

The Joyful Mysteries

Monday 11th May 2020



As I mentioned in the last reflection, this week we will be praying the Rosary together as a family, albeit virtually through the power of the internet! In this *St. Mary's Parish Family Rosary* let us pray for each other during this pandemic.

Holding the Crucifix we begin by making the sign of the cross +

The Crucifix

There in our hands is the image of the Lord on the Cross. Maybe the crucifix on your rosary is like mine, scuffed and worn. Maybe it has scratches or the metal plate has flaked off. No matter how it looks this imperfect image of Jesus raises our minds, our thoughts and our hearts to him '*the Way, the Truth and the Life.*' It is only through him, with him and in him that we will find completeness and happiness. As St. Augustine once wrote, '*Our hearts are restless Lord, until they rest in You.*' The whole purpose of the Rosary is, with Mary's prayers and guidance, to draw us closer to Jesus who is the **only one** who can give meaning to our lives.



As we hold the image of the Lord in our hands, we profess our faith. This is the same faith our brothers and sisters in the early church professed. It is not just the mere empty recitation of doctrine. It is the public witness of our belief in the One God who has revealed Himself to us. By praying the Apostles Creed, we are remembering what we believe and how it unites us as the Church. Not just today with people we know, but with the saints and faithful people who have gone before us.

*I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
He descended into hell;
on the third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of Saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.*

First Single Bead.

We now pray those words that Jesus taught us. As we begin the Rosary already, we are not alone. Not only have we prayed those words that countless Christians have professed before us but now the Lord himself joins us in this prayer. He gives us the perfect words and sentiments to guide and direct our minds.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.



The Three Beads

Faith. On the first bead we pray for faith. Faith is the expression of our belief in God. It is not a mere intellectual exercise but the concrete reality of our belief shown in thought and deed. Faith is not and can never be private, it is always public and must give witness. Faith is believing in Jesus, the Son of God, and each day wanting to know him more, love him more and serve him more.

Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.

*Blessed are thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus.
Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.*

Hope. On this second bead we pray for the virtue of hope. Hope is that desire within us that wants to attain a greater good despite difficult circumstances and apparent impossibilities. Hope is certain and full of confidence because it knows with God all things are possible.

Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed are thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus.

Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

Charity. On this third bead we pray for charity. Charity is that virtue that allows us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Remember the Lord's actions at the Last Supper:

'When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again, he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done...' (Jn 13:12-15)

Charity is that call to love our brothers and sisters, to love the stranger and the foe. To be merciful, forgiving and compassionate. To give and never to count the cost. Our Teacher not only preached the commandment of love but he practised it – The cross!

Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed are thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus.

Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

Single Bead

On this bead we give praise and honour to the Holy Trinity. One God in Three persons. God the Father loves us so much that he gave us His only Son. The Son promised that he would never leave us as orphans and so he gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit we are never distant from Jesus but always close to him. It is the Spirit who draws us ever closer to the heart of God in His Son, Jesus.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

Tomorrow we will meditate on and pray the First Joyful Mystery – The Annunciation.

God Bless and keep praying
Fr. O'Brien

The Joyful Mysteries

Tuesday 12th May 2020

First Joyful Mystery: The Annunciation



'In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin...and the Virgin's name was Mary...The angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus... 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.'
(Lk 1:26-38)

We all know the importance of a good solid foundation. It is key to building up the rest of the structure. Without a firm foundation everything is fragile and risks collapse. Jesus himself taught this lesson very clearly.

'Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house and it did not fall: it was founded on rock.' (Mt 7:24-25)

The foundation of our lives cannot rest on the fleeting and perishable world around us. I think during the current pandemic this truth has been very much realised. To simply '*go with the flow*', to accept worldly values and principles ranging from sexuality, gender, marriage and human perceived justice and truth, distorts the way to Jesus who wants to bring us to the very heart of God the Father in heaven. The foundation to our life must be Christ the Lord. To build upon him, to make him our keystone, will never be misguided or a wrong decision.

