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A Catholic Perspective

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## **Editor's Corner** by **Kathy Bishop**



**Kathy Bishop** is founder and editor-in-chief of The Faith Companion. She has a BA(Hons) in RE, an MA in Pastoral Theology specializing in Christian Spirituality and has trained for 2 years as a spiritual director at the London Centre for Spiritual Direction. She is a registered adult nurse.

**A**s we face dark times, we hope this edition will shed the light of Christ into the lives of our readers. I wish to thank Steve Carroll graphic designer and Kenads printers for their excellent partnership producing The Faith Companion and who I haplessly forgot to thank last edition. We couldn't do it without them!

In this edition Sister Magdalene continues exploring St Thomas Aquinas on the Incarnation, Pia Matthews explores the Church's position regarding the ethics surrounding the new COVID-19 vaccine and Martin Ryan focusses the command by Mary to "Do whatever he tells you".

"Turning the other cheek" - are we really meant to remain passive when confronted by oppression? I explore Jesus' probable meaning. I also share a method of prayer which helps to cultivate a more personal encounter with Christ. Roderick Campbell Guion reflects on St Blaise, our saint for this edition, who is said to have been associated with the ritual of the blessing of the throat. I also explore the devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus during the month of January.

We have an incredible faith story by Sean Booth who tells of one blessed Christmas attending Holy Mass with a Muslim, a group of refugees and a prostitute. A parishioner shares her experience of a vision of Jesus during a most painful moment. A volunteer from Chilworth Abbey tells us how they adapted to the pandemic by providing virtual veneration of a relic of St Faustina and Richard France tells how he developed a virtual tour of Lourdes for those unable to go physically as pilgrims. Finally, Martin Ryan answers a question on indulgences; God's justice or mercy?

We hope this edition enlightens your path and nourishes your journey ahead as we walk in faith with you. Please may I ask for your prayers for The Faith Companion as we navigate these difficult economic times.

With every blessing,

**Kathy Bishop**



The Forget-Me-Not flower is known as a symbol of undying love and eternal friendship. However, there is an ancient Christian legend regarding this little flower according to which the Child Jesus, sitting on Mary's lap, told her He wished future generations could see her eyes. He then waved His hands over the ground and the blue forget-me-not flower appeared. Thus, according to legend, this flower represents Mary's eyes and as such will be used by The Faith Companion as its main symbol. Mary is to be at the centre of our vision watching over her children, The Faith Companion's readers.

### DISCLAIMER

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## **And the Word was Made Flesh: A Thomistic Look at the Incarnation by Sr. Mary Magdalene Eitenmiller, O.P.**



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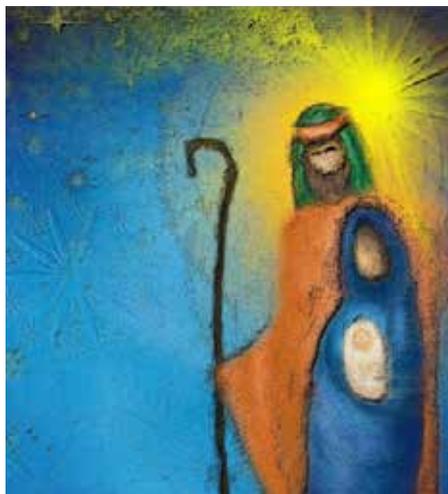
### **Part 2**

**I**n the last article, we looked into the question, *who* is this Word of God who became flesh? This time I would like to delve more deeply into our second question, which is, *why* did God become incarnate? We might begin answering this question by first looking at what is known as the fittingness of the Incarnation. That is, one might ask, as many have, was it fitting for one who is truly God to enter into time and become a man?

St Thomas Aquinas begins the third part of his *Summa Theologiae* with this question concerning the fittingness, or suitability, of the Incarnation. Aquinas points out that “the very nature of God is goodness ... so what belongs to the essence of goodness is fitting to God. And it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others [as Pseudo-Dionysius says] ... and for the highest good to communicate itself in the highest way ... So, it was [truly] fitting that God should become incarnate.” Note that this is an *argument from fittingness*, not a demonstration of the Incarnation.<sup>1</sup> A mystery of faith cannot be demonstrated like a geometrical proof, but one can argue that it is fitting that it is the case. In other words, it is not irrational.

“...was it fitting for one who is truly God to enter into time and become a man?”

Aquinas also gives another argument in the *sed contra* (meaning ‘on the contrary’ or ‘I respond’), saying that “it would seem most fitting that by visible things the invisible things of God should be made known; [in fact] it was to this end that the whole world was made.”<sup>2</sup> What he means here is that creation itself was created in order to reflect the glory of God (as it says in Psalm 19), in order that,



as Romans 1:20 teaches, “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” If this is true with regard to God’s presence in creation, giving all things their very being, which, as we saw last time, is known as the *first mode of divine presence*, such that we can perceive the effects of God’s power and deity in creation, and thus come to know of the Creator’s existence (similar to the way we can surmise a fire exists when we see the smoke which is its effect), how much more reason then does God have for making Himself known visibly and heard audibly in assuming a human nature and becoming man in order to reveal His inner life to us?

In asking why God became incarnate, Aquinas also points out that “such things as spring from God’s will, and are beyond the creature’s due, can be made known to us only through being revealed in Sacred Scripture, in which the Divine Will is made known to us. Hence, since everywhere in Sacred Scripture the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason for the Incarnation, it is more in accordance with [revelation] to say that the work of the Incarnation was ordained by God as a *remedy* for sin; so that, had sin not existed, the Incarnation would not have been. And yet the power of God is not *limited* to this; even had sin not existed, God *could have become incarnate.*”<sup>3</sup>

“... creation itself was created in order to reflect the glory of God...”

Here St Thomas is saying that since Scripture makes it clear that God became incarnate in order to save mankind from sin, this appears to be at least the principal

reason for the Incarnation, although God could have become incarnate had we not sinned. One of the places where Scripture at least indicates this reason why God became incarnate is John 3:16, which says, “God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever might believe in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.” St Paul’s First Letter to Timothy also clearly states that, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

On the other hand, Aquinas also notes that God *could have* saved us in some other way, since he is omnipotent, but this way seemed *most fitting* for two reasons: 1) with respect to furthering us in good, as well as 2) with respect to withdrawing us from evil. He lists five ways (and there are certainly others as well) in which the Incarnation serves to further us in good, the first three of which are aimed at our growth in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. He says:

*First, with regard to faith, which is made more certain by believing God himself Who speaks; hence Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xi, 2): ‘In order that man might journey more trustfully toward the truth, the Truth itself, the Son of God, having assumed human nature, established and founded faith’. Secondly, with regard to hope, which is thereby greatly strengthened; hence Augustine says (De Trin. xiii): ‘Nothing was so necessary for raising our hope as to show us how deeply God loved us. And what could afford us a stronger proof of this [ie*

1 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. III, q. 1, a. 1, resp., transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947). Hereafter, ST.

2 ST III, q. 1, a. 1, s.c.

3 ST III, q. 1, a. 3, resp.



of God's love] than that the Son of God should become a sharer in our human nature?' Thirdly, with regard to **charity**, which is greatly enkindled by this fact that God became incarnate; hence Augustine says [*De catechizandis rudibus*, iv]: 'What greater cause is there of the Lord's coming than to show God's love for us?' And he afterwards adds: 'If we have been slow to love, at least let us hasten to love in return'.

[In addition to the growth in virtue, Aquinas continues with two other reasons]:

Fourthly, with regard to **well-doing**, in which he set us an example; hence Augustine says in a sermon (*xxii de Temp.*): 'Man who might be seen was not to be followed; but God was to be followed, who could not be seen. And therefore, God was made man, that he who might be seen by man, and that whom man might follow, might be shown to man.' Fifthly, with regard to the **full participation of the Divinity**, which is the true bliss [beatitude] of man and end of human life; and this is

bestowed upon us by Christ's humanity; for Augustine says in a sermon (*xiii de Temp.*): 'God was made man, that man might be made God'.<sup>6</sup>

The fourth reason refers to our call to imitate Christ in offering loving service to one another, and the final one refers to what is called 'deification', in which human beings are made like God, being sanctified, or 'divinized', by His grace and gifts.

St Thomas subsequently provides five ways in which the Incarnation serves to *withdraw* us from evil:

*First, because man is taught by it not to prefer the devil to himself, nor to honor him who is the author of sin; ... Secondly, because we are thereby taught how great is man's dignity, lest we should sully it with sin; hence Augustine says (De Vera Relig. xvi): 'God has proved to us how high a place human nature holds amongst creatures, inasmuch as he appeared to men as a true man'... Thirdly,*

4 See also ST III, q. 1, a. 2, s.c.

5 1 Tim 1:15.

6 ST III, q. 1, a. 2, resp.

because, 'in order to do away with man's presumption, the grace of God is commended in Jesus Christ, though no merits of ours went before'...

[That is, grace is purely a gift from God, and we cannot merit that gift — and so ought not to be presumptuous of it — although we can and must cooperate with it]. Fourthly, because 'man's pride, which is the greatest stumbling-block to our clinging to God, can be convinced and cured by humility so great,' [that God should deign to become man] ... Fifthly, in order to free man from the thralldom of sin, which, as Augustine says (*De Trin. xiii, 13*), 'ought to be done in such a way that the devil should be overcome by the justice of the man Jesus Christ,' and this was done by Christ satisfying for us.

Now a mere man could not have satisfied for the whole human race, and God was not bound to satisfy; hence it behooved Jesus Christ to be both God and man. Hence Pope Leo says, 'Unless he was God, he would not have brought a remedy; and

unless he was man, he would not have set an example.'

*'God has proved to us how high a place human nature holds amongst creatures, inasmuch as he appeared to men as a true man'...*

I would like to briefly note here two reasons that Aquinas gives why we cannot of ourselves completely satisfy, or atone, for sin: 1) the wounds of Original Sin are in our human nature itself, and we do not have the power to overcome the wounds in our own natures by ourselves, without the grace of God, which comes to us from Christ; 2) sin committed against God, who is infinite, has a kind of infinity, but we are simply finite. So only one who is both God and man can make satisfaction (atonement) with that 'infinite efficacy' needed to overcome and atone for sin.

That, then, is where I will leave the second question, on *why* the Word became incarnate. Next time, we will move on to the third question: *how can we rightly understand* the fact that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us?

to be published in the next edition of *The Faith Companion*?

7 ST III, q. 1, a. 2, resp.

8. However, we can, in being united to Christ, make sufficient, though imperfect, satisfaction for sin, insofar as God accepts our efforts, even though our satisfaction is not condign, or absolutely just, satisfaction. Aquinas explains that "just as everything imperfect presupposes some perfect thing, by which it is sustained, hence it is that satisfaction of every mere human being has its efficacy from the satisfaction of Christ" (ST III, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2). So, our efforts to atone for sin become efficacious when joined to the merits of Christ.



## Thinking About Vaccines by Dr Pia Matthews



**Dr Pia Matthews** is the programme director for MA in Bioethics and Medical Law at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London. She also is the managing editor of the journal "New Bioethics". Pia lives with her husband and disabled daughter.

News that there are now a number of vaccines against Covid-19 has come as a great relief to many people. People are beginning to see a light at the end of this long tunnel and the possibility of a return to normal. However, it is always important to think about the ethics of new developments. This is especially so in healthcare when often technological advances seem to race ahead of ethics, and what *can* be done soon becomes what *should* be done. Circumstances do not dictate our ethical principles. Indeed, in a pandemic we may need ethics more than ever. One central ethical principle is that we cannot do evil in the expectation of a good result. One central standard of ethical permissibility is whether a technology or intervention safeguards and respects the dignity of the human person.<sup>1</sup>

When we think ethically about vaccines we may have many questions, including: what about the safety and risks, who should be first in line to receive the vaccine, how should vaccines be distributed, what about people in poorer countries, what may be the long-term effects? Many people recognise that vaccination against diseases such as German measles, mumps, measles and chickenpox represent a milestone in the fight against contagious diseases. A vaccine against Covid-19 is equally welcome, especially since Covid-19 is a global pandemic, devastating for some populations, and it causes such a huge

strain on healthcare services. If we are to be good stewards of our health, and if we think about the common good, including the good of our healthcare resources, then we can see that we have a serious duty to think carefully about the use of vaccines and about protecting our own health, and the health of others. However, some people have significant concerns about the actual production of vaccines, and this is what we will be exploring here.

