a crime against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue committed with a minor, or with a person who habitually has an imperfect use of reason, or with a vulnerable adult.'

"Anything that expands the categories of those who should be protected is to be welcomed," Oblate Father Andrew Small, secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, said.

Fr Small also pointed to the updated document's insistence that not only must dioceses and bishops' conferences have a 'system' for reporting abuse or its cover up, they also must have "organisms or offices easily accessible to the public" to accept reports.

Making the procedures "well known and publicly accessible is part of justice," he said.

Bishop Juan Ignacio Arrieta, secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Legislative Texts, said that the updated document was based on four years of experience operating under the previous version, but the update in-



Pope Francis greets a child during a meeting with parishioners from Rho in the Archdiocese of Milan in the Vatican audience hall

corporated changes Pope Francis made in 2021 to the Code of Canon Law's *Book VI: Penal Sanctions in the Church*.

Boston Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, said that with the updated text, "the Church's ongoing work of preventing sexual abuse by ministers received a further boost."

By updating the rules, "Pope Francis has reconfirmed the serious responsibilities on bishops and others in

leadership positions to ensure robust safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and are effective."

One thing the updated version did not do, however, was provide mandatory and explicit steps for revealing publicly when a bishop has been asked to or forced to resign because of abuse or covering up abuse allegations.

Many Catholics, including bishops, have called for such public notification after news reports revealed that a bishop who 'resigned' had been sanctioned by the Vatican.

In November, the French bishops revealed that Bishop Michel Santier of Créteil, who announced in 2021 that he was retiring for health reasons, had been credibly accused of sexual misconduct and disciplined by the Vatican.

Archbishop Filippo Iannone said the Vatican was ignoring such issues, but "a distinction must be made between those who have a legitimate interest in the case, specifically the victim, and the public," the archbishop said.

Polish mining tragedy families hear that God is with them, even in silence



Pope Francis receives a gift from the deceased miners' families

Silence can be compassionate and, sometimes, anger can be prayer, Pope Francis told families who lost loved ones in two coal mine disasters in Poland a year ago.

"To lose a husband, a father in an accident like this is terrible. And, also, the fact that some people are still buried there in the mines..." the pope told about 80 people, including many children, during an audience at the Vatican.

Ten people were killed after a tremor at the Borynia-Zofiówka mine near Poland's southern border with the Czech Republic hit 23rd April, 2022, and triggered the release of deadly methane gas and flooding in an underground gallery. Just 50 hours earlier, two methane explosions killed nine people and left another 20 injured and seven more missing at a mine in Pniówek,

also near the Czech border.

Pope Francis thanked the families of the deceased for their visit and apologised for not knowing the right thing to say.

"Silence is compassionate," he said. Instead of offering them words, the pope said he just wanted to tell them that "I am close to you" and was praying with them "in this very difficult and terrible situation."

Sometimes, he said, "it seems that God is not listening to us. There is the silence of the dead and the silence of God. And this silence sometimes causes us to be angry."

"Don't be afraid," he said, because "that anger is a prayer that asks 'why?' "And the answer is, 'In the darkness the Lord is near,'" he said.

"We do not know how, but he is near us."

Colombia's indigenous look for new Rite in Church

Indigenous communities in Colombia are calling for a new rite in the Church that reflects their varied spiritualities and lifestyles, Colombia's bishops said.

About half of the country's bishops met with Pope Francis to end their *ad limina* visit to the Vatican, the first for Colombia's bishops since 2012.

Bishop Omar de Jesús Mejía Giraldo of Florencia, whose diocese sits along the border of the Amazon rainforest, told journalists that the pope is encouraging Colombia's bishops to continue researching an Amazonian Rite and remain close to the region's Indigenous communities.

"In this moment the Church is asking CEAMA, the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon Region, to reflect deeply and thoroughly to see how we can make inroads toward an Amazonian rite," he said.

The bishop said that Pope Francis told them the Vatican would not "shut down" the development of an Amazonian rite and that "there will arrive a moment where (the Church) will discern it thoroughly."

Bishop Mejía said the prospect of Amazonian Rite was the main point of discussion in the bishops' hour-long meeting with Cardinal Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

"The bishops that work in these areas had the opportunity to tell (the Vatican) the cultural variety and richness of these original peoples in terms of languages and spiritualities," he said. "Indigenous communities are not monolithic, they are so many."

Bishop Mejía said one practice CEAMA is looking into is the purification rituals of the Amazon's Indigenous communities, which involve stepping into the smoke produced by burning branches and aromatic plants.

Yet he noted that any conclusions still remain distant. The bishop referenced the creation of the Zairean Rite used in Congo and approved by the Vatican in 1988. Priests celebrating Mass in the Zairean Rite dress in traditional African priestly vestments and dancing is permitted among the congregants, among other liturgical differences from the Roman Rite.

"The bishops that worked in that region said they took 27 years of research and being close to the different cultures to decide on the formation of a Rite," he said, so for bishops in the Amazon, "it's about at least starting the process."

In September 2022, a delegation from CEAMA submitted a proposal for the institution of the Amazonian Rite to the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Bishop Mejía said that while there remains a "very long process of prayer and reflection" before any action is taken, the Amazon's bishops are buoyed by the support from the Pope.

"He is telling us: Dive in, be creative, be in communion with the Church but have some creativity, too," he said.

In brief

Suspect for Jesuits' deaths murdered

A Mexican suspected of being responsible for the murder of two elderly Jesuit priests in 2022 has been found dead in what police have described as an execution-style murder.

The Society of Jesus expressed deep dissatisfaction at the news, saying they wished the man, who has not been named, had been arrested and charged rather than meet his fate at the hands of other criminals.

"His death in no way can be considered a triumph for justice, or a solution to the structural problem of violence in the Sierra Tarahumara region of Mexico," the Jesuits said. "The lack of an adequate legal process in the murder case would only imply the Mexican government has failed in its basic duties and confirm that the authorities do not have control of the territory."

"The government had this criminal perfectly located, where he moved, what he did," Jesuit Father Javier Ávila said. "Why did they never detain him?"

Miracle of the multiplying hosts

The US Church is investigating a possible Eucharistic miracle after Communion hosts seemingly multiplied during a liturgy at St Thomas Church in Thomaston, Hartford where Blessed Michael McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus, had once served as pastor. Celebrant Father Joseph Crowley described the incident in a homily livestreamed on YouTube as "one of those moments where God showed up in a very powerful way."

He added the occurrence showed St Thomas Church "is a very special place" because of "Blessed McGivney's life here."

David Elliott for the Archdiocese of Hartford said it was looking into the possibility of a Eucharistic miracle at the parish.

Utah bans licensing abortion clinics

A new law in Utah prohibits licensing of abortion clinics after 2nd May. In addition, the law states that no abortion clinic may operate in the state on or after 1st January, 2024. Under the new law, abortions may only be performed in hospitals, with some exceptions.

Governor Spencer Cox said the law modifies provisions that govern what constitutes a medical emergency in relation to an abortion, and modifies the conditions under which an abortion may be performed to protect the life or health of the mother.

World Churches brief pope on plans for Ukraine peace drive

Carol Glatz

Recognising how war and political differences can increase Christian divisions, believers must keep their focus on Christ and his Gospel, said members of a delegation of the World Council of Churches after a meeting with Pope Francis.

The Rev. Jerry Pillay, general secretary of the Geneva-based WCC, and Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, moderator of the WCC central committee, met with the pope at the Vatican where they expressed concern about how Churches are becoming "disunited because of other factors, including political and economic ones," the WCC said.

"We recognised that some of these aspects are certainly finding their way into Churches and into relationships and affecting them in a negative way," Rev. Pillay said.

"We affirmed the centrality of Christ in our conversations, and how we can focus together on the Gospel, and how that actually helps us in our relationships in the world," he added.

The situation in Ukraine was discussed, with the WCC sharing with Pope Francis "our views about the dynamics of what is happening and expressed our concern."

The group is "planning a new roundtable session, in which we will bring the Ukraine Churches, Orthodox Churches, and other Church leaders together with the Russian Orthodox Church, in Geneva," the general secretary said.

"The idea is to bring them all together into a conversation about what it means, in terms of Christian unity, to deal with the context of the war," he said.

The proposed roundtable would explore "how to put Christ in the centre with respect to Ukraine."

There has been no immediate response from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church over whether they will attend, but the WCC says it prays "they will take this chance for peace."

Bishop Bedford-Strohm said he and Pope Francis spoke about ways to strengthen Church unity, saying, "We agreed that it must be our common concern to set signs of unity and understanding in a divided world. For this, we need an ecumenism of the heart, which gives a clear common witness to Christ even where the institutional unity of the Churches has not yet been achieved."

"We see this witness to Christ also in a clear commitment to the world: to deal with refugees in a dignified way, to overcome poverty and hunger in the world, to overcome the destruction of nature and take steps toward climate protection," he added.

"A spirituality based on Christ and the civil commitment of the churches that comes from it is important," he said. "Only in this way can the Churches be forces of peace and reconciliation in this world."



The pope with Rev. Jerry Pillay, general secretary of the Geneva-based WCC, and Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm

Church demands answers after fire in migrant centre

Pope Francis prayed for the victims of a tragic fire that killed at least 38 people and injured some 29 others at a migrant processing center in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, 27th March, amid claims from relatives that some of the victims were shut in while the fire took hold.

The pope dedicated a silent prayer to the victims and their families at his weekly audience, adding "Let us pray for the migrants that died yesterday in a tragic fire in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. May the Lord receive them in his kingdom and console the families," he said before bowing his head in silence.

Mexican authorities said the fire broke out when the migrants set mattresses on fire after learning they would be deported.

But eyewitnesses said inmates were abandoned by guards as flames engulfed their locked cells.

The tragedy provoked sorrow and outrage from Catholic leaders and laity working on migration matters in the United States, Mexico and across Central America, along with calls for a rethinking of immigration policy that criminalises migrants streaming through Mexico toward the US.

"The pain and suffering from abandoning their homes is already too

much, and we cannot allow their transit through Mexico to become an ordeal for those who leave their family and country in search of a better life," said the Mexican bishops' conference.

"As the Church, we will always remain at the side of those who suffer most, of the excluded, of the poor and the neediest persons."

The blaze broke out shortly before 10 pm in a section of the centre hold-

ing 68 male migrants, according to Mexico's National Immigration Institute. The victims hailed from across Latin America, including 28 Guatemalans, 12 Venezuelans, 12 Salvadorans and one each from Colombia and Ecuador.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said that the migrants had ignited a mattress to protest their pending deportations. "They put mat-

tresses in the shelter doorway and ignited them," the president said. "They didn't imagine it would provoke this terrible accident."

The president's comments drew rebuke from Catholics, who pointed out the migrants had been detained and were being blamed for their own deaths.

"We do not share the idea that the president calls migrant detention centers, 'shelters'. We ask that he refrain from using language that distorts reality," the Mexican bishops' migrant ministry said.

Guatemalan bishops also attacked his statement, saying "Immigration stations are not shelters but detention centres where the human rights of people in forced mobility are violated."

Catholic migrant aid group the Hope Border Institute in El Paso, Texas, said "those who blame the victims obscure the fact these deaths are an indictment of the policies and structures implemented at large by both governments."

A leaked video showed guards seeming to walk away as the fire grew in ferocity. A desperate migrant kicked the door to no avail.

The tragedy underscored the difficulties confronting migrants trying to reach the United States via Mexico.



A Venezuelan migrant mourns outside an ambulance for her injured husband while Mexican authorities and firefighters



Bishops mourn as double tragedy hits US

The Church has led mourning after two tragedies struck the United States this week.

25 people died, dozens were injured and thousands left homeless after the Rolling Fork and Silver City towns in Mississippi were hit by a tornado that reached 200mph

"I encourage all to continue to pray and find ways to support all affected communities," Bishop Joseph R. Kopacz of the Diocese of

Jackson, Mississippi said. "Our Catholic Charities Disaster Response team is assisting recovery efforts.

Pope Francis referenced the tragedy on Sunday during his Angelus, saying: "We pray also for the victims of the terrible tornado that struck Mississippi in the United States." Marvin Edwards, a lay ecclesial minister of Sacred Heart Parish in Winona who survived a tornado, told OSV News, "I got

angels protecting me evidently. I just thanked him (God). Something was protecting me."

The second tragedy struck across the border in Tennessee on Monday, when six people, including three children, were fatally shot at The Covenant School in Nashville.

The three children killed were 9-year-olds Evelyn Dieckhaus, William Kinney and Hallie Scruggs, the daughter of the senior pastor of

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Chad Scruggs. The three adults killed were school head Katherine Koonce, teacher Cynthia Peak and school custodian Mike Hill. The private, Christian school educates students in preschool through sixth grade and was founded as a ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

The shooter, identified as 28-year-old Audrey E. Hale, carried out the attack armed with two short barrel,

magazine-fed tactical-style semiautomatic weapons, and a semiautomatic handgun.

Hale died upon being immediately engaged by police officers who had responded to the scene. "My heart breaks with news of the school shooting," Bishop J. Mark Spalding of Nashville said in a statement. "Let us pray for the victims, their families and the Covenant Presbyterian community."

Zelensky issues warning over future as pressure mounts on Bakhmut

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has warned that defeat in the battle for Bakhmut would enable Russia to start building international support for a deal that would require his nation to make unacceptable compromises.

And he has invited Chinese President Xi Jinping, long aligned to Russia, to visit to see the fate of his nation.

Mr Zelensky said if the eastern city of Bakhmut fell to Russian forces after a protracted battle, president Vladimir Putin would "sell this victory to the West, to his society, to China, to Iran".

"If he will feel some blood – smell that we are weak – he will push, push, push," he told the Associated Press.

Mr Zelensky warned that a loss anywhere at this stage in the war could put Ukraine's hard-fought momentum at risk.

"We can't lose the steps because the war is a pie – pieces of victories. Small victories, small steps," he said.

"Our society will feel tired. Our society will push me to have compromise with them."

Some in the United States – including former president and 2024 candidate Donald Trump – have questioned whether Washington should continue to supply Ukraine with billions of dollars in military aid, in the first sign of



The shattered city of Bakhmut must not fall, President Zelensky has said, as it will give Putin a symbolic victory he can sell to his allies such as China and Iran

Western support waning, and Mr Zelensky worries the war could be impacted by shifting political forces in Washington.

"The United States really understands that if they stop helping us, we will not win," he said.

He extended an invitation to Ukraine to Mr Xi.

"We are ready to see him here," he said. "I want to speak with him. I had

contact with him before that war. But for more than one year, nothing."

China, economically and politically aligned toward Russia across many decades, has provided Mr Putin diplomatic cover by staking out an official position of neutrality in the war.

Mr Xi visited Putin in Russia last week, raising the prospect that Beijing might be ready to provide Moscow with weapons and ammunition but

the trip ended without any such announcement.

While Mr Zelensky acknowledged the war has "changed us", he said it has made his society stronger.

"It could've gone one way, to divide the country, or another way – to unite us," he said. "I'm thankful to everybody – every single partner, our people, thank God, everybody – that we found this way in this critical moment for

the nation. Finding this way was the thing that saved our nation, and we saved our land. We are together."

Meanwhile, Ukrainian church leaders have warned Russians they will have to answer for savagery inflicted on their country, following the International Criminal Court's indictment of President Putin for war crimes.

"The world is gradually waking up to what we are suffering and giving a name to it," said Bishop Stanislaw Szyrokoradiuk of Odessa-Simferopol.

"It suited the perpetrators very well when the world resolved not to take note of the great many crimes being committed here, since this helped them spread their lies. Now, thank God, people are grasping what they're doing more clearly."

International investigators are amassing evidence of war crimes following the ICC's arrest warrant for Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, his commissioner for children's rights, on charges of abducting Ukrainian children and deliberately targeting civilians.

Bishop Szyrokoradiuk said Ukrainians were sceptical about the warrant's likely impact, but he said he was personally convinced the ruling would eventually have "practical consequences."

