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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
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Sunday 21st March 2021
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Dear brothers and sisters,

You have all heard sayings that encourage perseverance like, *'Practice makes perfect'* or *'Slow and steady wins the race'* and my favourite, *'Don't be discouraged. It's often the last key in the bunch that opens the lock'*. Throughout our lives as disciples, we can feel that we are simply just going through the motions. The Lord seems to ask so much of us, to love unconditionally, to forgive wholeheartedly, to pray unceasingly and to carry our crosses daily. There are times that many of us may feel that walking in Our Lord's footsteps is impossible and beyond our capability. That deceitful voice inside says, *'Give up! What's the point carrying on? You will never be holy enough, your only human.'* This is the deceitful voice that we need to close our ears and hearts to because it limits our lives and relationship with God.

In St. John's Gospel we encounter a man who embodies perseverance and shows us that if we practice this virtue then the grace of God will not only surprise us but will revive us on our spiritual journey. We first meet this man at the pool of Bethesda by the Temple in Jerusalem. Along the porticoes of this pool were crowds of sick people who hoped that the healing waters would cure them of their various illnesses.

***'...for at intervals the angel of the Lord came down into the pool, and the water was disturbed, and the first person to enter the water from the disturbance was cured of any ailment he suffered from.'* (John 5:4)**