*One central standard of ethical permissibility is whether a technology or intervention safeguards and respects the dignity of the human person...*

For some time now, the Church has been aware of the use of embryos, of aborted fetuses and of what has been called 'biological material of an illicit origin', in some bioethical research. Although not all vaccines are linked to elective abortions, or to biological material of an illicit origin, some vaccines are. It is important to consider the ethics of the use of these 'materials' in research, since respecting the dignity of human beings rules out the evil of an elective abortion and the technological production of human

<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, *The New Charter for Health Care Workers* (2017), n.49 [https://www.scribd.com/document/431501363/The-New-Charter-for-Health-Care-Workers#download&from\\_embed](https://www.scribd.com/document/431501363/The-New-Charter-for-Health-Care-Workers#download&from_embed)



vaccines that are not connected to illicitly obtained material.

In its examination of the ethics surrounding vaccines, the Pontifical Academy for Life looked at the principle of cooperation in evil because of the link between the evil of abortion and the production of some vaccines. To aid discernment, Catholic

embryos. Respect does not allow human beings to be reduced to tissue, and respect includes the respect owed to the body of a human being who is dead.<sup>2</sup> Biological material includes cell lines that have been developed from elective abortions carried out decades ago in the 1960s and 1970s. Cells are replicated over many years to produce a cell line. A cell line is not tissue from the foetus, but it is a product from that tissue. Nor is a cell line an ingredient in the vaccine. Rather a cell line is used in research, usually to grow the virus and then is filtered out of the final product, though there is a possibility that traces of DNA may remain. However, the very fact that the cell line originated from an aborted foetus is a cause for concern. In 2005, the Pontifical Academy for Life examined the question of vaccines that had been prepared using cell lines derived from aborted human fetuses, and this document was updated in 2017. The question was also considered in the instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Personae: On Certain Bioethical Questions* (2008) and in the *New Charter for Health Care Workers* (2017).<sup>3</sup> In these documents, the Church urges researchers to reflect on the ethical nature of vaccines and to develop

moral theology has traditionally made a distinction between formal and material cooperation. In many areas of life people cooperate in evil; for instance, our taxes may be used to fund schemes such as abortion services, but paying tax is not in itself a moral evil. Moreover, taxation serves the common good of society, so I should pay the tax I am eligible to pay. In terms of cooperation, if I share in the evil aims of someone and actively help them achieve those aims, then I am formally cooperating in their evil acts and this is something a conscientious person should

<sup>2</sup> *The New Charter for Health Care Workers*, n.62; *Dignitas Personae*, n.35.

<sup>3</sup> Pontifical Academy for Life, (2005) *Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared From Cells Derived From Aborted Human Fetuses* <https://www.immunize.org/talking-about-vaccines/vaticandocument.htm>; *Note on Italian Vaccine Issue* (2017) <http://www.academyforlife.va/content/pav/en/the-academy/activity-academy/note-vaccini.html>; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dignitas Personae*, *On Certain Bioethical Questions* (2008) n.34-35 [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20081208\\_dignitas-personae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html); *The New Charter for Health Care Workers*, n.69-70.

never do. Formal cooperation can be explicit, but it can also be implicit if, for instance, the person cooperating denies that he or she shares the other person's wrongful aims, yet his or her actions seem to shore that person up in what he or she intends. By material cooperation someone may be involved in a wrongful act, but only remotely and without sharing in that person's evil aims. One example of remote involvement in an act would be where landowners cleared land using exploitative employment methods in order to build the house that decades later, I have now bought. This is not so much remoteness in time as moral remoteness. The assessment of material cooperation is more complex than an assessment of formal cooperation, and it requires practical wisdom since there are many factors to take into account. Among these, the person should consider whether there are any alternatives, how urgent the act is, the goods and the harms at stake, and whether cooperation would mislead others and cause scandal.

*... the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Academy for Life explain... where there is considerable danger to health, a person can with a clear conscience receive a vaccine developed from foetal cell lines.*

Anyone who shares in the evil intention of those who performed an elective abortion would be formally cooperating. However, moral remoteness means that different people can have different moral responsibilities.<sup>4</sup> The responsibility of someone directly involved in an elective abortion is not the same as for a researcher who produces and uses biological material

of an illicit origin. This responsibility is not the same as for a researcher who acquires the material commercially decades after the original cell line was produced. The responsibility of a person who is given a vaccine with a link to this material is even further removed. In *Dignitas Personae*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explains that "... grave reasons may be morally proportionate to justify the use of such 'biological material'". Thus, for example, danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, whilst keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available. Moreover, in organisations where cell lines of illicit origin are being utilised, the responsibility of those who make the decision to use them is not the same as that of those who have no voice in such a decision.<sup>5</sup> Both the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Academy for Life explain that this remoteness means that where there is considerable danger to health, a person can in good conscience receive a vaccine developed from foetal cell lines. Additionally, the Pontifical Academy for Life's 2017 investigation concluded that the cell lines used in research were now very distant from the original abortions. Moreover, it was no longer necessary to obtain cells from new abortions. The lawfulness of the use of a vaccine is not the same as declaring the lawfulness of its production.

*"... the Church urges researchers to develop vaccines that are not connected to illicitly obtained material."*



In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, vaccines are not simply the answer to getting back to a normal way of life. Certainly, it is important to be aware of the arguments. Moreover, given the logistics and the questions of supply and demand, people may not be in a position to choose which vaccine they would in conscience want. But the use of these vaccines can help to protect people from infection, serious illness, and in the case of those particularly vulnerable to the disease, protect from possible death. There is then grave reason to receive a vaccine and so it is possible to do so in good conscience.

However, we may wish to think more deeply about a 'return to normal'. The simple acceptance of a vaccine that has links to elective abortions, no matter how remote, may give researchers the impression that such a link is no longer a matter of ethical concern, or at least suggest that the use of biological material of an illicit origin can simply be tolerated. The Church has always promoted the inviolable dignity and full ethical status of each human being, however small, from that person's very beginning at conception to that person's natural end.<sup>6</sup>

The Church also asks people to inform their conscience, to be good stewards of their life and health, and the lives and health of others, and to attend to the common good. The ethics of research, and of the production of vaccines, should take full account of the respect for human dignity, conscience, and our care for and solidarity with other people, especially those who are vulnerable.

**Note from the editor-in-chief:** I decided this article should be included as we face the role out of the COVID-19 vaccination to combat the pandemic. I wanted to inform people of the Church's position and the ethical considerations upon which the Church based its thoughts - we exist to support the Church. Cell lines derived from foetal tissue from the 1960's and 1970's is of real ethical concern and may sway people away from taking the vaccine, but there is a real threat to life here also. I just wanted readers to be informed of the Church's stance and to weigh these things up in order to make an informed decision.

<sup>4</sup> *The New Charter for Health Care Workers*, n.70.

<sup>5</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, n.35.

<sup>6</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, n.5; *The New Charter for Health Care Workers* n.40-41.

## **Do Whatever He Tells You!** by Martin Ryan



**Martin Ryan** was a Redemptorist for fourteen years, ordained in 1983 and left to get married in 1989. Now sixty-two, he has never lost his faith nor ever stopped his Catholic practice. He was born in London and has a first-class honours degree in theology. Now living in Scotland, Martin is an IT professional. He also expresses his faith through poetry published to his own website: <https://www.poemsforpilgrims.com/>

**O**n the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you". (John 2:1-4).

I think one of the most profound sentences in the Bible occurs in this short extract, which is part of the story we know as the Wedding Feast at Cana in St John's Gospel. Five simple words: **"Do whatever he tells you"**. Five simple words, but they conceal a treasury of meaning for us.

These words come at the end of a brief but revealing conversation between Jesus and His mother Mary, a conversation about a relatively mundane situation in which a young couple are in danger of social embarrassment because they didn't order enough wine for their wedding celebration. Mary, caring as ever, is perhaps the only guest who realises the situation and instinctively she turns to Jesus and makes Him aware of the situation. She doesn't have to spell out the implications to her son, but she gets what seems to be a sharp rebuke: "What's that to you and me?". The Gospel



passage is marvellously economical with words. It can appear as though Mary, blithely ignoring Jesus' response, turns to the catering staff and simply says: "Do whatever he tells you". In this amazing interchange between mother and son, it might appear that there is a power struggle going on, and that Mary is the clear winner! Actually, Mary affirms her recognition of the authority of Jesus and her own acceptance of this.

*Mary... is perhaps the only guest who realises the situation and instinctively she turns to Jesus and makes Him aware...*

As always with Sacred Scripture, these amazing words have potent messages for us too, living so many centuries after that wedding feast. Mary speaks to the servants, but she also very much speaks to us. But let us not forget also that, through Mary's words, God Himself is speaking to us. And when God speaks there is priceless treasure and grace for our lives.

This brief instruction is so profound that I think it is almost too easy to miss what our Blessed Mother is saying to the wedding servants, and thereby also to us. Let me try and explain why so much is contained in a few simple words spoken by "the mother of Jesus".

Frankly, the statement "do whatever he/she tells you" is a hard command to swallow. It is a bold statement that no human should unconditionally say to another human about a third human.

Imagine three people: person A, person B and person C. Person A says to person B: "Do whatever person C tells you." Now, how on earth can person A ever say such a thing? From a moral point of view, how can person B ever be sure that what person C tells them to do is right and proper? To be human is to be fallible, and for us sin is ever in the mix. Person C might be a really good person, perhaps even a saint, but no one is beyond fault or sees every angle of a situation. Without therefore being too pedantic, it is not morally feasible for anyone to say categorically to another: "do whatever he/she tells you". Neither for person A to advise it, nor for person B to act on it. It also would appear to put a huge moral burden on person C!

*...let us not forget also that, through Mary's words, God Himself is speaking to us.*



To look at this another way, a soldier effectively signs his conscience away when he joins up and undertakes to do whatever his superior officer commands, even to the point of killing. There are stories of an individual soldier disobeying an order which he feels is wrong, but these scenarios are extremely rare in warfare and the soldier can often expect to be treated harshly for disobeying, because he is denying the chain of command and thereby destroying the cohesion of his unit, ultimately risking the success of the campaign. An army only functions when all ranks promptly and without equivocation obey their superiors, but history is littered with appalling stories of dreadful atrocities when the perpetrators were 'only obeying orders'.

A key word here is of course conscience. We usually understand conscience as that inner voice which tells us right from wrong, and from a faith point of view, this inner voice is, in fact, the voice of God speaking in the depths of our heart. In Catholic theology conscience is seen as sacred, for in God's design He has placed His law within our hearts, and, in this life, conscience is therefore the ultimate practical arbiter of how we should act. Again, history is full of stories where brave folk have disobeyed superiors by following their consciences, and often paid a heavy price for doing so. St Thomas More is one of the greatest examples of this.

Yet while we might understand in essence what conscience is and what it demands of us, it is perhaps too easy to overlook how conscience manifests itself in our lives, and in particular how conscience develops.

When we are children our consciences are not properly formed and we rely on our 'significant adults', primarily our parents,

to guide us. Our innate sense of right and wrong still needs to be nurtured and this development succeeds or fails depending on how the child is shown love. As we grow up, we need to take ownership of our own consciences and work to inform them by right living. In contrast, people who are deprived of love as children may not have formed a conscience at all and can be capable of the very worst acts without showing any remorse. Their conscience is so suppressed by lack of love to be effectively absent, and their guilt is not necessarily a clear-cut issue. In contrast, the person who consciously goes against their formed conscience must be considered culpable.

Conscience therefore needs to be properly formed, and there is a moral duty on all adults to give proper time and attention to doing so. In fact, the Church teaches that there is guilt accruing when individuals fail to nurture their own consciences. The Church also teaches that when a person has truly respected the role and formation of their conscience by right living then they must always follow it, and it becomes for them the ultimate arbiter of the truth (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992, ref 1800). It is fundamental to how each of us discern God's will in any particular situation.

The Church's teaching on conscience is therefore clear: if another person tells you to do something, you must always vet it by your own formed conscience first, and if the order doesn't square with what your conscience is telling you, then you must not obey.

*Mary is in fact saying to us:  
"This man, my son Jesus, is  
God".*



The wedding staff came to perceive this through the miraculous changing of water into the finest wine. We come to know this truth through the practice of our faith.

Mary's simple command to the wedding servants, but more importantly the sacred and direct instruction to all of us since these words are part of Sacred Scripture which is the Word of God, is both insight into what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, but also it is Mary's bold affirmation of her faith in the reality of who Jesus is, the Incarnate Son of God.

