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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
Catlow Hall Street, Oswaldtwistle
Lancashire
BB5 3EZ

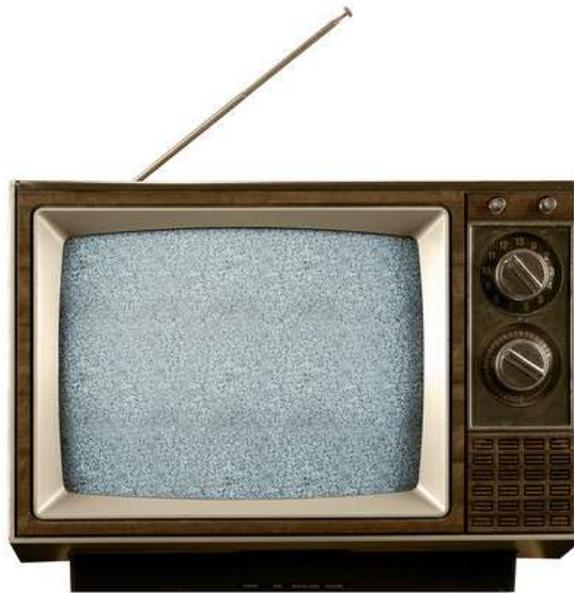
DIOCESE OF  SALFORD

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. S D O'Brien
Tel: 01254-232433

Wednesday 24th December 2020
Christmas Eve

Dear brothers and sisters,

Picture an 'old fashioned' television. The kind before digital, sky plus and satellites. The kind that had the flimsy metal aerial attached to the box similar to the one in the picture below.

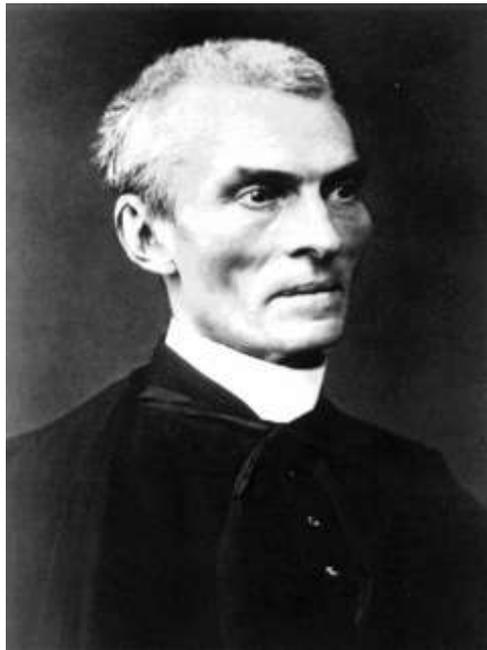


It may look dated now but many families scrimped and saved to have these new entertainment machines in the corner of their living rooms. The aerial and its position were crucial to the quality of picture and sound that came through. If the aerial was tilted the wrong way or there was outside interference from the weather then all you could see was a black and white fuzz with loud static crackling noise. The adjustment of the T.V aerial required skill and a great deal of patient perseverance!

There are times in life when our own spiritual aerials have not been pointing in the right direction. Rather than receiving God and being able to focus on our relationship with Jesus Christ the picture that has emerged is one of patchy faith and blurry hope. Over the last nine months we have all been living through uncertain and frustrating times, even now the new year of 2021 is still unclear and fuzzy. Many people have been plagued with understandable worries and genuine concerns. All this 'interference' has caused static and crackling in our lives of faith which in turn has made it difficult to clearly see and hear the Lord. What do we do? How do we resume normal service?

The best spiritual T.V repairman that I can recommend is Saint Peter Julian Eymard. He was a 19th century French priest who established the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and whose words of wisdom are still in print today. Over the last few months when I have pondered over ways to be a priest during the Covid-19 pandemic and adapt to the challenges and new pastoral needs it's presented,

I've found myself turning to this saint and asking for his intercession. Saint Peter Julian has repaired and redirected my spiritual aerial back towards Jesus Christ especially in the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament. The following words he penned are perfect for this moment in time with Christmas looming!



'We must keep in mind that the Holy Eucharist is Jesus Christ, past, present, and future; that the Eucharist is the last development of the Incarnation and mortal life of our Saviour; that in the Eucharist Jesus Christ gives us every grace; that all truths tend to and end in the Eucharist; and that there is nothing more to be added when we have said, "The Eucharist," since it is Jesus Christ...It is not difficult to find a relation between the birth of Jesus in the stable and His sacramental birth on the altar and in our hearts...Who does not see that the hidden life of Nazareth is continued in the Divine Host of the tabernacle, and that the passion of the Man-God on Calvary is renewed in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at every moment of the day and night, and all over the world?'

