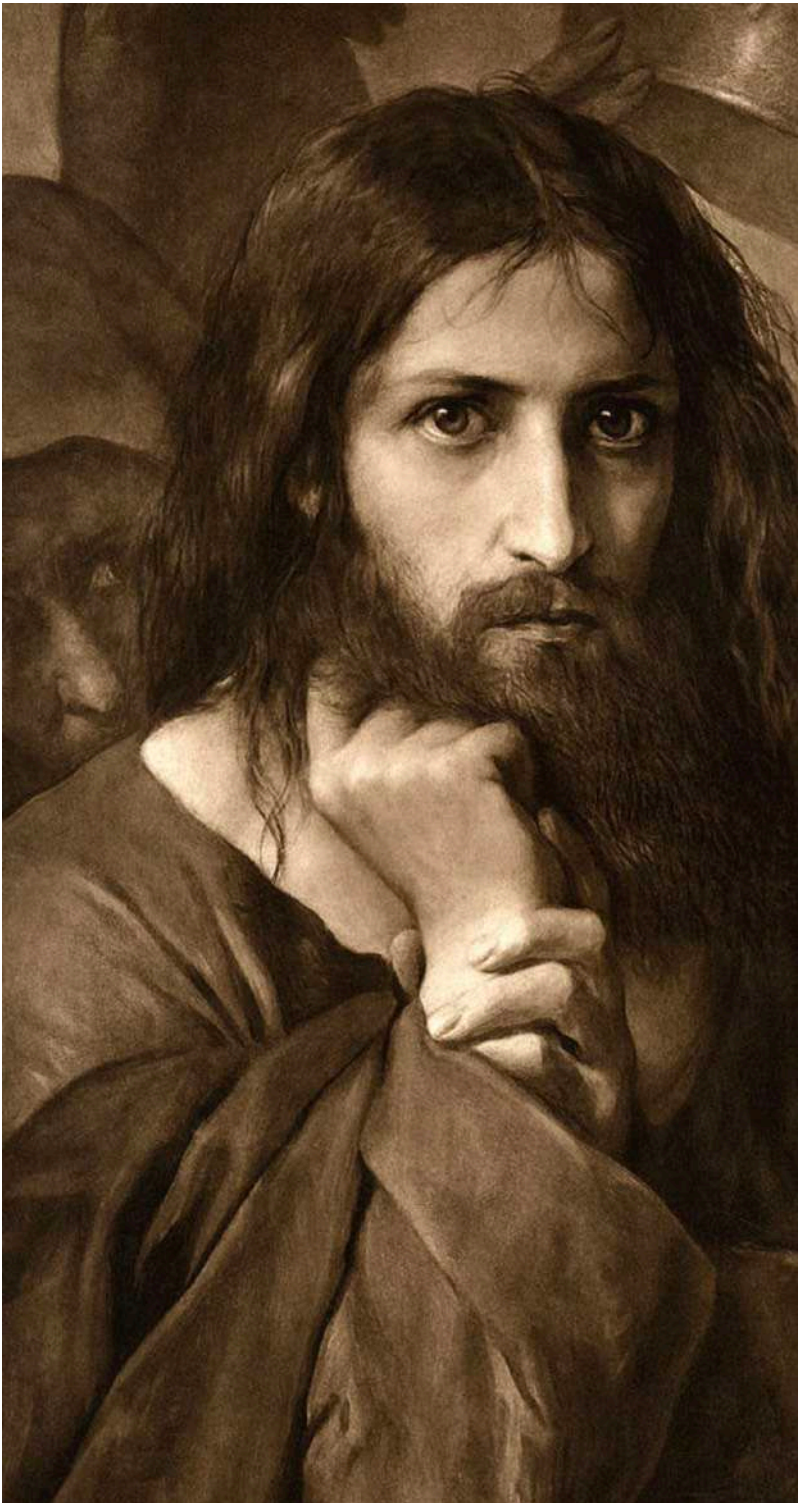


HIGH TIDE

*Parish
Magazine*

*Weymouth
St Paul
with Fleet*

MAR 2025



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John Echaniz is a practicing Christian. Holy Communion and Holy Rosary are parts of his and his family's life. Then one day a great tragedy puts his faith to the test: he has to appear in court to give a victim's statement. There, he must face the man who, in cold blood, killed his son. Here is what he had to say.

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Shockingly little do we know about slavery. Not the historic one. I am talking about modern slavery. Men, women and children are still sold, exploited and abused in our "modern" society. Their number, only in Africa, reaches 7 million! Many of them were deceived by promises of a better life. But wouldn't it be our Christian responsibility to help them create a better life in their homeland?

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*Many thanks to all who have contributed to the Parish Magazine and to Liz Evans for the proofreading. The next Magazine will be published on **Sunday 30th March**. Please, send all articles, information, news you wish to be publish by Sunday 23rd March.*

Front cover: "The temptation of Christ" (painting on canvas)
by Georg Karl Franz Cornicelius (1888), original lost, probably destroyed

From the Vicar

Dearly Beloved,

I have chosen a painting for the cover of this month's magazine with a fascinating history. As you can read on the previous page, it was painted in 1888 by a German artist from Hanau, named Georg Karl Franz Cornicelius (1825-1898). The original artwork was kept in the Royal National Gallery in Berlin until the end of the II world war when, during the bombing of the city, it disappeared. Many of the artworks found in Berlin were confiscated and went to different allied countries; others were simply destroyed in the biggest wartime bombing raid in 1945. It is uncertain what happened to Cornicelius's painting but probably it did not survive the end of the war.

So far, the story of this painting is tragic but, as mentioned above, not uncommon. However, at some point, another version of this image began circulating. Compared to the original, in the copy Satan took a more concrete form in the background, and a crown appeared as well, raised by him above the head of Jesus. Other than these two details, the copy is identical to the original but Cornicelius's signature was removed. Nothing else is known about the copy—where, when or by whom was it made, or even how, where or when did it surface.

Let then leave those questions to art historians and let us rather focus on the painting itself. I am sure you will all see something different in it. As for me, I have the impression that the Lord Jesus knows very well what is happening at his back. He knows Satan is there, observing him, and he also knows about the crown being moved closer to his head by the tempter. He knows all of this—he just doesn't care. This moment, this temptation is not about Jesus or Satan. It is about us. You and me.

His hands express both readiness and waiting for action. He is holding them in a way that we can be sure: he is ready to act. Ready to refuse temptation, ready to conquer sin, ready to triumph over Satan... but not yet. He is waiting. Waiting for what? For me. He is giving me time. But time for what? To make a decision: who do I side with?

Observe the image and tell me if Christ is not looking right into your soul?! The clarity and sharpness of his eyes make the whole background—Satan, temptation, sin, crown of vain glory—all blur. They all become unimportant, only those eyes count now and the question they are asking: who do you side with? "*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth*" (Luke 11,23).

