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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
Catlow Hall Street, Oswaldtwistle
Lancashire
BB53EZ

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



Sunday 21st February 2021
First Sunday of Lent

Dear brothers and sisters,

Have you ever watched one of those classic epic films like Spartacus (1960)? Cleopatra (1963)? Or even Gladiator (2000)? What I love about them isn't the plethora of famous actors and actresses who star in them like Kirk Douglas, Elizabeth Taylor, Laurence Olivier or Russell Crowe but the epic battle scenes they have in them. Hundreds upon hundreds of film extras re-enacting the clash of tribes and empires. Swords flailing, arrows piercing the sky, the thunderous roaring of hordes on the battle field and the immense shouting of bloodthirsty crowds in the gladiatorial arena. It may surprise you that St. Paul uses epic battle language himself when describing the daily life of a Christian!

'So stand your ground, with truth buckled round your waist, and integrity for a breastplate, wearing for the shoes on your feet the eagerness to spread the gospel of peace and always carrying the shield of faith so that you can use it to put out the burning arrows of the evil one. And then you must accept salvation from God to be your helmet and receive the word of God from the Spirit to use as a sword.' (Ephesians 6: 14-17)

St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, described the spiritual warfare that believers of Jesus would have to engage in. A war that is not optional. Battles that are unavoidable. ***'Put God's armour on so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics.'*** (Eph 6:11)



Who is the enemy in this spiritual warfare? The devil. The devil who has been around since Eden and continues to distort truth, continues to cause rifts and divisions, continues to shake the foundations of our faith in the Lord. In Lent, St. Paul's words to the Ephesians seems very apt especially when we are all trying to draw closer to Jesus and yet find ourselves bombarded by temptations and under fire from distractions.

I promised the Lord that part of my fasting routine, my spiritual battle, would involve leaving the biscuit tin alone between meals. Ash Wednesday was less than four days ago and I'm sitting at the computer typing this letter with cookie crumbs all over the keyboard and desk! What happened in four days? Temptation and a weak will.

The penitential season of Lent and the practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving which we take up during this time are meant to be ways in which we move closer to Christ. Scoffing biscuits four days after Ash Wednesday isn't going to cause the Heavens to fall down around me but it is an indicator about where my heart and mind are. The crumbs around my feet are letting me know that so far my heart and mind are anywhere but near the Lord! Lent can be a battle we choose to surrender early on or it can be the spiritual fight we seriously engage with using body, soul and spirit. Remember, anything worth having does involve hard work and putting up a fight and I think we can all agree that Our Lord and the life he offers is worth the fight. Just ask the Saints.



Good News! We are not alone nor defenceless in our spiritual warfare. Here are five ways we can co-operate with God's grace when we feel overwhelmed by temptation in our Lenten practices and distracted in our daily spiritual lives.

1. Prayer. It sounds so simple but it's so often overlooked. When we face troubles, challenges, worries and anxieties we can turn to God who is always attentive and listening. He will help if only we ask. Calling upon God in the midst of trials and tribulations will always give us the strength and confidence to overcome.

2. The name of Jesus. Invoking the name of Jesus is a powerful weapon in our spiritual armoury. Saint Peter firmly taught this as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

'For all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.' (Acts 4:12)

Sadly many people, because of lazy tongues and ignorance, use Our Lord's name in a derogatory way to curse and make dramatic statements. However the Holy Name, when called upon with a sincere and true heart can defend and dispel the assaults of the devil.

'Jesus said, 'In my name they will cast out devils...' (Mark 16:17)

'Naught but the name of Jesus can restrain the impulse of anger, repress the swelling of pride, cure the wound of envy, bridle the onslaught of luxury, extinguish the flame of carnal desire – can temper avarice, and put to flight impure and ignoble thoughts.' Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

3. The Sign of the Cross. St. Cyril, one of the early Church Fathers, wrote how the sign of the cross could terrify ungodly creatures because it was the sign of Christ's victory over the devil and death. Whenever we make the sign of the cross ***In the Name of the Father + and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit***, we are reminding ourselves of God's unconditional and merciful love. God the Trinity is a communion of persons bonded by perfect love. God the Father shared His love with the world by giving us God the Son who died for us sinners and rose again on the third day. The Gift of God the Holy Spirit allows us to enter into this mystery of divine love. Whenever you feel lost, downcast, isolated or confronted by temptation then make the sign of the cross because its power and meaning are transformative.