But to return to Our Lady's words, surely her statement – "do whatever he tells you" – is a bypassing of our conscience? Surely, Mary, and by implication God, is telling us to ignore the primacy of our own conscience, and thereby contradicting the clear teaching and tradition of the Church, if not the entire moral law? How can this be?

Going back to persons A, B and C, no one can ever advise us to do just whatever another human person tells us to do – our conscience would be effectively put on hold, or at least in subjugation to the other. How then can Mary give us such advice? For that is precisely what she is doing.

Of course, Mary is not subverting the moral law! There is only one condition and one condition only where such a statement as "do whatever he tells you" can be always morally justifiable and appropriate: if the other person we are to obey is ... God.

Mary is in fact saying to us: **"This man, my son Jesus, is God"**.

As such, it is both her great mission in God's salvific plan to always lead us to Jesus, and also her personal statement of belief in who her son is. It is only legitimate for Mary to say "do whatever he tells you" because Jesus is truly God – the God-man who is without sin. And Jesus as the Son of God will never abuse our conscience because a properly formed conscience is nothing other than the inner voice of God and ultimately how we understand His will in the daily living of our lives. And in saying this to the wedding servants, and saying it to us, she is fulfilling her great role as the pre-eminent sign and pointer towards Jesus. "Do whatever He tells you!"



## Jesus's Teaching on Nonviolence **by Kathy Bishop**

**W**alter Wink, in *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, explores nonviolence as a Christian trait. He cites incidences of nonviolent struggle – such as that in the Philippines that overthrew the dictator Ferdinand Marcos; the Solidarity movement in Poland against the Communist regime; Mohandas Ghandi in India; and Martin Luther King Jr in the American South – as successful movements that conquered using nonviolent struggle. Wink goes on to name many more. However, for many Christians nonviolence often means remaining passive/submissive before the authorities. They often cite Matthew 5:38-42:

*“You have heard that it is said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the evil doer, But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give him your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”*

The question being asked in this article is, when faced with injustice would Christ really ask us to remain passive, accepting blow after blow? Are we to forgive every injustice with no thought for change?



However, this passage is difficult and can be interpreted in many ways. Some see guidance for disputes to be settled peacefully that is in a pacifist way; others think it is telling us to allow things to happen without resistance which is called passivism. Movements such as those mentioned above prove nonviolent struggles can conquer, but is pacifism or passivism what Jesus had in mind in these teachings? Wink says not. In fact, he says it is evident Jesus's teachings on nonviolence is *not* about passivity or conflict avoidance with oppressive, unjust authorities. He says the above passage is in fact one of the most revolutionary statements Jesus ever made (Wink 2003:10).

*The question being asked here is, when faced with injustice would Christ really ask us to remain passive, accepting blow after blow?*

To understand this, we must look at the passage of Scripture through the lens of the social context of the time. Concerning "Do not resist the evil doer", Wink says:

*"When the court translators working in the hire of King James chose to translate the Greek word antistēnai as 'Resist not evil', they were doing more than just rendering Greek into English. They were translating nonviolent resistance into docility."*

(Wink 2003:10)

This Greek word is made of two parts; *anti* still used today for against, and *histēnai* which actually means violent rebellion, armed revolt, or sharp dissension. It refers specifically to the moment two armies collide, steel on steel, until one side is

overcome or flees. So, *antistēnai* meant more than just 'resist'; it meant to resist violently, to revolt or rebel, to engage in an insurrection. Somehow something got lost in translation. What it actually meant was 'Do not meet evil with violent revolt or revenge', or 'Don't strike back at evil'. You can see this does not mean to remain passive; far from it! It just meant do not use violence or violent revenge against the evil doer. Wink argues that you should see from this mistranslation that the understanding of Christ's teaching on nonviolence has been watered-down, emptying it of political power.

Walter Wink clarifies further Christ's meaning using specifically three examples, but here I will just demonstrate using one: the passage on 'Turning the other cheek', which many interpret as being passive and submissive.

*"If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."*

(Matthew 5:39)

The first thing to mention is, why the right cheek? In a world with predominantly right-handed people, if a right-handed person strikes another on the cheek it would land on their left cheek. To strike the right cheek of another with a fist would require using the left hand. However, in that society, at that time, the left hand was only used for unclean tasks – a tradition strictly adhered to. The only way to strike the right cheek with the right hand would be to use the back of the right hand.

### **The first thing to mention is, why the right cheek?**

Wink notices the significance that normally a peer would not be struck in this manner; if they were, the fine was



exorbitant. In the *Mishnah Bava Kamma* (8:1-6), four zuz was the fine for a blow to a peer with a fist and 400 zuz for backhanding him; but to an underling, no penalty. A backhanded slap then was the normal way of admonishing inferiors; masters their slaves, husbands their wives (who were seen as inferior at that time in that society), parents their children, men to women and Romans to Jews. The society had a strict hierarchical order embedded within the culture of the time. When Jesus is talking about someone striking you on the right cheek, what he is talking about is an insult, a humiliation. In that society, any retaliation when a superior backhanded an inferior would have been suicidal; the normal response would have been cowering submission.

When taking into account Jesus's audience, Wink says the majority were not those doing the striking; they were more likely to be the ones being struck with a backhanded slap, victims of indignities, forced to stifle their rage

at the dehumanising treatment they experienced living within the hierarchical structures of the society – one of caste, class, race, gender, age and status, more often than not as a direct result of imperial occupation.

So why turn the other cheek? Wink says this action robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is in effect saying, "Try again. Your first blow failed to humiliate me. I am still a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me". Turning the other cheek would create a huge problem for the striker because he cannot use his backhand – the nose would be in the way – and he can't use his left hand which was strictly used for unclean activities. If he hits with his fist, then he makes the other into his peer, acknowledging him as his equal. The whole point of the backhanded slap is to reinforce the caste system, dominate and humiliate, keeping the status quo of institutionalized inequality. Wink says

even if the oppressor orders a flogging, the point has been made. By simply turning the other cheek, the subordinate effectively forces the oppressor to see him as an equal, stripping him of his power to demoralize and dehumanize.

*So why turn the other cheek?  
Wink says this action robs  
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humiliate.*

This clearly demonstrates the response Jesus is advocating is far from passive, but is an act of subtle defiance, outwitting and outsmarting the oppressor into seeing the human dignity of the subordinate. According to Walter Wink, suffering indignities and injustice is not something Jesus would have taught us to just take lying down. There is a power struggle at play here, subtle but the effect would have been profound. Far from our common understanding of resisting evil, this interpretation of Jesus's teaching aligns far better with what we know about Jesus, his ministry and teachings. The virtue being taught is more about

standing firm, endurance, obstinacy, power to sustain blows, fortitude, perseverance, steadfastness or relentless firmness; power that comes through a tenacious devotion to the ultimate reality (Miller 1972:28).

For Christ, justice is a goal and Wink says as Christians we must ask ourselves: "What does God require of me in response to the needs of others, and how can I participate in the struggle of the oppressed for a more just world?" I, like many, often can't think of clever means of nonviolent retaliation, or to say the right thing at the right time to defend myself. However, God, in our plight, will, I believe, provide us with all we need. Jesus shows us there is always power still at play and Our Good Lord will help us when He needs us to find the Third Way.

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THINK before you speak;  
Is it TRUE?  
Is it HELPFUL?  
Is it INSPIRING?  
Is it NECESSARY?  
Is it KIND?

**Aid To Personal Prayer** by Kathy Bishop

Bruce Downes

**I**t is of the greatest problems within the Church today is many who attend do so without feeling any sense of connection to God. They lack an authentic spirituality. Some come to Mass because they have always done so or some see it as just a cultural, social activity. However, there are still those who live closely to God and experience a rich spiritual life. How can the Church address this important issue and cultivate a personal, living prayer life among parishioners? I believe it starts with teaching people how to pray in a way that makes prayer a personal encounter.

Life today is busy, so it is not always easy to fit in quiet times of prayer. Yet in order to grow in our spiritual lives, to grow in relationship with God, pray we must. Here, I explore a method of personal prayer that some may find useful. It is a way of encountering Our Lord that can be transformative and is based on a method passed on by Bruce Downes. Based in Australia, Bruce set up his ministry to try and reach those who have fallen

away from the Catholic Church, and to proclaim the Gospel to help bring people into relationship with Jesus Christ to impact their real-life issues in order to live better lives. This article is based on a talk given on his website.

*...many who attend (Church) do so without feeling any sense of connection to God.*

Many find one's prayer life can wax and wane. Discipline is required and as flawed human beings, when we have competing pressures in life, this can be hard. So, finding ways to keep our prayer life fresh is vital as sometimes we can feel disconnected from God. Bruce points out that in 2 Chronicles 7:12-16, God shows us a path back to Him:

*"Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: 'I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens*



*so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For I have chosen and consecrated this house so that my name will be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time”.*

The way we grow in relationship to get to know God is by spending time with Him in prayer. There are many ways to pray – prayers handed down that we learn, prayers during liturgy, etc. – however, on the whole, these prayers are not personal in nature. Bruce’s way of prayer helps develop a personal encounter with God which can be transformative. A basic step

to consider first is finding a suitable place to pray. This must be a comfortable, quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Choosing a time when the household is quiet, like early in the morning or right before bed, may give you the best chance for peace. Next, make sure you have beside you a dedicated prayer journal which will help focus you. In this method every letter of PERSONAL means something and here two R’s are used. We will go through each letter in turn:

**P stands for PERSPECTIVE.** The first thing to do is to get perspective, so in your prayer journal write a ‘P’ on the page and then list all the things that help you see God for who He really is. For example, God, you made the whole world, but I can’t create a flower out of nothing; God, you exist throughout all time, but I am only in this place and in this time. This stage helps us to see God for who He is and see us in relation to Him. When we see God in this way, we are then able to come before God honestly as we are. It is

suggested to bring the Gospel of the day into your prayer here, which also helps us gain perspective.

**E stands for EVERYTHING.** Say to God, for example: "God, I want to put you in the centre of my life, and I give you everything to the degree that I can today". As we grow in our relationship with Christ, our ability to give even more of ourselves to God will grow. What we can give to God 20 years from now will be much more than that which we can give today. Grace will allow growth as we spend more time with God.

*"God, I want to put you in the centre of my life, and I give you everything to the degree that I can today"*

**R The first R is for REPENTANCE,** meaning to change direction; turn more towards God. Say to God, "God, if you were in front of me now, am I the person that you wanted me to be, have I done all the things you have asked of me since we last met in prayer, am I in the place you want me to be at this point in my life?" The truth is, often here most of us would have to say sorry as we would have turned away from God to greater or lesser degrees. Here we recognize our need for repentance; to turn back to God. Given our fallen natures, most of us will recognize this continual need to turn back to the place where God wants us to be – the continual need for repentance.

The first PER can be done very quickly, but the second R means REAL and it is here we should spend time being completely open and honest with God about where we are right now.

**R is for REAL.** For the second R, note where you think you are right now. For

example, I feel close to you today, Father, or I have no idea where you are, or I am not doing too well with my work, or things with my spouse are fantastic, or we are not getting on very well. You must be very honest with God. Scripture tells us that God loves sincerity/honesty and He loves us to come before Him showing our complete reliance on Him. God already knows everything, but willingness to be completely honest with God can help us to become more receptive to hearing Him in our prayer.

**S means SALUTE,** which can mean to greet with a kiss; to show honour and respect, or in other words to worship. Here you come before God and tell Him how much you love Him, honour Him and put Him at the centre of your life and how much you appreciate Him because you know who He is. To help stay focused, make a list under 'S' such as, "God you are great", "God you are First and Last" or "God you made everything". List things that emphasize how great God is. You declare who it is you are standing before. This can transform your prayer. Sometimes if you don't emphasize the greatness, the wonder and the goodness of God in your prayer life, it can lead to a place where all you do is ask. Any relationship where one side is always asking isn't a very healthy relationship.

**O means to OBSERVE.** Some believe that whenever we worship God this should always lead us into a place of silence. So, here OBSERVE means to listen, to sense what God might be saying to you right now. By sitting in that silent place, listening for God's voice after we have worshipped Him, making Him great and big, Bruce says it is surprising how often he has heard the voice of God in his life. Some of the biggest decisions he ever made have been made during this

OBSERVE phase of personal prayer, being still and just listening.

**N means to NOURISH.** In this stage you read a short passage of Scripture (the emphasis on short) and ask yourself two questions: what do I see/feel, and what do I think God may be saying to me? Sit with this for a couple of minutes. Often Bruce found that many confirmations were given of thoughts and impressions discovered during the OBSERVE phase, proving NOURISH to be a very important part of personal prayer.