Satan's biggest and most successful lie is that there is middle ground in the battle for our souls. But there isn't. "*He that is not with me is against me*".

The Holy Season of Lent, starting on Ash Wednesday, is the time when we renew our commitment to the “*captain of our salvation*”, as Jesus is called in Hebrews 2,10. We leave in hurry the imaginary, the false middle ground of the battlefield where satan, our weakness and everyday life pushed us during the year. Our means are prayer, alms and fasting. Prayer obtains the necessary graces to strengthen our weak nature (John 15,5); fasting defeats satan (Matthew 17,21); and almsgiving heals our disordered relationship with the goods of this world (Tobit 12,9; Luke 18,22; 1 John 3,17).

“*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*” How very thankful we should be to the Lord that he made the things on which our salvation depends so simple and clear. No grey areas, no confusing middle ground. Love, mercy, humility, meekness, goodness, forgiveness, generosity, truth are the open, glorious battle fields of Christ. Hate, vengeance, pride, arrogance, sin, unforgiveness, selfishness, lies are the dark, filthy trenches of satan.

March is the month dedicated to St. Joseph. His life could have been the most pitiful, most terrible of all lives. When he thought Mary had betrayed him, he could have chosen not to listen. He could have chosen vengeance and unforgiveness. He did not. He acted in a forgiving, meek, tender and generous way. When he realised that by choosing Mary he can never have children of his own—the greatest possible blessing for a Jewish man—, he could have become selfish, hurt, arrogant or self-pitying. But he did not. He learnt not only to obey God’s plans for him but to rejoice in them. When he had to flee to Egypt in fear for the life of Jesus and Mary, and for his own, he could have become bitter, cynic and full of hate. But he did not. Instead he learnt trust and hope. When he realised that during his earthly life he would never see Jesus, whom he lovingly raised and taught, fulfil his mission (since St. Joseph died before Jesus’ public ministry), he could have questioned his whole life and the choices he had made. But he did not. Instead, he found great peace and joy and was given the greatest of gifts: a holy and peaceful death in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

Things do happen to us too and so we have to make choices again and again. For these choices, we can rely on our own wit, judgement and strength and end up in an imaginary middle ground, fooled by satan. Or we can learn from St. Joseph and rely on God through prayer, fasting and alms, and march through life by our Captain’s side towards a holy death followed by life everlasting. Now let us look into Christ’s eyes and choose: to be with him or to be against him, to gather with him or to scatter.

Assuring you of my prayers, I am,
ever yours in Christ,

Fr. Gregory 5

Desiring the salvation of everyone—including my son’s murderer

by John Echaniz (for CWR, 5 Feb 2025)

Background: Mathew Wiessing, charged with murdering a San Antonio teacher and coach in 2022, was recently sentenced to 40 years in prison. Michael Echaniz (23) was leaving his apartment when Wiessing approached him and shot him several times. The reason? Wiessing was upset that his ex-girlfriend had begun dating Echaniz. The following is an article written by the victim’s father.

What is it about the comment sections of websites that attract the outrageous? I suppose that there’s something intoxicating about sharing one’s thoughts in print, utterly democratized by the internet, unfiltered and raw. Add anonymity to this cocktail and people summon the courage to say almost anything.

I usually avoid such corners of the internet, but I confess that I did linger over news comment sections when my family and I were in the news. It is admittedly hard not to be curious, wondering what people were saying about us.

The circumstances that thrust us into news headlines were unpleasant. On March 10, 2022, my 23-year-old son Michael was on his way to his job as a fifth-grade schoolteacher, when he was abruptly murdered in cold blood. The young man who committed this crime is now serving a 40-year sentence in a Texas prison, parole eligible in half that time.

The online commentary was generally compassionate. People said some very nice things about the remarks I made in the courtroom when I confronted the perpetrator for the first time in person.

Mingled with the kindnesses, however, I found a lot of vengeful sentiment. Anonymous commenters spoke of the awful things they would do if they had been in my shoes; some took pleasure in thinking about the horrors that await the perpetrator in the Texas prison system; several expressed a desire that the perpetrator burn in hell for eternity.

So many of these angry, vengeful, hateful things are very easy to say. And when it’s *your* son that has been murdered, they’re even easier to feel.

All of this came to mind again because of the recent decision by President Joe Biden to commute the death sentences of 37 prisoners on federal death row, leaving them to live the rest of their days in prison without parole. Some reactions to this decision sounded all too familiar, but one stood out from the rest.

Our former-and-new President, Donald Trump, had this to say: “Also, to the 37 most violent criminals, who killed, raped, and plundered like virtually no one before them, but were just given, incredibly, a pardon by Sleepy Joe Biden. I refuse to wish a Merry Christmas to those lucky ‘souls’ but, instead, will say, GO TO HELL!”

Over the last two or three years, I have developed a renewed appreciation for what it means to believe what you say. Each day of my life, I would repeat the words of the Lord’s Prayer: *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*. We are called as Christians to forgive, and every single day, we ask Our Lord to forgive *us* by that same measure. If I am to be forgiven by Our Father in heaven, I need to forgive my brother.

I knew in my mind that I needed to forgive the young man who took my son’s life, but I struggled to believe it in my heart. What helped to soften my hardened heart was reflecting on Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep in the Gospel of Luke. “*Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance*” (Lk 15,7).

More joy in heaven? There can be *more* joy in an eternity with God? If a cold-blooded killer repents and turns towards the light, there will be more joy in heaven. Why not the guy who killed my son? Who am I to stand in the way of more joy in heaven at his repentance?

These were some of the thoughts, the key moments of grace that helped me on the journey to forgiveness. I can earnestly desire the eternal salvation of the young man who killed my son. Salvation is the ultimate goal of the repentance that Jesus preached, and his disciples after him (e.g. 2 Peter 3,9: “*not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*”). Put another way, if you desire someone’s damnation, that puts you *actively at odds with the Lord*. Siding with Satan: that ‘s not a great place to be.

None of this merciful talk is meant to dismiss the need for justice. The young man who killed my son “only” murdered one person, so capital punishment was never even discussed. In time I came to realize that any search for justice on this earth would end in frustration; no amount of earthly retribution can return Michael to us. There is no happiness to be found in more evil or suffering. How hard do we have to look to see that “an eye for an eye” doesn’t end well?

The imperfections of mankind will never provide the true and complete justice found only in Our Father in heaven. I’ll do the best I can in this world, and focus on reunion with my son in the next one.

“Go to hell” is easy to say, trivially or earnestly. It is a sentiment in which no joy can be found. More joy can be found in repentance and in forgiveness.

The original article ends here. Below you can find parts of the statement made at court by Michael's parents.