4. Guardian Angel. From the moment we are conceived God appoints an angel to watch over us and pray for us.

'Besides each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.'

Saint Basil

Read through the Gospels and you will see the numerous times when angels were sent to help Our Lord and minister to Him. From the end of the forty days and forty nights ordeal in the wilderness to the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the Lord is always attended by Angels. So many Catholics neglect to turn to their Guardian Angel and do not know that traditional beautiful prayer:

*O Angel of God
My guardian dear
To Whom God's love
Commits me here
Ever this day/night
Be at my side
To light and guard
To rule and guide. Amen.*

5. Acknowledge your weakness. It may seem absurd as a powerful spiritual weapon but when we acknowledge humbly our weaknesses and beg God not to be tempted beyond our abilities He does listen and He does act. Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his book, *'Jesus of Nazareth'* that when we pray the Our Father and recite the phrase *'...lead us not into temptation...'* it is as if we were saying to God,

'I know that I need trials so that my nature can be purified. When you decide to send me these trials, when you give evil some room to manoeuvre, as you did with Job, then please remember that my strength goes only so far...Don't set too wide the boundaries within which I may be tempted, and be close to me with your protecting hand when it becomes too much for me.'

Brothers and sisters, I pray that we will all embrace this season of Lent and check our hearts and minds to see where they are in relation to Christ Our Lord. The biscuit crumbs on the desk have reminded me that I have a war to wage but with God's grace and using those five weapons I have a chance. Will you be in the trenches moving closer to the Great Reward or on the side-lines quietly fading away?

Welcome & Prayers

Traditionally the First Sunday of Lent is when the Rite of Election takes place at the Cathedral. It is a liturgy that formally welcomes all those who wish to be received into the Church. In this special celebration, our Bishop, in the name of God and of the whole of God's Family in the Diocese of Salford, will 'elect' or call those adults who are preparing for Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at Easter and invite them to sign the Book of the Elect. This year at St. Mary's we pray for Wesley, one of our young adults and as many of you will know a regular volunteer steward for Holy Mass. Wesley will hopefully be received into full communion with the Church at Easter so please keep him in your prayers. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic this year's Rite of Election will take place online with the Bishop. Let's also pray for those new members of our parish who have been received into the Church over the last three years:

Amourelle, Andrew, Bernadette, Daisie, Emma, Gerry, Helen, Jonathan, Mark and Theo. May the Lord continue to bless and sustain them, and all those here at St. Mary's over the last 124 years, who have had the courage to actively respond to His call and follow Him. In these difficult times may our witness as a living and worshipping family to the Risen Christ edify and support others to heed the call and become disciples. Amen.

ABC (About Becoming Catholic)

During the last year of lockdowns, social distancing, furloughs and daily life being interrupted many people have found themselves with time to think. To think about the direction of their own lives, to think about the fragility of this world, to think about what happens after death and even daring to contemplate the person of Jesus Christ! If you or somebody you know is contemplating such things then tell them to email me at sean.obrien@dioceseofsalford.org.uk or call the presbytery 01254 232 433 (leaving a voicemail if I don't answer straight away). We are made for the Lord and we will only find real happiness, true purpose and total completeness in adoring and loving Him.

**'You have made us for Yourself, O Lord,
and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.'
(St. Augustine of Hippo)**

The Sacrament of Confession

Those who took the opportunity to come to Confession in Advent will testify to the safe and prayerful way in which the Sacrament was celebrated. This Lent, because of parishioners volunteering as stewards, I am able to offer Confessions on the following dates:

**Saturday 27th February 2021, 9am -10am.
Saturday 6th March 2021, 9am -10am.**

The Rosary will be publicly prayed in church, by kind volunteers, during these periods. The intention for each rosary will be that all faithful disciples of the Lord will return to Him in this most merciful Sacrament that He instituted. The invitation is there, the welcome is warm and His forgiveness is REAL!

Young Parishioners of St. Mary's

Many of us have been blessed by God through our young parishioners at our Friday evening Masses. Not only those on the sacramental programme but other young people and their families whose presence and witness remind us of hope in the future. They definitely keep me on my toes during the Homily! Let's pray for Faye, Francesca, Georgia, Luke, Poppy and Tessa as they prepare this Lent to make their First Confession and receive Jesus' forgiveness. We also keep Rheon in our prayers who will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in the next few months.