*You don't want to get to Heaven and discover there was so much God could have given you, but you didn't ask ...*

**A means to ASK.** You don't want to get to Heaven and discover there was so much God could have given you, but you didn't ask ... you didn't give God permission to give you everything He wanted to give you. Jesus says in Scripture, ask the Father in my name, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, He will bless you. In the back of your journal list all of your prayer intentions, including people who asked for your prayers.

**L stands for LEAVE.** After you have followed this way of prayer take your leave. Take with you all you have gained during this personal encounter with God, all the thoughts and inspirations, and take it into the busyness of your daily life; carry with you that encounter with God, taking it with you into your life.

Bruce was given this prayer method by others and found it totally transformative. Using personal prayer in this way connects or reconnects people to God. Many have lost their faith or have fallen away from the Church because they simply don't know how to connect with God. This is a way of perhaps reaching those lost to the Church, by sharing how to experience God's power in their lives using personal prayer.

I have been using this method of prayer recently and I found it has helped to remind me of who I am in relation to God, reinforcing our connection. It gave me the correct perspective and predisposition during my prayer. I highly recommend freshening up your prayer life by using this personal prayer method.

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## A Lesson on Trusting God A Story Passed on by Brian McDonough



*But Lord, when you mix them  
 all together and bake them, I do  
 love warm fresh biscuits*

A while back I read a story of a visiting pastor who attended a men’s breakfast in the middle of a rural farming area of the country. The group had asked an older farmer, decked out in bib overalls, to say grace for the morning breakfast.

“Lord, I hate buttermilk”, the farmer began. The visiting pastor opened one eye to glance at the farmer and wonder where this was going.

The farmer loudly proclaimed, “Lord, I hate lard.” Now the pastor was growing concerned.

Without missing a beat, the farmer continued, “And Lord, you know I don’t much care for raw white flour”. The pastor

once again opened an eye to glance around the room and saw that he wasn’t the only one to feel uncomfortable.

Then the farmer added, “But Lord, when you mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm fresh biscuits. So, Lord, when things come up that we don’t like, when life gets hard, when we don’t understand what you’re saying to us, help us to just relax and wait until you have done the mixing. It will probably be even better than biscuits. Amen.”

Within that prayer there is great wisdom for all when it comes to complicated situations like we are experiencing in the world today.

Stay strong, my friends, because our LORD is mixing several things that we don’t really care for, but something even better is going to come when HE is done with it.

## Devotion to the Most Holy Name of Jesus

by **Kathy Bishop**

In some places, in times past, children were taught to bow their heads at the very mention of the Most Holy Name of Jesus as a sign of reverence. This form of respect was passed down from generation to generation – this reverence fostered and valued. These days that has all but gone as people generally use His Most Holy Name sacrilegiously. The month of January is traditionally dedicated to the devotion of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and as such, here we will be trying to recover this reverence and resurrect practices which elevate the Holy Name of Jesus to its rightful place in our life of faith.

The first thing to note is Jesus's parents did not choose His name, it was given to them by God. At the Annunciation, the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary:

*“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. And now; you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will call him Jesus”.*  
(Luke 1:30-31)

Also, Joseph dreamt of an angel telling him:

*“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*  
(Matthew 1:21)

The Gospel of Luke also relates Jesus's naming at his circumcision:

*“After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”* (Luke 2:21)

So, Jesus was named eight days after Christmas, January 3rd, which is an optional liturgical memorial in the Catholic Church. The 8th day is actually January 1st, the Octave of Christmas. Since this is now kept as the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God and January 2nd is the feast day of Ss Basil and Gregory, then the Holy Name of Jesus is kept on the 3rd. Historically, however, its celebration has moved around with different orders keeping it on different days in some quarters, such as the Franciscans, Augustinians and the Carmelites, this is memorialised on the 14th January, whereas it was the 15th for the Dominicans. The New Testament is filled with incidents where the name of



Jesus is invoked to drive out devils, cure illnesses and perform miracles. St Paul exalts the Holy Name:

*"... at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth ..."*  
(Philippians 2:10)

*Jesus's parents did **not** choose His name, it was given to them by God.*

Jesus's name comes from the Greek Iesous, derived from the Aramaic Yeshu which means 'Yahweh is salvation'. In Ancient Israel, the name of God, Yahweh, was so holy it was not to be written or uttered. Invoking "Yahweh" was so serious a sin it would provoke the tearing of the hearer's shirt in protest and repentance. This practice was later enshrined in Jewish law as the second of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain". It was the Franciscan, St Bernadine of Siena, who, in

the early 15th century, was called to the spread of the devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus.

One other thing to note is that in the culture in which the Holy Family lived, the act of naming was widely believed to reflect the essence of someone or their very being. In the Bible, a person's name had a meaning. In literature, ancient authors would give characters names that reflected their character or their role in the story. So, as you can see, the meaning of the Holy Name of Jesus is 'God who saves us' (Bareket 2016). As Catholics we know this, but how much of this meaning do we remember to take into our hearts every time we utter this most Holy Name? Jesus himself reinforces the power of His own name in St John's Gospel:

*"If you ask the Father anything in my name He will give it you."* (John 16:23)

Naming in our culture has its place today too, echoing these ancient traditions.



In the Greek Orthodox culture, a person's birthday is not so significant; it is their name day that is a big feast of celebration. During the Catholic Baptismal Rite, parents are asked, "What name do you give this child?" and at Confirmation we take on a saint as our patron adopting their name. My name is Kathryn (named after my mother's sister), Jane (named after my paternal great-grandmother), and at my Confirmation I took on the name of Mary Magdalene, as she was the first saint I ever felt an affinity towards. So, my full name is Kathryn Jane Mary Magdalene Bishop. So why do we take on a new name at Confirmation? I believe this is to symbolise being new and transformed in Christ – you are a new person in Christ, hence a new name. In line with ancient traditions, you take on a name which reflects the person you wish to be in Christ. I wish to love Christ as much as Mary Magdalene loved Him and to follow Him all my days as she did. Jesus even gave us this model of renaming when He says in Matthew 16:18, "And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it". In Jesus's time, Peter was translated as Cephas, a name of Hebrew origin meaning 'rock'. Clearly Peter's name and his identity in Christ portrayed the role he would take – the rock upon which Christ built his Church – the first Pope.

*In the Greek Orthodox culture, a person's birthday is not so significant; it is their **name** day that is a big feast of celebration.*

The Church itself ends all her prayers "... through Jesus Christ". So, every time we

utter the Holy Name of Jesus let us make it a prayer and not blasphemy, especially in the month of January. When we utter the Most Holy Name, we give God glory and recall the infinite merits of Jesus's Passion, Death and Resurrection, which sums up the essence and meaning of His life. Before receiving Holy Communion, let us say His Most Holy Name prayerfully and at the same time offer up all Masses being said all over the world, uniting ourselves with all these Masses and their intentions. When we pray, the Most Holy Name of Jesus lets us gain indulgences for those souls suffering in purgatory, who cannot pray for themselves, but who can pray for us. Doing this will require little time, just a momentary intention of the heart. We can also utter the Most Holy Name of Jesus when we feel the devil is near at hand, as Jesus can save us from all evil and deliver us from the powers of the devil, who is continually trying to harm us. When you feel your soul is troubled, utter the Most Holy Name and feel immeasurable peace and joy enter your heart, giving strength and courage to bear burdens, making them light.

Let us remember whose name we are uttering, Our God who saves us by His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Cherish this Most Holy Name in your hearts, not just in the month of January, but always. A child, when once asked to define love, said that, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. Your name is safe in their mouth." The Holy Name of Jesus should be safe in our mouths as we utter it as an act of love and a prayer.

Jesus, the very thought of Thee  
with sweetness fills my breast,



## Jesu Dulcis Memori

by **St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)**  
**Doctor of the Church**

But sweeter far Thy face to see  
 and in Thy presence rest.  
 Nor voice can sing nor heart can frame,  
 Nor can the memory find  
 a sweeter sound than Jesus' name,  
 O Saviour of mankind.  
 O hope of every contrite heart,  
 O joy of all the meek  
 to those who fall, how kind Thou art,  
 how good to those who seek!

But what to those who find?  
 Ah this nor tongue nor pen can show,  
 the love of Jesus, what it is none  
 but His loved ones know.  
 Jesus our only joy be Thou  
 as Thou our prize wilt be.  
 Jesus, be Thou our glory now  
 and through eternity.  
 Amen

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## St Blaise by Roderick Campbell Guion OCDS



**Dr Roderick Campbell Guion's** doctorate was on the mystical transformation in the life of St Elizabeth of the Trinity. He is a Secular Carmelite who teaches Ecclesiastical History with the Carmelite Institute of Britain and Ireland.

As a mature student of theology, I was agreeably surprised when my supervisor pointed out that the direction where my research was leading fell within the realm of 'Ecclesiastical History'. I say 'agreeably surprised' because even though I had been an avid consumer of history books since my schooldays, I could not claim to have studied history in any formal sense. But what exactly is an ecclesiastical historian? Well, many things, but if historians are supposed to arbitrate and interpret facts from the past, then the possibility of supernatural factors cannot be excluded by ecclesiastical historians. Well, this conveniently leads me to the subject of this article: St Blaise. So, first of all what do we actually 'know' about St Blaise? Tradition associates him with many miraculous cures, so when his Feast Day is celebrated on February 3rd it culminates with a symbolic invocation using candles that have been blessed at Candlemas on the previous day. The blessed candles are held against the throat of those who seek the blessing, whilst the priest says, "Through the intercession of St Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from



every other illness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

*St Blaise ... recommends invoking his aid where objects are stuck in the throat ...*

The origins of this blessing are buried in

ancient tradition. The first official reference to St Blaise comes from some 6th century medical writings by Aëtius Amidenus, who recommends invoking his aid where objects are stuck in the throat. He was referring to a 4th century physician, who became a bishop, with a reputation for miraculous cures and died a martyr in AD316. To look at how the ritual associated with him arose, we have to return to the frequently overlapping aspects of the stories tradition has ascribed to his life. He lived amidst the tense relationship between two emperors, Constantine in the west and Licinius in



the east. The jointly agreed Edict of Milan had intended to end ongoing religious persecution; however, it failed to extinguish Licinius' dislike of Christians of which St Blaise would finally become a victim. His story follows two slightly overlapping threads where Agricolaus, the local Roman governor, was enthusiastically continuing to enact Licinius' dislike of Christians with aggressive persecutions. Refusing to renounce his Christian faith, St Blaise is reported to have taken refuge in a cave in the hills where, somewhat like St Francis in later years, he developed a close relationship with wild animals who were said to have been particularly attracted

into his presence. One story relates how a poor woman's pig was seized by a wolf. Knowing of St Blaise's natural affinity with wild animals she begged his help, and so, at Blaise's command, the wolf immediately restored the pig to the woman. The story continues that this same woman, upon hearing that St Blaise had been arrested, brought two elegant candles to his cell. St Blaise immediately put them to use for his reading of the Scriptures whilst he awaited his execution. A parallel story that relates to the present-day ritual tells how a distraught mother threw herself at his feet begging him to save her only son who was on the point of death, choking on a fishbone lodged in his throat.

*...a distraught mother threw herself at his feet begging him to save her only son who was on the point of death, choking...*

The role of popular tradition here is complex and as memory can often become blended with piety and folklore it is far from being an exact science, but this does not mean it has nothing to tell us. As I said above, historians supposedly make their interpretations having researched the best available documentary evidence, but in the early Christian era this was scarce. So, what then is the role of traditional pieties from these times, and are some of us Catholics too tied up with our traditions? Since the time of the Second Vatican Council, attempts to define what may or may not be the essential features of our Catholic heritage and popular piety has fuelled a low-key ongoing debate. This, of course,

is not necessarily a bad thing, so I will turn to Jaroslav Pelikan, a church historian from within the Lutheran tradition, to arbitrate a distinction between the value of traditions and the risks presented by 'traditionalism' in its different forms. He sees a continuing value where the past is able to provide us with an example that animates our faith in the present but warns against an alternative where traditions of obscure origin might stultify our relationship with the Living Christ. Of course, one person's tradition can be another person's traditionalism, and as one who (*mea culpa, mea culpa*) is at times seduced by traditionalism, I try to keep a mindful focus on his advice.

