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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
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Parish Priest: Rev Fr. S D O'Brien
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Sunday 25th April 2021
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Dear brothers and sisters,

This weekend is 'Vocation Sunday' where we are asked in particular to pray for vocations to the priesthood. As we know what stands between us and an empty tabernacle is the lack of holy priests. The Lord is still calling men to the priesthood but sadly many are not hearing or acting on His invitation. Why? There exists in our world a culture where self-sacrifice, life-long commitment and loving service for Our Lord are dismissed and ridiculed. Every parish wants a priest but always somebody else's son or brother, never their own. A culture of support, encouragement and most importantly prayer is vital if men are to discern God's call in this day and age. Families who pray and practice the Faith are essential. A recent comment from an individual was that they would never think about a vocation to the priesthood because they have seen how people speak to a priest and talk about the priest! Let's this weekend pray for vocations to the priesthood asking God to give us and all families His grace to create a culture where holiness and discernment can flourish.

The following words are from the diocesan vocation department. They are published this weekend to help remind us, not just of the sacred calling to the priesthood, but also to marriage, the diaconate and consecrated life.

What is a vocation?

The literal meaning of the word vocation is a "call." It comes from the Latin word "vocare": to call. However a vocation is more than an ordinary call. A vocation is a call from God, and anyone who has felt God's call knows that the process is anything but simple. While most people think of a vocation as what they are called to do in life, it is important to understand that the first and most important call from God, is a call to be holy. We are all called through our Baptism to share in Christ's mission to be like him.

The Call to Holiness

This distinction between a call to holiness and a call to a specific vocation – single person, married life, consecrated life or ordained ministry – is important. The universal call to holiness is rooted in our baptism. It is a call to know, love and serve the Lord. It invites us into a deeper relationship with God. We should feel a growing desire to love God and to love our neighbour. We come to understand that there is meaning in our lives and a purpose for our existence. God has called us all to do some "definite purpose" for him. It is part of the adventure of our lives as friends of Christ, to work out what that particular purpose is to be. It can take a long time to work out what God's plan for us is, so we should not worry if it is not blatantly obvious what it is, and therefore allow ourselves plenty of time pray and reflect about it might be.

The universal call to holiness is an ongoing conversion experience. It continually opens our eyes to a fresh awareness of God's loving presence in our lives. It keeps inviting us to turn toward God by aiming to make God's will, our own will. A willingness to do God's will is built on two pillars. We have to believe that God loves us more than we love ourselves and that God wants our happiness more than we want it. In other words, we have to believe that God knows more than we do about what will make us truly happy. We are to trust that God's will for us is our only chance to find true and lasting happiness.

We live out the invitation 'to be holy' differently depending on which vocation we have chosen. The four specific vocations are: single life, married life, consecrated life or the ordained ministry. Each vocation is a call to follow Christ closely.

Single life

For someone who has chosen a single life, even though they have not formally taken the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, they are still choosing to make a personal commitment to put their freedom at the service of others in their work and their prayer. And in doing so, they strive to follow Christ in their daily lives.

Marriage

For a married Catholic couple, they follow Jesus by giving themselves to each other completely and without any reservation. They promise to love each other faithfully for the rest of their lives. They agree to share their joys and sorrows in whatever circumstances life presents to them. They express their love through their sexual union, which brings them together in the closest intimacy and opens them to the gift of new life in their children.



Consecrated life

For someone who has chosen the consecrated life, their path of following Christ is through their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. This often involves belonging to a religious order and living with others in community. They are called to live as Christ lived; to model their lives on the life of Jesus – who was chaste, poor and obedient – making their hearts more free for service and prayer.

Priest or Deacon

For those who have chosen the ordained ministry, through sacramental ordination, they share in the priesthood of Christ in a special way. Their very beings are changed so that they can represent Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd for God's people and Christ as the Head of the Church. They not only offer their own lives to the Father, as all Christians do, but they also stand before the Church and minister to the faithful as another Christ. Therefore, when they teach with the authority of the Church, Christ teaches; when they absolve sins in the sacrament of Reconciliation, then Christ forgives; when they offer the Sacrifice of the Mass then Christ offers that Sacrifice; when they love, support and care for God's people entrusted to their care, then Christ is present with his people.



A commitment to love

The demands and lifestyle of each particular vocation is very different but there are some similarities between them. Each vocation is a commitment to love in a certain way. The object of every vocation is God. Lots of things like: self-fulfillment: making life better for people: building the Church: may be involved in a vocation but the main purpose of our vocation is to love Our Lord. As St John Paul II wrote, "Love makes us seek what is good; love makes us better persons. It is love that prompts men and women to marry and form a family, to have children. It is love that prompts others to embrace the consecrated life or become priests."

