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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
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Sunday 28th March 2021
Palm Sunday

Dear brothers and sisters,

I invite you to look at the Book of Numbers in the Old Testament, particularly Nb 21:4-9. Here we see the Hebrew people, recently liberated by God from Egypt, now grumbling, moaning and complaining. The source of their unhappiness is the journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land, '**For there is neither bread nor water here; we are sick of this unsatisfying food**' (Nb 21:5). The Almighty is perturbed by this truculent people and sends into their camp fiery serpents whose bites bring death.



Die von giftigen Schlangen gebissenen Israeliten genesen beim Anblick der eiserne Schlange.

Da machte Moise eine eiserne Schlange und richtete sie auf zum Heilen, und wenn jemanden eine Schlange biß, so sah er die eiserne Schlange an und blieb leben.
IV Mos. Kap. 21. v. 9

The people immediately turned to Moses and pleaded with him to intercede on their behalf which he duly did. '**The Lord answered him, 'Make a fiery serpent and put it on a standard. If anyone is bitten and looks at it, he shall live.'**' (Nb 21:8) In this Old Testament episode we see the foreshadowing of Jesus on the Cross. Just as the image of the serpent was raised up to heal those who were bitten so Our Lord was raised up on the Cross to save us from the affliction of our sin. '**See, my servant will prosper, he shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights.'**' (Is 52:13)

This Palm Sunday let us mediate on the above passage from the Book of Numbers and allow it to bring us closer to Jesus and to shape our prayer over Holy Week. First let's ask ourselves – What are the serpents in my life? Is it the serpent of impatience whose fiery tongue lashes out at those around me, those who I live with, those who I work with? Is the serpent in my life pride and ego? I'll worship God in **MY** way, on **MY** time, when **I** choose and how **I** choose? Does this serpent's bite prevent us from putting ourselves out for God, for going the extra mile that costs?

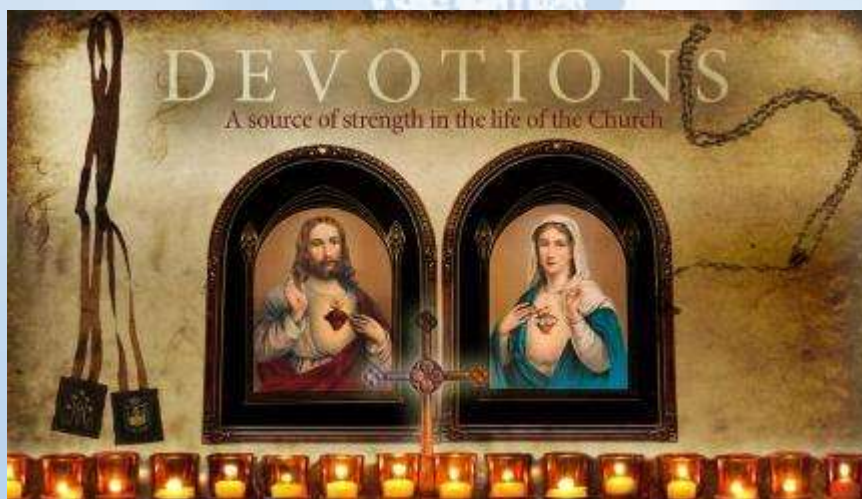
Is the serpent we find coiling around us one of distorted passions? Does its bite distract us from a pure heart, from loving God, spouse, friends and family? Does the serpent of procrastination infect us with its poison? Do we use our time wisely both for prayer, family and work? Do we have the right balance? Remember family and work can't get us into Heaven only God the Holy Trinity can do that. Does social media or the T.V dominate our time? When was the last time we picked up a book for some spiritual reading to both edify and nurture our soul? Is your serpent a negative relationship? One that strangles the life out of you and restricts your living for God and the blessings He has given you? This week search out that nest of serpents in your life and name and shame them.

Moses, following God's direction, instructed the people to make an image of a serpent and raise it up so that all who were bitten and looked upon it would be healed. When the serpents of sin bite and infect us, our healing can only come from looking upon Our Saviour, raised up on the Cross. Therefore each and every day which should turn to the Lord. How is this done in a practical way? Fr Francis Fernandez, a Spanish priest, wrote these helpful words:

***'Often, in order to keep Jesus present during the day, we will need to make use of those 'human devices', those ejaculations, acts of Love and reparation, spiritual Communion, 'glances' at a picture of Our Lady and some human means to remind us that some time has gone by during which we have not turned to Our Lord, Our Lady, our guardian angel...
They are always simple things, but very effective ones.***

It happens to all of us that when we want to remember something during the day we find a means of ensuring that we do not forget it. If we take with the same interest in remembering Our Lord, we will fill our day with little reminders, little ideas that will lead us to keep him present.'