Living in Western Europe in the 21st-century, it is difficult to deny that we live in a society that has made a decision to distance itself from its Christian roots. Whilst we still accept two great Christian feasts to define our now secular calendars,

for many these have been taken over and commercialised to a point where they are now scarcely recognisable. However, if the great heroes of our faith are often forgotten, it is curious how they live on as silent witnesses in the place names given to the communities within which we live. For instance, I am now fortunate to live in Weem in the Southern Highlands of Scotland, and this is a name derived from the anglicised mispronunciation of



the Gaelic word *uaimh*. This refers to the cave and spring behind our house where tradition places St Cuthbert living as a hermit before he subsequently became Abbot of Lindisfarne in AD664. Since St Cuthbert was so well-known in medieval times it was thought unnecessary to add his name to the cave, so few nowadays know of its sacred connection; however, in this sense St Blaise is still very much with us. We have St Blazey in Cornwall, and there are churches and schools throughout Britain that near his name; indeed one (not especially reliable!) tradition even claims St Blaise to have been born in the Channel Isles. For his answering of prayers to avert a Venetian siege in AD971, he became the patron saint of Dubrovnik, and elsewhere he has dedications as far apart as Iceland and India.

*...without the articulation of the throat, none of the words from our tongues would ever be heard.*

We now live in a world that is swamped with information of varying reliability and thus seeking verification of our sources should be seen as a sensible precaution. So, can we see traditions surrounding St Blaise and other saints of the Early Church as reliable? Well, I was on the point of concluding that maybe it just came down to whether you liked ancient pious traditions or not, until the other day whilst I was wasting time following 'clickbait' on the internet. Of course, the beastly cookies predict from our viewing history what subject areas will likely seduce us into spending more time staring at our screens, so it was probably not pure chance that Google offered me a homily on St Blaise. In this, the priest having first outlined the familiar story,

invited us to consider the throat from a more symbolic perspective. In our everyday speech we generally see the tongue as being the bodily component that symbolises our speech, and we thus hold it responsible for what we say and, perhaps more importantly, its consequences. The tongue itself is of course neutral, the problem lies in how we use it. With this in mind, the priest drew our attention to two texts. In the first, St James warns us that "If any think they are religious and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless" (James 1:26), which he followed by turning to St Mark where in Our Lord's final injunction he tells us that we should "Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation' (Mark 16:15). The interesting slant he introduced for the Congregation's reflection on that particular Feast of St Blaise was the physical reality that without the articulation of the throat, none of the words from our tongues would ever be heard. What struck me as particularly interesting was that he was helping us to connect the symbolism of St Blaise with teaching given in a wider Scriptural context, which struck me as a valid litmus test that is applicable to the Christian life in general. Personally, I have always been much drawn by the colourful traditions of our faith and their continuing contribution to our everyday spirituality. Having said that, I have to admit that when it came to justifying my pious enthusiasm to legitimate doubters, it was a conversation that the historian within me usually chose to avoid. To conclude, therefore I must thank St Blaise, and an unknown priest on the internet, for providing me with a valuable way to measure my steps through the sometimes-colourful undergrowth of my spiritual imagination.

## A Christmas Testimony Shalom by Sean Booth

**Sean Booth** is a member of the Lay Missionaries of Charity from Manchester, England, and is currently studying a Bachelor of Divinity Undergraduate Degree at Maryvale Institute in Birmingham, England.



Sean Booth

*“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those whom his favour rests’” (Luke 2:9-14).*

I have received many blessings in my life, but the most memorable Christmas gift I have received in my life involved paying a prostitute. Before you complain to the editor of this magazine, or contact your local police officer, allow me to explain.

Around three years ago I was helping at a homeless centre in Manchester, England, where we used to go and share the Gospel with people who came each Sunday for a meal. One of the men that came was a Muslim man. He was not homeless but used to join us for fellowship, and over the course of a few months we struck up a close bond, sharing about our respective faiths. Often our conversations would last for hours. Christmas was drawing near and I explained how special Christmas time was for us as Christians, and asked if he would like to join me to attend



Midnight Mass, on Christmas Eve. He gladly accepted the invitation explaining he had never been in a Catholic church, let alone attended a service.

At the same time, I was also volunteering with a city centre Catholic church, who were working with a charity who provided a meal and bed for the night for homeless asylum seekers. Many of these men were also Muslim. By the grace of God, I was on the rota to sleep over on Christmas Eve. It was all hands to the pump with the priests understandably busy preparing for the celebration of Mass. As we shared the meal that night, I invited the men to come to Holy Mass and five of the men accepted the invitation. I explained I had to pick up a friend but would be back in time before Mass started.

*I then felt inspired to follow her inside and asked if I could pray with her.*

I picked my Muslim friend up and as we drove down the main road into the city centre, we saw a lady waving her hands at us. She seemed distressed and I explained I believed she was a prostitute, but turned the car around just to make sure she was OK. As I wound the window down, she begged me for a lift to the pharmacy as there were no buses running and it closed at midnight. I agreed and as we drove, she leaned forward from the back of the car and asked if I would 'like some business'. I declined her offer explaining we believed in God and were on the way to attend a church service, and invited her to join us. She apologised if she had offended us and said she could not come as she had to 'earn some money' on the streets. We reached the pharmacy in time and she went inside. I then felt inspired to follow her inside and asked if I could pray with her. As her prescription was being prepared, she closed her eyes and held out both of her hands, and we prayed

standing at the counter, holding hands. It was beautiful. She was so open. We came outside and I asked her once more to join us, but again she expressed her need for money so could not come. In that moment I had a thought. I had brought money to put in the collection at Church during Mass, but reasoned this money could be for the Church by bringing her to God's house, with a packed Church at such a special time, potentially opening her up to an encounter with Jesus, in a service where Heaven meets earth, whilst at the same time keeping her from potential evil. I offered her the money and said it would only be an hour long, and if nothing else it was warmer than being stood on the streets. She deliberated and eventually agreed. My heart skipped a beat and I thanked God.

As we drove to the Church and parked up, the asylum seekers were waiting for us on the steps of the Church at two minutes to midnight. I was in absolute awe of God and asked before we all entered the church if we could pray together. We did and I asked for The Lord's blessing on each one of these beautiful people, that they would each feel welcome and for the peace that only Jesus can bring may rest upon them all. The lady asked if I was a priest and I laughed and said no.

*I offered her the money... it would only be an hour long... it was warmer than being stood on the streets. She deliberated and eventually agreed. My heart skipped a beat and I thanked God.*

As we walked in, I felt like I had to pinch myself, I felt that blessed. Only God could have arranged this. I stood with tears in my eyes thanking God in absolute awe of

His goodness, thanking Him for allowing me to be in His presence with my new group of friends. The gratitude and love in my heart exploded. There was nowhere else in the world I would rather have been.

During Mass, when it came to Holy Communion, I explained how Jesus wanted to give them a personal blessing through the priest. The lady said, "Look at me. Look at what I am wearing. People will look at me. I can't go up there". I told her if they were any type of Christians, they would not judge her because Jesus tells us not to judge, else WE will be judged. I explained how Jesus came for the sinners, those on the edge of society, the outcasts. How he came to the defence of a woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), and how he often ate and drank with tax collectors and prostitutes, insisting out of everybody there she was the most worthy and welcome. The Muslim man heard our every word and agreed. I told her the only eyes that she needed to be conscious of being on her were The Lord's. She went up sobbing like a baby. If only every person who went for a blessing or Holy Communion was aware of their own unworthiness and brokenness like this beautiful child of God; we would have a different Church, that is for sure. There is a saying a priest once told me in Confession: "The Church is not an exclusive club for saints, but a hospital for sinners".

*I asked for The Lord's blessing on each one of these beautiful people, that they would each feel welcome and for the peace that only Jesus can bring may rest upon them all.*

St Paul reminds us too that "All have



*sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). ALL of us! As we came back to our seats, she again cried. The asylum seekers and Muslim man also received a blessing from Jesus through the priest. I now had inside me the Real Presence of Jesus through Holy Communion, and was able to pray with even more love.

The Mass came to an end, and before the final blessing the priest wished everybody a Happy Christmas. In typical Catholic reserved style, there was not much of a response, apart from one person, my lady friend, who replied, "And a very Merry Christmas to you too, Father". Instantly, I beamed with a massive smile, my insides lit up. The priest, almost shocked, smiled and thanked her. As people turned to look at who had said it, she said, "Well, he said it to us!" Nobody could deny saying Amen to that!

I mentioned in the beginning how this was the most memorable Christmas gift I had received and what an absolute honour, privilege and blessing it was to be with these beautiful human beings that night. Nothing can compare, though, to the very first and greatest gift the whole world received over 2000 years ago at that very first Christmas, when God Himself took on human flesh and became a helpless baby, when the Light was born into our darkness and the world was changed forever.

This is the true message of Christmas, welcoming Jesus into our lives for the first time, or once again. This is the real giving and receiving. Allowing Him to be born inside us, welcoming Him with joy, love, awe and wonder. He gives Himself to us every moment of every single day. We must hear and respond like the shepherds, who were invited to come and see, and after they had encountered Jesus went away "Glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, as it had been told to them" (Luke 2:20). We must also be like the angels, God's messengers, inviting and leading people to discover Jesus for themselves.

*"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light"* (Isaiah 9:2). Will you be witness to this Light this Christmas, to those in the darkest of places? The lonely, the depressed, the oppressed, the rejected, the dejected, the forgotten, the lost, the abandoned, the sick, the homeless, the prisoners, the elderly, the orphan, the widow? You may not have to look far. These could be members of your own household or family. It could be as simple as remembering them in your prayers. Or will you put yourself out physically and personally, and share the greatest gift this Christmas that anybody could ever wish to receive – the gift of Jesus Christ – and make it the most memorable Christmas for other people, as well as yourself.

*"We must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"* (Acts 20:35).

Let us remind the world that Christmas is about Christ.

## **Star of the Sea** by Sr. Valerie Walker, O.P.



**Sister Valerie Walker OP** is a Dominican Sister at St Dominic's Convent in Stone Staffordshire. She has a personal interest in the theology and philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas running many study days at the Convent.

*"The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork!" (Psalm 19)*

My North Norway is a wonderful place to live in if you are interested in nature. Even in the dark season of winter, nature produces her wonders – The Northern Lights, for example. At the moment, however, I am not thinking of the Northern Lights, but of the morning star and clear December mornings.

In December the sun has deserted us, here in Bodø. When the days are clear we see only the sunlight, shining behind the mountain ranges; we cannot see the sun. We long for the sun, of course, and for the spring; the dark season weighs almost physically upon us and the winter can seem endlessly long. But on clear winter mornings, the morning star wakes our hearts to new hope. As I come out of my room, long before dawn, I see through the big window at the end of the landing, the morning star twinkling brightly in the dark night sky. Later on, as the dawn breaks, I stand and watch the star shining steadily brighter. When the snow on the mountain tops begins to glitter in the sun, then the star in its radiance seems to be rejoicing in the sun's nearness – yes, it really seems to shout for joy! We, who cannot see the sun, rejoice with the star; with greater hope we look forward to the sun's return – to spring – to the long summer days.



*...the morning star wakes our hearts to new hope...*

There is certainly an advantage in coming as a foreigner to a new land; particularly such a land as North Norway. For it has been since my coming here that nature has, so to speak, revealed herself to me. Here I, an English Dominican sister, have experienced in a dramatic way, things I thought I was familiar with; the morning star is, after all, seen in England too!

I must admit that I have been 'slow on the uptake'! Mark 8:18 *"Have you eyes without seeing, ears without hearing?"* Our Lord asked his uncomprehending disciples. Yes, I have, at any rate! But now, the beautiful nature of North Norway has more or less forced me to ponder over what eyes and ears experience. When I stood and watched the morning star, I was reminded again and again of that ancient title given to Our Lady – and sung in her litany – 'Morning Star'. And in that connection, what had the star to teach me?

I thought of how the star rejoices to welcome the sun; it shines with and in the sun's light; it has no light of itself. The sun is the light of the whole world. The nearer the star – in fact the planet Venus – comes to the sun, the more it lights up, the more beautiful it is. Thousands of years before the coming of Christ, the prophet wrote in the same Psalm 19,

*"He has set a tent for the sun, which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy."*

St John begins his Gospel like this: John 1:19, *"The true light that enlightens everyman was coming into the world"*. Christ says of himself in John 8:12, *"I am the Light of the world"*. Yes, God, who is creation's beginning, source of all light and life, came into the world as a man – as the sun – to make His glory visible.