Each vocation challenges us to live our faith more deeply and to follow Christ more closely. Each vocation, if it is lived generously and faithfully, will involve times of lasting happiness and reward, but also occasions of sacrifice and suffering.

Finally, it is important not to compare the value of different vocations but to appreciate the value of each one and to work out which one is right for you.

Vocation Sunday

This year the World day of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious life will be celebrated on Sunday 25th April 2021, Good Shepherd Sunday. In the light of the Pandemic, the diocesan vocation department would like to encourage parishioners to think about **donating directly** to the Ecclesiastical Education Fund, which supports our seminarians. Any donations should be sent to Ruth Turley at the Finance Office Cathedral Centre, 3 Ford St, Salford M3 6DW.

Please hold our seminarians in your prayers: Luke Bradbury and Paul Chisnall at St. Mary's, Oscott College, Theo Sharrock at the Venrable English College in Rome as well as Carmine Rea and Mark McGeehan at the Royal English College of St. Alban in Valladolid, Spain.

With grateful thanks for all you do to support vocations in the Diocese of Salford.

Yours sincerely,

Fr. John Hitchen and Fr. David Featherstone

Office of Vocations

For more information about the priesthood in the Diocese of Salford, please contact:

Fr John Hitchen, Vocations Director

Tel 0161 445 2079 or email john.hitchen@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

For information about becoming a permanent Deacon in the diocese please contact:

Mgr Anthony Kay anthony.kay@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

Saint Catherine of Siena, Patron of Europe

Thursday (29th April) is the feast of St. Catherine of Siena who is one of the patronesses of Europe. It is on her feast that we are called to offer special prayers for our continent of Europe. Pope Francis preached about the importance of her example and intercession:

“May her example help everyone understand how to be united, with Christian consistency, an intense love for the Church with an effective solicitude for the civil community, especially in this time of trial...I ask St. Catherine to protect Europe, because she is the Patroness of Europe.”

Saint Catherine was born in Siena (Italy) in 1347, entered the Third Order of St. Dominic while an adolescent. She was on fire with love of God and neighbour; she brought peace and harmony between her fellow citizens, fought for the rights and liberty of the papacy, and worked to renew religious life. She died 1380. Saint Catherine of Siena, Pray for us.

SOS! HELP! SOS!

The wooden fencing surrounding the church property is in need of a good lick of paint. As always parishioners of St. Mary's have stepped up with a kind donation of paint being given, however, people are needed to put that paint on the fencing – can you help? All social distancing requirements will be maintained so that people continue to feel safe volunteering at St. Mary's. It's a chance to be outside with others and help the church. Days and times are flexible according to when people are free. For more information email Navada Keenan at keenannavada@gmail.com

Young Adults: An Evening with Austen Ivereigh

We are privileged to invite all young adults (18 – 35 years) to an evening of reflection with Dr Austen Ivereigh. Thursday 13th May 2021 7pm – 9pm. Austen is the co-author of Pope Francis' latest book: *“Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future”* In it the Pope sets out his vision on how to create a better world as we emerge from the crisis that we have been living through. He sees this crisis as having meaning for us and inviting us to new ways of thinking and doing things.

To listen to the invitation on YouTube, please click on the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZT4nZcd1yE> The first 20 young adults to register will receive a free copy of the book! To register or for more information, please email: formation@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

Gift Aid and Envelopes

On behalf of the parish I would like to thank Rob Harrison for all his voluntarily work concerning the gift aid scheme and donation envelopes. Over the next few weeks, as people book to come to the Holy Mass, those who have signed up to the gift aid scheme will receive their envelopes from a steward. In line with GDPR, envelopes can only be given to the individual whose name and address is printed on the box. If you do not contribute to the gift aid scheme but would like a box of donation envelopes then please ask a steward when you come to church. For more information about helping the parish through gift aid you can contact Rob: giftaid@stmaryoswaldtwistle.org.uk

Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst Talk Series

The Logos & Literature: Elaborating the Divine. A series of online evening talks exploring some of the great themes of Catholic Christianity in writing old and new, with Catholic scholars and contemporary authors. Every second Thursday at 7:30pm from 29th April. For info and registration: <https://christianheritagecentre.com/events/logos-and-literature/>

Easter - Weekly Eco-Thought for Parishes

Fourth Sunday of Easter: So many Gospel passages are connected to the world of nature and farming. Every year, on this Sunday, the Gospel is connected to the image of Jesus as shepherd, the Good Shepherd. While in English the word shepherd denotes the one who herds the sheep, in many languages the word (Pasterz, Pastore, Pasteur) denotes the one who feeds the sheep. How may we allow the Good Shepherd to lead us, and the whole of God's people, to fresh and sustainable pastures?

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.

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.

Saint Catherine of Sienna, pray for us.

Fr. O'Brien