Fr. Fernandez reminds us that the antidote to the serpents of sin in our lives is found in the healing of Jesus. This healing comes about when we make ourselves constantly present to the Lord. For example:



Holy Pictures

I'm sure we all have photos of loved ones dotted around our homes and stored in our mobile phones. These people are important to us and the moments captured on film remind us of cherished times. As Catholics it is so important that we have pictures and statues of Our Lord, Mary and the Saints. These are members of our heavenly family who are actively loving and praying for us everyday. Looking at their images daily calls us to contemplate our own lives and the direction we are going – towards God or further away! Sadly some ignorant people will say 'My house is a home and not a church!'

My response is the words of Jesus:

‘And if anyone does not welcome you into their home or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from you feet. I tell you solemnly, on the day of judgement it will not go as hard with the land of Sodom and Gomorrah as with that town.’ (Mt 10:14-15)

Let’s never be foolish enough to regulate Jesus Our Lord and the company of Heaven to simply a church building. Let’s welcome Him into our very homes with holy pictures and statues.

Pious Ejaculations

This phrase is very rarely used in modern parlance but when properly understood can be so beneficial in helping to bring Jesus to our daily thoughts. A pious ejaculation is simply a phrase, quote or scriptural verse that we can easily bring to mind and say as a prayer. These ejaculations can be said and repeated throughout the day. The purpose of them is to make us aware of the Lord’s constant presence. Here are a few examples:

‘O God come to my aid, O Lord make haste to help me.’
‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.’
‘Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph, pray for me.’
‘My Lord and My God.’
‘I love you Jesus above all things.’

The Angelus & The Holy Rosary

The ancient practice of praying the Angelus at 6am, 12noon and 6pm is another way in which we can look upon the Lord and remind ourselves of His daily presence. It allows the day to have that thread of prayer weaving itself throughout the hours.

During these next coming sacred days let’s constantly be aware of Our Lord’s presence and mindful of the painful task He will begin out of love for our sakes. Let’s banish those fiery serpents with His help who lead us away from adoring and serving God and look upon the Cross. Let us daily glance and recall the antidote to sin – Jesus Christ, the divine physician and true fruit of salvation hanging on the Tree of Life. May every moment of the day be an opportunity for us to look upon the Lord and grow closer to him.

The Sacrament of Confession

On Good Friday between 11am – 12noon there will be the opportunity for those who have not had the chance to go to Confession during Lent to receive Our Lord’s forgiveness in this Sacrament. As always Covid-19 health and safety requirements will be implemented.

Holy Week Devotions

As well as Mass each day during Holy Week there will be other opportunities for devotional prayer.

Palm Sunday 28th March – 3pm Stations of the Cross

Maundy Thursday 1st April – 10am The Holy Rosary

Good Friday 2nd April – 11am Stations of the Cross

Parishioners will not need to book for these prayer times, however, if the church was to reach restricted capacity then sadly people would be turned away.

Welcome to the family

At the great Easter Vigil Wesley Davitt will be received into full communion with the Church. The Bishop has given me the faculties to Confirm Wesley at this Holy Mass plus he will also receive the gift of Our Lord in Holy Communion for the first time. Let's keep Wesley and his family in our prayers at this time. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about the faith then do contact me.

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.'

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.

Lent - Weekly Eco-Thought for Parishes

Palm Sunday: The drama of this week starts on the Mount of Olives. On Thursday evening we relive the Lord taking bread and wine to be his Body and Blood. Olives, bread, wine, the dying and rising of Jesus. There can be no olive oil without the crushing of the olives. Bread needs flour but flour cannot be made without the crushing of the wheat. And wine comes forth from the crushed grapes. There can be no Easter without Good Friday. As olives and wheat and grapes, crushed, give rise to something new, so the life of Jesus offered by himself to be crushed as a sacrifice for sin, gives rise, in the Resurrection to new life for Jesus and for ourselves.

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.**

Building Work

On Friday Victoria Glass Joinery & Plumbing Limited in Accrington completed the work proscribed by Health and Safety. The external sacristy door has now been replaced by a composite door and is in line with emergency exit regulations.

Clocks

If you are reading this e-newsletter on Saturday 27th March 2021, then don't forget the clocks go forward tonight. Spring forward and Fall backward.

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

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, iPad s 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)**

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