It will be difficult at times and challenging, admittedly, and he even said himself, ***'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross...'*** (Mk 8:34) The cross can be heavy and by being associated with it will lead people to reject and denounce us. However, by building our lives on the Lord and his ways, his teachings, his truth will bring joy and ultimately lead us to heaven; despite the obstacles and rebukes it will provoke along the way by the world around us.

***'Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:
It was the stone rejected by the builders
that became the keystone.
This was the Lord's doing
and it is wonderful to see?'' (Mt 21:42)***

The rejection of Jesus led from his his passion and death to ultimately his Resurrection! New life! Eternal life! True and real life with God in paradise forever! He is the foundation stone that is truly worth building on.

What has all this to do with the first Joyful Mystery of the Annunciation? Well to make the Lord the foundation on which we build our lives we first must know him. This is the example Our Blessed Mother shows us in this mystery that we are called to meditate upon today. The term to *'know'* in the Bible means a lot more than just acknowledging the existence and presence of another. To *'know'* in the Scriptures points to an intimate relationship where there is a genuine and deep understanding about another. When Mary said *'Yes'* to God at the Annunciation it was not a whim, a sudden inspired moment but something that had been nurtured and pondered about over time with God's grace. Look at the paintings below and can you notice something that is constant in all of them?





The book! In nearly all artistic depictions of the Annunciation, including our carving on the reredos of the High Altar at St. Mary's, Mary is either holding a book or there is one positioned close to where she is sitting or kneeling. The book of course is the Sacred Scriptures, the Old Testament. On those divinely inspired pages God reaches out to allow us to experience Him and therefore grow in faith. The words speak of God's saving deeds for His people, his passionate love for His

own. The words sing His praise for the many wonders He has done and the kindness and mercy which flow from Him. The words direct and guide so that we may walk in His light and get to know who He truly is.

Mary, as a Jew, as a daughter of Israel knew those words from the moment she took her first breath. They were the words used at home in prayer. The words chanted at the Temple in worship. The words pondered and discussed each and everyday by those around her. She would have seen in the Scriptures how God reached out to His unfaithful people. How He raised up holy men and women at different stages in history to bring them back to Himself with all their hearts. She would have been very familiar with the hope of the coming Messiah, God's anointed and chosen Saviour. Our Lady lived, breathed, pondered, contemplated and mediated on the Sacred Scriptures. When she was asked to be the Mother of God her 'Yes' came naturally and trustingly because she '*knew*' the God who called her from experiencing Him in those sacred words of Scripture.



Do we truly ‘*know*’ God? How often have we seriously picked up our Bible to pray? Do we have a Bible and if so where is it? On the book shelf next to the novels, DIY guides and gardening books? Is it a big fancy posh Bible kept in a draw or cupboard that never sees the light of day? Our Lady shows us the importance of praying with the word of God because it allows us to get to ‘*know*’ Him. God’s word helps us build our lives the right way on the true foundation stone. St. Jerome famously said, ‘***Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.***’ Let’s trust in Mary and the example she gives us and pick up the Word of God and be amazed in the ways that God will speak to us.

First Single Bead: Our Father

Let us pray during this mystery that we too come to ‘*know*’ the true God. Let us pray that we will say ‘Yes’, completely and totally, when He calls us in the extraordinary moments of life and the very ordinary mundane moments of life. Let us ask Mary to be with us as we read our Bible’s and encounter the God of life speaking to us.

Ten Beads: Hail Mary for each one

Contemplate Mary and the Book, the Sacred Scriptures. See her thirst and desire for God, for true life, being quenched at the wellspring of every page. Pray that we as a parish family may yearn and long for that same Life, that same Way, that same Truth that same Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God who is the only one who makes life make any sense.

Single Bead: Glory be

At the end of a decade we always praise the Holy Trinity with a Glory Be as well as another prayer known as the Fatima prayer. It was taught by Our Lady to the three children at Fatima (St. Francisco, St. Jacinta & Sister Lucia) on the 13th June 1917. Our Lady asked that it be prayed at the end of every decade of the Rosary.

O My Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of Hell and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those who are in most need of Thy mercy.