In their respective statements, each parent shared the agony their son's murder had inflicted, and the raw anger and heartache that had seared their souls. The victim's father, John Echaniz, gave victim impact statement that lasted more than 20 minutes. He explained the hurt and pain his son's sudden death had caused to his family.

"I'll never forget when I saw my son's dead body for the first time back in Virginia ... how the morticians had to patch up the holes you made in his skull and his right hand," he said, noting, *"It made me think of how the Virgin Mary might have felt, beholding her crucified Son."*

Reciting a daily family rosary with their seven children was a family tradition, with each member invoking their patron saint at the end. *"I'll never forget ending that first family rosary after the murder when we came to St. Michael. I don't do a whole lot of crying in front of my children, but I sure did then."*

Their longtime spiritual regimen — prayer, Mass, Eucharistic adoration and Scripture study — has been crucial in sustaining them as they navigate life without their son, the Echanizes told. In the end, the Echanizes forgave Wiessing: *"I want you to know, Mathew Wiessing, that despite all this, I forgive you,"* said Sharon Echaniz. *"I wish no evil upon you. I pray you choose to dedicate your life, which is a gift to you, to making amends for the devastation you have caused, and in doing so to find peace."*

"As for me," John Echaniz said, *"I forgive you for what you've done and I earnestly desire for you to be with Michael, my son, in paradise one day. And I mean that from the bottom of my heart. Along with justice, I seek God's mercy for you. And I pray for your heart to be open to the unconditional love of the Almighty. I mentioned that Michael wore a blue rosary on his wrist, just like this one. I would like you to have it. Even if you can't take this particular rosary with you, you are going to a dark place, and I hope the prayer can be a light to your darkness."*

Now, John and Sharon Echaniz are living out the reality of that offer of forgiveness, relying on their deeply held Catholic faith to implement what John called in his statement *"those pesky words near the end"* of the Lord's Prayer — *"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. The first thing to say here is that it is not done. This is something that I continue to pore over."*

"I think that you immediately know, because of your faith, that it needs to be done," Sharon Echaniz said. *"But humanly speaking, you have to pray that you can do it, because everything about it you're kind of repelled. You want justice... **but anger begets anger. Misery begets more misery. Violence begets more violence. That cycle can only stop one person at a time, one heart at a time. And each of us can only start with ourselves.**"*

St. Bakhita inspires fight against modern slavery and human trafficking in Africa

by Ngala Killian Chintom (for CWR, 8 Feb 2025)

Holy Masses, prayers, meetings with community leaders and elders, as well as awareness campaigns to educate the public about the challenges of human trafficking took place on February 8th in over 30 African countries. It's an initiative of the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) that seeks to draw global attention to the shameful reality of human trafficking, particularly in Africa, where poverty, lack of opportunity, bad governance as well as ignorance have all conspired to force millions on perilous journeys in the search for a better future.

According to the 2023 Global Slavery Index, an estimated 7 million people are living in modern slavery in Africa, accounting for 14% of the worldwide total population. Children are particularly vulnerable, especially in West Africa, where they constitute more than 75% of detected trafficking victims. These children are often subjected to forced labor, sexual exploitation, and recruitment as child soldiers.

Countries such as Eritrea and Burundi have been identified as having the highest rates of human trafficking within the continent; it's an issue that spans across Africa.

Voices of victims — The stories of the victims are mind-boggling. With quivering lips and fighting back stubborn tears, Claudine (not her real name) tells CWR about the pain and anguish she went through in the Middle Eastern country of Kuwait. The nurse, 34, was deceived by middle men who told her she could get a good job that would pay her as high as \$500 in Kuwait—a far cry for the typical nurse in Cameroon who doesn't earn above \$200. “The agent even offered to foot my travel expenses,” she told CWR.

“When I got on that flight for Kuwait in 2013, I knew I was flying into wealth and success,” she said with a wan and ashy smile.

It turned out to be an illusion. On arrival in Kuwait, Claudine's passport was taken by an agent, and she and about fifty other Cameroonian girls were channeled to a small room. “There were many other girls from other nationalities,” she recalls. It was then she realized she was effectively on the market-to be sold like a commodity. “Bidders came. They negotiated prices, and we were sold off.”

She said she was bought by an Egyptian man to work as a house help, but she saw “hell” in that house. With very little to eat, Claudine would work from dawn to dusk, sleeping on the bare floor, and frequently raped by her

master. “I shared the same toilet with cats and dogs. I used to call them my brothers, because they were the only beings I felt safe with,” she said, the tears flowing freely.

“Our children are bought and sold like commodities on the market,” said Beatrice Titanji, National Vice-President of the Trauma Centre for Victims of Human Trafficking in Cameroon.

Migration and trafficking: two sides of the same coin — Regional and country-specific realities of migration and trafficking could help in better elucidating the scale of the problem.

Countries of the Maghreb have become hotspots for migration with thousands of people from sub-Saharan Africa as well as The Horn of Africa flooding those countries, mostly on transit to Europe. The journey of these migrants is marked by long, arduous and risky journeys. They are undocumented or have falsified documents. Once they arrive, they face enormous difficulties: housing, care, integration, jobs, food, or identity regularization.

Human trafficking is primarily driven by poverty, lack of education, use of technology especially social media, inadequate protection, gender inequality and limited employment opportunities. The persistent high levels of unemployment and economic instability have left many individuals, especially women and children, at risk of exploitation. Traffickers often prey on these vulnerabilities by offering false promises of employment or better living conditions.

Fr. Onuh Ladi Sixtus PhD describes his homeland Nigeria as “the hub of this criminal activity in the West African subregion.” There have been a lot of arrests being carried out by the relevant government agencies in Nigeria; however, this has not eradicated the evil of human trafficking.

The cartels who perpetrate this syndicate usually promise their victims a rosy life in Europe and other destinations. However, experience has shown that most of them end up languishing in jails in Lybia, Tunisia and other prisons. Some get drowned at the high sea.

The Church, in line with Catholic Social Teaching, works to give migrants and victims of trafficking respite. Through their various programmes, they are following and applying the four verbs of Pope Francis: welcome, protect, promote, and integrate. In addition, they listen to, accompany, meet, visit and follow all the migrants who knock on their doors.

Campaign to combat human trafficking — The PACTPAN campaign to combat human trafficking in Africa is a critical part of the larger strategy of the Church. And it is by design that the campaign took place on

the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita who was a slave in Europe, and she ended up becoming a nun and eventually a saint. The campaign is not for one day but will run all through 2025-2030.

PACTPAN operates in five blocks in the continent: Northern Africa, Southern Africa, Central Africa, Western Africa, and Eastern Africa. The campaign brings together representatives from various organisations, some survivors, and representatives of the various countries who will be sharing the efforts they have put and are planning to put in place to end trafficking in human beings.

