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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
Catlow Hall Street, Oswaldtwistle
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DIOCESE OF  SALFORD

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. S D O'Brien
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Sunday 29th November 2020
First Sunday of Advent

Dear brothers and sisters,

You've probably already glimpsed the picture below and are thinking that doesn't look very seasonal. What an odd image to use at the start of Advent!



You're right this is not a traditional sign of Advent but I think it's meaning is very clear and conveys the Advent message perfectly – STOP!

Christmas trees are decorated, Turkey and trimmings have been ordered, lights are flashing, cards are being signed and sent, families are facing diplomatic quandaries about where, when and who can they meet over the festive period and online shopping is reaching new highs of demand. All this is understandable as 2020 has been a bleak time with the Covid-19 pandemic and Christmas brings a glimmer of hope, something to look forward to. After a second national lockdown who isn't longing to meet up with friends and loved ones again. However, let's look to that unusual Advent sign again – STOP! It doesn't mean stop all the Christmas fun and excitement. It means stop and catch your breath; it means stop and gather your thoughts; it means stop and allow yourselves time to think and refocus.

Stop and embrace the season Advent. A time of hopeful expectancy. A time of joyful preparation. A time of excited waiting. The world seems in such a rush to devour the main course of Christmas that it's missing out on the sweet appetisers and tantalising starters of Advent. The build up and preparation of Advent allows us to fully experience the Christmas mystery of the Incarnation in a profound and joyful way.

Pope Benedict XVI gave a beautiful quote a few years ago, to help us Catholics fully appreciate and understand the meaning of Advent, a meaning that as you will see is two-fold.

**'In Advent, Christians re-live a dual impulse of the spirit:
on the one hand, they raise their eyes towards the final destination of their pilgrimage through history, which is the glorious return of the Lord Jesus; on the other, remembering with emotion his birth in Bethlehem, they kneel before the crib.'** (Pope Benedict XVI)

The season of Advent is not just a countdown until Christmas day but a time for us to remember that the Second Coming will be a real event in the future. Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour will come again. We profess this regularly in our prayers and at the Holy Mass.

‘...He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead...’ (The Creed)

‘...and as we look forward to his second coming...’ (Eucharistic Prayer III)

*‘We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection until you come again.’ (The mystery of faith)*

*‘Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days,
that, be the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress,
as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.’ (Embolism)*

Advent asks us to Stop and think about the Second Coming. When the Lord returns again am I ready to go out and meet him? When he judges me have I striven throughout life for holiness or just trying to be a ‘nice’ person? (Remember ‘nice’ does not appear in the Bible!) It’s a sobering thought isn’t it! The Second Coming sounds almost like a Hollywood apocalyptic blockbuster but it’s a very real truth of our faith. Hence Advent asks us to Stop and take time to reflect and pray about our lives and strivings for holiness.

The second part of Advent then begins to prepare and direct us towards the birth of Our Lord. The prayers, symbols, liturgies and Masses all combined draw us deeper into fully understanding what the long promised birth of Jesus Christ truly means.

So brothers and sisters do have a wonderful and blessed Christmas once the 25th December arrives. Until then Stop and give yourself time to fully embrace and enjoy this liturgical season of Advent. I promise it will make Christmas, despite Covid-19, that spiritually more enriching. On the parish website, you will find on the homepage a link that will give a number of Advent resources you can use at home.

Resumption of Public Worship

As the national lockdown comes to an end this coming week and we enter the government’s designated Tier 3 for Lancashire, public worship will be allowed to resume. Mgr. Daly as you know has been appointed by the Bishop to help facilitate the safe re-opening of our diocesan churches. He emailed a summary of the continued restrictions that are in place for the safety and protection of all parishioners throughout the diocese.

‘Finally, please remember the importance of adhering to these guidelines for the health and well-being of everyone (ourselves included). Please look after each other in this respect. So to summarise:

Whilst we remain in tier 3 for the sake of safety the restrictions in place in church continue, attendance at Mass will be limited, there will be no singing, Holy Communion will be distributed at the end of Mass (the practice of all parishes in Hyndburn) ... and people are advised not to gather in groups either before or after Mass. We know this is difficult particularly for funerals and with the Christmas season approaching however such care will ensure that, especially given the relaxation on socialising at Christmas, our churches remain amongst the safest places and the celebration of Holy Mass will not be interrupted over Christmas.’

Both telephone and online bookings for Mass will resume again here at St. Mary’s. Ursula Heyes will be available on Wednesdays and Fridays, from 5pm – 6pm on (01254) 232 433 to take telephone bookings. The parish website will have a link for online bookings which hopefully will go live at some point next week. 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). On behalf of the parish I would like to say thank you to all those involved with our parish booking system.

Confessions

Advent is a time of preparing to meet Our Lord and an important part of this is Confession. This sacrament was instituted by Christ so that we could tangibly feel and truly receive his mercy and forgiveness. Dependant on the availability of volunteer stewards I'm hoping to offer Confession on Saturday 12th December 9am – 10am and Saturday 19th December 9am – 10am. The practicalities in regards to Covid-19 health & safety conditions are still to be formalised but the Sacrament of Confession will be in the church building. Please do check the parish website for news and information later this week.

Stewards & Cleaners

We have been blessed to have such good parishioners who have sacrificed both their time and services to make sure St. Mary's has been open for both private prayer and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as well as being clean and safe. THANK YOU from all the parishioners and the parish priest. 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

Sacramental Programme: Confession and Holy Communion

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed a lot of our usual routine events and this includes the sacramental programme. I feel very strongly that those young people who are actively engaged with the parish should be able to receive Our Lord and therefore, adapting to new circumstances, I'm beginning the new programme. *If you live in the parish* of St. Mary's and have a baptised Roman Catholic child who is seven years old + and you believe that they are ready to begin preparation for the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion then please do contact me before the end of December. The sacramental programme at St. Mary's is through the parish and not the schools. Mass attendance and full active participation in the life of the parish is just automatically assumed because Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is both the '*object and means of our faith*' (St. Peter Julian Eymard). Without an active relationship with Our Lord, with out regularly being in His Presence before the Blessed Sacrament, our faith can never grow nor can we truly know Him and Jesus wants us to know Him. Why? Because he has Good News for us!

Parish Online Advent Calendar

The Parish Online Advent Calendar can be accessed via the 'Advent' box on the parish website homepage. It's still not too late to send through submissions. Everybody in our parish family has words and stories of hope to share that could help others during these difficult winter months. Do not worry about spelling or punctuation – you have all put up with my poor grammar for the last eight months most graciously! You may want to write a poem, retell a story, compose a prayer or recall times past at St. Mary's etc. There is no exact word limit and if you wish you can remain anonymous. If a theme is needed then I would simply say look to the baby born in the manger who brought the world hope and love. Have a think and do email me at sean.obrien@dioceseofsalford.org.uk Thank you to those people who have already submitted various memories and poems so far. More are always welcomed.

God Bless, keep praying and do remember to Stop and enjoy this season.

Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle, pray for us.

Saint Joseph, pray for us.

Fr. O'Brien