(‘The Real Presence’, Saint Pierre Julian Eymard)

Whenever he was on his travels or could not pray before the Blessed Sacrament Saint Peter Julian would close his eyes and picture the tabernacle in his own church. This simple practice reminded him of the reality of Jesus' true and substantial Presence in the world. It was the Blessed Sacrament contained within the tabernacle that reaffirmed Peter Julian Eymard's faith that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was not in the clouds above but dwelling amongst his people on earth. Throughout his life Fr. Eymard faced many trials and challenges but it was the love of Christ found in the Eucharist that helped him to have a clear picture of Heaven.

As we approach these days of Christmastide and look towards the New Year I invite you brothers and sisters to imitate the prayer of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Close your eyes and think of the tabernacle here at St. Mary's. Picture the red lit sanctuary lamp whose flickering flame reminds us of the Lord's Presence in our midst. Once you have that visual image talk to Him, the Good Shepherd. Adore Him, give Him Thanks, talk to Him about your worries and concerns and petition Him for your friends and family.

Many people, even a few atheists I know, love Christmas cribs and are always sad when they have to pack them away. One individual I know always says good bye to Jesus for another year when they bubble wrap the bambino figure. Brothers and sisters we may pack away the image of Jesus from our nativity scenes and Christmas cribs but we can never pack away Christ's Real Presence in the tabernacle. No matter how the future pans out and what ups and downs 2021 has in store for us Our Lord, ever present in the Eucharist, remains steadfast and constant in the tabernacle. If you want to see Jesus in a clearer way this Christmas and beyond then adjust your spiritual aerial to the tabernacle and you won't go far wrong. God Bless. Amen.

Masses for the Christmas Season

Both the 6pm and 8pm Christmas Eve Masses are now fully booked but there are some places available for the 8am and 10am Christmas Day Masses. Do check the parish website for more information in regards to dates and times over the Christmas and New Year period. My thanks to the stewards who have been able to offer their services so that we can have two public Masses for the Solemnity of the Epiphany (6th Jan 2021).

Telephone Bookings

Ursula Heyes has done a great job with the telephone booking system which has allowed people with no internet access to ring up and book a place for Mass. Over the last nine months each Wednesday and Friday from 5pm – 6pm, Ursula has been available to answer the phone to parishioners. However, the pattern that has emerged over this time is that the majority of people are now booking online with very few calls on a Friday. As of today Ursula will continue to provide the phone booking service but only on Wednesdays. Please note the phone booking service will resume on Wednesday 6th Jan 2021. (Tel: 232 433)

Online Bookings

My thanks to Czes and the team for all their help with the online booking system. If you would like to book this way then please visit the parish website www.saintmarysosaltdtwistle.co.uk which has a link for online Mass bookings. Sadly, some volunteers have had to return to work and therefore you will only be able to book online during the week (Monday to Friday).

Stewards & Cleaners

Thanks to all the stewards and cleaners for their dedicated service especially over the forth coming Christmas period. If you would like to serve Our Lord as a volunteer steward then please email Jennifer Pickles (St. Mary's Steward Co-ordinator) at: jennifer.pickles@virginmedia.com or to volunteer as a cleaner please contact Karen Beard (Parish Housekeeper) at jakey9998@aol.com

Parish Christmas Crib Appeal

I'm hoping you will have noticed the restored figures in the crib this year done by Lewis & Lewis. As you will remember at the end of 2019 we made an appeal for donations to help repair and paint the Bambino, Our Lady, St. Joseph and the donkey. Thanks to the kind generosity of many parishioners these restored crib figures look beautiful. This year we are asking for donations to help repair and paint the shepherds and Ox, who are looking even more bedraggled than usual next to the Holy Family. It cost over £700 for last years restoration. There will be a basket in front our crib for any donations towards restoring our three shepherds and Ox. God Bless you.

The Year of St. Joseph 8th December 2020 - 8th December 2021

The last two years, pre-Covid 19, I have celebrated a New Year's Day Mass where I have invited people to come forward to the sanctuary and choose the name of a saint, written on paper, from a basket. This year there will be no need to do this as our Holy Father Pope Francis has chosen a saint for us all – Saint Joseph. Bishop Arnold has written the following:

'... 8th December 2020, marked the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX placing the Universal Church under the Protection of St. Joseph. To mark the anniversary Pope Francis has written a powerful meditation on St. Joseph, particularly in the light of the current pandemic. It is well worth reading and is a rich stimulus to prayer. The link is here

<http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2020/12/8/letteraapostolica-patriscorde.html>

The Pope has dedicated the next twelve months as a Year of St. Joseph. The Decree from the Apostolic Penitentiary is not yet available in English but there is a good summary here

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-12/apostolic-penitentiary-plenary-indulgence-year-st-joseph.html>

God Bless and keep praying.

Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle, pray for us.

Saint Joseph, pray for us.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard, pray for us.

Have a Holy Christmas and a Blessed New Year for 2021

Fr. O'Brien