Sunday Prayer Resource – "The Lord's Day at Home"

For those still at home and not attending Mass the Liturgy Office has prepared a service called "The Lord's Day at Home", based on the Sunday Scriptures, that you can pray on your own or with your family. It is particularly aimed at those not able to follow a Mass on the internet. This week's Lord's Day at Home resource can be found: www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/news/covid19/lordsdayathome

Stations of the Cross

Though we are unable to publicly gather for the Stations of the Cross this year in church, it does not mean that we cannot pray them. Thanks to John Hughes, 'Our Internet Man', you will find St. Mary's Stations of the Cross on the parish website. Visit www.saintmarysoswaldtwistle.co.uk

Lent - Weekly Eco-Thought for Parishes

The First Sunday of Lent 21st February 2021

From the first reading: God spoke to Noah and his sons, 'See, I establish my Covenant with you and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you.' God pledges never to destroy his creation. Can we make that same pledge to God and safeguard the gift God has given us? Think of one practical step that you will take this Lent and beyond.

A Message from Global Healing

The Global Catholic Movement invites you to "Global Healing." In 2015, Pope Francis published his ground-breaking letter on the environment *Laudato Si'*. Since then, millions of people worldwide have joined the global movement to address the environmental crisis our world is facing. This Lent, we are inviting YOU to join us for a series of reflective evenings with inspiring speakers, prayer and discussion, using the film-based resource "Global Healing". These engaging documentaries will inform and challenge people to respond to Pope Francis' call to Care for Our Common Home.

Suitable for all who are concerned about what is happening to our world and who want to take action. When? Six Thursdays from 18th February – 25th March 2021, 7.30pm – 8.30pm

How to join? Email jane@catholicclimatemovement.global

Hosted by GCCM *Laudato Si'* Animators in the UK.

"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience...Truly, much can be done!"

(Laudato Si', 217, 180)

Lenten Reading

Lent is that time when we push ourselves to come closer to Our Lord through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. It can be so easy to excuse ourselves from these practices but if we truly embrace them, then the fruits and blessings they produce will always draw us closer to Jesus in ways we never imagined before. Lent is a time for love. Love that is not just intellectual but real and shows itself in action. The following book titles are just suggestions that you may want to use for spiritual reading during the Lenten period.

The Faith

Jesus of Nazareth. Holy Week: From the entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection by Pope Benedict XVI

Reasons to Believe, How to Understand, Explain and Defend the Catholic Faith by Scott Hahn

Spirituality

Toward God, The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer by Michael Casey

Praying the Rosary like never before by Edward Sri

The Power of Silence, Against the dictatorship of noise by Cardinal Robert Sarah

The Rule of Saint Benedict in English, edited by Dom. Timothy Fry OSB

Befriending Silence, Discovering the Gifts of Cistercian Spirituality by Carl McColman

Into His Likeness. Be Transformed as a Disciple of Christ by Edward Sri

An Exorcist tells his Story by Fr. Gabriele Amorth

The Blessed Sacrament

Eucharistic Miracles by Joan Carroll Cruz

7 Secrets of the Eucharist by Vinny Flynn

Our Lady and the Saints

Hail Holy Queen, The Mother of God in the Word of God by Scott Hahn

Lives of the Saints by Alban Butler

The Life and Prayers of Saint Michael the Archangel by Wyatt North

Saint Mary Magdalene, Prophetess and Eucharistic Love by Fr. Seán Davidson

The Confession of Saint Patrick, translated by John Skinner

The Life and Miracles of Saint Benedict by Pope Gregory the Great

Saint John Bosco by F.A Forbes

The Story of a Soul, The autobiography of the Little Flower by St. Therese of Lisieux

Saint Maria Goretti, In Garments All Red by Fr. Godfrey Poage

Diocese of Salford Lent Course

LET US DREAM -- Our Lenten Journey with Pope Francis, guided by Austen Ivereigh.