True enough, there are many who *"received him not ... They loved darkness better than the light"* (John 3:19). Nobody, however, has *"received him"* as his mother did. Even while she waited and hoped for a redeemer, she was *"full of grace"*, as we hear from the Angel Gabriel. When she accepted her Son into her womb, she received also the Holy Spirit. From then on, throughout her life, as we read, she *"pondered these things in her heart"* (Luke 2:19). In her docility to the Holy Spirit, she grew more and more in the Son's love and wisdom – yes, until his death on the cross, where she stood by his side, shining as his mirror.

*God, who is creation's beginning, source of all light and life, came into the world as a man ... to make His glory visible.*

Now let us look at the star again. Even though the star receives its light from the sun, it shines with its own individual beauty. *"Look at Venus, the morning star!"* we may be moved to call out. *"How beautiful it is!"* Millions of years in the future, when the planet Venus dies, the heavens will be the poorer. Mary receives all her grace and beauty from her Son – yes – that is true. All the same, as the Lutheran Norwegian priest, Borre Knudsen, writes of her:

*"You dance before the face of God's wonderful beauty the graceful craftsman of his will."*

Mary is God's *"craftsman"*; she calls herself God's *"handmaid"*; and God waited for her answer before He became flesh in her womb. In Mary, God shows us His purpose in sending His Son into the world: that he will have us as friends, as sons in the Son, children in our Father's house. *"No longer do I call you servants,"* Christ says to the Apostles at the Last Supper. *"I call you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you"* (John 15:15). Therefore, Christ advises us, *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven"* (Matthew 5:16). As Mother to the Son of God and his co-worker, Our Lady shows us a *"good work"* beyond compare. All creation stands in debt to her – and praises God! Of such friends, Our Lord says, *"In them I am glorified"* (John 7:10).

And so, to the star again. It is impossible for us to look at the sun with uncovered eyes; but we can look safely and with pleasure at the small brightness of the star. Nor can the star possibly dim the brightness of the sun; on the contrary, the star makes it possible for scientists to study



the sun and for us to wonder evermore at the sun's power and influence.

*Mary is God's "craftsman"; she calls herself God's "handmaid"*

...

In a comparable way, the Son of God made man is an overwhelming light for us. *"No one knows the Son except the Father; (Matthew 11:27)"* Christ said himself. God's Mother reflects in a small but perfect way the light of the mystery of Christ and she makes it easier for us to ponder on and study the mystery – as we should as children of God. For example, the doctrine of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, that she was born uncontaminated by the inheritance of Adam, shows her to us as a woman like us, but without sin. Consequently, that same truth about her Son, *"a man like us in all things but sin (Fourth Eucharistic Prayer)"*, and from whom she received her gift of sinlessness, is shown to have yet more profound meaning. It is the difference between the gift and the Giver; between the star and the sun.

*"Those who turn many to righteousness shall shine like stars for all eternity (Daniel 12:3)"* God promised through the prophet Daniel. When day breaks and the morning star disappears into the sun's light, we are not sad. We know that with the night the star will come again and once more lead us forward to the morning, while it proclaims the coming of the sun. Our Lady has only one message: *"Do what he tells you"*. Therefore, during this time that we live in – the 'dark season' of Faith – we can safely look to her as our Morning Star, who will lead us forward to her Son's light.

What a lot we may learn from the morning star! It is remarkable that the star has led us to the Bible and to the Church's teaching and even, necessarily, to a little scientific research! It has in truth been something of a 'voyage of discovery'. I have glimpsed that there is much more to explore. To encourage myself I should keep before the eyes of my mind the picture of Our Lady given us in the Book of Revelation 12:1:

*"A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars."*

# **The Night Shall Be as Bright as the Day**

**by Sr. Valerie Walker, O.P.**

## **Introduction**

In 1953 the Dominican sisters of Stone in Staffordshire were invited by the Prefect Apostolic of Northern Norway to make a foundation in the little town of Bodø on the coast of North Norway, about sixty miles north of the arctic circle. During their occupation of Norway during the Second World War, the Germans had built an airport at Bodø and the railway had been extended out to the coast; consequently, post-war Bodø was a growing town and needed a stronger Catholic presence; Norway is officially Lutheran. Bodø is a 'land of the midnight sun', so no dark nights during the summer; a land of the aurora borealis or Northern Lights during the winter, when there is no sun. Bodø is on the coast, so it does not get as much snow and ice as inland; however, it does get snow and a 'spark' is a chair on runners with which one can 'ski' into town with one's shopping bags on the seat of the chair. Sr.M.Valery spent some years in the Bodø community and this poem comes from those days.

## **The Night shall be as Bright as the Day**

There once were some sisters of Stone  
 who lived in the northernmost zone.  
 in summer delight  
 with the light  
 in the night  
 filled their hearts.  
 in winter dismay  
 at the dark  
 in the day  
 led to gloom.

But the snow  
 and the show  
 of the bright  
 Northern lights  
 and the moon  
 full at noon  
 filled their hearts  
 with a glow.  
 And so, with a spark \*  
 in the dark  
 they would ride  
 slide  
 and glide.

And thus  
 when the sun  
 with a run  
 came up  
 they were glad.  
 And the spring  
 made them sing  
 for the joy that shall come  
 when the lamp of the sun  
 at the height of the night  
 makes the night  
 into light  
 makes a day that shall last.

Yes, a day that shall last  
 when the lamp of the Son  
 and the glory of God  
 in the hearts of those nuns  
 shall light up the world  
 and the nations  
 shall come  
 and all peoples be one  
 and the sisters of Stone  
 be eternally home.

\* A spark is a type of sled

## A Most Painful Moment by a Parishioner of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton



I suffer from chronic autoimmune disease and in the last eight years my immune system has been attacking my eyes, which means I used huge amounts of steroid drops. A side-effect is early cataracts. Post-cataract surgery, I experienced a common complication where a film grows over the lens capsule, resulting in loss of vision – the sight gets cloudier and cloudier.

Now, I was receiving telephone consultations due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a few weeks before had mentioned loss of vision, but nothing was done. My loss of vision then became marked and I had to go to eye casualty. Immediately, my ophthalmologist looked into my eyes and could see I needed laser treatment to remove the film that had grown, clouding my vision. He consequently found a willing volunteer to

carry out the procedure there and then, which was needed as my vision was so impaired.

*... at the centre of this tiny white light came into focus the image of the Holy Face of Jesus...*

I wasn't too anxious as I have had this procedure twice before in the past, so I knew what to expect: 1-2 minutes of bearable pain, then finished. However, this time I was tired, so in truth there was a little anxiety and I found I couldn't concentrate to keep my eye still. The young doctor lasered the affected eye many times successfully, but when it carried on longer than the 1-2 minutes, it was becoming very painful and my anxiety increased. The doctor said there were some stubborn 'sticky' bits proving

difficult to remove.

To steady my focus – as by this time I was finding it hard to keep my eye still enough – she tapped a small light that hung just beside the headrest and she asked if I could just focus on the light. As I tried to do this, at the centre of this tiny white light came into focus the image of the Holy Face of Jesus I have beside my bedside. Immediately, I felt a sense of peace come over my heart, I relaxed, and all my anxiety just washed away as I placed my entire focus on the Holy Face of Jesus. I found it then immediately easier to steady my eye allowing the doctor to freely zap the laser. Amazingly, I was able to sit still long enough for the whole procedure, which lasted for about 10-15 minutes.

To ensure every bit was lasered to give me a greater chance of non-recurrence (this episode was a recurrence from a few months ago), this laser treatment had to be extensive so the doctor had to laser a wide circumference. For the whole of the

procedure after the doctor tapped the light, I could see the Holy Face of Jesus in the middle of the tiny white light. I felt Christ's presence in the peace and calm of my heart, and I know He never left my side during this stressful and extremely uncomfortable procedure.

A few days later, friends at my prayer group were sharing some really painful life experiences they were currently living through. I really felt their pain, so I shared my experience of seeing Our Loving Lord's Holy Face in the ophthalmologist's light.

Christ is our light and my experience taught me that when the pain of life threatens to overwhelm us – cutting like a laser – by focusing on Christ's light, on the Holy Face of Jesus – suddenly, not only does the pain become bearable, but Our Lord's presence will act as a calming balm in our deepest, most painful moments. This balm is His Love which, in faith, can overcome all. I pray this sweet balm comforts all those in their most painful moments.

## THE FAITH COMPANION

The Faith Companion has now launched an online Catholic gifts shop including The Faith Companion Candle available for £10 and one of a kind rosaries at [www.thefaithcompanion.co.uk](http://www.thefaithcompanion.co.uk) or call **01403 754808**.



## **Consider The Birds** by Sr. Valery Walker, O.P.

**W**ould it ever enter your head to compare yourself to a puffin? Yet it could do us well to do so, as Our Lord Himself recommends it: *“Consider the birds of the air ... You are worth more than many birds* (Matthew 6:26)“.



In the Arctic Spring comes very late. Not until late May or late June are the baby eider ducks swimming in procession in Bodø harbour with Mamma and Auntie (Papa takes a long holiday at this time of year!). By then, further out to

sea, on the bird island of Røst, thousands of screaming seabirds are working hard for their newly hatched young.

It is quite impressive to think that all these varieties of seabirds are specially equipped to cope with their individual lifestyles. Baby puffins, for example, even though born in holes in the cliff side, are born with a ready-made jacket of down. This is in contrast to so many of their near relations, who are born naked on the exposed cliff face. It seems curious, not to say unfair; but there is a reasonable explanation. It has been observed that when the northwest wind blows along the ‘wall’ of the Lofoten Islands (of which Røst is the tail end), puffins suffer from a kind of rheumatism! They come out of their holes, ready to fly far out to sea as usual, but instead are overcome by cramp – and retire again to the shelter of home. So, it is understandable that their young need some extra warmth.



What is it Our Lord says? *“Consider the birds of the air, they neither toil nor spin, yet your Heavenly Father cares for them (Matthew 6:26)”*.

*In order that we might know Him, become His friends, He has given us the Sacraments...*

It certainly seems odd to compare ourselves with baby puffins, but the link is real. We too belong to the animal world, even if we are more than animals. Like hundreds (thousands?) of bird species, we too have our special characteristics. Chief among those characteristics is this: that part spiritual as we are, nevertheless, we obtain all our information by means of the body, through the five senses. And here it is that we too experience God’s minute and tender care for His creation. In order that we might know Him, become His friends, He has given us the Sacraments and the sacramentals. First, He sent His Son to become man and to bring us into His own family. The Son, in his turn, has made visible, sensible things

– bread, wine and water, salt and oil, light and clothing, words and actions; the means of our learning about the unseen, divine life He brings us.

And not only a means of learning. He has made them the means of our receiving the great gifts of grace.

The familiar, loved things of our bodily, everyday life have been made our protective ‘down jacket’, lest we, like puffins, should be tempted – in the face of our great difficulty in moving from the seen to the unseen world – to shuffle back into our old familiar holes!

Odd to compare ourselves with puffins! Yes. But it would seem that when Our Lord draws our attention to something, He asks for proper attention. He is, after all, the Creator of the world and knows what ‘visual aids’ He has provided.

Birds come in thousands of varieties of design and beauty, but *“You are worth more than many birds”*.

So: ***“Consider the birds!”***



## Relic of St Faustina Venerated Online

### St Augustine's Abbey, Chilworth by **Richard Morris**

Richard Morris is a volunteer at St Augustine's Abbey, Chilworth.



the year at St Augustine's Abbey from 3 to 4pm, as recommended by St Faustina, to remember Christ's suffering and death. It is currently only run on Skype and to take part, call Mac Lee on 07863 831 987.

Grateful thanks go to Carol Ann Grace and Kate Hall for singing, and to Feraz Hannah for leading The Chaplet of Divine Mercy (a Chaplet is a devotional prayer).

**A** relic of St Faustina Kowalska has been venerated online at St Augustine's Abbey, Chilworth, with over fifty people taking part via their computers and mobile devices at the special Mass and event held on Saturday 26th September 2020.

The bidding prayers said by Carlos George Monteiro were very impressive.

To find out about future Divine Mercy events, please call Mary Jo Hoyne on 07787 122 372.

St Faustina was a Polish Catholic nun who was blessed with apparitions of Christ in the early 20th century. She died in 1938 and was made a saint in the year 2000. She has inspired the devotion to the Divine Mercy, which has a large international following.