These efforts aim to raise awareness, educate communities, and foster collaboration among stakeholders to combat human trafficking in Africa.

Pope Francis has been a staunch advocate against human trafficking, calling it a ‘crime against humanity.’ He frequently condemns trafficking in his speeches and official documents, urging world leaders to act and fostering collaborations between religious groups, governments, and NGOs. He also established the World Day of Prayer Against Human Trafficking on February 8 (Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita) as a global day for prayer and action.

Talitha Kum, a Vatican-supported global network of Catholic sisters operating in 92 countries, fights human trafficking through prevention and education. They train communities, schools, and religious leaders to recognize trafficking signs. They also rescue and rehabilitate survivors by providing shelter, legal aid, and psychological support.

PACTPAN tackles social justice issues through research and advocacy. They mobilize local churches by engaging bishops, priests, youth activists, survivors of trafficking, and laypeople in African countries to combat trafficking.

PACTPAN produced a documentary in 2024 based on research with survivors of human trafficking from various countries in Africa. Titled “*If Silence Was to Speak: Unveiling the Hidden Wounds of Trafficking of Girls in Africa 2025*,” the documentary sheds light on the dark realities of human trafficking, and offers pathways to healing and hope for the victims. The campaign also aims to reintegrate the many men and women who, due to human trafficking, have been ridiculed by their families and society.

“All human beings regardless of their colour, sex, age, nationality, religion are created in the image and likeness of God. This calls us to respect each person without reservations. Ending human trafficking in Africa requires collective effort. PACTPAN urges the public to recognize the inherent dignity of every individual and to take an active role in preventing exploitation. By working together, communities can create a safer environment for all.”

Russia and Ukraine: history, identity and conflict

(edited from various sources)

One crib — Russia’s and Ukraine’s shared heritage goes back more than a thousand years to a time when Kyiv, now Ukraine’s capital, was at the centre of the first Slavic state, *Kyivan Rus*, the birthplace of both Ukraine and Russia. In A.D. 988 Volodymyr the Great, the pagan prince of Novgorod and grand prince of Kyiv, accepted the Orthodox Christian faith and was baptized in the Crimean city of Chersonesus. This is why Putin recently declared that “Russians and Ukrainians are one people, a single whole.”

Troubled history — Over the past ten centuries, Ukraine has repeatedly been carved up by competing powers. Mongol warriors from the east conquered Kyivan Rus in the 13th century. In the 16th century Polish and Lithuanian armies invaded from the west. In the 17th century, war between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Tsardom of Russia brought lands to the east of the Dnieper River under Russian imperial control. The east became known as “Left Bank” Ukraine; lands to the west of the Dnieper, or “Right Bank,” were ruled by Poland.

In 1654 the peoples living in the land of today’s Ukraine asked the Orthodox Russian Tsar’s protection against Catholic Poland. In 1709, when these people tried to break away from this Russian protection, Russia did not allow it to happen and large parts of right bank (western) Ukraine, too, were annexed by the Russian Empire. Over the years that followed, a policy known as Russification banned the use and study of the Ukrainian language, and people were pressured to convert to the Russian Orthodox faith.

Finally, during Catherine II (1729-1796) further Ukrainian territories were annexed by Russia and any remaining autonomy was abolished.

The concept of ‘Ukraine’ existed, though not an independent country, and locals continued calling themselves ‘Rusyns’ rather than Ukrainians, while referring to the Russians as ‘Muscovites’.

In 1722 western Ukraine became part of the Habsburg Empire. The more liberal attitude of the Hapsburgs towards minorities was a great opportunity for Ukrainians. Under the influence of European Romanticism, new interest in Ukrainian history and folklore developed among intellectuals. During the 1840s, Ukraine’s national bard, Taras Shevchenko (1814–61), published his first poems in Ukrainian and subsequently co-founded a secret political society that discussed a free Slavic federation.

The 20th century — Ukraine suffered some of its greatest traumas during the 20th century. After the communist revolution of 1917, Ukraine was one of the many countries to fight a brutal civil war before, after a short-lived independency, being fully absorbed into the Soviet Union in 1922.

In the early 1930s, to force peasants to join collective farms, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin orchestrated (!) a famine that resulted in the starvation and death of 4 million Ukrainians. Documents reveal the immense proportions of what only can be called a genocide. Due to unprecedented starvation, cannibalism appeared in Ukraine. Most cases were necrophagy, the consumption of corpses of people who had died of starvation, but the murder of children for food was common as well.

After the period now known as *Holodomor*, meaning “death by hunger”, Stalin imported large numbers of Russians and other Soviet citizens—many with no ability to speak Ukrainian and with few ties to the region—to help repopulate the east.

This also explains what seems to be a contradiction: while Ukraine produced a number of notable communist leaders, and served as a major centre of Soviet agriculture and industry, it was also resistant to Soviet rule.

Eastern and Western Ukraine — Because eastern Ukraine came under Russian rule much earlier than western Ukraine, people in the east have stronger ties to Russia and have been more likely to support Russian-leaning leaders. Western Ukraine, by contrast, spent centuries under the shifting control of European powers such as Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire—the reason why Ukrainians in the west have tended to support more Western-leaning politicians. The eastern population tends to be more Russian-speaking and Orthodox, while parts of the west are more Ukrainian-speaking and Catholic.

Soviet oppression — Ukrainian identity in Ukraine, then a republic within the Soviet Union, was quite complex. Most elements of a healthy national pride (language, culture, literature, etc. just like in any nation) had been eliminated by then during decades of forced Russification. However, there was still a very small minority, so-called dissidents, for whom the preservation of Ukrainian language and culture and the goal of Ukrainian sovereignty was very important. They were considered by Soviet leaders as bourgeois nationalists and were oppressed by the Soviet state. Many of them spent years in the gulags.

It is interesting to remember that even in this minority group of proud Ukrainians, many “functioned” as Russians. A lot of Russian was spoken within these families, and school and work were primarily or even exclusively in Russian, but they still considered themselves Ukrainians.

The 1980s and Gorbachev — Things began to change when information about Soviet state oppression of non-Russian nationalities really got out in the open. This is the period when there were public discussions of the Holodomor famine. Before that, it was forbidden even to talk about it. An Ukrainian sovereignty movement was formed in late 1980s and became an important political force after the 1990s legislative elections—the first fully competitive elections in the Soviet Union.

At this point, Ukraine's political elite was divided into three groups. The *unreformed communists* didn't want any change and wanted to remain part of the Soviet Union. The right-wing, pro-independence Rukh was the second group with 25% of seats in the Ukrainian (not fully independent) parliament. And then there was the centre. Most of them were still communists, but they realized that the winds were blowing for greater sovereignty and the power of the Communist Party and the central state in Moscow was diminishing. This group was pragmatic: why take orders from Moscow when I can be in charge?