Hope for Nicaragua's faithful as jailed bishop seen in staged TV show

David Agren

Imprisoned Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez appeared unexpectedly on Nicaraguan television on 24th March, more than six weeks after refusing to be exiled from his country, opting instead to face his sentence of 26 years behind bars.

Looking pale and gaunt, Bishop Álvarez was reunited with his brother and sister for a meal at the La Modelo prison in the staged event. He has been held at the jail since hastily being convicted in a secret trial of conspiracy for “undermining national integrity” and spreading false information.

The appearance followed weeks of Catholic leaders and human rights groups demanding proof of life after rumours began that he had died in jail. The last confirmed sighting of Bishop Álvarez was back in January when he appeared in court. He had previously been held under house arrest after being detained in an August 2022 raid on his diocesan headquarters.

Government-friendly media showed Bishop Álvarez breaking bread with his siblings, then switched to a coerced interview with him. Bishop Álvarez was asked to confirm he had received “dignified treatment” – something he confirmed, though other political prisoners have described their conditions in the prison as squalid.

The interviewer then told Bishop Álvarez, “We’re glad to see you doing well,” to which the smiling bishop



Bishop Rolando Álvarez (in blue T-shirt, looking at camera) as seen on Nicaraguan TV at a special meal with his brother and sister. The bishop looked gaunt, but appeared in good spirits.

responded, somewhat archly, “How do I look? Healthy? And my face, how does it look?”

Bishop Álvarez’s response ignited a social media storm among Nicaraguans – many of whom have fled the Central American country as the Ortega regime turns increasingly tyrannical and suppresses all dissenting voices.

“It overjoys me to see photos of my brother, Monsignor Rolando. I give thanks to God that he’s alive!” tweeted Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Baez of Managua, who is exiled in Miami. “The dictatorship’s staging of

this has been repugnant and cynical and doesn’t erase its crime. The force of the people’s prayers and international pressure has been revealed. Release him now!”

Bishop Baez said in his 26th March homily, “Those who have locked up and have wanted to silence Rolando’s voice, don’t be deceived: you are the true prisoners, prisoners of evil, of ambition, of cruelty. Remove the stone from the prison door and release the bishop.”

Nicaraguan lawyer Yader Morazán told OSV News that the regime likely considered international pressure in

presenting the bishop, as human rights lawyers are investigating the forced disappearance.

He also noted the bishop’s attire – he was dressed all in blue – didn’t match the clothing given to inmates in Nicaraguan prisons.

“We can see this as using the justice system for political propaganda, having now exhibited a person this way,” said Morazán, who fled Nicaragua in 2018 and was recently stripped of his citizenship.

Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, have branded Catholic bishops



The bishop before his arrest

“terrorists” and “coup plotters”, and recently severed diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The Vatican closed its embassy in Managua in March with the chargé d’affaires, Monsignor Marcel Diouf, leaving the country.

“We have a bishop in prison, a very serious and capable man, who wanted to give his testimony and did not accept exile,” Pope Francis told the Argentine media outlet Infobae just prior to relations being severed. “It is something from outside of what we are living, as if it were a communist dictatorship in 1917 or a Hitlerian one in 1935.”

Nicaragua released 222 political prisoners in February, sending them to the United States and stripping them of their Nicaraguan citizenship. Bishop Álvarez refused to board the plane and was subsequently convicted and sentenced.

Bishop Bode resignation accepted as he becomes first senior cleric to fall over German abuse scandal

The vice president of the German bishops’ conference, Bishop Franz-Josef Bode, has become the first Catholic bishop in Germany to resign in connection with the abuse scandal.

The Vatican announced 25th March that the pope had accepted his resignation after Bishop Bode stood down over “errors made in the handling of clergy sexual abuse cases,” the German KNA agency reported.

The move by the bishop of the northern German Diocese of Osnabrueck was met both with respect and regret by fellow bishops. To date, Pope Francis has rejected the resignations of other German bishops over the abuse scandal, including Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Archbishop Stefan Hesse of Hamburg. The pope has yet to decide on the resignation offer submitted by Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne, despite it being

submitted last summer.

Bishop Bode, 72, said he was resigning primarily because of his own mistakes in the reappraisal of sexual abuse cases. He also said his “increasingly poor health” would prevent him from remaining in his post until he reached 75, the age at which canon law requires bishops to submit their resignation to the pope.

Bishop Bode became an auxiliary bishop in Paderborn in 1991 and was appointed bishop of Osnabrueck in 1995. He has been at the vanguard of liberal attempts to reform the Church in Germany, and recently said he would push ahead with reforms of the German Catholic Church’s ‘Synodal Path’. He wanted to swiftly implement in his diocese resolutions approved during the final assembly of the German Synodal Way in March, including providing blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples and remarried divorcees. He also advocated giving

laypeople and women more important roles in the Catholic Church.

Bishop Bode said the report published in September 2022 on the reappraisal of sexualised violence “once again clearly showed me my own mistakes in dealing with cases of abuse,” he told KNA. He acknowledged his responsibility as a bishop and that he had not paid enough attention to the victims for a long time. “Today, I can only ask all victims again to forgive me.”

The president of the bishops’ conference, Bishop Georg Baetzing, expressed “great regret and respect” at Bishop Bode’s resignation. “I would have liked to see you at our side in the German Bishops’ Conference for more years. At the same time, I understand your decision and the consequences it entails. From the bottom of my heart, I express my thanks and appreciation for your work, both

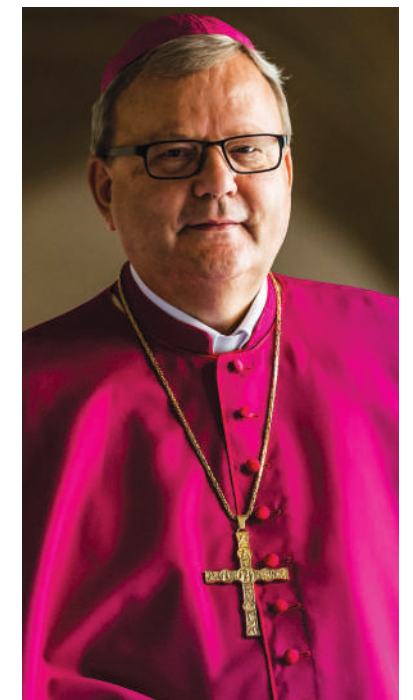
personally and on behalf of the German Bishops’ Conference,” Bishop Baetzing wrote to Bishop Bode.

Bishop Baetzing added that Bishop Bode had taken responsibility for the “issue of sexual abuse which has accompanied us all for a long time.”

Groups representing victims were critical, however. “Bishop Bode should have resigned earlier,” Matthias Katsch of the victims’ association Eckiger Tisch (Square Table) told Germany’s KNA agency.

The German government’s independent commissioner for sexual abuse issues, Kerstin Claus, told KNA that it should be clear that Bishop Bode was “by far not the only Catholic functionary who has not lived up to his responsibility in this matter.”

Right, Bishop Bode has been allowed to resign three years before the usual age of 75



France holds its breath... as Paris's Grand Old Lady sets a date for its re-opening after devastating fire

Four years after a devastating fire, the date of the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris has been set for 8th December, 2024, at 11:15 am, according to Philippe Villeneuve, the architect leading the reconstruction.

Villeneuve set the very precise time and date for the grand re-opening during a trip to Val de Briey in eastern France, a small agricultural town near the Luxembourg border. It was there that the base of the famous Notre Dame spire was being assembled before its installation on the four pillars at the crossing of the cathedral's transept, at a height of nearly 100 feet. The spire was destroyed when a fire ravaged the cathedral 15th April, 2019.

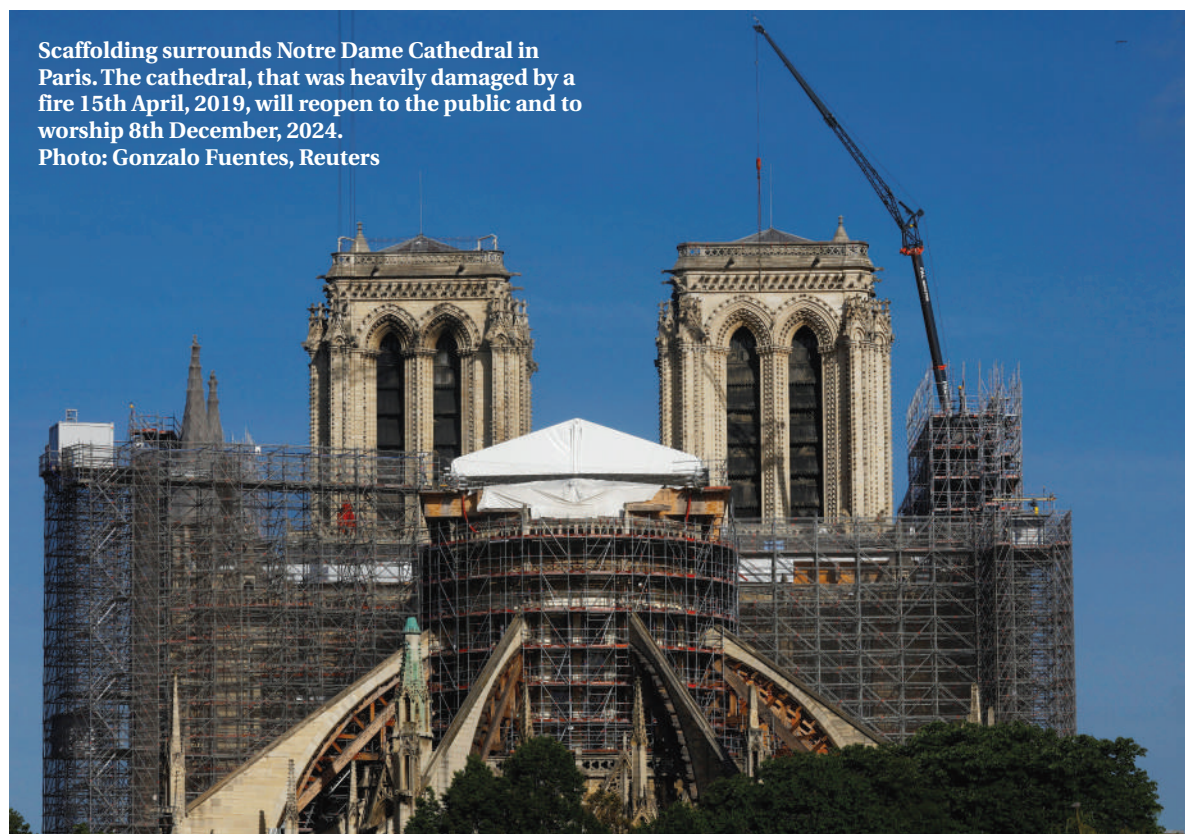
Making the announcement with Villeneuve was Jean-Louis Georgelin, the five-star general appointed by French President Emmanuel Macron to oversee the operations of what French media have named "the building site of the century."

"Let's say 11.30 am. We may be slightly late," the general joked in front of journalists.

Even if Paris' famous medieval cathedral won't reopen in time for the Paris Olympic Games – which open the same year, on 26th July – the reopening date is a significant one for Catholics, as 8th December marks the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, one of the biggest feast days of Mary, to whom French King Louis XIII consecrated himself, his dynasty and his kingdom in 1638.

In what Louis XIII called his vow, he had proclaimed: "We hereby declare that by taking the very saintly and very glorious Virgin as special protector of our Kingdom, we particularly dedicate to Her our person, our state, our crown and our subjects."

At that time, the king stated that



Scaffolding surrounds Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The cathedral, that was heavily damaged by a fire 15th April, 2019, will reopen to the public and to worship 8th December, 2024. Photo: Gonzalo Fuentes, Reuters

he desired a new altar for the cathedral – one with a depiction of the Pieta – Mary holding her son after he was taken down from the cross. The sculpture, created by brothers Nicolas and Guillaume Coustou, was commissioned by King Louis XIII's son, Louis XIV, and it emerged completely intact from the 2019 fire. In fact, the spire and the vaults underneath it collapsed at its feet.

The fire, which started in the afternoon, quickly spread to the roof of the cathedral. The original 13th-century oak beams burned down. While firemen protected the stained-glass windows and the famous twin towers from catching fire, crowds gathered in shock around the cathedral and witnessed

the collapse of the spire. Groups of the faithful were praying along the streets of Paris that their beloved cathedral would be saved.

Many treasures were, in fact, saved from the inside of Notre Dame, including the Crown of Thorns that is believed to be worn by Jesus during his passion. The crown temporarily is on display at the Louvre Museum.

Also present at the news conference were two dozen carpenters dressed in black, each with their tools hanging from a large leather belt, who have the responsibility of rebuilding Notre Dame's roof and spire.

These men and women are considered the best in their trade – called "companions of duty," in France. They started their

apprenticeship at age 15 with a three-year Tour de France – and not on bicycles. According to artisanal traditions, these chosen carpenters tour the country, going town to town to learn skills from different master artisans.

The skilled companions are taught not only a craft but an ethic. Their motto is, 'Neither self-serving nor submissive, but being of service.'

"It is the chance of a lifetime," Paul Poulet, a 27-year-old carpenter who specialises in the restoration of historical monuments, told journalists. Poulet works for Cruard Charpente, one of the four family-owned artisan companies chosen for the task.

Along with three other small companies based in different

regions of France – Le Bras Frères, Asselin and MdB Métiers du bois – Cruard Charpente has chosen to set up its Notre Dame workshop in the leafy valley of Val de Briey.

The first assemblage of the 'tabouret' of the spire – the base – is a crucial step. It will allow the workers to check if the 110 pieces of oak used to make the base fit perfectly together. If not, they will recut a new piece from one of the 1,000 oak trees chosen last year in France's former royal forests for the rebuilding of the 860-year-old cathedral.

The sheer scale of the carpenters' workshop in Val de Briey is unprecedented. The spire base itself is 49 feet long, 43 feet wide and 20 feet high – and it is only one of the five pieces making the entire spire, which is high and will reach, once completed, 315 feet into the sky of Paris.

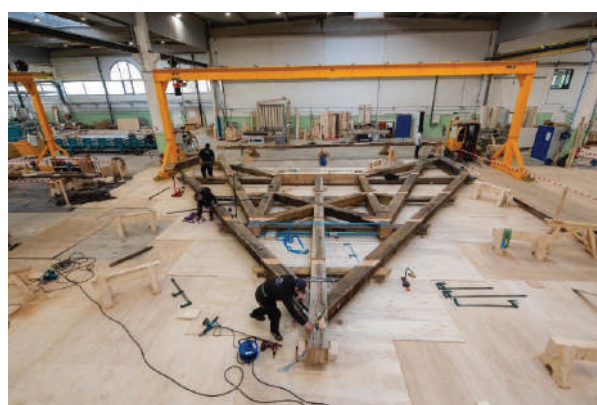
In early April, Poulet will travel with his fellow carpenters to the French capital to begin to raise the spire above the cathedral's vaults. He is hoping for fair weather and as little wind as possible.

"At this height, things can get tricky, and the higher we go, the trickier it will be," he said.

However, it is already known that it won't be a carpenter giving the final touch to the spire on completion day. It will be Villeneuve, the architect-in-chief.

When the spire crashed down just before 8p.m. on 15th April, 2019, the copper rooster perched at its tip was feared lost. However, the next day at dawn, Villeneuve found the battered rooster lying in the gutter of Rue du Cloître-Notre-Dame, a street right next to the cathedral square. The relics of Paris's patron, St. Genevieve, were found intact inside.

"Philippe Villeneuve will be the man who will place the copper rooster back at its place," Georgelin confirmed.



Photos: David Bordes, Etablissement public Rebatir Notre Dame de Paris

The teams of project management are pictured in Val de Briey, eastern France with carpenters from the four French wood construction companies that are putting together a new Notre Dame Cathedral spire. The first assemblage of the 'tabouret' of the spire, in other words its base, is a crucial step. It will allow the workers to check if the 110 different pieces of oak used to make the base fit perfectly together. If not, they will recut a new piece from one of the thousand exceptional oak trees chosen last year in France's former royal forests to rebuild the 860-year-old cathedral.