It is a prayer that reminds us that the only sure and concrete person in our life is Jesus. He stands with us through thick and thin and it is only he who can forgive and save us. The Fatima prayer also reminds us to pray for others out of love.

***‘The stone which the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.’ (Ps 117:22)***

Tomorrow we will meditate on the second Joyful Mystery, The Visitation.

God Bless and keep praying

Fr. O’Brien

The Joyful Mysteries Wednesday 13th May 2020

Second Joyful Mystery: The Visitation



'Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah...Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?'

(Lk 1: 39-45)

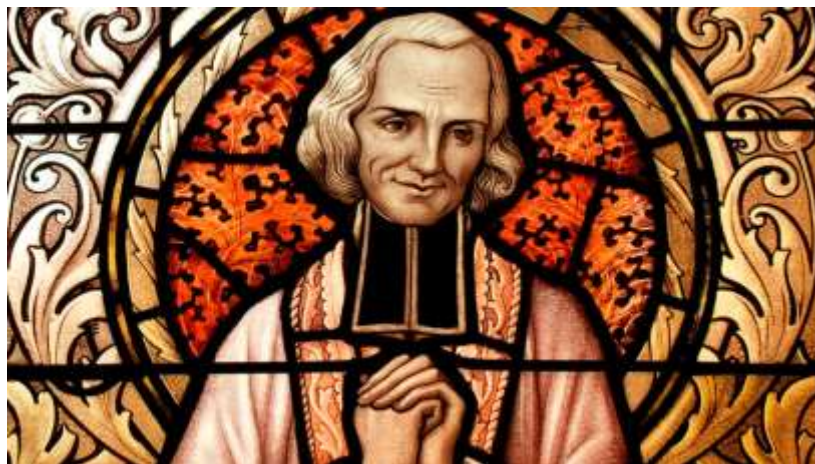
I think we are all very familiar with the famous portrait of Henry VIII painted by Holbein the younger. The phrase, 'a picture paints a thousand words', is very true;



Especially, when we look at Henry! Here stands a man who wants to be seen as no mere mortal. From the fine fur lined coat to the opulent jewel encrusted chains and garter, Henry proudly, loudly and unabashedly proclaims 'I am King!'. His stance is strong, his facial expression is confident and smug, and the blatant revealing of the dagger is menacing. There is no trace of humility anywhere on this canvas. What makes this Tudor king more exacerbating is that when Holbein painted the 'cocky monarch' between 1536-1537, Henry had committed numerous crimes against God and his fellow man! This painting portrays an ego bursting with self-assertion at the achievements of the 'I' and 'Me' and all at the cost of the 'other'.

What would a portrait of Our Lady look like? What would be the expression on her face? How would she be dressed? What position would she have taken for the artist at her sitting? Though we have no such portrait in paint or oils we can still see Our Mother very clearly in the words of Scripture. Every page and word rather than brushstroke or etching, paints the image of Mary who is the model of faith for us to aspire and emulate.

Today's mystery of the Visitation paints a portrait of humility, a virtue that Jesus taught us all to embrace. ***'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'*** (Lk 14:11). We see our Lady as the very embodiment of humility in this mystery, not by words but by actions. Actions that speak louder than words! Humility is that virtue which recognises our total dependence upon God. No matter our skills, gifts and talents all of these are from God. No matter our personal achievements and the blessings we have, all these are from God.



St. John Vianney described humility perfectly when he wrote:

'Who can contemplate the immensity of a God without humbling himself into the dust at the thought that God created heaven out of nothing, and that with one word he could turn heaven and earth into nothing again? A God who is so great, and whose power is boundless; a God filled with every perfection; a God with his never-ending eternity, his great justice, his providence, who rules everything so wisely, and looks after everything with such care, and we a mere nothing!'

There is a medieval spiritual classic, still in print today, known as the *'The Imitation of Christ'* by Thomas á Kempis. Again, the virtue of humility is described in regards to our relationships with others.