Neither the right, nor the left could gain power without the centre. So a coalition was created between the Rukh and the centre. Pro-independence was now a majority but in return, the right basically allowed the centrists—former communist elites and new business actors—to do whatever they want with the economy. This contributed to corruption problems in Ukraine, lack of judicial independence, oligarchs. This will be important to remember a few paragraphs later...

Independence — With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine became an independent nation. During the referendum, 92% of Ukraine voted for independence. But uniting the country proved a difficult task because of the above mentioned West-East division in culture, language and identity.

Another critical issue was that the transition to democracy and capitalism was painful and chaotic, especially economically (see above), and so many Ukrainians, especially in the east, longed for the stability and security of the soviet era. Little did the cost, unknown to most people, of that stability matter to many. They wanted secure jobs, low prices, political stability.

Problems — The 1990s was a period of great economic crisis, and substantial parts of the population came to think that maybe some kind of closer connection with Russia and the former Soviet countries economically would bring improvement. On the other hand, politicians pursued cooperation with Russia only to the extent that it didn't threaten state sovereignty.

For its part, Russia consistently tried to foster closer political ties with Ukraine. Dual citizenship, participation in regional Russia-led political

integration initiatives, and status for Russian as the second state language in Ukraine were policies Russia tried to get Ukraine to agree to but Ukrainian politicians—including those who were Russian-speakers themselves and came from eastern regions of Ukraine where pro-Russian sentiments were strong in the 1990s and 2000s—resisted.

Russia or Europe? — The fundamental question in these years of difficulty was: who to look to for stability? Many, especially in east, saw (and had experienced!) the Russian imperial and Soviet rule as something good. Some of these, as mentioned above, did not have links to Ukraine anyway. For others, especially in west, both the Russian imperial and the Soviet era were a tragedy. These fissures were laid bare during the 2004 Orange Revolution (protesters wore an orange ribbon), in which thousands of Ukrainians marched to support greater integration with Europe.

That's not what Russia (Putin) wanted... — The more Russia increased its pressure on Ukraine, the more it produced an outcome Russian leaders wanted to avoid.

For example, the annexation of Crimea and the support of the anti-government, separatist insurgency in the Donbas in 2014 cut about 12% of the Ukrainian voting population from the electorate. Those were areas that historically were the most sympathetic to Russia in all Ukraine. Russia's post-2014 aggression also increased “anti-Russian” sentiments in the rest of Ukraine.

The consequence was a dramatical change in the political landscape in Ukraine. The political parties that advocated a stronger anti-Russian course got elected with majorities—they didn't have to compromise with the centre anymore. So legislations that for Putin were completely unacceptable and had been blocked through Russian influence on Ukrainian politician—strengthening the status of the Ukrainian language, interpretation of historical events differently from how Russia wanted—now got passed in the parliament. Another unwanted consequence of Russian pressure and aggression was an increased support amongst Ukrainians for European integration and NATO membership.

Russia or Europe? = Yushchenko or Yanukovich? — The two main candidates in the 2004 presidential election were Viktor Yushchenko (pro-Europe) and Viktor Yanukovich (pro-Russia). The election was marred by massive corruption, intimidation and fraud, in favour of the pro-Russian candidate. After months of civil unrest and disobedience, Ukraine's Supreme Court annulled the results and ordered a new election. The new elections were declared free and fair by international observers and were won by the pro-European candidate (52%). Yushchenko thus became president

(2005-2010) and drove Ukraine closer to Europe and farther away from Russia. Both Belarus and Russia have condemned the Orange Revolution.

However, Ukraine's division is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in the 2010 presidential election the pro-Russian Yanukovich won and his victory was declared fair and valid by every international observer.

The change in the political landscape (pro-Russian president), the chaos during the Orange Revolution and economic difficulties were seen by Russian leaders as their best chance to get their hands on Crimea. And so in 2014 Russia invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula—back then part of Ukraine. The Russians calculated that the local Russian majority would support the peninsula's incorporation into Russia, attracted by higher salaries and better career options without the need to study Ukrainian.

The Crimean Peninsula — Although attached by land only to Ukraine, Crimea became an autonomous republic within Russia in 1921, partly because of the peninsula's strategic significance. Neither Russians nor Ukrainians constituted a majority there, and in the 1920s the Soviets cultivated the culture of the Crimean Tatars, who had lived on the peninsula since the 13th century and whose Crimean Khanate the Russian Empire conquered in 1783. When the Red Army retook Crimea from Nazi Germany in 1944, however, Stalin ordered a forced deportation of the Tatars, which many historians consider genocidal. As a result of this deportation, ethnic Russians became a numerical majority virtually overnight. The II World War had left the peninsula's economy and cities in ruins. Khrushchev organised the transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR, which was to rebuild it and supply it with fresh water through a major channel to be constructed.

The eastern regions of Ukraine — In the last years of the Soviet Union, Russian speakers outnumbered Ukrainian speakers in most of Ukraine's eastern oblasts; by 2001, the number of Ukrainian speakers was higher everywhere except in Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk. Today, more than two-thirds of Ukrainian citizens claim Ukrainian as a native language; even in eastern regions, a plurality is bilingual in Ukrainian and Russian.

Putin — Putin is obsessed with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Many historians think that he wants to reconstitute the Russian Empire and its guiding ideologies, which were orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality—except now, under the power of a very sophisticated police state. Ukraine's invasion is a result of Putin's intolerance for Ukrainian sovereignty.

Peace? — Now the main question is: should Ukraine be pragmatic and realistic and let its territories with Russian majority go (Trump) to achieve peace or should it continue fighting Russian invasion (EU) at the cost of so much death and destruction? There is no simple answer.