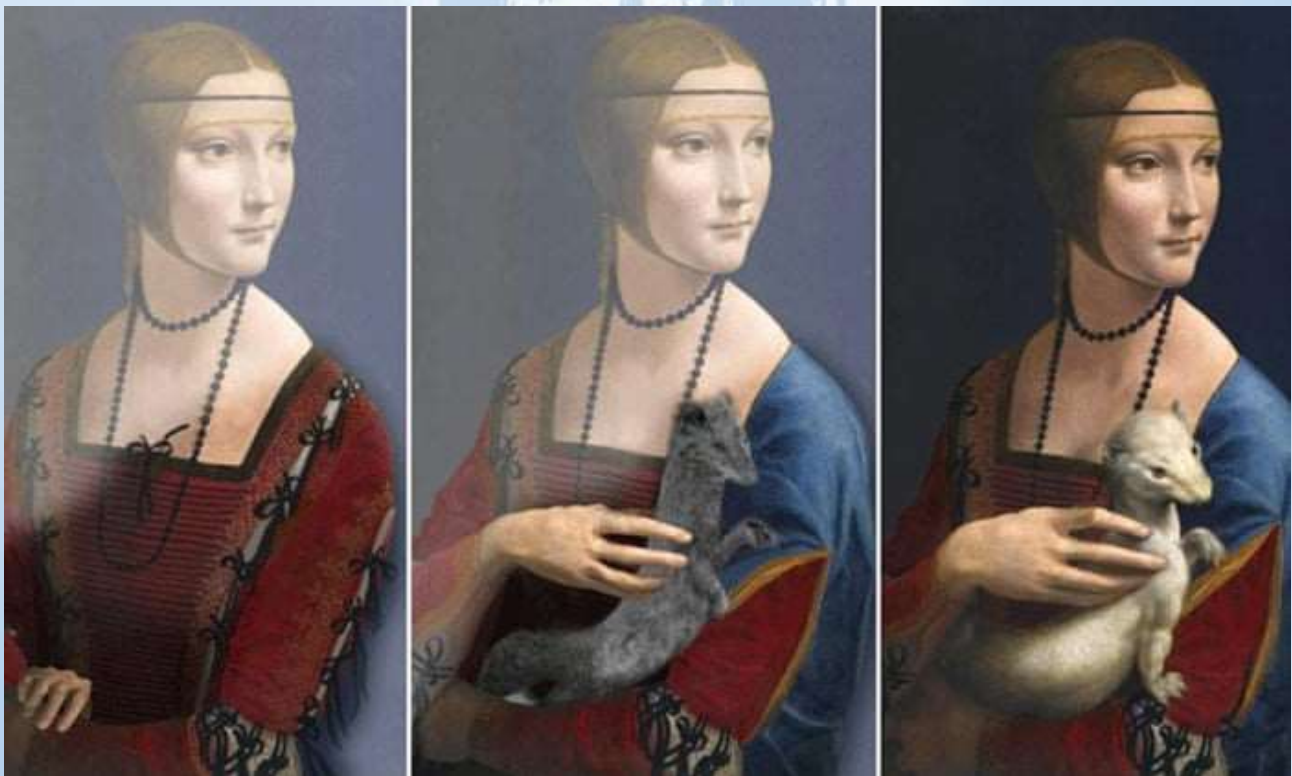


The man waiting by the pool is almost certainly paralysed and at the age of 38 years old he has not given up on receiving a cure from God for his affliction. He describes his current predicament to Jesus:

‘Sir,’ replied the sick man ‘I have no one to put me in the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way, someone else gets there before me.’ (John 5:7)

Just imagine, 38 years of paralysis, 38 years of waiting for a cure, 38 years of struggling, 38 years of being overlooked and always relegated to the side-lines. Despite that length of time and all the ups and downs that the sick man has experienced we still find him persevering in hope for a cure. How often have you given up when the going got tough? When was the last time you threw your hands up in surrender because the task before you proved too daunting? What excuses do you use to justify your giving up? The paralysed man persevered in waiting for a cure, he did not give up and his waiting paid off because when the Lord appeared he found the sick man ready and eager to be healed.

Leonardo da Vinci is known the world over for his artistic masterpieces. However, as experts have discovered, underneath the surface of these great works are the clues that show Leonardo’s perseverance to reach perfection.



The painting above is known as ‘Lady with an Ermine’ and was painted by da Vinci between 1489 - 1490. Art historians and experts, using all kinds of technology, discovered under the visible painting two further original portraits that reveal the development of the final masterpiece. Leonardo was obviously not satisfied with his first attempt and persevered to reach the final painting. We can see the adding of the blue cloak, the re-stylising of the Ermine and the re-positioning of the Lady’s arm, hand and fingers. From the first strokes of his brush to the final outcome it all took da Vinci time, energy, vision and most importantly perseverance.

We too are called like the paralysed man and the great artist to persevere in our spiritual lives, in our relationship with God the Holy Trinity. If we've failed to fully embrace those Lenten tools of prayer, fasting and alms-giving then we mustn't give up. It's only the fifth week of Lent – we still have time to start again and pick up from where we lost momentum. If we find ourselves distracted at the Holy Mass, during our Rosary or even attempting to do some spiritual reading we mustn't give up too quickly. There will be always distractions, it's how we tackle these annoying habits and thoughts. To give up is too easy and we will always find an excuse, but if we persevere out of love, out of wanting to deepen our relationship with Jesus, then he will always give us His grace to carry on and aid us along our path in this life. It is in our perseverance, our hopeful waiting that the grace of God will come upon us most surprisingly and lead us to something better and beyond our wildest expectations. Will you continue to persevere out of love for Jesus to transform you into the artistic masterpiece he knows you have the potential to be?

Coronavirus Day of Reflection and Prayer

The diocesan Communication Department have sent out the following information to all parishes:

'Tuesday 23rd March is the anniversary of the start of the first lockdown and it to be marked in our country as a Day of Reflection. The Cardinal and Archbishop McMahon ask for all churches to be open on that day and for people to come and pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Established practice in stewarding and hygiene still needs to be followed. It is better for churches to be open for part of the day safely rather than to be open for the whole day in an unsafe manner.'

In response to the call to prayer by His Eminence Cardinal Nichols, St. Mary's will be open for Adoration on Tuesday 23rd March 2021 from 6pm -7pm. As always this has been made possible by parishioners volunteering as stewards. There will be no need to book for this time of prayer as some people may just wish to pop in for 10 minutes and others for the full hour. The doors will be open for people to come into the very presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and speak to Him from their hearts. It has been a long year since the first lockdown with many moments of sadness and frustration as well as blessings and moments of hope. Come and bring all these things to Our Lord who is the great healer.