VATICAN LETTER

CINDY WOODEN



Memorial to the ‘new martyrs’ of the Christian faith opens in Rome

Amid the remains of a pagan temple on an island in the Tiber River hangs a red chasuble worn by St. Oscar Romero of San Salvador.

Nearby there is a relic of Blessed Stanley Rother, an Oklahoma priest shot in Guatemala in 1981, and a jagged rock used by the Polish security police officers who murdered Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko in 1984.

In 2002 St John Paul II recognised the Basilica of St. Bartholomew on Tiber Island in Rome as a shrine to the ‘new martyrs’ of the 20th century. Shortly afterward, the Italian government began an archaeological exploration of the crypt under the church and discovered the remains of a temple dated to the third century before Christ and dedicated to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine.

The Community of Sant’Egidio, which cares for the basilica and the shrine, has now dedicated a new exposition space among the ruins in the crypt as a museum and memorial to the new martyrs of both the 20th and 21st centuries.

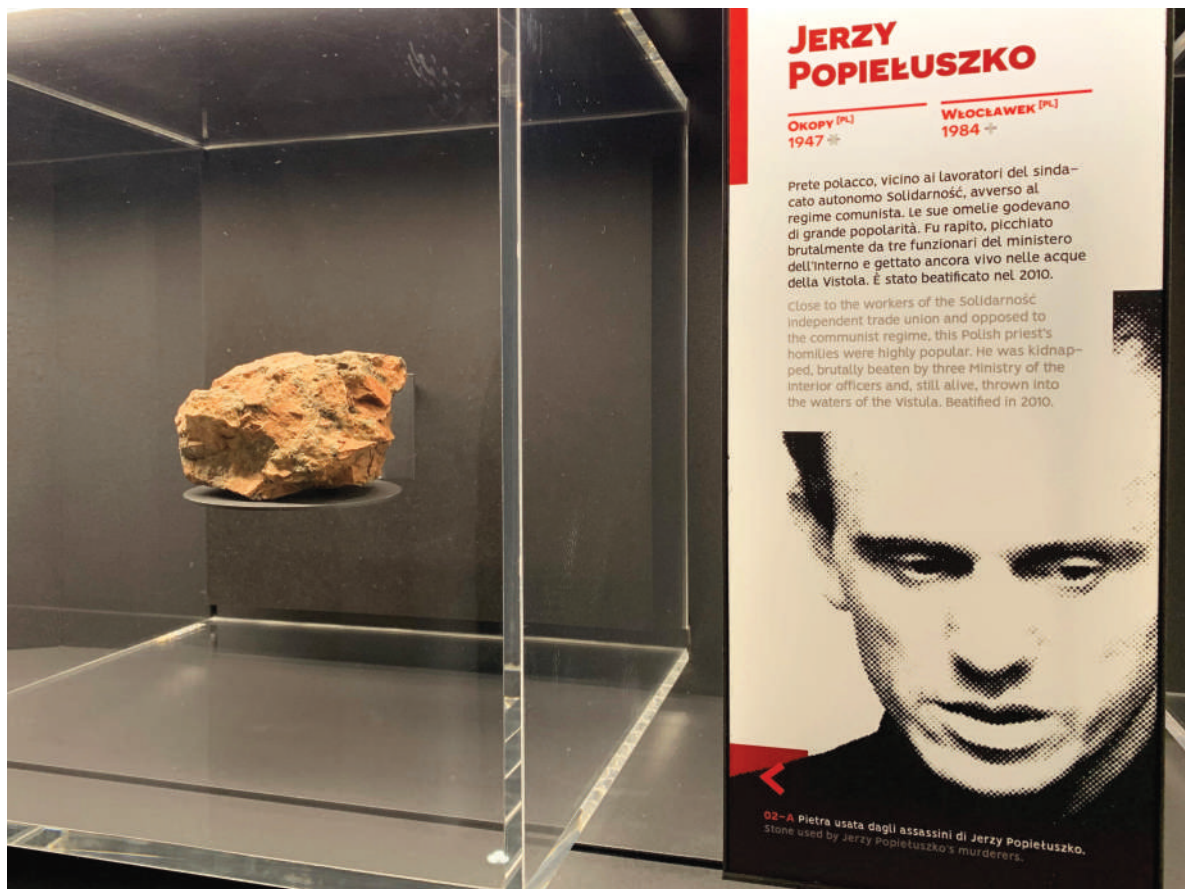
The inauguration took place on the eve of St. Romero’s feast day, a day the Diocese of Rome and many others around the world remember the ‘new martyrs’ of Nazism, communism, totalitarianism and anti-Christian persecution.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago, titular cardinal of the church, told those gathered, “Here in this sacred space we remember the stories and honour the relics of those, who while they come from different lands and cultures, share the common bond that the Gospel of Jesus Christ gave birth to their martyrdom.”

And, he thanked the community for including Blessed Rother, “the first martyr from the United States and the first priest born in the United States to be beatified.”

Archbishop Fabio Fabene, secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, said the fact that the basilica hosts a relic of the Apostle Bartholomew as well as a breviary used by Father Jacques Hamel, killed in France in 2016, is a reminder that “martyrdom has been a reality of the Church from the beginning” and is a “sign of the greatest love a Christian can have for Christ and for his brothers and sisters.”

He also announced that as part of the preparations for the Holy Year 2025, the dicastery is instituting a ‘new martyrs’ commission that will gather documentation about Christians who have given their lives



Left, a rock used by the Polish security police officers who murdered Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko in 1984, is on display in the new memorial to 20th and 21st century martyrs



Below, the chapel in the crypt of Rome’s Basilica of St Bartholomew

Below left, a relic from the body of Blessed Stanley Rother, an Oklahoma priest shot in Guatemala in 1981

for their faith in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, the papal vicar for Rome, said it is important that the memorial is in Rome so that “every pilgrim who comes to pray at the tombs of the martyrs St. Peter and St. Paul will have a reminder that there are still people giving their lives for their faith today.”

Like other speakers, Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Sant’Egidio Community, noted that the shrine and memorial illustrate what Pope Francis has called the “ecumenism

of blood,” or the unity Christians have experienced in being persecuted for their faith in Christ and not for their belonging to any one denomination.

The martyrs honored at the basilica are Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant.

“The martyrs confirm that the heart of the Christian faith is giving one’s life for others,” Riccardi said.

Cardinal Cupich said they “reveal the unity” of Christians across time and space, and “they have the power to rebuild fraternity among all peoples.”



HEART OF THE MATTER

BARB FRAZE

India's Christian Dalits left to tread a tightrope in dealings with the state

Ghana Mary, 50, studied government in college, but she said she did not get a job because she was Christian. Her son studied English literature in college.

"Because we are Christians," she said, they lost their government benefits as Dalits, the lowest of the now-outlawed caste system, but they kept the faith "because they have trust and confidence in Jesus."

At Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Church in Tamil Nadu state's Diocese of Chingleput, parishioners discussed the challenges they face. Not all are Dalits, but almost all are day labourers, earning barely enough to get by.

Ramaye, 51, said life is a struggle, and people are afraid things will not change. Her husband is over 80 and cannot get another job; they were betrothed when Ramaye was a child and waited to marry until she was of age. They had six children, four of whom are still alive.

Others spoke of attending college for studies but said they now must do manual labour, like masonry.

In India, Dalits receive government social welfare benefits to help lift them out of poverty. However, once they become Christian or Muslim, they lose those benefits, because their new religions do not recognise the Hindu caste system, a class system that was officially eliminated in 1950 but that remains a social hierarchy.

To varying degrees, Catholic leaders have taken on the fight for Dalit rights. Eastern- and Latin-rite dioceses offer self-help programmes for Dalits, and these programmes are often supported by international Church bodies like Pontifical Mission Societies, which help Latin dioceses. Eastern dioceses, like those of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Catholic Churches, are helped by the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

Some Indian advocates argue that Church leaders are not doing enough to fight what they say is pressure on Christians from Hindu extremists, who claim that Christians are taking advantage of the illiterate lower classes to convert Hindus. Sometimes that pressure is subtle; other times, it results in violence.

Cardinal Anthony Poola of Hyderabad made news last August when he became the Catholic Church's first Dalit cardinal. He, like others interviewed by OSV News, spoke of good relations with his local government officials.

But the cardinal said sometimes small incidents put pressure on Catholics. For instance, he recounted



Ghana Mary

Archbishop
Elias GonsalvesArchbishop
Machado

what happened when Hindu children arrived at a Catholic-run school dressed not in their uniforms but in special clothes marking a season on the Hindu calendar, even though the special dress "is for the elders," not children.

A religious sister from the school called the parents to take the children home, saying their clothes were inappropriate and uniform must be worn. In retribution, Hindu extremists stormed the school, "broke our computers, they destroyed our furniture."

Cardinal Poola said he agreed that some bishops are not advocating enough for Dalit rights: "It's a fact – some are not doing it" in an effort to maintain peace. However, he said the Church needs to fight for the rights of Dalits.

Archbishop Felix Machado of Vasai, secretary-general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, which serves all three rites, said the Church has fought with all governments, not just the current Hindu nationalist government, to get rights for India's Dalits and tribals. Although Church leaders have good relations with local leaders, he said one of the biggest challenges is reaching top federal government officials.

Muslims represent 15 per cent of the population, and Christians are 2.5 per cent, "so we (Christians) don't count for them," he said.

"Individually, we are respected well ... but collectively, we are not given our rights," he told OSV News.

"I don't want lollipops, but I want our rights."

The archbishop and others disputed claims that Catholics were serving Dalits in order to convert them. He noted that Catholic numbers are diminishing, not increasing. He also noted that despite its small stature, the Christian community provides about 35 per cent of education and health care in India – second only to the government.

Archbishop Machado acknowledged that the situation of



Some bishops are not advocating enough for Dalit rights in an effort to maintain peace ... but the Church needs to fight for their rights

Christians is different in different parts of the country. For instance, one village might have only one Christian family, "so they are easy targets."

Several Church leaders spoke of good ecumenical relations with other Christians, including mainline Pentecostals. But, they said, fringe groups of Pentecostals might go into a town, pitch a tent and promise people that Jesus will save them and take away their poverty. People feel threatened by outsiders, Archbishop

Machado said.

India is "a lot of contradictions," he said, adding that although Indians can be very welcoming, "the wave of hatred (against Christians) at the moment is multiplying."

Archbishop Elias Gonsalves of Nagpur lives in a city which is home to the headquarters of the RSS – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist paramilitary volunteer organization. He said that despite tension, his area does not have a lot of trouble with violence against Christians, because people would blame the RSS.

He said RSS leaders would say that fringe Hindu groups are perpetrating the violence – like fringe Pentecostals are violating some state laws against "forced conversions."

The RSS was founded to motivate people for the cause of a Hindu state, but some Catholic advocates point to the more extremist ideology of Hindutva, which proposes establishing India as a nation based on one culture, one language and one religion. It's the philosophy pushed by some members of the government BJP party of Narendra Modi. Several people said much of the funding for extremists was coming from groups such as the US-based nonprofit Hindus for Human Rights.

Complicating the situation is that many people see Christians as one big umbrella group and do not differentiate between Christian sects and Catholics.

Archbishop Gonsalves said Church leaders are working on strong ecumenical ties and trying to build bridges with Hindu political groups and parties "so they can understand us." But some senior bishops feel like "speaking out has got a double effect."

"It can boomerang on us. So surely the Church must be very, very careful," he told OSV News.

In Vasai, Fr Richard Dabre said Archbishop Machado has fostered good relations with Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Muslims. The archbishop hosts an interreligious gathering each Christmas night, and people go to each other's houses for religious festivals. Fr Dabre said it is part of the archbishop's plan to see "what is good in each one of us."

Jesuit Father Stanislaus Alla, a Delhi-based theologian and ethicist, told OSV News when a Christian institution or an individual works to empower the poor by making them aware of their dignity or fighting for their rights, then the Christian center is seen as a threat. "When you unsettle the socio-cultural hierarchy, then you are seen as a threat. A prophetic stand taken can be risky," he said.

The Jesuit said he believed Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, was "a game changer."

"*Fratelli Tutti* invites us all to recognise people with their religious identities; we are challenged to see the good in their religion and appreciate it. A formidable challenge," he said.

TALKING POINT

REV. CANON PETER NEWBY MA



Chaplaincy in a Catholic University

If I were to choose two statements that speak about University Chaplaincy in a Catholic context, they would be Pope Francis' call to the Universities of Chile, "to learn the grammar of dialogue" and Pope St John Paul II address to the Universities during the Jubilee celebrations of 2000 to continue to enquire into the value of the human person, made known through Jesus Christ.

Both statements point to what might be described as nurturing a positively humanistic culture which I see as the unique and necessary task of any University Chaplaincy. This sets the context for the sacramental, spiritual, pastoral, ecclesial, institutional and intellectual daily work of the Chaplaincy.

This mission may be divided broadly into three interconnected potential audiences; the sacramental; the intellectual and the maintenance of memory. The first and most obvious would include those Catholics who wish to avail themselves of the sacraments, those members of the University seeking spiritual comfort, and those wishing to enjoy the community of other catholic students.

St Mary's University has a priest Chaplain thus making it easier to provide this sacramental economy; the saying of Mass, Sacrament of Reconciliation, the preparation of converts, and other spiritual activities. Here at St Marys, the Chaplain shares this mission with the Sisters of the Assumption, a resident community located adjacent to the University. They arrange weekly Adoration, and other activities, such as Foodbank Collections within the University as well as sustaining a small community of female students.

Enabling a sustained living spiritual presence through the Chaplaincy gives a sacramental foundation to the other parts of the mission, allowing for the potential integration of academic studies into the life of faith, and maintaining the collective memory of the institution. Today much of this might seem wishful thinking when confronted with sustained and extensive religious indifference, but some students do grasp the connection and that is always gratifying because the seed of faith is developing into a humanistic culture that hopefully will sustain the test of time. These



students will become the active parishioners of the future.

Every parish includes these former students who can trace their continued involvement with the Church back to those Chaplaincy days. The same may be said about vocations to the clerical and religious life. Today's vocations come out of a University setting because Chaplaincies combine in a small way, faith, community and intellectual endeavour, all the qualities that make a vocation an intelligible proposition.

Making tangible the theme, taken from *Gaudium et Spes*, of Jesus Christ making known men and women to themselves, is somewhat harder to develop within the wider University. Enlightenment and post-modern prejudices about academic freedom and hidden patterns of power, make proposing a common method of enquiry, open to the transcendent, deeply problematic for most academic staff in the modern university. Trying to impose an overall unity of method, based on natural law and the humanistic culture of Christianity will not work. However, developing a culture of shared courses, as is already happening, even if for economic motives alone, allows broader themes and basic principles to be

discussed. One additional initiative with which the Chaplaincy has been involved is a course entitled, *'An Interdisciplinary Encounter with the Sacred'* and though numbers were small this is a great beginning. Accepting the primacy of the person, as possessing unique value, provides an opening to the 'natural theology', of intimations of the divine, within every academic discipline. Academic specialisation as practiced in University, is begun too early, in my opinion, for students and responding to the government demands on research excellence leads to a culture of publication, makes it easy to forget the larger questions and to live in academic silos, and unconsciously adopt presuppositions contrary to

the person.

Lastly the Chaplaincy here at St Marys sustains the living memory of this institution. Though the percentage of Catholics is probably not very different from that of most Universities, when tragedy strikes, the ability to say Mass for the repose of the soul or for the recovery from illness, is a balm to the bereaved or worried. The ready form and years of experience that the Church possesses can give comfort even now in this secular age. The Chapel is also the place to give thanks and mark the beginning and end of the Academic Year. These annual Masses are a collective endeavour in beginning and ending each academic year, and opening the work undertaken to the workings of

grace. St Marys had been run for many years by the Vincentian Order and its ethos still exists. The chapel is located in the middle of the Piazza can hardly be missed by any student Catholic or non-Catholic alike! Sustaining the memory here at St Marys is both a maintenance and a missionary concern and contrasting maintenance and mission does not do justice to the institutional contexts of Universities. Each summer the number of former students who return here for annual gatherings testify to the enduring mission of the University.