‘Do not think yourself better than others lest, perhaps, you be accounted worse before God Who knows what is in man. Do not take pride in your good deeds, for God’s judgments differ from those of men and what pleases them often displeases Him. If there is good in you, see more good in others, so that you may remain humble. It does no harm to esteem yourself less than anyone else, but it is very harmful to think yourself better than even one. The humble live in continuous peace, while in the hearts of the proud are envy and frequent anger.’

The portrait of Mary in this Joyful Mystery paints a thousand words. She has been chosen to be the Mother of God. The Saviour and Messiah will be born to her. Of all women she is the most blessed. Of all mothers blessed is the fruit of her womb. Of all women she is the one chosen by God and full of His grace. Yet the first thing she does after having this wonderful blessing from God is to go out and serve.



Mary’s actions after the Annunciation are not to boast or makes demands on others because of her status and unique privilege. She makes the arduous journey to serve Elizabeth. The Mother of God walks miles and miles to care for her cousin who is expecting her own new born. Mary comes to Elizabeth’s home not as a visiting monarch but as a humble and lowly handmaid.

It is after this action of humble service that we then hear Mary’s words which embody the virtue of humility. Her prayer, found in Luke’s Gospel, is called the Magnificat.

***‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exults in God my Saviour;
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid...’ (Lk 1:46-48)***

Our Lady acknowledges that she is poor when she refers to herself as 'his lowly handmaid'. She is poor because she brought nothing into the world. Her life, her faith, her blessings and her hopes are all from God and God alone. Mary joyfully proclaims her poverty because through it God had made her rich and bountiful. In her nothingness she has everything. In her poverty she has had no distractions or false gods and therefore has been able to see clearly the hand of God in her life. Everything received freely and lavishly from the Lord, Mary has welcomed and given joyful praise, a praise that naturally flows into humble actions and thankful deeds.

First Single Bead: Our Father

Let us pray during this mystery that we may embrace the virtue of humility which is always the first stage of the spiritual life.

Ten Beads: Hail Mary for each one

As we contemplate the humble service of Mary, the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, to her cousin Elizabeth let us ask ourselves some questions. Are we humble? Do we recognise that everything we have is from God? If we were to have our portrait painted what would it say to the viewer? Is this the true image we wish to leave the world or do we need to humbly start a new canvas and begin again? What is our Magnificat? What are we thankful to God for? Are we selective and prejudice in the people we choose to serve? Does service depend on how much effort it involves for us personally?

Single Bead: Glory be

As we pray the Glory Be today, let it be a prayer of thanks to God the Holy Trinity for his saving love and mercy. In the Fatima Prayer may it be an act of love for others and we remember that today is the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

Tomorrow we will meditate on the third Joyful Mystery, The Nativity.
God Bless and keep praying. Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us.
Fr. O'Brien

The Joyful Mysteries Thursday 14th May 2020

Third Joyful Mystery: The Nativity



‘...Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David’s House and line, in order to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.’ (Lk 2: 1-7)

When a man enters a monastery, he is not automatically given a habit, a cell and a set of instructions on how to be the perfect monk. Instead he is entrusted to the care of a Novice Master. St. Benedict, composed a Rule for his monks back in the 6th century and in chapter 58 he wrote the following about the Novice Master:

‘A senior chosen for his skill in winning souls should be appointed to look after them [Novices] with careful attention.’

The skill of ‘winning souls’ and the emphasis on ‘careful attention’ is essential for the Novice Master to have, if he is to accompany his students in discerning the will of God. The new monk is given practical assistance from the Master when it comes to the teaching of monastic etiquette and tradition, passing on monastery customs and giving helpful guidance and techniques in meditating and praying with the Scriptures. However, this is only one part of the Novice Masters role. The description given by St. Benedict in the Rule saw the job of the Master as being more than just a teacher. He stated that a senior monk should be selected for his skill in touching souls and being diligent and attentive to their care. When I was a monk it was not so much the formal teachings given by the Novice Master that helped me but his example, how he lived the monastic life himself.