**Calendar, Service times,
and Prayer Intentions**

Anniversaries of death

Order of Morning and Evening Prayer

Calendar for March 2025

SAT	1 st	St. David Bishop	9.30am
SUN	2 nd	QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY	10.30am, 4pm
MON	3 rd	<i>Monthly Requiem</i>	12pm
TUE	4 th	Feria (<i>St. Casimir</i>)	9am
WED	5 th	ASH WEDNESDAY	10am
THU	6 th	Sts. Perpetua & Felicity, Martyrs	6pm
FRI	7 th	St. Thomas Aquinas	12pm, <i>5pm Stations</i>
SAT	8 th	Feria (<i>St. John of God</i>)	9.30am
SUN	9 th	1ST SUNDAY OF LENT	10.30am
MON	10 th	Feria (<i>The Forty Martyrs</i>)	—
TUE	11 th	Feria	—
WED	12 th	Ember Day (<i>St. Gregory the Great</i>)	—
THU	13 th	Feria	—
FRI	14 th	Ember Day	<i>5pm Stations</i>
SAT	15 th	Ember Day	—
SUN	16 th	2ND SUNDAY OF LENT	10.30am
MON	17 th	Feria (<i>St. Patrick Bishop</i>)	—
TUE	18 th	Feria (<i>St. Edward King, Martyr</i>)	—
WED	19 th	ST. JOSEPH	10am
THU	20 th	Feria	6pm
FRI	21 st	St. Benedict Abbot	12pm, <i>5pm Stations</i>
SAT	22 nd	Feria	9.30am
SUN	23 rd	3RD SUNDAY OF LENT	10.30am, 4pm
MON	24 th	St. Gabriel Archangel	12pm
TUE	25 th	ANNUNCIATION	10am, 6pm
WED	26 th	Feria	10am
THU	27 th	Feria (<i>St. John Damascene</i>)	6pm
FRI	28 th	Feria (<i>St. Stephen Harding</i>) - <i>Anointing</i>	12pm
SAT	29 th	Feria	9.30am
SUN	30 th	4TH SUNDAY OF LENT	10.30am, 4pm
MON	31 st	Feria	12pm

Daily Intentions



Anniversaries of death

We pray for...

- 1st Walsingham - *Elizabeth Gentle, Vernon Thomas pr, Sophie Llewellyn*
- 2nd Our Parish - *Joan Witham*
- 3rd Chapter of St. Aldhelm (Servers)
- 4th Immigrants and refugees
- 5th Fruitful and holy Lent - *Lilian Miles*
- 6th Priests & Vocations
- 7th Dying - *John Pryer, Lucien Ciceron*
- 8th Cell of O.L.W. - *Beryl Grove*
- 9th Our Parish - *Ernest Sibley, Jack Harvey*
- 10th Jobseekers
- 11th Our choir and musicians - *Suzanne Hart, Gilbert Turner, John Haining*
- 12th Our PCC - *Doreen Legg*
- 13th Conifers - *Leonard Patt*
- 14th Beechcroft
- 15th Our Benefactors, living & departed
- 16th Our Parish - *Jack Bibby*
- 17th Reconciliation
- 18th Peace in Ukraine - *Olive Riggs, Elfreda Paddock, Ronald Coleman, June Shirt*
- 19th Fathers (spiritual, foster, of families) - *Phyllis Lee*
- 20th Peace in Israel and Palestine - *Noel Wray, Grant Goodwin*
- 21st Refugees and migrants - *John McCaig*
- 22nd Mothers - *Vera Sertin*
- 23rd Our Parish - *Charles Seyfang, Graham Hardick*
- 24th Catholic Societies - *Cyril Croxford, Mark Houghton, Ruth Edgar*
- 25th Our Parish
- 26th The spread of Christ's Gospel - *Muriel Curley*
- 27th Spiritual renewal of our Parish - *Doreen Mounce, Bernard Collick*
- 28th Sick - *Ann Uphill, Peggy Moore*
- 29th Victims of human trafficking - *George Hornby*
- 30th Our Parish
- 31st Those who visited our church this month - *Martyn Fisher pr.*

If there are names missing from the list or you want to add names, please, talk to the Vicar.

Open, O Lord, my mouth to bless thy holy Name; cleanse also my heart from all vain, evil, and wandering thoughts; enlighten my understanding and kindle my affections; that I may worthily, attentively, and devoutly recite this Morning Prayer, and so be meet to be heard before the presence of thy divine Majesty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MORNING PRAYER

V. The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

V. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

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

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it unto me according to thy word.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt amongst us.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray. We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the Incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of his Resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

V. O Lord, open my lips. R. And my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

V. O God, make speed to save me. R. O Lord, make haste to help me.

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

V. Let us rejoice in the Lord; let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him!

R. The Lord has promised a crown to those who love him.

V. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth; and the heights of the mountains are his.

R. The Lord has promised a crown to those who love him.

V. The sea is his, for who but he made it; and his hands fashioned the dry land. O come, let us worship and fall down, and weep before the Lord who made us! For he is the Lord our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

R. The Lord has promised a crown to those who love him.

V. Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts: As in the provocation, on the day of temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers tempted me, and put me to the test, and they saw my works.

R. The Lord has promised a crown to those who love him.

V. For forty years I loathed that generation, and I said: They always err in heart, they have not known my ways, so I swore in my wrath: they shall not enter my rest.

R. The Lord has promised a crown to those who love him.

V. 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.

R. The Lord has promised a crown to those who love him.

HYMN

The fast, as taught by holy lore,
We keep in solemn course once more:
The fast to all men known, and bound
In forty days of yearly round.

More sparing therefore let us make
The words we speak, the food we take,
Our sleep and mirth, and closer barred
Be every sense in holy guard.

Avoid the evil thoughts that roll
Like waters o'er the heedless soul;
Nor let the foe occasion find
Our souls in slavery to bind.

In prayer together let us fall,
And cry for mercy, one and all,
And weep before the Judge's feet,
And his avenging wrath entreat.

Forgive the sin that we have wrought;
Increase the good that we have sought:
That we at length, our wanderings o'er,
May please thee here and evermore.

Grant O thou Blessed Trinity,
Grant, O Essential Unity,
That this our fast of forty days
May work our profit and thy praise.

The appointed Psalm(s) and Reading(s) follow:

1	89 v. 19-end	Ecclesiastes 12 John 20,19-end	3	90	Jeremiah 1 John 3,1-21
2	Psalm 2	Exodus 33,17-end 1 John 3,1-3	4	92	Jeremiah 2,1-13 John 3,22-end

5	38	Daniel 9,3-6 & 17-19 1 Timothy 6,6-19	19	25, 147 v. 1-12	Isaiah 11,1-10 Matthew 13,54-end
6	96	Jeremiah 2,14-32 John 4,1-26	20	115	Jeremiah 9,12-24 John 7,1-13
7	97	Jeremiah 3,6-22 John 4,27-42	21	117	Jeremiah 10,1-16 John 7,14-24
8	98	Jeremiah 4,1-18 John 4,43-end	22	120	Jeremiah 10,17-24 John 7,25-36
9	50 v. 1-15	Micah 6,1-8 Luke 5,27-end	23	26, 28	Deuteronomy 6,4-9 John 17,11-19
10	99	Jeremiah 4,19-end John 5,1-18	24	121	Jeremiah 11,1-17 John 7,37-52
11	100	Jeremiah 5,1-19 John 5,19-29	25	111, 113	1 Samuel 2,1-10 Romans 5,12-end
12	101	Jeremiah 5,20-end John 5,30-end	26	122	Jeremiah 13,1-11 John 8,12-30
13	103	Jeremiah 6,9-21 John 6,1-15	27	123	Jeremiah 14 John 8,31-47
14	106	Jeremiah 6,22-end John 6,16-27	28	125	Jeremiah 15,10-end John 8,48-end
15	108	Jeremiah 7,1-20 John 6,28-40	29	126	Jeremiah 16,10-end John 9,1-17
16	119 v. 161-end	Genesis 17,1-17 & 15-16 Romans 11,13-24	30	84	Genesis 37,12-end 1 Peter 2,16-end
17	110	Jeremiah 7,21-end John 6,41-51	31	132	Jeremiah 17,5-18 John 9,18-end
18	112	Jeremiah 8,1-15 John 6,52-59			

Each reading ends with these words:

V. This is the word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTUS – *One of the following antiphons is used:*

Ant: Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil and when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was hungry.