What one might ask about counselling for students and staff, that preoccupies so much of the life of other Chaplaincies? This is not a primary Chaplaincy activity, in my understanding, being best left to Student Services who employ qualified personnel. That being said, Universities should by their very nature be a place of dialogue, and everyone employed, Chaplain included, should be willing to listen to any student and staff on any matter. Conversation and a cup of tea can begin to resolve many of the issues that students and staff face. Anything further requires the professional staff of student services. Christian Faith is the commitment of the whole person to Jesus Christ, not simply supplying an emotional need, an unconscious secular prejudice which Chaplaincies have swallowed in order to provide a client base for University accountants. Faith opens the mind and heart to wonder, beauty and friendship, faith drives reasons to ask the big questions. Sacramental practice and living community sustain faith. Here lies the mission of the Chaplaincy.
Rev. Canon Peter Newby MA (Cantab), STB, PhL is the University Chaplain, St Mary's University Twickenham



Conversation and a cup of tea can begin to resolve many of the issues that students and staff face.

A VIEW FROM THE PEWS

MICHAEL CAINE,
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE

Excuses are the work of Satan

Whenever you don't agree with something the Church teaches, are you sure you're being honest and not just using excuses, or could it be Satan urging you to think in this way to help you lose your eternal soul?

How often do we hear comments by Catholics such as "I don't agree with that, because things have changed, and the Church hasn't kept up with the times"?

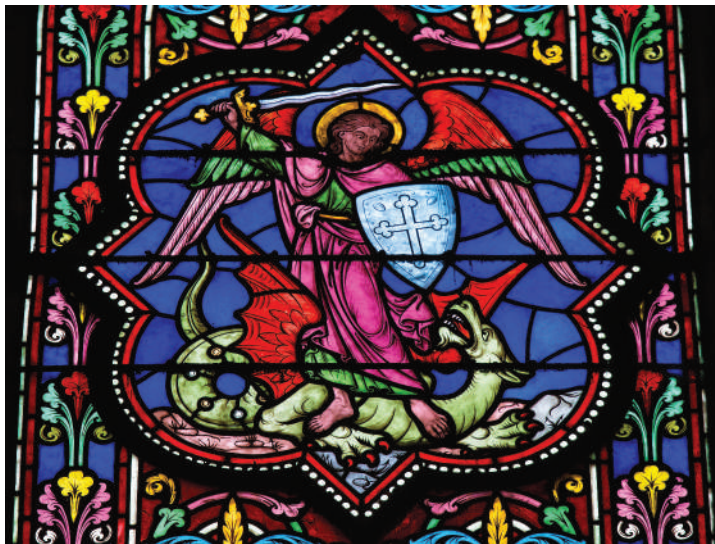
There are things within the Church that can change and will change with the times, but never the ones told to us by Jesus Christ, or some which are true no matter what time period we're in.

In simple terms, we cannot and should not change things initiated or agreed to by Jesus Christ, as his wisdom is infinite. Human beings, on the other hand, are far from perfect and can be susceptible to Satan's efforts in making us believe in our excuses.

What the Church initiated can be changed, and are, when and if necessary. We do see, every year, the Church making changes to things to bring them up to date. A spectacular one was the changes to the Mass, from a global Latin version to one which used the local language.

Whenever we don't agree with anything in the Catholic Church, we should first determine if it is something that Jesus initiated or agreed with, such as the seven sacraments.

Some people like to believe that some of these are no longer necessary such as Confession, which was instituted by Jesus Christ, but we should always remember that it's the only time that sceptical humans



Stained glass window depicting Saint Michael the Archangel slaying Satan as a dragon, in Bayeux, Calvados, France.

know for sure that God has forgiven their sins. Getting people to ignore this Sacrament must be a major target of Satan's.

Another major excuse is people not agreeing to go to Mass at least once a week. They argue that modern life is such a busy one, that finding time to go to Mass can be difficult.

Is taking their children to football classes more important than the eternal soul of their children? Do they prefer to look good in front of their non-Catholic friends rather than help their children know and understand the Catholic faith? Is a game of golf more important than their own eternal souls? Satan is always very busy in all these excuses. All these are tiny life-time things,

but our souls are for eternity

Remember, the Church's overall ambition is to help people make sure that their souls get to be with God in Heaven for all eternity when they die. Satan's is to make sure a person's souls gets to Hell for all eternity when they die. Be very wary that the things you don't agree with are not just excuses.

The one thing we do know about Satan, whatever he's called, is that he is obsessed with acquiring the souls of mankind by showing and urging them how to offend God.

He's intelligent, persuasive, and relentless in pursuit of all souls and uses whatever he thinks is the most appropriate for his quest. As we've seen, a major one is helping people to come up with excuses for not

believing in some things the Church teaches.

Another of the greatest threats from Satan was described very clearly in that great gangster film *The Usual Suspects*. In it there's a discussion about the possibility of a particular fearsome gangster not actually existing. When asked if this could be possible, one of the men responds by saying:

"The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he didn't exist".

Today, many people believe that the Devil doesn't exist, and it's this kind of belief that is making Satan's work easy. The greatest proof that he exists is in the casting out of 'evil spirits' from possessed people.

There's real evidence from thousands of such cases that have been witnessed and documented throughout the ages, making Satan a reality.

Watch out for Satan, he exists and tirelessly tries to persuade us to sin every day of our lives in many ways. As we've already seen, a major one is persuading us to use excuses for not believing in some of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Never forget that we do have two great weapons in our arsenal to help us overcome all of Satan's temptations; the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.

Go to these sacraments regularly to make sure that Satan doesn't stand a chance of winning your eternal soul.

CREDO

FR HUGH DUFFY

The greatest faith in the Gospel

The Gospel of Luke, chapter 7:6-9

Today's reading challenges us to examine our faith; to discover if we really cherish it and are prepared to put it into practice.

Jesus always responded to those who approached him with faith. He still does. The faith of the centurion in today's Gospel was so strong that it did not require a special sign from Jesus. Precisely, because the centurion's faith was so strong, his prayer was answered.

Faith is not an easy gift to accept. In his letter to the Galatians, St Paul makes it clear that faith may require taking a stand which is not always popular. St Paul expresses amazement at those Christians who abandoned the true teaching of Christ for "another gospel."

Living the faith is a mighty challenge in today's world. Faith can hardly be called the in-thing today.

Faith, which is based on the gospel of Christ, involves standards, values, attitudes, beliefs, and ways of acting that are counter-culture. Living the faith can mean opposing the popular opinions and ethics of our contemporaries. But, living the faith also means living a fulfilling and wholesome life.

The gift of faith was not given to us by God to be deposited in the misty recesses of our minds. It is something to be exercised and enjoyed, otherwise it will die. There are many ways in which faith can be actualized. Spiritual reading, especially the scriptures, helps to develop the right kind of thoughts in the minds of believers of all ages. This is one way of increasing our knowledge of the faith. Doing some service for someone in need also helps to foster the practice of the faith. For example, visiting the sick,

the shut-ins, and those who are alone in this world; giving a helping hand to children, the elderly, and the poor in our midst; performing a kind act at home, at school or at work. When you help another person in any of these ways you forget about yourself and reach out, in love, to others. Such is the joy and reward of faith; it sets you free.

It is only by living our faith that God and others can respond to our faith. Faith is like a light, a spiritual light that must shine through what we say and do. This light cannot be left hidden; it must appear for all to see. Only then can we truly delight in it. The faith of the Centurion in this reading was a light for all to see. Jesus showed amazement at his luminous faith for he was a Pagan, of all things! That is why Jesus said:

"I have never found so much faith among the Israelites."

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SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS

The Passion of the Christ

2nd April 2023 – Palm Sunday, (Passion Sunday) Years A, B, C
Entering into Palm Sunday

The account of the Passion is a vivid story with a variety of characters and much action. To enter into the passage we can read the story slowly and see if we can identify with different characters in the story. Also any one scene within the story can provide us with much food for reflection and prayer. Keep in mind that one of the aims in reflecting on the passage is to discover the GOOD NEWS the story has for us.

Isaiah 50:4-7

Words of the Suffering Servant: "I shall not be put to shame!"

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens — wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

Responsorial: from Psalm 22

R./: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me

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

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

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

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

Philippians 2:5-11

The self-emptying of God's Servant, dying to save his people

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of



a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel: Matthew 26:14 - 27:66
A sober Passion Narrative, focused on the fulfilment of scripture

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it

is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them,

"I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

"The hour is at hand"

So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus

put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"

Do you come to arrest me?

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death."

Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, "Prophesy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."

Continue reading on following page



After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

Judas repents

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him."

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

The torture of Christ

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.



From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

The curtain of the temple

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared

to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

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

The Pharisees before Pilate

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can."

So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH FR DOYLE

On this very tragic day, why do we call it ‘Good’ rather than ‘Black’?

Q. As we enter Holy Week, I wondered why we call the day on which 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, then 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. Death does not have the final word through the resurrection of Jesus and everything has changed. Hope has come and life has triumphed.

Q. I have always been attracted to the verse in which, learning of Lazarus’ death, “Jesus wept”, which we heard in a recent Lent Gospel (Jn.11:35). It shows how much Christ loved Lazarus and all humanity. Reflecting further, I’m wondering why Jesus wept. Do you think it was because Jesus was actually grieving over the death of his friend? Or do you think that he wept tears of joy, knowing that Lazarus was not suffering from his illness anymore, that Lazarus was perhaps getting a taste of Heaven and that Christ was going to use the occasion to show forth the power of God?

A. That short and simple verse from the Gospel reflects a complex truth, a truth that prompts your excellent question and makes the answer difficult. Jesus had two natures: He was truly human and truly divine, and both natures were at work in the matter of Lazarus.

Pope Leo the Great, reflecting on this same passage, is thought to have said: “In his humanity Jesus wept for Lazarus; in his divinity he raised him from the dead.” Jesus felt deeply the pain of Lazarus’ death.



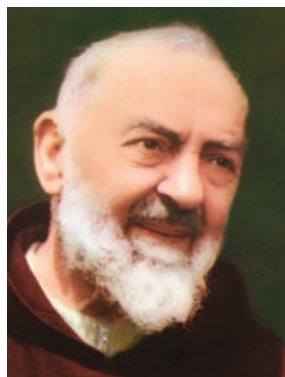
When Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus of the impending crisis, their message had been, “Master, the one you love is ill.”

Clearly, Jesus knew in advance what he was going to do, for he told them: “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God.” But his awareness of that eventual outcome did not relieve Christ’s human sorrow, and this is the mystery of his dual nature. And so, the answer to both of our letter writer’s questions is “Yes.”

Jesus was truly grieving over Lazarus’ passing and the pain it was causing Martha and Mary, but just as surely he knew that the situation would serve ultimately to glorify God.

The mystery of that duality will only lift fully when we, one day, rest in God’s house; but meanwhile it may help to think that, right now, we ourselves struggle to balance those twin feelings. When someone we love dies, our faith promises the joy of reunion; yet, even so, we feel deeply the sting of loss. We believe in eternal life, but that doesn’t stop our tears.

It should also help us to know that Jesus cares for us and shares in our pain and our sorrows. When we experience something painful, He does not stay away as an aloof presence, but comes among us intimately and shares our feelings. Most importantly, He will always help us when we feel desperate and sad—just as He helped Martha and Mary. The life of Jesus underlines the truth that God is faithful and kind,



St Pio: ‘St. Padre Pio’s simple prayer seems perfect for those precious moments when the eucharistic presence is nestled in our hearts.’

slow to anger and rich in love.

Q. My husband died suddenly and did not receive the Last Rites of the Catholic Church. We had just come back from Mass and Communion about three hours earlier. I am very upset that he was not able to receive the last rites, and this has been very difficult. I would be grateful for your thoughts.

A. I would not be worried about your husband’s salvation. I suspect strongly that he was wonderfully prepared to meet the Lord – having just shared in the celebration of Mass, together with receiving the Lord in the Eucharist.

God is not bound by the sacraments; if one has led a good, prayerful and charitable life, he has little to fear when the moment of death arrives – even if that should come suddenly. At the same time, though, I don’t want to minimise the importance of the anointing of the sick.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, the conferral of that sacrament has several effects: “the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church; the strengthening and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age; the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of penance; the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul; (and) the preparation for passing over to eternal life” (No. 1532).

Given the salutary effects of this sacrament, the Church recommends not waiting until death is imminent before requesting to be anointed. Any serious illness, even early in its course, qualifies a person to ask for this sacrament.

Q. What prayers does one say in silence when you first enter your seat in Church? And what about after Communion? I have developed my own but am wondering if I have been missing something for all these years.

A. There is no “official” prayer a Catholic says when first entering a church, so I think it is just right that you have “developed your own”.

Speaking personally, what I do is to ask God to quiet my heart and make me more aware of his presence, his power and his peace. Then I thank him for the blessings of the day and speak to him about those for whom I have promised to pray.

I have always believed that we should converse with God as we would with any friend and that our own words serve us best. Asking the

Holy Spirit to pray in us and help us is also a good idea. He knows what we need to pray about. He may remind us of how much God loves us, how He delights in us and is eager to listen. This is always a good starting point for prayer.

As for praying after Communion, I try to spend some minutes in church after Mass to thank God for the gift of the Eucharist. In those moments of quiet, I often use the Prayer Before a Crucifix, which begins: “Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus.” Being aware of God within you is a powerful prayer, closer than your very breath.

Others use the ‘Anima Christi’ prayer, which dates back to the early 14th century and starts: “Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me.”

A simple prayer from the 20th century saint, St. Padre Pio, seems perfect for those precious moments when the eucharistic presence is nestled in our hearts. It reads: “My past, O Lord, I entrust to your mercy. My present, to your love. My future, to your providence.”

Q. Does it count as true forgiveness if you don’t hate the person, if you pray for their well-being, yet purposely avoid them because you’ve seen enough to know that they won’t change their ways (gossiping, etc.)?

A. Forgiveness is essential to the Christian way of life. We have only to think of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stoned outside the city of Jerusalem, he died praying for his executioners. He took his example, of course, from Jesus, who said from the cross: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34). We have been totally forgiven of our sins, so are called to do the same to those who have hurt us.

Earlier, after giving us the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus had said: “If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you” (Mt 6:14). So, a willingness to forgive those who have offended us is a Christian imperative.

At the same time, though, the Church does not dictate the people whom you have to associate. In your own case, I believe that you have done everything you are obligated to do: You do not hate the one who offended you, and you continue to pray for his or her well-being.

To continue to fraternise with that person may not only be unpleasant for you; it could also “pull you down” into the world of gossiping. You are justified, I would think, in keeping your distance.

Please note that this column does not accept reader inquiries or questions

SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

DAVID TORKINGTON



Mary and the sword of suffering

David Torkington continues his series on Our Lady's Teaching on Prayer. This week, the Sword of Suffering

Our Lady's teaching on prayer has always been the same. It is the same teaching that she taught her son as he grew up. Like everyone else born into this world, there are a hundred and one things to do to keep body and soul together each day.

However, there is always time for prayer; not just the formal prayers that Our Lady was taught by her parents and the prayers that she taught her son, but also the deep interior personal prayer that she practised and taught her son to practise too.

When his time came to teach others, he would not only teach them to follow his example in practising the more formal daily prayers that his mother had taught him, but something further.

Solitary personal prayer

Just as she found time daily to be alone before God, and taught her son to do the same, her son did the same for others by both word and example. He told them to go into the 'Inner room' alone to pray to God, just as he did. That would, of course, not be so easily possible when he was a travelling speaker, so he would disappear for hours at a time 'onto the mountain side' or other lonely places when he was in the countryside, or when in Jerusalem into the 'garden where it was his custom to pray'. These were not just occasional sorties into solitude. They were as regular as his mother had prayed and taught him to pray in Nazareth.