More information about events at St Augustine's Abbey can be found at <http://www.chilworthbenedictines.com>

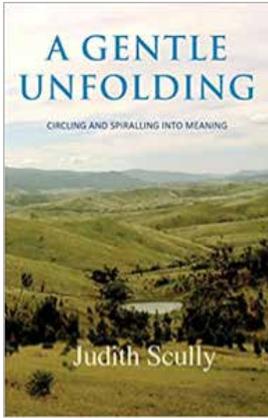
Celebrating the online Mass at Chilworth near Guildford was Benedictine monk Fr Thomas Kolangaden OSB, who prayed for peace and was keen to run the accompanying online half-day healing event to offer peace to everyone during the current Covid-19 pandemic.



*Fr Thomas Kolangaden OSB*

The event linked with the daily Divine Mercy Hour that takes place every day of

## **Book Review: [A Gentle Unfolding by Judith Scully](#)**



John At various times in its history the Catholic Church has been obliged to redefine its self-understanding. During the 20th Century in many fields we have had to re-evaluate much that we thought we understood, so in this sense, interpreting the impact of the Second Vatican Council will keep Church historians busy for many years. This is further complicated by the discipline of history having itself undergone a revolution where much of the certainties taught in my schooldays are now perhaps deservedly discredited. Amongst new schools of thought arising within this now pluriform discipline is 'History from Below', an approach that avoids privileging the evidence of great minds and great events but seeks instead to evaluate events through the impact on the lives of ordinary people. Judith Scully's recent book *A Gentle Unfolding* is therefore not just an agreeable account of faith but also the sort of anecdotal evidence future historians will consider whilst interpreting twentieth century ecclesiastical history. It is a short book that provides us with a spiritual account of Catholic discipleship through changing

times. Starting just before World War II and passing through the times of the Council it takes us right up to the present day. Her life evolves within the Australian Catholic Church – a church with its own share of the problems that have beset most Western Catholic countries during the past sixty years.

Her childhood was set amongst the moral certainties of the 1940's where coming from a family of Irish descent meant a good Catholic education which prepared her for a religion she describes as 'a love affair with words and correct ideas'. Leaving school, it seemed for her a fairly natural progression to enter the novitiate of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the first step towards becoming a teacher for the next generation in the system within which she herself had been formed. However, twelve years later as a woman of growing independence she was drawn into the 'spirit of the times' released by the Second Vatican Council. Initially she requested a twelve month 'exclaustration' from her convent, without yet realising that she would never return. The world she arrived back in was scarcely unrecognisable, being now populated with televisions, supermarkets and even restaurants selling Asian food. Clearly the theology of Vatican II sought to rebalance the relationship between religious and lay life however, if language is one thing, delivery is quite another. The main part of the book relates how an independent woman of strong faith seeks to live this out within her new secular environment. No longer a professed sister we see her transiting a range of roles, pursuing a post-Conciliar lay vocation. At first, she teaches in schools, then enters married life where she must painfully

accept that she is unable to have her own children before finally becoming a mother through adoption. Her new equilibrium is tragically challenged through the early loss of a child, leading her in time to conclude that even though 'busy like Martha about many things, I never lost the yearning to be Mary'. But where was she to find a path for lay women in this new Church? We follow her through different roles: a lay visitor, a 'Pastoral Associate', a coordinator of faith groups and a spiritual director, before later tragedy strikes once again as she loses her husband to Motor Neurone Disease.

Anyone involved in parish life through the second half of the 20th Century will recognise much of what the author relates in this book. From my own experience, I conclude that reform will inevitably satisfy some whilst offending others, where those shocked by change stand in the face of those who think that things should go much further. I have to stress here that this is not a polemical book however, the question that Judith Scully leaves for our reflection is whether, despite good intentions, the Church is still to find a meaningful role for women such as herself. Whatever one's own position on this issue, this remains an agreeable story which quietly highlights an important question unlikely to go away soon.

*... even though 'busy like Martha about many things, I never lost the yearning to be Mary'. But where was she to find a path for lay women in this new Church?*

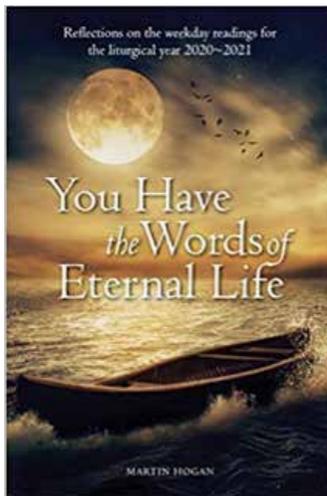
*Reviewed by Dr Roderick Campbell Guion*

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**Book Review: You Have the Words of Eternal Life**  
**- Reflections on the weekday readings for the**  
**liturgical year 2020-2021 by Martin Hogan**



(Messenger Publications, pbk,  
290 pages, 2020, £13.95)

This is the fifth volume of readings for the liturgical year that Martin Hogan has produced. He writes as a practising pastor with excellent exegetical skills, and with a warm and welcoming style.

He puts his message across with the ease of a skilled communicator, and covers, usually in a single page, the key moments of the scriptures of the day, whether it be a simple feria, a weekday in Advent, Lent or Eastertide, a celebration of a saint, or one of the feasts of Our Lord or Our Lady. The focus is mainly on the Gospel, but he often touches on the First Reading or the Psalm.

What he gives the reader is a handy *vade mecum*, which will help a preacher with insights for a homily, or will provide sound fodder to chew on for anyone who uses the daily mass readings as part of their prayer-life. So often it is easy to forget that the Lord is just as truly present in the Word as in the Eucharistic elements.

If you want a succinct and helpful companion volume for weekday readings, you will have to go a long way to find a better one than this.

Review by Denis Blackledge SJ



Fr Denis Blackledge SJ  
is a Jesuit Priest based at  
St Francis Xavier's Church,  
Liverpool.

## Indulgences – God’s Justice or Mercy?

**Q** I have been a Catholic all my life and obviously know about indulgences which the Church can offer, but have never really been clear on what they are exactly.

Answer by **Martin Ryan**

**A** In March of this year, when the coronavirus pandemic was beginning to rage around the world, Pope Francis offered *plenary indulgences* under relatively ‘easy’ conditions to all those affected, both victims and carers. The conditions for receiving these indulgences were seen by observers to be extremely relaxed, and this initiative was therefore considered to be completely in line with Pope Francis’ emphasis on God’s mercy, and as such represented a marvellous example of the Catholic Church as a caring mother. Particularly for people who might be dying from the virus, and without close family contact or the ministry of a priest – due to the requirement to isolate and avoid passing on the infection – these indulgences gave real and immediate comfort that God was with them in their last agony. God bless Pope Francis!

But, as you might be asking, what exactly are indulgences, and haven’t they been somewhat ‘out of fashion’ in recent years? To understand indulgences, we have to recognise that sin has two fundamental consequences:

~ a *guilt that has to be forgiven*;

~ a *punishment that has to be remitted*.

For the contrite penitent, absolution by means of the Sacrament of Reconciliation completely applies God’s forgiveness and

removes all guilt associated with the sins confessed.

### **But what about the punishment attached to the sin?**

I have to say that I am somewhat uneasy with this concept of punishment remaining for sin, which seems to me to stress the *justice* of God rather than His *mercy*, and I have never been a fan of indulgences. Indeed, indulgences in the Medieval Church became associated with money – the rich could pay for their punishments to be remitted and much wealth was accrued to the Church – and it wasn’t surprising that indulgences became one of the key criticisms of the Protestant Reformers at the time of the Reformation. And quite right too, I think!

*Nowadays, hopefully we can shed the historical baggage and refocus on the theology behind indulgences, and in particular try to clarify their pastoral usefulness*

Nowadays, hopefully we can shed the historical baggage and refocus on the theology behind indulgences, and in particular try to clarify their pastoral usefulness in modern Catholic life and practice. In January 1967, Pope Paul VI, building on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, issued a decree that substantially revised the understanding and application of indulgences. Gone was

the putative calculation of punishment 'time', which in popular imagination meant 'years' spent in Purgatory – effectively the prison sentence to be served by the deceased before their 'release' into Heaven; as if we could ever quantify in human terms what that might be!

A brief word about Purgatory is useful here:

*As Catholics we understand Purgatory as that state where the dead, who are neither saintly enough to go straight to Heaven or evil enough to 'choose' Hell, reside before they can be admitted to the eternal bliss of Heaven. Purgatory is therefore a process of purification – but nonetheless it is a one-way path to Heaven. The dead in Purgatory may still lack the glorious sight of God, but, crucially, they have the certain hope of entering Heaven.*

*Purgatory was another target of the Protestant Reformers who, allowing only Scripture as the sole rule of faith (**Sola Scriptura**), argued that there was no divine basis for Purgatory as it was not mentioned in the Bible. The Catholic teaching on Purgatory can be summarised as: Purgatory is implicitly contained in Scripture. In particular, in the second book of Maccabees, at the end of Chapter 12, we read that it is a "good and holy thing to pray for the dead". Now, applying simple logic, the dead who are either in Heaven or Hell do not need our prayers, so, if we are encouraged in Holy Scripture to pray for the dead, there must be some third state where the deceased **can be helped** by our intercession. And so, in traditional Catholic teaching we have:*

- ~ *the Church Triumphant – the saints in heaven;*
- ~ *the Church Militant – all the faithful on earth;*
- ~ *the Church Suffering – the holy souls in Purgatory.*

*I personally find the doctrine of Purgatory very comforting – it seems to respect the reality of our human nature, how we develop as individuals, and how we can never be 'perfect' in this life. It reflects a theology of **becoming** rather than **being**. And if, as St John of the Cross declared: "At eventide, they will examine thee in love", then who among us will ever pass that exam with full marks? Purgatory, in that sense, effectively means that God lowers the entrance bar for Heaven!*

*Ultimately, eternal life is the free gift of a merciful God because no one can 'merit' or be 'ready' for Heaven. Purgatory might be better understood as the essential period after death for refining our capacity to love to the point where our hearts are fully healed and redeemed. How else could we ever look upon the face of God?*

Coming back to indulgences, the definition from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) is:

*"An indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin whose guilt has already been forgiven. ... (c 1471)"*

We further read that there are two types of indulgence: partial and plenary. Partial, as the name suggests, removes some but not all of that temporal punishment,

whereas a plenary indulgence removes all punishment accrued to date. If we gain an indulgence, it can be either for the living or for the holy souls in Purgatory, the latter fulfilling the injunction in Second Maccabees, which is part of Scripture and therefore the inerrant Word of God.

Indulgences are of course mediated to us by the Church's God-given authority to "bind and loose" (Matthew 16:19). There are usually prescribed conditions for acquiring an indulgence, such as reverently performing devotional practices like the Stations of the Cross. In all circumstances the person should be in a 'state of grace', which essentially means being forgiven of all grave sin at that time. Conditions for gaining plenary indulgences are typically more involved than for partial indulgences, but as we began by saying, Pope Francis has himself effectively 'lowered the bar' during the pandemic, as a merciful outreach of God's grace.

*We must never doubt that God forgives us, indeed that He loves to forgive us.*

We must never doubt that God forgives us, indeed that He loves to forgive us. He 'throws our sins behind His back' so that, once forgiven, He will never draw our sins down on us again. For us here and now, He is the God of 'new beginnings'.

But sin clearly has a detrimental effect on us, a negative effect that 'clings' to our soul. Sin diminishes us as people. In particular, it diminishes our relationships with each other, and hampers our capacity to respond to God's love. This sin-deficit is poignantly illustrated in the Bible when Adam and Eve 'hide' from God when He comes into the garden in the evening of the day. How tragic, that they – and we –

avoid the very balm for our wounds! We run away from our truest friend ... from our own loving Father.

Perhaps the greatest 'punishment' for sin is not a period of purification or even hellfire, but the process of healing our enduring incapacity to give and receive love. Perhaps instead of stressing *punishment*, we should stress *rehabilitation*. And that, of course, can be painful.

*In a time when we rightly emphasise an incarnational theology - when we acclaim a God who does not sit on the fence and watch as we struggle, but a God who has already come down off the fence to be with us and raise us up from the mire - what place have indulgences, with their focus on remitting punishment, in such a milieu?*

What relevance then do indulgences have for today's Catholic? In a time when we rightly emphasise an incarnational theology – when we acclaim a God who does not sit on the fence and watch as we struggle, but a God who has already come down off the fence to be with us and raise us up from the mire – what place have indulgences, with their focus on remitting punishment, in such a milieu? I earlier stated my unease, and that indulgences – for me – appear to stress the *justice* of God rather than His *mercy*. My reading of Jesus' great Parable of the Prodigal Son is that God is profoundly portrayed as the 'Father of Mercies'. Indeed, instead of enforcing a period of punishment for the younger son, the Father proclaims a celebration!