I was able to see at first-hand how he lived and breathed this unique vocation as a monk just by time together. Daily we would eat together, pray together, talk and share together and work together. Manuals, guides and directives are all very well and good but nothing beats the actual lived experience of another who is generous enough to share that. (Photo of when I was Fr. Patrick)



Experience and realness are the key words to unlocking today's third Joyful Mystery of the Nativity. Our God is not some distant spiritual entity that hovers above the earth. Our God is not some convoluted high ideal that is unattainable. Our God is not some 'airy fairy' notion! Our God is real, true, and genuine. As it was through the experience of seeing the Novice Master live his daily life that helped me to grow so it is in the Nativity that helps us to grow in faith. Jesus, the Son of God, became flesh and blood, he became Incarnate. He allowed us to experience him not at a distance but amongst us and dwelling with us. It is this encounter, this experience that we are still talking about today 2000 years later! It is this moment in human history that has shaped and changed the world and opened the way towards heaven. God the Son allowed us to experience his real and living presence in order to help us believe and nurture our faith.

Let's reflect back to Moses for a moment to see how blessed we truly are.

***'Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I beg you.'* (Ex 33:18)**

Moses had heard the voice of God, he had felt His presence and so it was only natural that he wanted to see the face of God. Simply put, Moses wanted to experience the fullness of God. This is the answer the Almighty gives:

“You cannot see my face,” he said ‘for man cannot see me and live.’ And the Lord said, ‘Here is a place beside me. You must stand on the rock, and when my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with my hand while I pass by. Then I will take my hand away and you shall see the back of me; but my face is not to be seen.’” (Ex 33:20-23)

Moses is partly granted his request to see God but only his back, for to see the face of the Lord God Almighty would be too much and result in death. His glory and light would be too powerful and overwhelming for a fragile human to gaze upon, even for a great prophet like Moses. Moses’ experience of God is not perfect or clear. There is something missing.



Like Moses, God’s people for a long time were only able to experience the Lord God in a particular way. There was still some distance, some obstacle and barrier in the relationship between Creator and creation and this as we know was down to sin. Human beings free and purposeful choice to turn away from God, to prefer darkness to light, to worship the ‘I’ and ‘Me’ rather than the Creator. All this obviously had an effect upon peoples experience of God.

It was God’s mercy that broke down that dividing wall of sin built by us. It was God’s love that sent his only Son to dwell among us. On the night of the Nativity shepherds did not hide in the clefts of rocks and wise men did not shun the bright light of a star. All those people gathered around the manger were the first to have the honour and privilege to see the face of God Himself in Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh. Moses’ experience of God never allowed him the grace to see and gaze upon the face of Divine Love Himself. It is through the Incarnation that we are blessed and have been able to experience God who is real, he took on flesh and blood.

As the Novice Master teaches the student by his example and simply living the monastic life so God Himself drew his people into this authentic and genuine mystery by becoming Incarnate. Because of the Incarnation God is not some passing fancy for us. He has physically rubbed shoulders with us. His voice was heard, his body was seen, his blood was wiped and his tears dried. His meals were cooked and eaten; his thirst quenched. He touched and healed. He spoke and taught. He died, was buried and truly rose from the dead. He is Risen, Alive and will come again. The painting below by Caravaggio says it all.



The mystery of the Nativity is not just about the Word becoming Incarnate. But through his bodily presence, he has drawn us all into the presence of God, in a unique and intimate way. No barrier's or walls, no obstacles or illusions. No; just simply the experience of God amongst His people, loving them.

First Single Bead: Our Father

Let us begin this decade in a spirit of thanks. Thanks that we are loved so much by God that he came amongst us. He took on our fragility and humanity so that we could share in his divinity and return to the heart of the Father.

Ten Beads: Hail Mary for each one

Let us ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to imitate our Lady.

'As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.'
(Lk 2:19)

The enormity of what took place at the Nativity did not overwhelm Mary but in her gentle and quiet way she embraced the love and mercy of God in the great mystery of the Incarnation. May we too treasure this miracle of Christmas not just once a year but 365 days a year.

Single Bead: Glory be

Let us remember the work of God the Holy Trinity and reflect on how we have experienced it in our lives and continue to experience it through the love and mercy that flows from the God of Life.