In his Gospel St Luke put it this way: 'His reputation continued to grow, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their sickness cured, but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone to pray' (Luke 5:15-16).

He was taught well by his mother. Despite all her daily chores, in these precious moments when all her work was done, when all the prayers expected of her had been said, she turned to God to be lost in mystical contemplation of his sublime goodness.

Our Lady's complete humility

Compared to the one she contemplated, Mary was overcome with her own utter nothingness. The humility that is only ultimately learnt from experiencing 'he who is mighty doing great things', enabled her to be totally open to receive and be replenished with God's infinite goodness.



'This was the joy of Mary's life here on earth, making her the Queen of all the virtues, and the most perfect exemplification to all who would follow her example.'

She received all the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, filling her and her family with the love of God, and then eventually, all families that would look to her for the motherly love and protection they craved.

Julian of Norwich makes this point so clearly when she uses the example of Our Lady gazing upon God in profound mystical contemplation. 'The greatness and the nobility of this contemplation of God filled her full of reverent awe and with this she saw herself so humble and small, so simple and so poor in comparison with her Lord God that this reverent awe filled her with humility. And so, founded on this she was filled with grace and with every kind of virtue' (Long text chapter 7).

A sword of suffering

We may think that this may well be wonderful for Our Lady who was immaculately conceived and free from the sin and selfishness that prevents us from turning to God, as she did, to be lost in mystical contemplation. But what about us? We fail to understand what this meant for her spiritual life. It meant, as Simeon said in the Temple, that a sword of suffering would pierce her heart and that suffering would be multiplied many times over the sufferings of any other mother.

All the great mystics who have arrived at the peak of the spiritual journey know, as Mary came to know and experience, what it means to have her human heart and soul totally possessed by divine love. It made that heart and soul infinitely more open and sensitive to all the pain and suffering that she had to endure.

It was bad enough when her motherly love saw and experienced every tiny twist and turn of suffering in her son as he grew to maturity, but thereafter it became all but unbearable.

The sword goes deeper

From the very moment that he began to preach, the news of his preaching that was music to her ears was counterpointed by manic crescendos, as the usual rabble of dissenters accused him of everything from heresy and perverting the people, to being possessed by demonic powers. His arrival to speak in his own hometown should have been one of her greatest joys but it turned out to be a nightmare when the rabble that was roused against him took him to the edge of a cliff to do away with him.

The joy of his escape was only short lived because she continued to hear the evil, seditious lies that were levied against him. She must have

known how it was going to end when, the man described by her son as the most saintly man who had ever lived, St John the Baptist, was beheaded by the dissolute and debauched King Herod, for speaking the same truth that her own son was preaching. When the end did come and she stood at the foot of the Cross, no heart before or since has been so broken.

No heart before or since has been so delicate and so sensitive to the

ultimate powers of evil that were responsible for the greatest and cruellest crime in human history.

The Mother of us all

Just before he died, Jesus gave his mother Mary to the loving care and compassion of the apostle of love, St John. This gesture was seen as having universal significance. This divine action enabled her to be the mother to the Church over which he presided while she was on earth, but also to be the mother of us all, after her glorious Assumption into Heaven. After this had taken place, time and space no longer prevented her from being to all of us, in every time and place, the Mother that she has been ever since, and will continue to be in this world and the next.

To the end of her days, what happened on Calvary would have haunted her both night and day. But it nevertheless continued to do for her what she wants it to do for us. That is why she begged the children of Garabandal, and all who would listen to them to steep themselves in meditation upon the passion and death of her dearly beloved son.

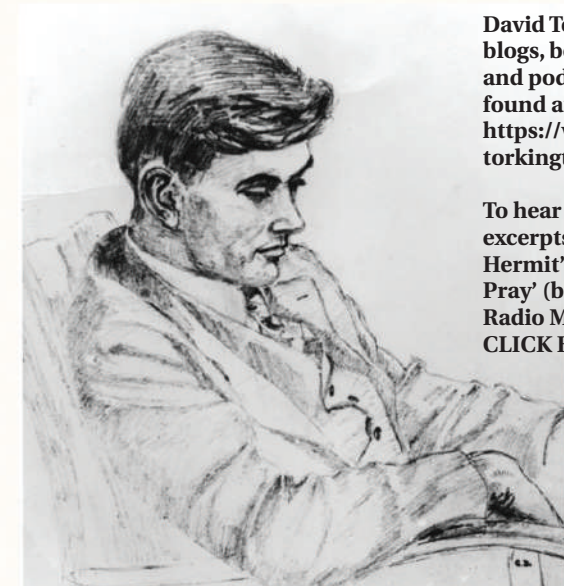
She knew that the love generated by doing this, would do for them what it continues to do for her, namely deepen their love for God. This is the love that will gradually lead us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, into the profound and transforming prayer of mystical contemplation.

This was the joy of Mary's life here on earth, making her the Queen of all the virtues, and the most perfect exemplification to all who would follow her example.

David Torkington's blogs, books, lectures and podcasts can be found at <https://www.davidtorkington.com/>

David Torkington reads from *The Hermit* – Episode 1

by David Torkington | Jan 18, 2021 | Mystical Prayer, Podcast | 10 comments



David Torkington's blogs, books, lectures and podcasts can be found at <https://www.davidtorkington.com>

To hear David read excerpts from *The Hermit* and *How to Pray* (broadcast on Radio Maria England), [CLICK HERE](#)

Sadness in Birmingham archdiocese as much-loved Bishop David dies, 78

The Archdiocese of Birmingham has announced 'with great sadness' the death of retired auxiliary Bishop David McGough.

Bishop David passed away recently at his home in Tean aged 78. Archbishop Bernard Longley said: "I know that you will join me in praying for Bishop David's eternal joy with the risen Christ as his good and faithful servant – and in offering Bishop David's family our heartfelt condolences and our prayers over the coming days.

"With immense gratitude for all that Bishop David has meant to our Archdiocese – and my prayers and kindest wishes."

The details of Bishop David's funeral will be published once arrangements have been made.

Born in 1944, David Christopher McGough studied for the priesthood at St Mary's College, Oscott – the Diocesan Seminary – from 1963. He also studied at the Venerable English College in Rome and obtained a degree in Theology.

He was ordained to the priesthood on 14th March 1970 by Bishop Joseph Cleary in his home parish, the Sacred Heart, Tunstall.

After a year teaching at the Diocesan seminary, he returned to Rome for Post Graduate Studies and gained a degree in Sacred Scripture in 1974.

Bishop McGough spent 15 years teaching scripture to students for the Catholic priesthood at Oscott College from 1974 until 1989.

In 1986, he was appointed as parish priest at Christ the King, Kingstanding, Birmingham, before moving to Our Lady and All Saints, Stourbridge, in 1990.

His other responsibilities in the Archdiocese of Birmingham have been as Dean of the Dudley Deanery and Canon of St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham.

He was appointed Episcopal Vicar for Walsall, Wolverhampton, the Black Country and Worcestershire in 2004.

He was ordained Bishop by Archbishop Vincent Nichols in St Chad's Cathedral on 8th December 2005.

The Archdiocese of Birmingham is praying for Bishop David's family, friends, his former parishioners and all who mourn him. May he rest in peace.



Top readers celebrated at Saint Paul's

St Paul's Catholic High School in Wythenshawe is very keen to encourage reading and the joy of books, and so the English department staff were delighted to reward Maisie, Jamie and Emma recently in recognition of their dedication to reading.

The best reader in Year 7 is Maisie with 2,094,999 words. She has read the *Hunger Games* trilogy, the *Mortal Instruments* series and the *Slated* trilogy.

The best reader in Year 8 is Jamie with 415,565 words, and the best reader in Year 9 is Emma with 1,054,270 words. She enjoys reading Teri Terry and Ally Carter books.

Librarian Mrs Savova underlined the importance of reading at St Paul's.

"At St Paul's, we recognise the importance of instilling a love of reading in every student," she said. "There is clear evidence that improving literacy levels in young people goes a long way to boosting their career opportunities in the future and it has been inspirational to see the impact our reading programme has had."

St Paul's literacy co-ordinator, Jamie Sharrock, backed up Mrs Savova's point. "We believe that reading is integral to pupils' understanding and appreciation of the world around them," he said.

"It is a platform that allows our children to see beyond what they know, share in cultural experiences, and develop the vocabulary they need to effectively express themselves."

Headteacher Alex Hren said: "To highlight the importance of reading in our school community and encourage our students to read for pleasure, we tell our students to put aside all distractions and enjoy books. As a school, we promote a real enjoyment, passion and enthusiasm for reading in all its forms."



Greyfriars to leave National Shrine

The Greyfriars have announced that they are leaving the National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham at the end of July after six years.

The Greyfriars (Order of Friars Minor Conventual of Great Britain and Ireland), moved to Walsingham in 2017.

In a statement, Fr Maximilian M Martin OFM Conv, Provincial Custos, said: “Due to a number of significant and pressing issues, it has become impossible for us to continue our presence at the Shrine of Our Lady in Walsingham for the time being. We will be bringing our current ministry and presence at the Shrine to a conclusion by 31st July.

“Despite the ministry at Walsingham being valued by us all, our ministerial and personnel needs at other locations within our Custody, has determined the need for our withdrawal from Walsingham.

“In other words, we did not decide to leave Walsingham but rather other circumstances and urgent needs within our wider Order and amongst the people we serve in those locations, made this decision for us.

“Our presence at the National

Shrine of Our Lady in Walsingham has been, since our commencement there in 2017, a time of great blessing, for us as an Order and clearly from the feedback we receive, for many pilgrims and the wider church in general.

“We have deeply appreciated the opportunity to minister at the National Shrine. It has been such a tremendous privilege for us to play our small part in the work and life of this most blessed and special place. Change always comes along with a degree of anxiety and concern for the future.”

Bishop's response

Bishop Peter Collins said: “I wish to express my heartfelt sadness upon hearing the news, whilst fully understanding the pressures faced by the Custos.

“On behalf of the Diocese of East Anglia, I give thanks to almighty God for the ministerial service rendered by the Friars Minor Conventual since their arrival in 2017. The moment of their return constituted a restoration of a Franciscan footprint that had been absent for centuries.

“I am grateful to the Provincial

Custos for allowing Fr James Mary to remain at the Shrine until the end of July, fulfilling the role of Acting Rector. I thank Fr James Mary for his personal willingness to undertake this important task.

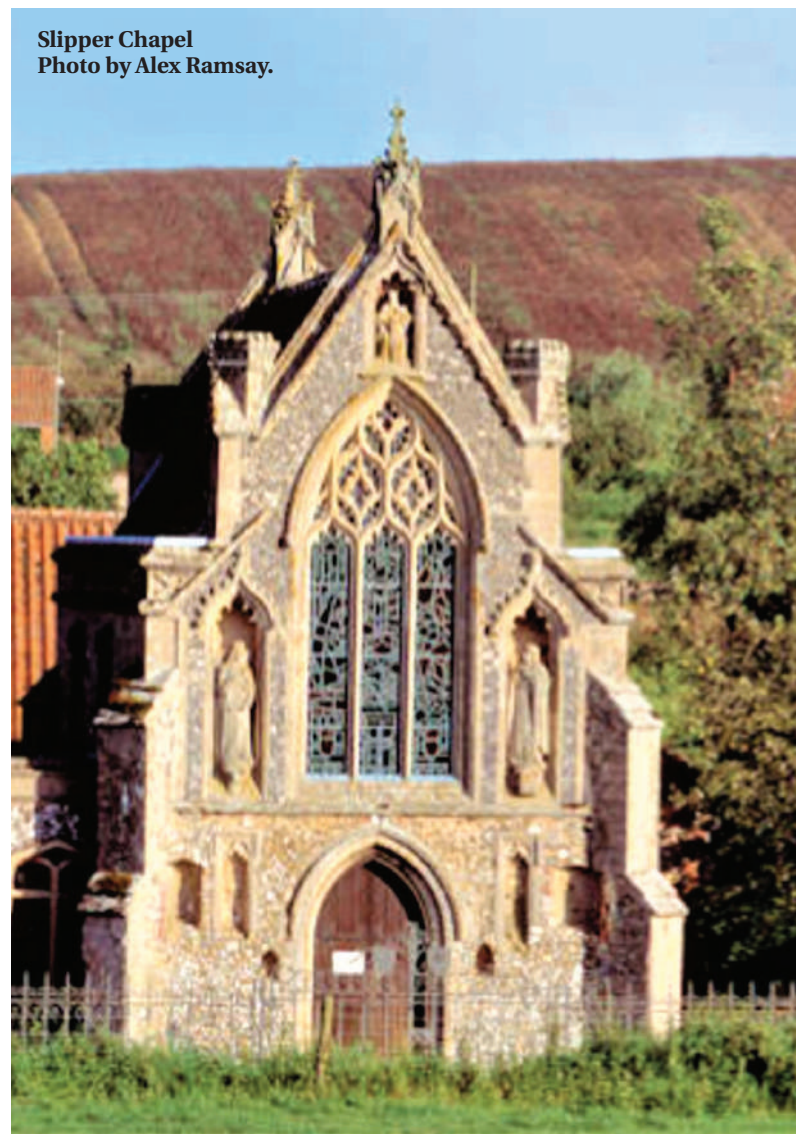
“The Walsingham Trust, the Diocese of East Anglia and the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales are actively seeking to appoint a new rector for the shrine as soon as possible. I ask the Catholic community, local and national, to pray earnestly in support of this process.

“We entrust ourselves to the care and intercession of our Lady of Walsingham. The National Shrine is securely embedded beneath the mantle of our blessed Mother. As we pass through a period of transition, we confidently proclaim our trust in the providential guidance of God's wisdom and grace.

“In the full communion of our Catholic faith, let us ensure that we remain focused upon the great mission of welcoming pilgrims to Walsingham.

“We will always be sustained in faith, hope and charity if we are allegiant to our veneration of our blessed Lady.”

Slipper Chapel
Photo by Alex Ramsay.



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AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION



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

PM pops in for extra maths!

Students from St Francis Xavier School, Richmond, had a surprise when Prime Minister Rishi Sunak joined them for maths, art and food technology classes during his recent visit to the joint Roman Catholic and Church of England school.

Student body representatives asked the Prime Minister, who is also the town's MP, questions about his work and his life in Westminster.

The MP took part in a year 11 maths class discussing Pythagoras, a cookery class making tuna pasta bake and an art group preparing tiles for screen printing.

During his Q&A with a group of students, including the head boy and girl and house captains, Mr Sunak was asked what it was like to speak in the House of Commons.

He replied that, while the combative sessions during Prime Minister's Questions often featured on television, much of the business of the House was less dramatic, with politicians working together to find solutions to difficult problems.

He was also asked about his recent announcement about some form of maths teaching continuing for all pupils up to the age of 18.

Mr Sunak said that, given the



Rishi Sunak with members of the school council

importance of data and statistics in so many modern job roles, it did not make sense for the UK to be out of step with other major advanced economies in allowing pupils to drop all maths at an earlier age.

While this did not mean every pupil taking a maths A-level, he wanted to see more pupils leaving education with better numeracy skills.

Head boy Andrew, who introduced the PM to council members, said: "His answers were really informative and it was a great experience."

Head girl Amelie, who chaired the

Q&A session, added: "It's not daunting to speak to him because of how soft-natured and kind he is. He has young daughters and knows how to speak to younger people."

Mr Sunak commended the school. "I was most impressed with the positive attitude and sense of purpose of all the pupils I met and their enthusiasm for the subjects they were studying," he said.

"The student leaders had a varied range of questions for me which demonstrated their keen engagement in current affairs. I very much enjoyed my discussion with them."



A parishioner from St Edmund's parish in Bungay and Harleston made a walking pilgrimage from her home in Suffolk to Walsingham, battling blizzards as she went, as part of CAFOD's Big Lent Walk to raise funds for the charity.