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, *
 who has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, *
 born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets God promised of old *
 to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us,
To show mercy to our ancestors, *
 and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: *
 to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship him without fear, *
 holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.
And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, *
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
To give his people knowledge of salvation *
 by the forgiveness of all their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God *
 the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, *
 and to guide our feet into the way of peace.
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.

Ant: Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil and when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was hungry.

V. Let us pray. – ***Intercessions*** are offered for the Church, for the Sovereign (the world), for those in need, and for the dead. Then follows one of the Collects:

Grant, O Lord, that your faithful people may, with true piety, undertake the time-honoured custom of fasting and may carry it out with unwavering devotion. Through Christ our Lord. **R.** Amen.

V. Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us: 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. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

V. The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life.

R. Amen. V. Let us bless the Lord. R. Thanks be to God.

V. And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. R. Amen.

Morning Prayer ends with the final Antiphon of Our Lady:

Hail, O Queen of heaven, enthroned! Hail, by Angels Mistress owned!
Root of Jesse, Gate of morn, Whence the world's true Light was born:
Glorious Virgin, joy to thee, Loveliest whom in heaven they see:
Fairest thou, where all are fair, Plead with Christ our sins to spare.

V. Allow me to praise thee, O holy Virgin.

R. Give me strength against thine enemies.

V. Let us pray. Grant, O merciful God, to our weak natures thy protection, that we who commemorate the holy Mother of God may, by the help of her intercession, arise from our iniquities. Through the same Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

EVENING PRAYER

V. The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

V. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

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

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it unto me according to thy word.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt amongst us.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray. We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the Incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of his Resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

V. O God, make speed to save me. R. O Lord, make haste to help me.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

R. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

HYMN

O kind Creator, bow thine ear
To mark the cry, to know the tear
Before thy throne of mercy spent
In this thy holy fast of Lent.

Our sins are many, this we know;
Spare us, good Lord, thy mercy show;
And for the honour of thy name
Our fainting souls to life reclaim.

Our hearts are open, Lord, to thee:
Thou knowest our infirmity;
Pour out on all who seek thy face
Abundance of thy pardoning grace.

Give us the self-control that springs
From discipline of outward things,
That fasting inward secretly
The soul may purely dwell with thee.

We pray thee, blessed Trinity,
One God, unchanging Unity,
That we from this our abstinence
May reap the fruits of penitence. Amen.

The appointed Psalm(s) and Reading(s) follow:

1	Psalms 107	Genesis 35 Philemon	7	118	Genesis 40 Galatians 3,1-14
2	89 v. 5-12	Exodus 3,1-6 John 12,27-36	8	124	Genesis 41,1-24 Galatians 3,15-end
3	109	Genesis 37,1-11 Galatians 1	9	119 v. 73-88	Jonah 3 Luke 18,9-14
4	114	Genesis 37,12-end Galatians 2,1-10	10	127	Genesis 41,25-end Galatians 4,1-7
5	51	Isaiah 1,10-18 Luke 15,11-end	11	128	Genesis 46,1-5 Galatians 4,8-20
6	116	Genesis 39 Galatians 2,11-end	12	129	Genesis 46,6-17 Galatians 4,21-end

13	130	Genesis 42,18-28 Galatians 5,1-15	23	12, 13	Genesis 28,10-19 John 1,35-end
14	134	Genesis 42,29-end Galatians 5,16-end	24	85	Genesis 3,8-15 Galatians 4,1-5
15	136	Genesis 43,1-15 Galatians 6	25	131, 146	Isaiah 52,1-12 Hebrews 2
16	135 v. 1-14	Jeremiah 22,1-9 & 13-17 Luke 14,27-33	26	148	Genesis 49,1-32 Hebrews 6,1-12
17	137	Genesis 43,16-end Hebrews 1	27	4	Genesis 50 Hebrews 6,13-end
18	132	Hosea 11,1-9 Luke 2,41-end	28	7	Exodus 1,1-14 Hebrews 7
19	1, 112	Genesis 50,22-end Matthew 2,13-end	29	9	Exodus 1,15-end Hebrews 8
20	138	Genesis 45,1-15 Hebrews 3	30	30	Isaiah 41,1-13 2 Timothy 4,1-18
21	140	Genesis 45,16-end Hebrews 4	31	10	Exodus 2,1-22 Hebrews 9,1-14
22	145	Genesis 46,1-7 Hebrews 5			

Each reading ends with these words:

V. This is the word of the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God.

MAGNIFICAT

Ant: Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation; let us approve ourselves in fastings, in prayer, and in love unfeigned.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,+
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,*
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed;+
the Almighty has done great things for me*
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him,*
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm*
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
Casting down the mighty from their thrones*
and lifting up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things*
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,*
to remember his promise of mercy,
The promise made to our ancestors,*
to Abraham and his children for ever.
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.

Ant: Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation; let us approve ourselves in fastings, in prayer, and in love unfeigned.

V. Let us pray. – *Intercessions* are offered for the Church, for the Sovereign (world), for those in need, our Benefactors, and for the dead. Then one of the following Collects is said:

Grant, O Lord, that your faithful people may, with true piety, undertake the time-honoured custom of fasting and may carry it out with unwavering devotion. Through Christ our Lord. *R.* Amen.

V. Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us: 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. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

All: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen. *V.* Let us bless the Lord. *R.* Thanks be to God. *V.* And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. *R.* Amen.

Optional private prayer to be said after Evening Prayer: To the Most Holy and undivided Trinity, to our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified, to the fruitful Virginity of the most blessed and most glorious Mary, always a Virgin, and to the holiness of all the Saints be ascribed everlasting praise, honour, and glory, by all creatures, and to us be granted the forgiveness of all our sins, world without end. Amen.

Lenten Prayers

O gracious Master, infuse in our hearts the spotless light of Your Divine Wisdom and open the eyes of our mind that we may understand the teachings of Your Gospel. Instil in us also the fear of Your blessed commandments, so that having curbed all carnal desires, we may lead a spiritual life, both thinking and doing everything to please You. For You, O Christ, our God, are the enlightenment of our souls and bodies; and to You we render glory. Amen.