Tomorrow our Rosary Reflection will be postponed until Saturday. Instead tomorrow's posting will be information from the diocese and updates in regards to the Covid-19 pandemic.

God Bless and keep praying.
St. Matthias, pray for us.
Fr. O'Brien

The Joyful Mysteries
Saturday 16th May 2020
Fourth Joyful Mystery: The Presentation



‘And when the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, they took him (Jesus) up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord – observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord.’ (Lk 2:22-28)

Waiting. Waiting...

More Waiting...

Waiting patiently...Waiting for ages...

Still waiting...Waiting...

Since the Covid-19 lockdown, how many of us have found ourselves waiting more than usual?

Waiting in the supermarket queue; waiting outside the post office and bank; waiting for the Amazon delivery; waiting for the email; waiting for the phone; waiting for the news update? Are we more patient now? Does waiting bother us? Is it all worth the wait?



It is this 'waiting' that draws us into today's Joyful Mystery of the Presentation. We meet two people in St. Luke's account of the Presentation:

'Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon...It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord...' (Lk 2:25-26)
'There was a prophetess also, Anna...She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over...' (Lk 2:36)

Anna and Simeon are described as being elderly, advanced in years and preparing for death. Most artistic depictions show the age of these two Holy people in their greying hair and stooped postures.



It would be wrong to see Simeon and Anna as simply old and aged, as being part of a bygone era, a past generation. They have so much wisdom to teach us because of their advanced years and their life experience. The sense of 'Waiting' is not inconvenient for these two, it is not a burden, but instead a grace filled space of time. In the preparation of waiting they have been shaped and moulded by God and so are able to recognise Him immediately.

A good image to illustrate this is the athlete. A person does not turn up at the race track one day, out of the blue, and launch into a gold winning sprint. No. They go into strict training and practice over a substantial amount of time. Think of those who begin preparing for the Olympics years in advance. The athlete is strict in their training regime from exercise to diet. They begin to learn over time what their strengths and weaknesses are. They study the form of their competition and soon begin to plan what techniques they can use in winning the race. The life of the athlete, their every moment, their every minute and their every second is focussed quite simply on the finishing line.

Anna and Simeon are spiritual athletes. Their whole life has been a training programme focused on God. Through prayer, fasting, worship, meditating on the Scriptures, living the commandments of love, mercy and forgiveness; these have all been aspects of their exercise regime. On the day when a small family approach the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem, Anna and Simeon, see the finishing line, the goal that their lives of waiting and patience has been preparing for. St. Luke records the joy of these two athletes when they see their prize, when they see the Christ Child.

***'Simeon said 'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace,
just as you promised;
because my eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared for all the nations to see,
a light to enlighten the pagans
and the glory of your people Israel.' (Lk 2:29-32)***

'She [Anna] came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.' (Lk 2:38)

Waiting can be tedious and frustrating, even at the best of times. However, in our spiritual lives when the Lord can appear to be silent and unresponsive in answering prayer, then we fall into the trap of our faith beginning to wane. Anna and Simeon teach us not to walk down this road of being disheartened. In the gift of their old age they show us the importance of persevering and waiting because the Lord is present, He is attentive and He always keeps His promises.

There is a lovely image from the letter of St. James in the New Testament about waiting and how in waiting we see it's fruits.

'Now be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too have to be patient; do not loose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon.' (Jm 5:7-8)

The question for us is this: Will we recognise the Lord when he comes? If we become so engrossed in our frustrations about waiting and the inconvenience it causes to our egos and pride then we are distracted. If we are distracted then our eyes are not on the goal, the finishing line of our life who is God and God alone. Anna and Simeon are two spiritual athletes who were not distracted but patiently vigilant and attentively waiting for the coming of the Lord. We know this because we first meet them in the Temple of Jerusalem, the place of prayer and worship. Because they were expectantly waiting in the spirit of trust and hope they recognised the Messiah in the tiny bundle of swaddling clothes held tenderly by a mother.