Mary Kirk, 75, a veteran long-distance walking pilgrim, says she most definitely chose the wrong week for her pilgrimage as every day except the last was dogged by heavy sleet or snow. She said: "I could not take photos of what would be a gloriously beautiful route as my phone would have been deluged every time."

Mary used local rights of way in

Suffolk in order to join the Boudicca Way in south Norfolk as far as Norwich. She then picked up the Walsingham Way for a further three days to the shrine.

The weather became steadily worse, culminating in a four-hour white-out blizzard on the penultimate day.

Mary said: "Pilgrimage is very definitely a metaphor for life. You take the rough with the smooth. The way-marking, as in life, was patchy – plenty of signage when you don't need it, but when a path forks – no guidance at all."

She has so far raised £740 for CAFOD. Well done, Mary.

Salford's Lent project captures the spirit of pope's Laudato Si

This Lent, schools and parishes across the diocese of Salford have been working with its own Laudato Si' Centre to create a special prayer series.

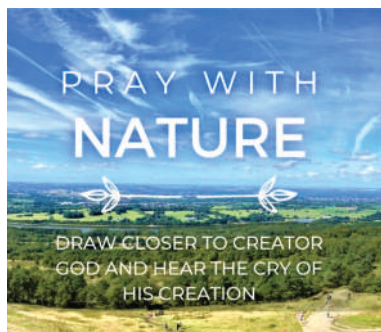
The *Pray with Nature* series, presented on the Laudato Si' Centre social media channels, is using the Lenten theme of prayer to draw ever closer to Creator God and to hear and understand the cry of the earth.

Each day, a photo of nature is posted on the Laudato Si' Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter channels, along with a line of scripture, to help reflect on the beauty of creation and our relationship with God the Creator.

The photos featured have all been sent in from people across the diocese of Salford and beyond, with parishes and schools responding with great enthusiasm.

Dr Emma Gardner, Head of Environment for the Diocese of Salford, praised the content of the "wonderful project."

"Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our Pray with Nature series – it's been fantastic to work



with so many people across the diocese on this wonderful project," she said.

"From the story of creation itself, to the poetic beauty of the psalms and striking imagery of the New Testament, nature is an ever-present theme running throughout scripture.

"This Lent, we wanted to invite people to reflect on these passages in a special way by meditating on them with the help of beautiful photos taken by the people in our schools and parishes."

Watch a roundup video of the Pray with Nature series [here](#):



On the march for the Big Lent Walk

Jo Lewry shares how Maureen Thompson at St. Joseph and Ss. Thomas parishes has encouraged parishioners to take up CAFOD's Big Lent Walk.

40 people, 40 days in Lent Challenge: This year in Havant and Emsworth parish we launched our CAFOD Lent appeal early so we could get started on the CAFOD Big Lent walk.

It was easy to link in with the third holy habit proposed by Portsmouth bishop Philip Egan: "To keep Friday as a day of penance in honour of the

Lord's Passion, intentionally serving the poor and needy." We wanted to see if, this year, we can raise the stakes and get more people involved – not only in Friday fasting but walking, praying and giving, too.

This is the third year that CAFOD has challenged people to join in solidarity with many of the poorest in the world who have to regularly walk long distances to survive, so some of us had done it before – but it's hard to keep going. This year, we wanted to make it a whole parish project, getting 40 people to walk for

one day each between Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday.

By the third Sunday of Lent we have already hit our target of 40 people walking at least once. Numbers were boosted by people walking with friends and, at weekends, whole families have joined in. Pictures of daily walkers are posted on parish notice boards, which is a great way to get to know each other.

Each day, we keep solidarity with CAFOD by sharing the reflection from the CAFOD Lent calendar.

Secondary school teacher Marie Healy shared in last week's Universe how she found kindness and dignity in the harsh environment of a centre for refugees in Calais. In the final part, Marie explains how she dealt with the pain of encountering people whose lives have been torn apart during the trip organised by the Columbans and Hallam Diocese Youth Ministry – and how she saw the face of Christ in them.

Last week I described how I and my group spent time engaging in 'normal' activities with the refugees, such as playing Connect 4 with one and laughing with people whose lives were incredibly difficult. The young people in our group displayed a maturity that I don't think I ever had at 17. They mixed with different groups of people, offering friendly games, chats and cups of tea. What was clear from the reaction of all the refugees was that this couple of hours was a rare time during the day where they were treated with kindness and dignity.

Later that evening our group spoke about what we had experienced, and I found myself worrying that so many of us had found the day enjoyable. Surely that couldn't be right? We went to Calais to see the misery and be so outraged that we would come home and take action. But despite being tired, traumatised, cold and hungry, the refugees still managed to give out positivity. One of our group leaders had spoken earlier in the day about looking for the face of Christ in those we would encounter. I saw Him in the faces of those who were persecuted, and in those who showed love and kindness.

The people we met were not of the same religion, but all had the belief that a greater being was at work. I found it hard to believe that any God could let this injustice and brutality happen, but I believe that we find God in our lowest moments and it is He who gives us the faith and strength to carry on.

An encounter through shaving

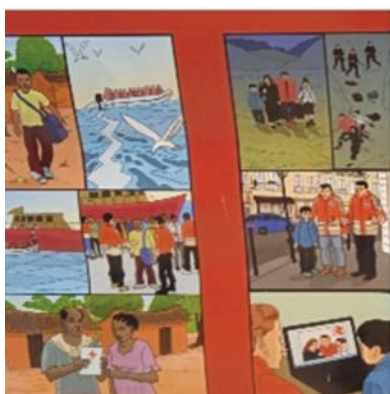
The next morning followed the same routine, but in the afternoon we set up in a car park in the centre of Calais. Again, men came from all directions. I was nervous this time. A few police cars went past and the organisers had told us that they might stop and question us. Whereas the day before, the men seemed to move and communicate effortlessly around each other, this day there seemed to be a little tension between different groups.

A young man, Frankie, from the Ivory Coast came to use the clippers and asked one of the volunteers to shave him. Without hesitation, the volunteer sat him down and started.

The sight of these two men engaging with each other is one I will never forget. It was more than just a shave. I wondered how long it had been since Frankie had been touched with such tenderness. We did not know when or how he arrived in Calais, how long it had been since he had last washed or the last time he had any physical contact with someone. I wondered about the volunteer. Had he given a second thought in saying yes or was this his faith in action, treating all people equally and with love?

Frankie briefly told us a bit about his story, tears quietly rolling down his cheek as he spoke about the son he had left behind in the hope of

When you see Christ in the shape of a wearied refugee



getting to the UK to start a life away from fear and persecution. I felt ashamed knowing that, if he did make it across the Channel, he would not be welcomed by the authorities.

He told us that he no longer had the money to pay traffickers to get him across the Channel so he was in limbo. There was nothing we could say.

We spoke with three men; one had a gash on his forehead and another wore a hospital band. Their dinghy had overturned and the police had picked them up and beaten them with batons. Their silver lining, as

they told it, was that they got to stay in hospital overnight, out of the cold.

The men joined a queue to be offered a jumper, not having the choice of colour or style. Some were happy, others not and although I fully understood the impracticality and logistics of having free rein on what they chose, I thought of my own brother and how he would hate, and refuse, to let me choose a jumper for him.

On our first day, I had seen a very smart looking young man who I had mistaken for a volunteer. I saw him again in the exact same clothes for the following two days. He didn't



have a change of clothes, but he still took pride in his appearance – no different to most men I know.

'Where love becomes tangible, God is there'

Over the few days, we came up with a kind-of game, 'how bad must your life be....'. How bad must your life be to leave the place you call home? To make this treacherous journey and be stripped of all self-respect? To have literally the possessions you can carry? To not know when your next meal will be, let alone warm meal? To sleep in a muddy field or under a bridge? To not be able to wash or dry your wet clothes? To charge your mobile phone on a pallet in a muddy field for an hour a day? To be constantly scared of people hurting or stealing from you? To be surrounded by people who don't understand you or speak your language? To be faced with hate? It can go on and on.

This trip was the most humbling experience of my life. My travel companions have no idea of the impact they made on me. It sounds clichéd but we went as strangers and yet I have no doubt that if we were to meet again, we would pick up where we left off. It was a special experience to have shared.

I met so many people who have been stripped of all their rights and dignity and yet they still have hope that things will get better. That glimmer of hope is what keeps us alive. My faith has been strengthened by seeing love and



I met so many people who have been stripped of all their rights and dignity and yet they still have hope that things will get better. That glimmer of hope keeps us alive.

faith in others. In the refugees that continue to trust and have faith that they will find safety. In seeing good people reaching out, with great compassion, to those in need. In witnessing people, especially those I travelled with, advocate for refugees and speak out in support.

At night I see the faces of those who were prepared to leave Calais and risk their lives for a better life in the UK. I pray that they are still alive but I know in reality many will not survive the wait or the journey. I will continue to tell people of my experience and campaign for safe and legal routes for all refugees to reach safety.

During times it is difficult to see where God is. Pope Francis said: "Where love becomes tangible, becomes closeness, becomes tenderness, becomes compassion, God is there". It is up to us.



GARDENING

Bacteria, fungus, and viruses: an overview

Plant diseases can be difficult to diagnose. So often, they display the same symptoms as plants that are perfectly healthy, except for stresses imposed upon them by our poor cultural practices. When a plant is diseased, it is because of a bacteria, fungus, or virus. A better understanding of each will help you diagnose and treat the problem if possible.

Bacteria

Not all bacteria are bad for plants and soil. In fact, most are beneficial, and there are millions! However, there are approximately 200 types of bacteria that cause diseases in plants. They are most active in warm and humid environments, so this is when you'll see the most evidence of their presence.

There are several symptoms of bacterial infection. One is leaf spot. In this case, the bacteria that attacks the plants, produces a toxic chemical that kills the surrounding plant cells. The plant then reacts defensively by killing off the surrounding plant cells, thereby isolating the infected cells. In some cases, these dead cell areas drop out, creating what looks like "shot holes" in the leaves.

Bacteria can clog the plants ability to deliver water and nutrients to the rest of the plant. Eventually the plant begins to wilt or droop. This process can occur rapidly, and within one day, you can see a dramatic decline in your plants.

Other symptoms cause the plant tissue decline, such as in cankers and soft rot, which are sunken areas produced by dead plant tissue. In other cases, abnormal growth is the symptom, referred to as galls. Plants respond to these bacterial invasions by producing a rapid abundance of new cells. This is often evident is unusually large, misshapen growths somewhere on the plant or root.

Bacteria can spread in several ways, including insects, splashing water, other diseased plants, or tools. They enter plants through tiny openings either through damage, or cuts, but also through natural opens in the plant itself.

Once plants are affected, they can be difficult to control. Remove infected plants or parts immediately from the garden. Do not add these parts to your compost pile. Instead, destroy them. Once present, controls options are limited. Copper-based sprays provide some help, but are not a cure. Bacteria are



best controlled as a preventative measure, treating plants before damage is even present. Additionally, good cultural practices are always helpful. This includes sanitation of equipment, and removal of all plant debris.

Fungi

Like bacteria, many more fungi are actually good for the garden. But, unlike bacteria, there are thousands of fungi that are harmful to plants. For this reason, you are likely to encounter fungal problems most often. Because fungi are present in the soil and above ground symptoms of fungal attack can appear above and below ground. These include rotting or dead roots, or large swelling on roots below ground. At the soil level, new seedling stems can rot and flop over. Above the soil line, plants can display leaf spots, mildews (white or gray powdery

patches on foliage), rusts, and wilts.

Fungal spores are very small and light, and can travel great distances through the air to infect other plants or trees. They are also spread by water, animals and insects, and people.

The best way to prevent fungi from attacking your plants is to buy disease resistant varieties whenever possible. Other ways include minimising the amount of water contacting foliage. Water at the soil level and early in the day. This allows foliage to dry out quickly, should it become wet. It's also helpful to provide good air circulation through proper spacing between plants, and pruning.

To control fungal outbreaks, as with bacteria, remove all infected plant parts, or plants. You may also choose to apply a fungicide. There are many products available for treatment, organically

(copper, sulphur, and baking soda are common) or synthetically. These treatments are best at preventing the germination of new fungal spores, so applications before outbreaks occur will provide the most effective control.

Viruses

Even viruses on occasion can be beneficial, but for the most part, they are bad news in the garden. They can persist for many years, before they appear as a problem, and when they do, they often show up in one of a few primary ways. First, plant foliage may appear yellow, or they may appear as mosaic patches of yellow, light green, or white. Next, the plant may appear stunted. In addition, the plants are often misshapen or malformed. Specifically, the leaves may be rolled, or swollen or puckered, or they may be abnormally narrow.

Unlike bacteria and fungi, viruses are not spread by water or wind. Instead, they must physically enter the plant. One of the most common vectors of viruses are insects. Insects feed on infected plants and transmit the viruses to healthy plants when they feed again. Other ways include plant propagation, contact by humans, and infected seed.

Unfortunately, once infected, there are no chemical treatments for eliminating a virus. Once detected, you should remove all suspected plants. Although this can seem like drastic measures, it is the most effective way to reduce continued spread. It is difficult to prevent viruses from affecting your plants. Your best efforts will be to look for virus-resistant cultivars, provide physical barriers, such as floating row covers, or to actively eliminate vectoring pests from entering your garden.



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HEALTH

Problems with your brain's energy supply could be behind Alzheimer's

Afshan Malik

Scientists have been working to understand the root causes of dementia and Alzheimer's disease for decades now. But one of the reasons we don't yet have a cure for this disease is because of the complexity of the human brain – alongside the complexity of the disease itself.

One of the leading theories in the field suggests that Alzheimer's disease is caused by the abnormal accumulation of two proteins called amyloid beta and tau in the brain, resulting in plaques and tangles. Amyloid plaques are clumps that form between neurons, which can damage surrounding cells, while tau tangles block communication between nerve cells.

For years now, scientists have been trying to understand how the accumulation of these proteins begins and how this affects brain health, leading to memory loss. Despite the huge amount of research that's happened to date, there's not been much success in treating and preventing Alzheimer's disease.

This has led many experts in the field to wonder whether there's something else we should also be looking at in the brain when it comes to understanding and curing Alzheimer's disease.

A recent article in *New Scientist* describes an idea which could be important in the field of brain health. This article highlights an alternative theory: that damage to mitochondria (the energy-producing structures within cells) could actually be the cause of Alzheimer's.

Energy deficit

Mitochondria are found in virtually all the body's cells. They use both oxygen and breakdown products from food to make a high energy molecule known as adenosine triphosphate (ATP). ATP is like your cells' energy currency – kind of like a rechargeable battery. Our cells use ATP for the energy needed to carry out everyday functions and maintain their own health. Once used up, mitochondria can reload it with energy.

Mitochondria also have a host of other functions important for cellular health, such as telling the cell's nucleus (the cell's hub of genetic information) to carry out important functions, and sending signals



to other cells. They're also packed full of antioxidants – molecules that protect cells from damage.

Mitochondria are particularly important for the brain. The human brain only accounts for around 2 per cent of our total body weight, yet even at rest, the brain uses around 20 per cent of the body's total energy expenditure. As the control centre of the body, the brain needs this energy in order to carry out its many important functions which make virtually everything we do possible – whether that's blinking, smiling or memorising a poem.

So, our brain cells – particularly our neurons, the brain cells that send and receive signals from our brain to the rest of the body – have high energy needs. This is why each neuron can contain thousands of mitochondria.

It's thought that neurons are formed at birth and do not get regenerated at any point in a person's life. Instead, their mitochondria and cellular parts are constantly turning over and being renewed. This ensures that their mitochondria remain healthy – which in turns ensures the neuron can function properly. Essentially, this means that as

long as the mitochondria are healthy, the neuron is too.

But what would happen if the mitochondria stopped being able to produce enough energy for our cells to carry out their functions and repair damage? This would mean the cells may start to accumulate damage. In neurons, this could result in damage – and even death.

This is the foundation of the mitochondrial cascade hypothesis.