For Jesus, *mercy* always trumps *justice*.

Perhaps instead of consigning indulgences to the bin of ecclesiastical history, we might take our cue from the wonderful Pope Francis, and put the emphasis on the ease of receiving indulgences, especially in times of crisis such as the present pandemic, and thereby both acknowledge the enduring damage caused by sin and the proactive mercy of God who is ever keen to apply the essential medicine for our souls? As one theologian has warmly commented on Pope Francis' policy in regard to indulgences, the Pope is promoting a '*ridiculously-pardoning Church*'. Surely that's a Church which can hope to search for and find the lost sheep?

Many years ago, I wrote the following poem which I hope expresses the theology that underpins this pastoral approach:

*Justice demands, "An eye for an eye!";*

*Mercy says, "Let bygones be bye".*

*Justice claims, "You're in my book!";*

*Mercy laughs, "I've forgotten to look!"*

*Justice cries, "All debts to be paid!";*

*Mercy whispers, "All men have strayed".*

*Justice shouts, "Principle before fashion!";*

*Mercy entreats, "Live through compassion".*

*Justice boasts, "I won't ever bend";*

*Mercy states, "I'm with you to the end".*

*Justice instructs, "Forgive, but don't forget";*

*Mercy pleads, "Let go with no regret".*

*Justice asserts, "Goodness is what matters";*

*Mercy suggests, "Righteousness flatters".*

*Justice says, "Work hard for your place";*

*Mercy reminds, "All we have is grace".*

*Justice dictates, "Fairness is the key";*

*Mercy counters, "Let off scot-free!"*

*Justice warns, "The law will not be denied!";*

*Mercy gently counsels, "For you, has He died".*

## Meet the Team



**Kathy Bishop** is founder and editor in chief of The Faith Companion. She has a BA(Hons) in RE, an MA in Pastoral Theology specializing in Christian Spirituality and has trained for 2 years as a spiritual director at the London Centre for Spiritual Direction.



**Rev Andrew Brookes OP** who is a Dominican of the English Province based in London at the Rosary Shrine North London and is The Faith Companion's theological advisor



**Martin Ryan** was a Redemptorist for fourteen years, ordained in 1983 and left to get married in 1989. Now sixty-two, he has never lost his faith nor ever stopped his Catholic practice. He was born in London and has a first-class honours degree in theology. Now living in Scotland, Martin is an IT professional. He also expresses his faith through poetry published to his own website: <https://www.poemsforpilgrims.com/>



**Dr Roderick Campbell Guion** has a doctorate on the mystical transformation in the life of St Elizabeth of the Trinity. He is a Secular Carmelite who teaches Ecclesiastical History with the Carmelite Institute of Britain and Ireland.

**Bernadette Daly** is our executive administrator. Bernie helps support Kathy and promotes The Faith Companion across the UK.

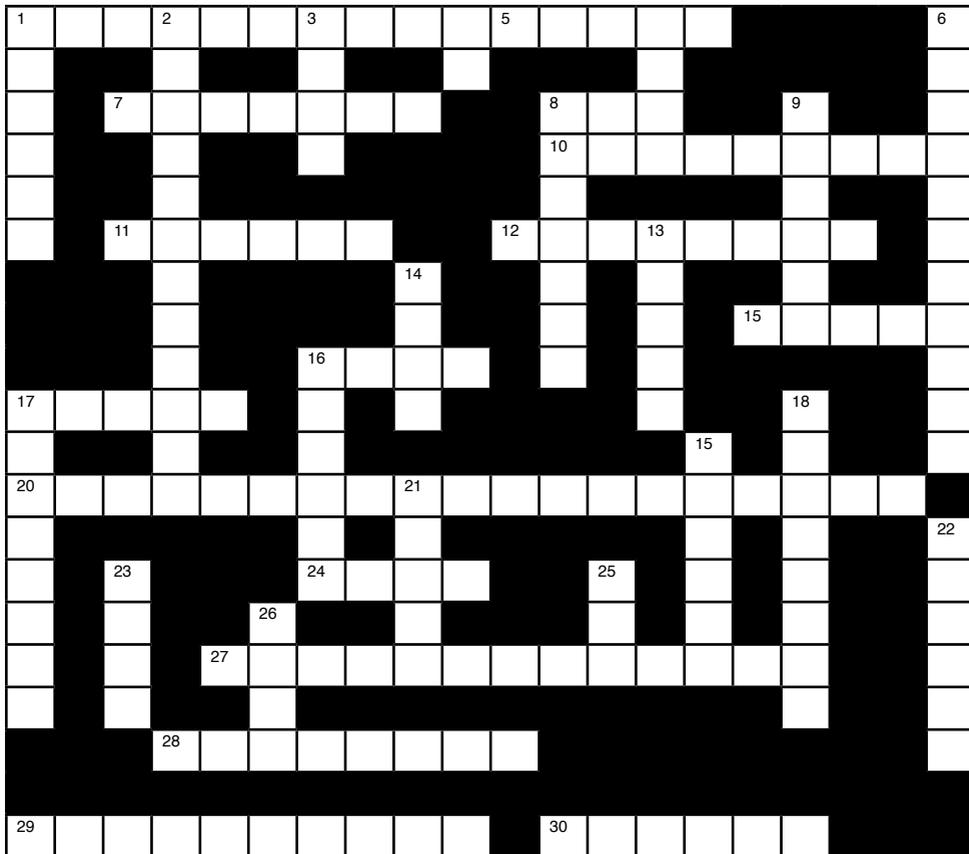


# The Answers to Last Issue's Crossword

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# Crossword



## CLUES ACROSS

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1 Feast celebrated on 2nd Feb when Jesus was first taken to the temple</p> <p>7 The section of the Mass preceding the Eucharistic prayer</p> <p>11 The elderly priest who welcomed the baby Jesus as the Messiah since he had known about His coming through a prophecy</p> <p>12 The number of apparitions of Our Lady, in Lourdes</p> | <p>15 The last letter of the Greek alphabet depicting Christ (until the end) as shown in the Paschal candle</p> <p>16 A prophet was also known as this at one time (1st Sam 9:9)</p> <p>17 Latin word for Happy in the Gospels</p> <p>20 The full name of Bernadette (10, 9)</p> <p>24 The two feasts celebrated by the Church on 2nd February are in honour of ...</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

- 27 Religious name of Bernadette (5,8)
- 28 The song of praise and thanksgiving by Simeon on seeing the Child Jesus who was the promised Messiah
- 29 According to the doctrine of the Church, Mary was conceived without sin and was therefore declared thus
- 30 Bernadette was declared a saint in 1933 by this Pope (4, 2 Roman numerals)

**CLUES DOWN**

- 1 This number applies to the Apostles as well as the tribes of Israel
- 2 Like 1 across, this also celebrates another traditional practice following childbirth
- 3 The wise men went by this special sign to make their journey to Bethlehem
- 4 Bernadette died of this disease (initls.)
- 5 Believed by some to be a sign of events to come
- 6 The tribes of Israel descended from them (4, 2, 5)
- 8 The tribes of Israel descended from them (4, 2, 5)
- 9 Latin hymn of thanksgiving sung for public rejoicing
- 10 Another name for the feasts celebrated on 2nd February
- 13 Joseph had to flee Bethlehem with his family for fear of this tyrant
- 14 Word relating to God
- 16 When Bernadette dug the ground with her bare hands at Our Lady's instruction the earth produced this, which remains to this day
- 17 Month in which the Virgin Mary first appeared to Bernadette
- 18 Mary and Joseph took these as their offering to the temple (3,5)
- 19 Bernadette's father was this before he fell on hard times
- 21 According to records this number of kings/wise men came to visit Jesus
- 22 The disused prison cell which became the family home of the young woman who saw Our Lady in Lourdes
- 25 After the apparitions, Bernadette consecrated her life to God as a ...
- 26 The place of birth of Jesus which sheltered a few animals and had straw to keep warm could also be referred to as this





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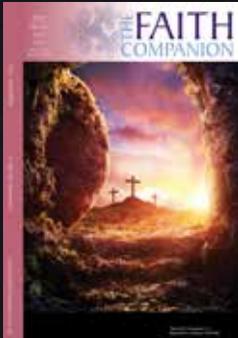
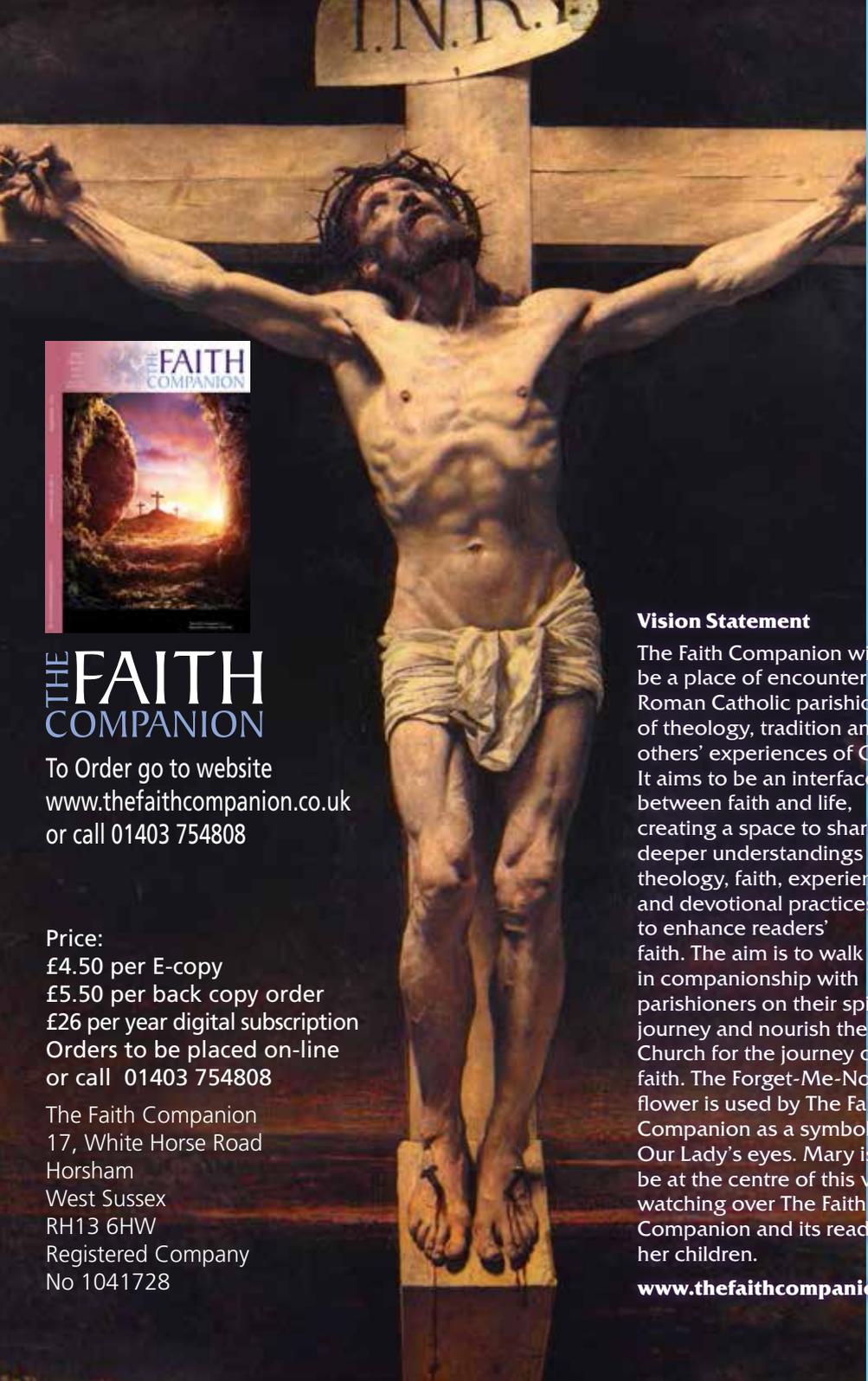
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The Faith Companion will be a place of encounter for Roman Catholic parishioners of theology, tradition and others' experiences of God. It aims to be an interface between faith and life, creating a space to share deeper understandings of theology, faith, experiences and devotional practices to enhance readers' faith. The aim is to walk in companionship with parishioners on their spiritual journey and nourish the Church for the journey of faith. The Forget-Me-Not flower is used by The Faith Companion as a symbol of Our Lady's eyes. Mary is to be at the centre of this vision watching over The Faith Companion and its readers, her children.

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