First Single Bead: Our Father

This prayer that Jesus taught us has the words: *'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'* The practice of waiting and patience is obvious. We are praying for that time when the Kingdom of God will come. When and at what time and date we do not know, but we are patient and we wait because come it will. Let us ask the intercession of Anna and Simeon to help us in our vigilance for the coming of the Lord and His Kingdom. When He does return may He find us ready and alert.

Ten Beads: Hail Mary for each one

On the day of the Presentation, the outside world took little notice of the mother and baby entering the Temple area. It was only the expectant eyes, the eyes of faith that gave Anna and Simeon hope and joy in the unremarkable everyday sight of parent and child. Let us ask Our Blessed Mother to pray for us that we may never loose heart and become distracted in our faith and prayers. May she be that beacon of light that helps guide and keep our sight on the Lord at all times.

Single Bead: Glory be

As we praise the Holy Trinity in the Glory Be let us be humbled. Humbled because God came to Anna and Simeon, as he comes to us each and every day, not in a triumphant procession, a large bustling entourage but in the simplicity of a young mum called Mary, carrying a tiny baby, embraced by Joseph an attentive father.

Tomorrow we will meditate on the fifth Joyful Mystery, The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple.

God Bless and keep praying.

Fr. O'Brien

The Joyful Mysteries Sunday 17th May 2020

Fifth Joyful Mystery: Finding the Child Jesus in the Temple



'Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he [Jesus] was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When they were on their way home after the feast, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it...Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and replies.' (Lk 2:41-50)

Pray to St. Anthony! Glasses, phone, TV Remote, wallet and purse; whatever you may have lost ask St. Anthony and he will find it. Every good Catholic knows this piece of wisdom, even the pagan and lapsed. The prayer that is sometimes recited to this miracle working Saint is, ***"Saint Anthony, please look around; something is lost and must be found."***



Where does this tradition come from for invoking the intercession of St. Anthony? One story that has been handed down from generation to generation begins with the theft of a book. This book was the prayer book of Anthony which he would use daily as it contained the psalms. The words of the psalms allowed him to praise God, to feel His Presence and to reflect on his relationship with the Lord. The words of the prayer book were oxygen for his spiritual lungs. Every syllable, nuance and sound was straight from the life giving breath of God.

Anthony's sadness and grief at losing his prayer book became so intense that day and night he would not and could not settle until he found it. The energy and effort he put into seeking and searching for that prayer book became supernatural. And so it happened one night when the thief, a young novice, was asleep, he awoke in terror to see an apparition before him. The spirit was the grieving Anthony wailing for the loss of his precious possession. The novice realising the miraculous and divine nature of this incident quickly returned Anthony's property and confessed his crime.

That is one traditional story associated with why St. Anthony will help you find something lost. The other is connected with the saint's eloquent preaching. Through his gift of speaking about God and preaching the Faith many lost souls were won for the Kingdom of God. (I prefer the haunting apparition story!)



The current novel I'm reading is called '*Silence*' by the Japanese Catholic author Shusaku Endo. I'm only halfway through, but without giving too much of the plot away, it is set in 17th century Japan where Christianity has been outlawed. The narrator of the story is a Jesuit priest and missionary called Rodrigues. He has arrived on the shores of Japan and begins ministering, secretly, to the underground Catholic communities he finds.

Through Rodrigues we encounter the persecution and torture of Catholic's who will not renounce their faith. There is a gruesome episode where two devout villagers who have helped the Jesuit priest, suffer a prolonged and exhausting death. As Rodrigues witnesses their demise from a safe distance on the hillside, he begins to ask the question – Where is God? A natural question in the face of suffering and evil. Where is God? One of the victims begins to sing a hymn which concludes abruptly when he dies from sheer exhaustion. Then there is silence. Silence. All the priest hears from this moment on is the silence of God.

The chapter I've just finished however offers a glimmer of hope to the silence Rodrigues experiences. On a journey to find another underground Catholic community he crouches down to drink from a pool of water on the roadside.