Mitochondrial loss

The mitochondrial cascade hypothesis

was actually first published by scientist and clinician professor Russell Swerdlow in 2004. This landmark article reviewed numerous studies which had previously found evidence of mitochondrial damage in Alzheimer's disease. In the paper, Swerdlow proposed a new theory suggesting that problems with mitochondria and their function could provide an alternative explanation for why Alzheimer's disease develops.

However, despite increasing evidence showing mitochondrial loss in the neurons of patients with Alzheimer's, the idea that mitochondrial dysfunction could be a cause has remained on the fringes of dementia research. There are many reasons why this is the case.

First, a large proportion of the limited funding given to dementia research in the past few decades has gone to scientists studying amyloid beta and tau. This was thanks to promising studies in the field which suggested that removing or reducing the amount of amyloid beta and tau in the brain could have an effect on cognitive function.

Second, until relatively recently the methods used to study mitochondria in humans have been limited – meaning that we've also been limited in our ability to detect, prevent or cure mitochondrial dysfunction. But developments in the field may soon make it possible to transfer healthy mitochondria into cells. This could therefore allow us to study what would happen if we replaced damaged mitochondria in the neurons of patients with Alzheimer's disease.

But while it's clear that problems with the brain's mitochondria are linked to neurodegenerative diseases, there are still many questions we need to answer before we can start developing treatments. For example, we need to understand what damages the brain's mitochondria, and how to prevent this damage.

Dementia is a complex disease. This may mean there isn't a one-size-fits-all cure for it. It could be the case that we may need to target multiple different mechanisms in order to treat the disease.

Afshan Malik is a Reader in Diabetes and Mitochondrial Research, King's College London

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LIFESTYLE

Why you should love your lawn

Lawns are seemingly everywhere and, while you may take them for granted, they're actually hard-working members of an ecosystem benefitting urban and suburban spaces in multiple ways.

If lawns were eliminated, climate change challenges would significantly increase, including higher air temperatures, more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and less oxygen.

Lawns are surprisingly good at capturing rain; without them, rainfall would run off instead of infiltrating the ground, increasing flooding. Lawns also capture a wide variety of environmental pollutants, so without them there would be more air pollution.

"It's interesting how little most people know about the environmental benefits of natural grass lawns and green spaces," said Britt Wood, CEO, National Association of Landscape Professionals.

"People have long known about the benefits of trees—but less about the benefits their lawns deliver."

How lawns benefit your environment

Here are facts from The Lawn Institute you might not know about how grass lawns contribute to the well-being of communities.

1. Breathe easier: One 5,000-square-foot grass lawn can produce enough oxygen daily to support 14 to 34 people.

2. Reduce carbon dioxide: Tackling climate change involves finding places to



store carbon from the atmosphere. Carbon modelling of a suburban home on a half-acre lot, with landscape beds, shrubs, trees and a grass lawn, indicates the lawn is responsible for 81-90% of the carbon captured. In a recent study of a typical metropolitan area, low- and medium-density residential lots accounted for over 50% of carbon captured in urban green spaces.

3. Keep cool: You've probably done it—

walking barefoot on an asphalt street in the summer can be painfully hot. How did you find relief? You headed for the nearest lawn. Lawns can be up to 60 degrees cooler than surrounding pavement. Plants, including natural turfgrass, act like air conditioners due to a naturally occurring cooling process known as evapotranspiration.

4. Lessen flooding: Lawns naturally provide excellent water filtration,

sediment reduction, run-off control, flood control and pollutant reduction. Natural grass has also been shown to reduce runoff and soil erosion from 6-18 times greater than bare soil.

5. Increase home values: Aesthetics matter. A well-maintained lawn increases home values by an estimated 10-15%.

From battery-powered mowers and irrigation with smart sensors that detect rainfall to soil sensors and more, today's lawn care practices are evolving to be more sustainable in caring for backyard and neighbourhood green spaces, so they'll provide even greater environmental benefits.

Common myths about lawns

Still on the fence about natural grass? Here are facts that set the record straight about lawns

Myth: Lawns are a monoculture.

Fact: Not true. The average lawn contains a variety of species of grasses, plants and weeds.

Myth: Lawns don't support biodiversity.

Fact: The soil underneath lawns teems with life: as many as 52 different arthropod families, 28 genera of nematodes plus a complex network of micro-organisms.

Myth: Lawns use too much water.

Fact: Most suburban homes don't use irrigation (only 37% of new homes in 2020 were built with irrigation systems,

according to the Irrigation Association). Many lawns in non-arid areas get much or all needed moisture from rainwater. In addition, turfgrass researchers have been developing new varieties requiring little to no additional water

Myth: Lawns are a waste of time and resources.

Fact: Working and playing in yards reduces stress and encourages physical activity, and doctors agree that fresh air, sunshine and exercise are beneficial for physical and mental health.

Stewarding local green spaces is vital

In areas with adequate rainfall, lawns comprise a valuable part of the environment. Where water is scarce, however, chosen plants and grasses should be drought-resistant and well-adapted to thrive in local conditions. If towns and cities have fewer green spaces, residents will struggle with rainwater runoff issues and heat island effects, highlighting the need for appropriate green space management nationwide.

"The more people know about the environmental benefits of green spaces, the better equipped they are to make good choices about prioritising their care," concluded Britt Wood.

To learn more about how to care for your lawn and maximise its environmental benefits, visit TruthAboutLawns.org

FOOD

MEXICAN CHICKEN WITH BLACK BEANS

Black turtle beans, or simply 'black beans' for short, are especially common in Latin American cuisine. High in fibre and packed with nutrients, they are a healthy addition to any dish. The tinned versions, coupled with ready-made salsa make this an easy recipe for any occasion.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 skinless, boneless chicken breast fillets
- 2 (270g) jars ready-made salsa,
- 1 large red pepper, chopped
- 2 tbsps ground cumin
- 2 tbsps lemon juice
- 2 tbsps chilli powder
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 (400g) tins black beans, rinsed and drained

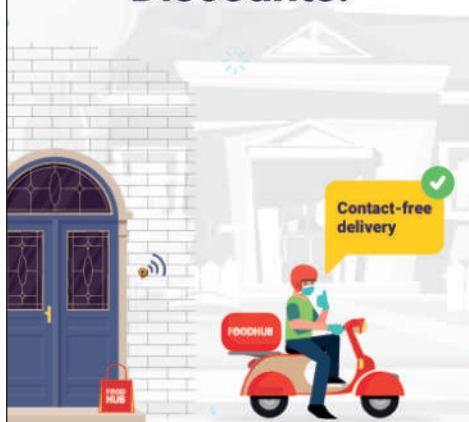
METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 200 C.
2. Arrange the chicken in a 3 litre casserole or a 23x33cm baking dish.
3. Combine the contents of the jars of salsa with the red pepper, cumin, lemon juice, chilli powder and garlic.
4. Pour the mixture over the chicken. Pour the black beans on top and cover.
5. Bake in the preheated oven for 1 to 1½ hours.
6. Serve with rice or tortillas if desired.


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CINEMA

Bocelli's travel monologue is a stunner – it just needed more faith

In recent years, the Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli has enjoyed international success while frequently offering traditional Christian songs to a mass audience. Blind since the age of 12 and experiencing significant success as a singer while only in his 30s, Bocelli has known hardship in his life, but his art and faith are nonetheless rooted in gratitude.

His spiritual life has been heavily influenced by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, and in the 1990s, Bocelli reembraced the Catholic faith of his youth. Following in the long tradition of the people of God offering beautiful music in expressions of joy and sorrow, gratitude and distress, Bocelli's music is appreciated by many as a gifted and graceful source of hope.

In celebration of his faith, family, friends, and homeland, Bocelli recently embarked on a 200-mile pilgrimage—on horseback—along the Via Francigena, from Rome to his provincial Italian estate. The result is the new film *The Journey: A Musical Special from Andrea Bocelli*, directed by Gaetano Morbioli and Paolo Sodi for the Trinity Broadcasting Network. For established fans of Bocelli and the artists with whom he travels and performs, the film will be a welcome treat for Holy Week.

The Journey begins with a delightful, but all-too-brief cameo from Pope Francis, who blesses Bocelli and his fellow travellers as they set out in dramatic fashion on horseback from St. Peter's Basilica. Chief among Bocelli's riding



Bocelli with his son, Matteo

companions is his wife, Veronica, who also is one of the film's executive producers. One scene features the couple's young daughter, Virginia, whom Bocelli serenades in an empty church with a version of *Ave Maria* that he had written for her a few years earlier. In another scene, Bocelli performs

Schubert's familiar version of the same sacred text in a picturesque landscape.

The film alternates between stunning drone shots of the Italian countryside, conversations on horseback between Bocelli and his friends, and dramatically staged performances in a variety of outdoor and indoor settings along the

route. Given the number of contemporary Christian artists who appear with Bocelli in this project, some Catholic viewers may find themselves encountering artists such as Tori Kelly, Michael W. Smith, Tauren Wells and Hillsong United's Taya Gaukrodgers for the very first time. Classical music fans may enjoy seeing

and hearing from the world-famous Welsh crossover singer Katherine Jenkins, Bach specialist Ramin Bahrami, conductor Beatrice Venezia, and the Croatian cellist duo, 2CELLOS, who have become a YouTube sensation.

Along the way, Bocelli reflects on his disability, his career and most of all his family. Toward the end of the film, he meets up with his adult son, Matteo, who reads his father a letter of appreciation while Bocelli strums a Spanish guitar. The film concludes with an outdoor celebration at Bocelli's home, with spontaneous music, wine and conversation—the epitome of the art of living Italians are famous for.

From a strictly faith-filled perspective, *The Journey* might have been more spiritually enriching had Bocelli and his companions spoken more about the holy sites along the route. Bocelli barely mentions his own devoutness, although it may be clear enough from his encounter with the pope and his choice of Catholic devotional anthems.

And while many of the songs from the evangelical performers might not resonate with all Catholics, we can all appreciate the ecumenical spirit of the whole group's performance of *Amazing Grace* at the end of the film.

Catholics may hope that *The Journey* (<https://thejourney.movie/>) may stir the hearts of all viewers for Christ, his Church, and the Kingdom of Heaven – the last of which feels at times to be very near in the beauty of Bocelli's native soil.

John Wick's back – and as ever, it's not for the faint-hearted

Saul has slain his thousands and Keanu Reeves his tens of thousands. Or so, at least, it seems by the end of the close to three hour-long festival of fatality that is *John Wick: Chapter 4* (Lionsgate).

Stylish savagery is the order of the day as Reeves reprises his role as the hitman of the title. Wick's ongoing struggle to break free of the High Table, the ultra-powerful behind-the-scenes criminal empire that once claimed his allegiance, becomes the cue for innumerable doomed extras to bite the dust. They prove as actuarially unsound as a Russian general in Ukraine.

A couple of Wick's adversaries have speaking parts, however, and so manage to offer more long-lasting opposition. One such is Vincent de Gramont (Bill Skarsgård), the foppish French nobleman the High Table leaders have entrusted with the task of exterminating the apparently indestructible Wick. He's not the first to find this a tall order.

A nameless bounty hunter (Shamir

Anderson), acting independently, is also on Wick's trail. He's accompanied by an attack dog who, at his command, butchers those who get in his master's way.

Wick gets unstinting aid from his old Osaka-based ally Shimazu Koji (Hiroyuki Sanada). But two other former friends, blind assassin Caine (Donnie Yen) and disgraced High Table satrap Winston Scott (Ian McShane), find their loyalties conflicted.

In adding to a series that got its start in 2014, franchise director Chad Stahelski helms a visually interesting but morally befuddled thriller whose deliberately over-the-top mayhem makes a visceral appeal to viewers while simultaneously winking at them. His movie's incidental treatment of religion is also unpleasantly ambiguous and sometimes barely skirts sacrilege.

Thus, at one point, an Orthodox priest in the middle of a church service suddenly produces a shotgun from under his vestments. Obviously ruthless villains are

shown at prayer and widower Wick himself pauses from his killing spree long enough to light a candle for his deceased wife – just in case, the dialogue later explains, his disbelief in an afterlife should turn out to be wrong.

The mumbo jumbo associated with the High Table, moreover, includes Latin phrases hijacked from Catholicism and the movie's climactic showdown unfolds on the terrace of Paris' Sacre Coeur Basilica. Piled on top of a body count that might put a serious dent in the census figures, these details will steer wise moviegoers clear of this bloody capping off of a queasy quartet.

An unusual aspect of *John Wick 4* is the humour present—unlike the other films in the series, creating an interesting and unique combination in the popular series.

But laughs aside, this is a film only for those with a strong stomach and warped set of values.

John Wick: Chapter 4 – out now. Certificate, definite 18 for us!



Keanu Reeves stars in a scene from the film *John Wick 4*. Photo: Murray Close, Lionsgate

Norse folklore still has a powerful pull on our culture and conscious

HISTORY

Carolyn Larrington

From Wagner to William Morris in the late 19th century, via Tolkien's dwarves and CS Lewis's *The Last Battle*, through to last year's controversial film *The Northman*, Scandinavian gods and heroes have been central to the stories we tell ourselves.

As professor of medieval European literature, I have been exploring Old Norse mythology since my undergraduate days. I have always been fascinated by the ways in which the old myths remain vital and relevant in the present, particularly now in various pop-cultural forms.

In my new book, *The Norse Myths That Shape The Way We Think*, I explore how 10 key Norse myths and legends have been reworked over the last 200 years.

Although these stories have been influential since their discovery in 17th-century Europe, in recent years Norse narratives have exploded across fiction, Hollywood blockbusters, rock albums, opera, video games and TV shows – these are just a few of the cultural spheres in which Norse myths have been put to work. Here I introduce three of the most important gods, the feminine divine in the form of valkyries and shield-maidens, and finally, the looming threat of ragna rök – the end of the world.

Gods and monsters

The main gods – not so much the goddesses unfortunately – offer ways to think about different stages of masculinity. Odin, the all-father, is the leader of the Norse pantheon, creator of humankind and god of wisdom. He will die at ragna rök, devoured by the great wolf Fenrir.

Starting with the main character Wotan in *Das Rheingold*, the first part of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* – and also in Neil Gaiman's 2001 epic *American Gods*, and Douglas Adams' 1988 comic novel *The Long, Dark Teatime of the Soul* – Odin is a figure who senses that power is draining away from him. Yet he ingeniously seeks out ways of clinging to his waning authority, cutting dodgy deals and manipulating his own flesh and blood through cunning and deceit.

The Marvel Comic Universe has already killed off the aged god, for he embodies an older patriarchal principle, one that refuses to step aside for the next generation.

In Norse myth, Thor's main role is smiting giants with his great hammer Mjölnir, patrolling the borders of the gods' and human territory to keep out enemies. An

Chris Hemsworth as Thor in the Marvel Universe film series: "The modern Thor is often depicted as a bumbling loutish thug... but his image has been rescued through his incarnation as the Mighty Thor. In Marvel comics and movies, he has learned maturity, how to wield and to restrain his power..."



indomitable performer of mighty feats, he is not always taken seriously in the myths: a favourite story involves him being forced to cross-dress as a reluctant and implausible bride.

So too, the modern Thor is often depicted as a bumbling loutish thug, reaching for his hammer instead of thinking things through. Contemporary writers, such as Joanne Harris and Francesca Simon, make him the butt of their tales for younger readers – the cross-dressing story makes for great comedy.

The god's image has been rescued through his incarnation as the Mighty Thor. In Marvel comics and movies, he has learned maturity, how to wield and to restrain his power, and has come to care for others, both humans and his own people, the semi-divine Asgardians. Marvel's Thor is constructing a new kind of masculinity, one that understands that violence is not always the answer and which has learned the value of forethought and compromise.

Half-god, half-giant, Loki is a strangely ambiguous being; in the Marvel Universe he is Thor's adoptive brother, though not in the original myth. He gets the gods out of tight situations – often ones that he himself has caused – but he will march against them with their enemies at ragna rök. For novelist AS Byatt, he is the intellectual's god, questioning and nonconformist, while Marvel and Disney have made Loki into a shape-changing, gender-bending cult hero, always ready with

a quip as he double-crosses Thor once again.