Over the Wednesdays of Lent we will explore Pope Francis' book, *Let us Dream*, with the assistance of Austen Ivereigh, who worked closely with Pope Francis on the book. *Let Us Dream* is the first book by a pope in response to a specific crisis, and offers us Pope Francis's spiritual guidance for humanity in the throes of the Covid crisis, helping us to seize the opportunity for conversion and change — as individuals and as a society. The course will begin with an Introductory presentation by Austen on Wednesday 24th February at 7pm.

Every Wednesday from 2nd March until 31st March we will meet 7pm-8.30pm, again with an opening reflection from Austen, to explore the book in five sections, share our thoughts, ask questions and deepen our understanding of the Lord's call to us, to our Church and world through the

teaching of Pope Francis. This is a wonderful opportunity and the Bishop and Diocese are very grateful to Austen Ivereigh for making this possible.

To sign up, please email formation@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

<https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/lentcourse/>

Online Parish Events

Parishioners from different parishes have been organising online rosaries, online sing-a-longs and virtual coffee mornings for their churches. I think this is a wonderful idea as many children and grandchildren have been stepping up to help older family members link up and use computers, mobile phones, i-pads etc. Any parishioner here at St. Mary's who would like to facilitate this has my complete support and I am happy to put them in touch with diocesan safeguarding department so that all correct procedures and online safety protocol can be followed.

Seven Sundays Devotions for the Year of St. Joseph

15 minutes before each Sunday Mass (Vigil 6:30pm/Sun 10am) we are continuing our prayer and meditation on the seven sorrows and seven joys of St. Joseph asking for his intercession. For those who want to participate in this devotion but are not presently able to attend the Holy Mass you will find prayers to St. Joseph on the parish website at www.saintmarysoswaldtwistle.co.uk

St. Joseph Petition Box

In front of our parish statue of St. Joseph there is a prayer box. I invite you to place any petitions that you may have in that box the next time you are at church. You may want to ask St. Joseph to pray for a loved one, to intercede for a soul in purgatory, to keep vigil over a friend or family member you have not been able to visit because of the pandemic. Your petition could be for a family going through financial troubles, mental health issues or your prayer to St. Joseph maybe for a person who has lapsed and walked away from Christ and His Church. Whatever your prayer is write it at home and then place it in the box before St. Joseph who will always bring your needs to God.

Prayer to Saint Joseph

To you, O blessed Joseph, do we come in our afflictions, and having implored the help of your most holy Spouse, we confidently invoke your patronage also.

Through that charity which bound you to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God and through the paternal love with which you embraced the Child Jesus, we humbly beg you graciously to regard the inheritance which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood, and with your power and strength to aid us in our necessities.

O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family, defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ;

O most loving father, ward off from us every contagion of error and corrupting influence;

O our most mighty protector, be kind to us and from heaven assist us in our struggle with the power of darkness.

As once you rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril, so now protect God's Holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity; shield, too, each one of us by your constant protection, so that, supported by your example and your aid, we may be able to live piously, to die in holiness, and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven. Amen.

Prayer of Pope Leo XIII

Covid-19 Health and Safety Reminder

The government has allowed places of worship to remain open during this third national lockdown but we must not become complacent. The diocese have asked us to remind people of the following procedures:

- Please make sure you are wearing a face mask before you enter the church building. Nobody should be putting a mask on once they are sat down at a pew or in the entrance/foyer near the stewards.
- Please do not remove your mask to speak to a steward or another parishioner in church. This shows a lack of safe respect for others. We all need to care and look out for each other.
- Please wear your mask when you are coming forward to receive Holy Communion. Once, and only once, you are stood before the priest then you can remove your mask. Communion is not a race so please take your time and do not rush. Once you have received the Blessed Sacrament then replace your mask and leave the church building.
- Please do sanitise your hands at the stations provided at both entrances and exits of church.
- Please keep the Two Meter Rule. This new strain of Covid-19 is more easily transmitted therefore it's important that we all keep to this practice.
- Please do not congregate to socialise on church property before or after Mass/Liturgy.
- Please do not come to church if you have Covid-19 symptoms, have tested positive for Covid-19 or are in isolation.

Mass Bookings

To book a place at Mass via our telephone service then please ring (01254) 232 433 on Wednesdays between 5pm – 6pm. To book a place at Mass online please visit the parish website www.saintmarysoswaldtwistle.co.uk 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).

God Bless and keep praying.
Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, pray for us.
St. Paul, pray for us.

Fr. O'Brien