'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.' (Matthew 11:28-30)

During the hour there will be different prayers and devotions which you may wish to pray depending how long or short your visit will be.

*6pm The Holy Hour begins with the Angelus and exposing the Blessed Sacrament.
6:30pm The Rosary will be publicly prayed for all those who have died during the pandemic.
6:55pm Benediction followed by closing prayers.*

**Blessed are you, O Lord our God, our shepherd,
who guided your people through the desert with a pillar of cloud by day,
a pillar of fire by night.**

**In this past year you have led us through the time of pandemic
and in these days of Lent you lead us on a pilgrimage of prayer
that time and again we might learn to be your people.**

**You open our eyes to your presence in the world
and you free our hands to be of service to others.**

**Refuge of the weary, healing for the sick, rest for the departed and comfort for those in grief,
blessed are you, O Lord and God, light in our darkness, stay with us on our journey. Amen**

The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

On Thursday 25th March 2021 we celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation when Mary gave her 'Yes' to God. Her 'Yes' brought light into darkness and hope into a despairing world. Her 'Yes' brought Christ the Lord into our very lives. The Mass for the Annunciation will be celebrated on Thursday at 10am. As always, during the pandemic, you can book online or via the Wednesday phone service between 5pm -6pm. Our Lady, pray for us.

The Sacrament of Confession

If over the last three weeks you have not been able to come to St. Mary's for the Sacrament of Confession there is an opportunity to go to the parish of St. Anne's and St. Joseph's on Saturday 27th March 2021.

11am – 12noon Outside by the grotto at St. Anne's, Cobham Road, Accrington. (Fr. Stamp)

11am – 12noon St. Joseph's Presbytery front garden, Belgarth Road, Accrington. (Fr. Livsey)

Confession will be offered again at St. Mary's on Good Friday 10am – 11am.

Year of St Joseph and the Family

Saint Joseph is a Principal Patron of our Diocese and the Bishop, following the example of our Holy Father Pope Francis, has decided that Salford Diocese will mark The Year of St Joseph and the Family together from 19th March 2021 – 19th March 2022. The Formation Department have produced a number of resources in a PDF which you can find on this page

<https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/news/stjosephandthefamily/>

On Friday we celebrated the great Solemnity of Saint Joseph and it was so good to see many of our young parishioners at church in prayer. I hope everyone who has been to Mass over the last week have used their gift of the Sleeping St Joseph.



Vocations to the Priesthood Discernment weekend for men aged 30 to 55

The Beda College in Rome is running a discernment weekend for men between the ages of 30 and 55 from Friday 3rd September to Sunday 5th September 2021. It takes place at St Beuno's Spirituality Centre in North Wales. The weekend is to reach men who are not already in touch with their diocese and is a first step for those who may be exploring the possibility of priestly vocation in later life.

Information and registration forms are at:

www.pathwaystogod.org/courses-events-retreats/discernment-weekend-older-men-1

Sung Vespers at Salford Cathedral

'Since the beginning of Lent and continuing each week, our Cathedral Choral Scholars will lead us in communal prayer as we sing the Office of Vespers each Tuesday and Thursday evening at 5pm.

Vespers will initially be live streamed only. Those watching online can participate safely and fully from home by visiting the homepage of the cathedral website where you can join the live stream from the cathedral and also find the link to download the order of service - www.salfordcathedral.co.uk
We look forward to having you with us.'

Lent - Weekly Eco-Thought for Parishes

The Fifth Sunday of Lent : 'Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single harvest; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.' Take time over these next two weeks to notice signs of new life in the natural world around you; new growth making its way from beneath the winter soil, leaves returning, springtime making its presence felt, albeit often hesitantly. And let the cycle of dying and rising in nature deepen our resolve to draw closer in these two weeks to Jesus and walk with him on his journey through the Cross to the Resurrection.