A female perspective

Loki is also the father of monsters: his daughter Hel, goddess of death, is the heroine of Gavin Higgins and Francesca Simon's chamber opera from 2019, *The Monstrous Child*. Hel is a sparky teenager living with disability and consigned to a grim underworld, a girl whose story takes in love, vengeance and learning the

true extent of her powers.

Warrior-maidens and fate-goddesses rolled in one, the valkyries range high above the battlefield, determining who shall live and who shall die. Wagner's Brünnhilde is the most remarkable of the valkyries, the true heroine of his *Ring Cycle*, fulfilling her father Wotan's will and finally bringing down the gods.

Valkyries were also imagined as the battle-trained women warriors

who now throng such TV shows as *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom*, skilled fighters who battle on an equal footing with men. These women vividly dramatise aspects of contemporary femininity: effective in traditional masculine domains, wielding power and choosing their own lovers, yet still working out how to manage motherhood alongside their professional identities.

Literally "the doom of the gods", ragna rök lies in the mythic future for gods and humans: the powers of ice and fire will destroy the earth. Tolkien suggests that this inevitable ending shapes the northern spirit, kindling courage and resignation in the face of certain doom.

Wagner saw his *Götterdämmerung* (the twilight of the gods) as sweeping away the corrupt divine order, leaving a purified, empty world where free human beings could build anew. In HBO's *Game of Thrones*, humanity's apocalyptic clash with the icy power of the Night King is resolved by one young woman's courage and determination.

The Norse myths envisage a cleansed green world that rises again from the ocean, but the climate cataclysm towards which we are heading admits no such renewal. Perhaps we can learn from the gods' bad faith and carelessness in time to avert the downfall that ragna rök foreshadows for us all.

Carolyn Larrington IS A Professor and Tutorial Fellow in English, University of Oxford



Loki is a strangely ambiguous being; he is the intellectual's god, questioning and nonconformist



First Grand Match of Cricket Played by Members of the Royal Amateur Society on Hampton Court Green, August 13th, 1836

Cricket... so quintessentially... Italian?

FAITH IN SPORT

Fr Vlad Felzmann

Continuing his look at the history of sport, Fr Vlad Felzmann enters the last-medieval era where some of our most popular pastimes and games were first played

During the Renaissance, educators, and medical surgeons promoted playing sports because of their numerous physical and psychological benefits to the human body. During this era, there was also support for moderating sports, as it was viewed as more for leisure than a strict procedure.

Open-air sporting events became an attraction for many and people of all different social hierarchies were involved in this new culture. These new radical ideas about sports made their way into books, and eventually became part of the social culture during the Renaissance.

Like many other renowned works of literature, *Gargantua*, written by François Rabelais, a well-known novel published in 1534, mentions sports and games as a unit. All different types of sports became a functional unit in many people's routines and it brought refreshment into people's lives.

As the popularity and involvement of sports increased, rules began to form and sports became more regulated so they could be fair. Sports clubs and associations which provided a sense of unity also became more common, especially for elite sports such as horse racing, cockfighting, hunting, and tennis during the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries.

For example, King Charles II formed 20 rules for horse racing in 1665. Sports were a form of entertainment for spectators who did not play themselves. There were stake-money contests and prizes in these sports and racing competitions. These modern advancements and developments made about sporting life in the Renaissance in Europe eventually made their way to Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In 1660, the Restoration of the monarchy in England was immediately followed by the reopening of the theatres. Sanctions that had been imposed by the Puritans on cricket, for example, were swiftly lifted. However, the political, social and economic conditions in the aftermath of the Restoration encouraged excessive gambling, so much so that a Gambling Act was deemed necessary in 1664.

It is certain that cricket, horse racing and boxing – that is prize-fighting – were financed by gambling

interests. Cricket patrons, all of whom were gamblers, formed strong teams through the 18th century to represent their interests.

A team was deemed strong when its members came from more than one parish. It seems certain that such teams were first assembled in or immediately after 1660. Prior to the English Civil War and the Commonwealth, all available evidence concludes that cricket had evolved to the level of village cricket only where teams were strictly representative of individual parishes.

The year 1660 also marks the origin of professional team sport. The history of the England cricket team can be traced back to at least 1739, when sides styled 'Kent' and 'All England' played a match at Bromley Common. Research has discovered that, prior to 1877, there had been over 300 matches involving 'England' or 'All England'.

Long summer days provided

predictable opportunities for free time, when the ordinary people could engage in athletic activities. Swimming, wrestling, and racing were common among all ages and both genders, while organised ball games of various types can be found in every medieval society and culture.

There is a consensus of expert opinion that cricket may have been invented during Saxon or Norman times by children living in the Weald, an area of dense woodlands and clearings in south-east England.

On the 17th of January 1597, a court of law in Guildford heard from a 59-year-old coroner, John Derrick, who gave witness that when he was a scholar at the Free School at Guildford, fifty years earlier, "*hee and diverse of his fellows did runne and play at creckett and other plaies [sic]*" on common land which was the subject of the current legal dispute, confirming that the sport was played there by schoolboys

c.1550. It is perhaps significant that cricket is the only one of the "plaies" to be specifically named.

In 1598, a reference to cricket appeared in an Italian-English dictionary by Giovanni Florio. His definition of the word *sgillare* is: "to make a noise as a cricket, to play cricket-a-wicket, and be merry". Florio is the first writer known to have defined "cricket" in terms of both an insect and a game.

Though ice-sports may have been there earlier, we have evidence that in Scotland curling existed in the early 16th century. A curling stone, inscribed with the date 1511, was uncovered – along with another bearing the date 1551 – when an old pond was drained at Dunblane.

On February 1541 the first written reference to a contest using stones on ice appeared. It is in the records of Paisley Abbey, Renfrewshire.

Meanwhile in what is now Holland, there are two 1565 paintings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. One, called *Winter Landscape*, depicts skaters while *Bird trap and The Hunters in the Snow* captures Dutch peasants curling.

In my role as Chaplain to Sport, I have been asked, "what motivates people to play sport?"

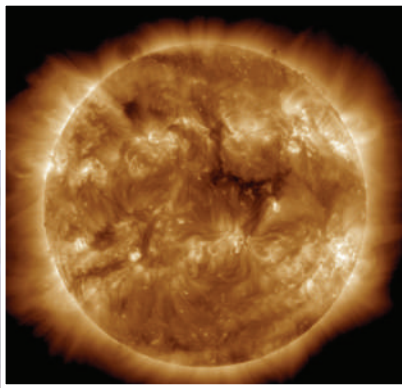
I reply, 1. Being part of a team. 2. Friendship, 3. Fun. 4. Love of the Game. And 5, yearning to be the best.

Worth a discussion over a Sunday lunch? Or indeed, a pint?

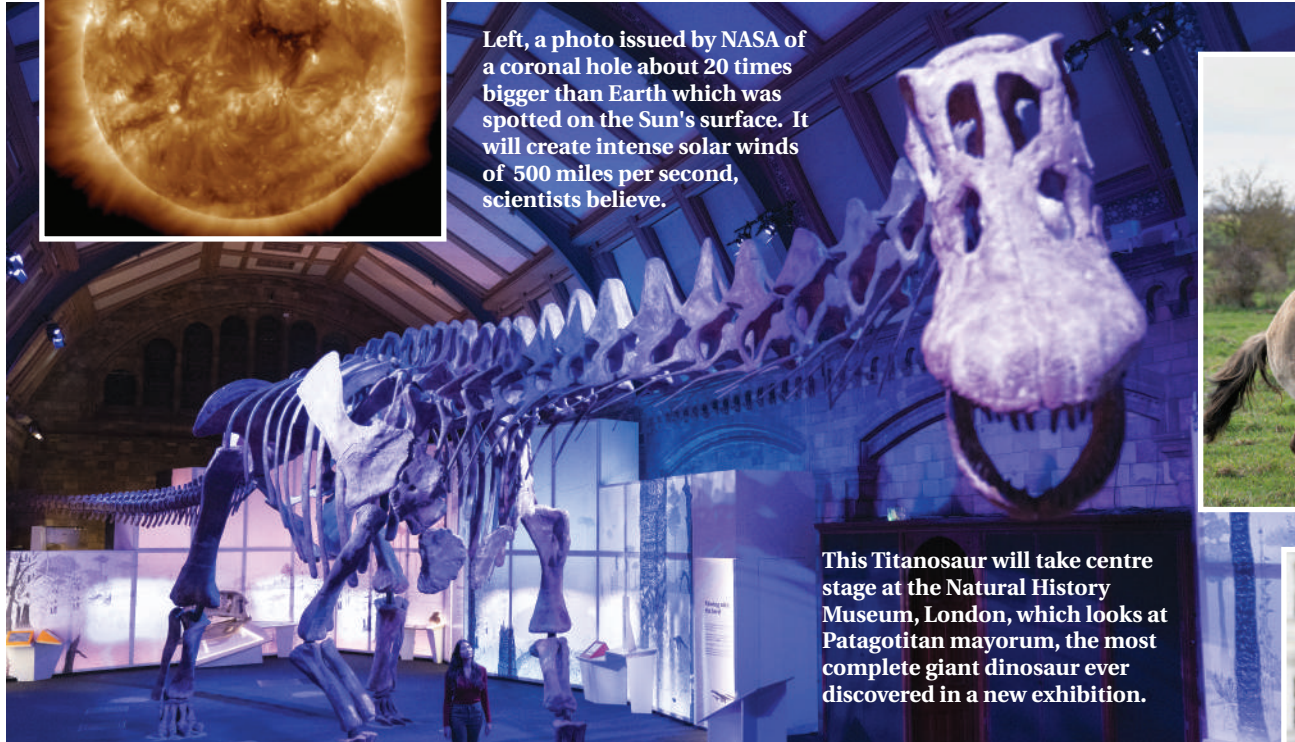


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A pictorial round-up of the past seven days...



Left, a photo issued by NASA of a coronal hole about 20 times bigger than Earth which was spotted on the Sun's surface. It will create intense solar winds of 500 miles per second, scientists believe.



This Titanosaurus will take centre stage at the Natural History Museum, London, which looks at Patagotitan mayorum, the most complete giant dinosaur ever discovered in a new exhibition.



Konik ponies sparring at the National Trust's Wicken Fen nature reserve in Cambridgeshire. Authorities hope the Polish horses will help preserve the habitats in the ancient wetland



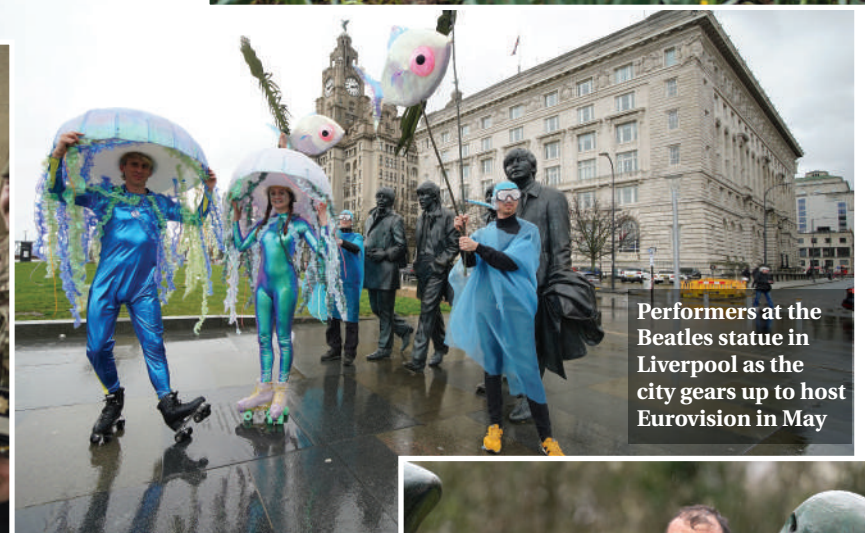
Dead and dying starfish that have been washed up on the beach at Saltburn-by-the-Sea in North Yorkshire. Hundreds of thousands of dead mussels lie on the shoreline, along with starfish, crabs and razor clams.



King Charles III and German President Steinmeier plant a tree after attending a reception at Bellevue Palace, Berlin, the official residence of the President of Germany, during his State Visit to Germany.



Presenter Mel Geidroyc with members of the Scots Guards and Coldstream Guards during the Coronation Big Lunch with military at Wellington Barracks, London.



Performers at the Beatles statue in Liverpool as the city gears up to host Eurovision in May



Sculpture technician Dai Roberts cleans and dries the bronze sculpture Goslar Warrior at the Henry Moore Studios and Gardens in Much Hadham, Hertfordshire as they prepare for reopening next week.

LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form Sunday Year A, Weekday Cycle I

Sunday, 2nd April: Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, Procession: Matt 21:1-11; Isa. 50:4-7; Ps. 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24 r. 2; Phil. 2:6-11; Mt. 26:14-27:66

Monday, 3rd April: Monday of Holy Week, Isa.42:1-7; Ps. 27; Jn.12:1-11

Tuesday, 4th April: Tuesday of Holy Week, Isa.49:1-6; Ps.71; Jn.13:21-33,36-38

Wednesday, 5th April: Wednesday of Holy Week, Isa.50:4-9; Ps.69; Mt.26:14-25

Thursday, 6th April: Maundy Thursday, Ex. 12:1-8, 11-14; Ps. 116:12-13, 15-18 r. cf. 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Jn.13:1-15

Friday, 7th April: Good Friday, Isa. 52:13-53:12; Ps. 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-17, 25. r. Lk. 23:46; Heb. 4:14-16, 5:7-9; Jn. 18:1-19:42

Saturday, 8th April: Holy Saturday – no Mass. Easter Vigil readings: Gen. 1:1-2:2; Ps. 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12-14, 24,35 r. 30; Gen. 22:1-18; Ps.16:5,8-11 r. 1; Ex. 14:15-15:1; Ex.15:1-6, 17-18 r. 1; Isa. 54:5-14; Ps.30:2, 4-6, 11-13 r.2; Isa. 55:1-11; Isa. 12:2-6 r. 3; Bar. 3:9-15, 32-4:4; Ps.19:8-11 r. Jn. 6:69; Ezek. 36:16-28; Ps.42:3, 5; 42:3-4. r. 42:2; Rom.6:3-11; Ps.118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Mt. 28:1-10

Extraordinary Form Calendar

Extraordinary Form Calendar according to the Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)

Sunday, 2nd April: Palm Sunday Mt. 21:1-9; Phil. 2:5-11; Mt. 26:36-27:60

Monday, 3rd April: Monday in Holy Week Isa. 50:5-10; Jn. 12:1-9

Tuesday, 4th April: Tuesday in Holy Week, Jer. 11:18-20; Mk. 14:32-15:46

Wednesday, 5th April: Wednesday in Holy Week, Isa. 62:11, 63:1-7; Isa. 53:1-12; Lk. 22:39-23:53

Thursday, 6th April: Maundy Thursday, 1 Cor. 11:20-32; Jn. 13:1-15

Friday, 7th April: Good Friday, Hos. 6:1-6; Ex. 12:1-11; Jn. 18:1-19:42

Saturday, 8th April: Holy Saturday, Gen. 1:1-2:2; Ex. 15:1; Isa. 4:2-6; Deut. 31:22-30 Col. 3:1-4; Mt. 28:1-7

Our Lady of Fidelity



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Rest in Peace

The Ursuline Sisters announce the death of

Sister Emmanuel Bali on 7th March 2023, aged 86, and

Sister Mary Carmel on 16th March 2023, aged 89.

Funeral Mass at **Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Wanstead**, on Tuesday, 4th April 2023 at 11 O'clock.

Followed by Cremation at the City of London.

The announcement is being arranged by T Cribb & Sons (Funeral Directors), 10 Woowich Manor Way, Beckton, London E6 5PA, 0207 476 1855.

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Christ on the road to Calvary

The encounter of Christ and his mother Mary along the road to Calvary is depicted in a church's stained-glass window as the global Christian community prepares to celebrate Holy Week