'The clouds disappeared from the water and instead there appeared the face of a man – yes, there reflected in the water was a tired, hollow face. I don't know why, but at that moment I thought of the face of yet another man. This was the face of a crucified man, a face which for so many centuries had given inspiration to artists.'
(extract from *Silence*, Shusaku Endo)

At a low moment in the priests life, at a time when he is doubting, when he seems to have lost Jesus and all he can hear is silence, the Lord uniquely makes his Presence felt. Not in a glorified and radiant state but in a muddy roadside puddle. The face that Rodrigues sees is not the noble image of a distant king but a close and present crucified Saviour. A Saviour who knows and has experienced the trials and tribulations of this life. This closeness of Jesus reminds me of Hebrews:

'For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weakness with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin. Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help.' (Hebrews 5:15-16)

Rodrigues, the persecuted suffering missionary, has not lost Jesus. In fact, he never lost Jesus. Jesus was always present but now in silence, when there is no distraction, he sees the Lord more clearly.

During this time of the global Coronavirus pandemic many things have changed and have been lost. The loss of lives, the loss of everyday routines, the loss of social gatherings and the loss of close and present human contact because of social distancing. But in this loss, something is found. I have seen the work of God the Holy Spirit each and every day from the news, phone calls and looking around me. God is not silent at this moment; God is not absent but has come closer as always in His unique and mysterious ways.

The Thursday 8pm public show of appreciation has not died out on Catlow Hall Street after these last two months; in fact, it's got louder. When I go to the Lychgate there is a really sense of togetherness and people let on to each other. There is no rushing but simply being present and appreciating the work of all key workers.



An appreciation of the blessing of family seems to have grown. The simple joy (though tiring and exhausting) of spending time with each other. Listening and discovering new things about each other. Bonds of unity becoming strengthened and love, real love, manifesting itself in thought, word and deed.

Parishioners are getting to know each other in different ways and meeting new members of the St. Mary's family. Those helping to do shopping, those ringing mobiles and landlines and face-timing all these relationships of faith are being cemented by the Holy Spirit.

As far as I can see the Lord is not lost, as he never went away. Through us his disciples, and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, he is present. As the suffering Jesuit priest saw in the roadside muddy puddle, the face of his compassionate Saviour, so we in our present trials can see the face of Jesus in our brothers and sisters.

First Single Bead: Our Father

Let us ask the Father today for the care of those who are bewildered at this moment in time. Those stricken with grief with the loss of a loved one and those mourning the familiar lives they had before Covid-19.

Ten Beads: Hail Mary for each one

Mary, beside herself at not being able to find Jesus her son, was given these comforting words at their reunion:

“Why were you looking for me?” he replied, ‘Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father’s affairs?’ (Lk 2:49)

The Lord reminds Mary that when she turns to God she will always find the Son. Let us ask the intercession of Our Lady to help us remember in times of doubt and uncertainty that Christ our Lord is always present and doing his loving Father's business for the salvation of the world.

Single Bead: Glory be

In God the Holy Trinity we see the image of a loving family. Three Persons, One God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit united in their love. United in their work of mercy, reaching out to a fallen and corrupted world. Let us ask God to continue to help us in the ups and downs of our life.

When we pray the Fatima prayer let us love those brothers and sisters who have consciously chosen to walk away from the Lord and have freely decided to not live by his commandments and teachings.

Hail Holy Queen

Since the 12th Century the '*Hail Holy Queen*' has been prayed by Catholics and it is the prayer that we normally recite to complete a rosary after meditating on a set of mysteries.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.

Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Amen.

Each day I go to the Chapel of Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle, and before her statue I pray the *Hail Holy Queen*. My intention when I pray those words is always for you, the parishioners of St. Mary's. I have also discovered my gift for flower arranging! Each week I make sure she has flowers as a votive offering for all of us, the St. Mary's family.

Final Prayer

Let us pray:

O God, whose only begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life. Grant, we beseech Thee, that by meditating on these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

God Bless you all, may the Angels watch over you and may Our Lady and the Saints always pray for you. Amen

I hope my inadequate reflections have in some small way helped you in prayer.

God Bless and keep praying.
Fr. O'Brien