Cathedral Centre Books

The Cathedral Centre Bookshop is open Mondays and Thursdays from 0830 to 1630 to process online and phone orders. You can make orders from the bookshop's new website:

www.cathedralcentrebooks.com or call 0161 817 2208

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

Hope in the Future

Representatives Zoom Gathering - Tuesday 23rd March 2021, 7:00pm

Parish and Deanery Hope in the Future Representatives are invited to attend a Zoom Gathering on Tuesday 23rd March at 7:00pm. There will be chance to share the challenges and opportunities of this time in your locality as well as to hear about plans for Stage 4. Register by emailing hope@dioceseofsalford.org.uk and you will receive the link the day before.

Vade Mecum for Holy Week 2021

The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales have now sent out their guiding principles in regards the celebration of Holy Week this year.

This year, the Celebrations for Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum will be in the presence of Christ's faithful. This differs from the situation faced last year when acts of public worship were suspended because of the covid-19 pandemic. The Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments has issued a Note (Prot. N. 96/21 – 17 February 2021) to assist the Bishops in their task of "judging concrete situation and providing for the spiritual welfare of pastors and faithful in living this great Week of the liturgical year."

The Note stresses that whilst the use of social media has greatly enhanced the participation of the faithful during the pandemic, there should be a focus on the media coverage of liturgies presided over by the Diocesan Bishop so that those who are "unable to attend their own church [should] follow the diocesan celebrations as a sign of unity." Thus the times of the Cathedral celebrations of the Sacred Triduum should be promoted in each of the Dioceses of England and Wales alongside the local parochial celebrations.

The Note states that the Decree issued by the Congregation last year (Prot. N. 154/20) is still valid for this year's celebrations. The contents of this have been incorporated into the Guidance given below.

The theological meaning found through the celebrations of Holy Week with their richness of sign and symbol have to be tempered by the provision that the Church in England and Wales is part of a broader community in which the possibilities of virus transmission are still high. Therefore the general guidance for the safety of those participating in acts of worship have to be strictly adhered to. These include:

- **The wearing of face coverings in church by the faithful (unless the person has a valid exemption from this regulation)**
- **Social distancing of people within the church building**
- **Stewarding of the church premises to assist the faithful whilst in church**
- **Frequent hand cleansing, either with sanitiser or washing**

- **Suitable one-way systems in the building to prevent excessive interaction between people from different households or bubbles**
- **Good ventilation of the church building to refresh the air quality within**
- **Cleaning of the church building after each act of public worship**
- **The timely dispersing of the faithful after the acts of worship avoiding congregating in car parks or on the streets outside the church.**

The celebrations of the various liturgies of Holy Week should include those things that are necessary for the celebration, but not be prolonged in any way. In particular, those responsible for the planning of the liturgy should take into account:

- **The time that people will be within the church buildings; the tension between a dignified celebration and the time to execute that celebration has to be recognised.**
- **Remembering that congregational singing is not permitted.**
- **The movement of people within the church building itself as a potential risk factor.**

The Triduum, dependant on availability of parishioners volunteering as stewards, will be celebrated publicly this year at St. Mary's following all relevant health and safety procedures. More updates and information to follow in the future.

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.

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)**

Alpha Online

On 13th April, Youth 2000 will begin running the next instalment of Alpha online. We have been amazed at the fruit from our first three Alpha courses. We are inviting parishes across the country to join Youth 2000 by bringing their youth groups or parish groups to Alpha Online. The sessions are organised over Zoom. The evening begins with a welcome from the Youth 2000 team, followed by the watching of the video, and then we go into small group discussions using the Zoom 'Breakout Room' feature; as a parish youth group, you have the option of either having the discussion online in a breakout room.

The Online Alpha Course will run for 9 weeks on Tuesday evenings, starting on Tuesday 13th April, 7:30 - 8:30 pm. For more information or to discuss the course in more detail, please contact Liam at liam.riley@youth2000.org.uk

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.

Fr. O'Brien