My precious and crucified Lord, I offer You this Lent. I offer it to You with total abandonment and trust. I offer You my prayers, sacrifices and my very life this day. Do with me, Lord, as You will. I pray that this Lent will be fruitful. I know You have much to say to me and much to do in my life. May this Lent be a time through which Your mercy is poured in abundance into my soul. Dearest Lord, give me courage and strength to confess my sins, and to turn from them with all my heart. Keep me faithful to my Lenten promises, and bring forth new life through these sacrifices of love. Amen.

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus while before Your face I humbly kneel and, with burning soul, pray and beseech You to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope, and charity; true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment. While I contemplate, with great love and tender pity, Your five most precious wounds, pondering over them within me and calling to mind the words which David, Your prophet, said to You, my Jesus: "*They have pierced My hands and My feet, they have numbered all My bones.*" Amen.

While fasting with the body, let us also fast in spirit. Let us lose every bond of iniquity; let us undo the knots of every contact made by violence; let us tear up all unjust agreements; let us give bread to the hungry and welcome to our house the poor who have no roof to cover them, that we may receive mercy from Christ our God. (*Byzantine Vespers*)

Look with favour, Lord, on your household. Grant that, though our flesh be humbled by abstinence from food, our souls, hungering after you, may be resplendent in your sight. (*St. Pius V Pope*)

Come, my Light, and illumine my darkness. Come, my Life, and revive me from death. Come, my Physician, and heal my wounds. Come, Flame of divine love, and burn up the thorns of my sins, kindling my heart with the flame of thy love. (*St. Demetrius of Rostov*)

God, may Your light guide my day, and your Spirit bring me peace. Amen.

Commentary on Zechariah's Song (The Benedictus) - part 3

*And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, **
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
*To give his people knowledge of salvation **
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
*In the tender compassion of our God **
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
*To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, **
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The climax of the Benedictus emerges here. Zechariah turns his prophetic gaze to his own son, John the Baptist. He knows that this boy will follow in the Spirit of Elijah. He will fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: a highway will be made in the desert for the New King to travel through. There shall be an access ramp for all who want to seek forgiveness for their sins and escape their darkness. Light shall spring forth. We shall no more be children of the darkness but shall have the dayspring rise in our hearts. We will be peacemakers, true sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven.

Zechariah's conclusion encapsulates the Gospel message. In this current age, it no longer belongs to the Jewish people alone: the message of God goes to every nation as a message of victory. All races, peoples, and nations are called to the table of the great King, no matter the darkness that holds them back. We long for the day when those nations shall bow before this Christ, seeing his kingdom of peace spread to the four corners of the world. In that hope, we rightly say, "*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*"

The whole of Zechariah's canticle (Luke 1,68-79) "happens" outside of time. Prior to this text and following it there is a narrative chronology. However, in this moment the author breaks time to speak to God's amazing capacity to operate across and within chronological time. It is now clearly revealed: God is at work at all times, history and time are in his hands.

And so the canticle makes continuous references to the Old Testament; references that would have been very clear to the first Christians (many of them of Jewish origins). The text takes us through the Exodus, into the monarchy, across the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel and into the hope for a new promise fulfilled first through John the Baptist and then through Jesus. As such, the text reminds us that we live in a cycle of both the declaration and fulfilment of God's promises in prophetic utterances.

5 tips to help you live liturgically this season



ChurchPOP

WHAT IS FASTING?



Fasting is a form of penance that imposes limits on the kind or quantity of food or drink.

WHAT IS ABSTINENCE



Abstinence refers to refraining from certain kind of foods or drink.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence.

St. Joseph, model of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving

St. Joseph, the most chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary and foster father of Jesus, offers us a model for virtue and holiness where the adage “actions speak louder than words” entirely applies. There are no recorded words of Joseph in the Gospel narratives; however, his actions, when considered and contemplated, speak volumes that every believer can draw upon for their own spiritual growth. St. Joseph is the exemplary model of the hidden life in our Lenten practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer called for in the Ash Wednesday Gospel: “*And your Father who sees in secret will repay you*”.

Fasting — Imagine being St. Joseph, along with Mary as the behind the scenes, the preparatory teacher for Jesus entering into his public ministry as the long-awaited Messiah and getting no public accolades of recognition or credit. How often do mothers and fathers perform those innumerable and unacknowledged acts of love and sacrifice that only our heavenly Father recognizes and rewards? This is the Lenten sacrifice of “fasting” from recognition, giving without counting the cost or getting something in return, that we can embrace willingly in our state of life during this Lenten season.

Almsgiving — Imagine how St. Joseph laboured day in and day out in his trade as a carpenter, eking out a living to provide for the Holy Family’s needs and allow Mary to be a stay-at-home mom to their son Jesus. Undoubtedly, there were times when they had to go without in order to provide for the family's needs and give to charity. This is the unrecognized “almsgiving” that one knows in providing for the financial needs of others and putting aside our own needs and preferences that’s especially called for during Lent.

Prayer — Imagine the burden of insurmountable circumstances and hardships that confronted the Holy Family, and St. Joseph’s reliance on God through trusting prayer that allowed him to remain faithful to his calling and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The many displaced and desperate experiences that St. Joseph prayerfully endured and overcame by God’s grace and provision are the “prayer” of Lent that he models for us all as we open up ourselves to God during Lent to realize and receive more of his love for us.

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust; with you Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen.

Know the Bible! - The Book of Samuel (1)

1 and 2 Samuel tell one, coherent story and they are divided into two separate books only in our modern bibles. The historic reason of this division is rather simple: for practical considerations, scrolls could not be of any lengths and so the long story the Book of Samuel tells us had to be recorded on two separate scrolls in antiquity.

Samuel continues the story we have seen in the previous books. Israel is supposed to be faithful to God in the promised land but Judges showed us how terribly they failed: their disobedience and the moral chaos in Israel made it clear that they need good, wise and strong leaders. And it is here that Samuel's story starts.

There are three main characters in the book: Samuel, Saul and David. 1 & 2 Samuel together tells us the story in four great units: 1) the key figure is Samuel (1 Sam); 2) we see the rise, fall and tragic death of Saul; we also witness the rise of David to power (1 Sam); 3) David's slow, tragic fall and the destruction of his family and kingdom (2 Sam); 4) epilogue: reflection over the whole story (2 Sam). In this article we will follow the first part of the story as told in 1 Samuel.

Chapters 1-3 — The book starts with Hannah's story who tragically was never able to have a child until God listened to her prayers. Hannah conceives Samuel. Her song of praise in ch. 2 is the main element of these chapters. The theme of her song is how God resists the proud, exalts the humble and works his purposes in history notwithstanding human evil. The song ends with an encouragement: God will raise up an anointed king for Israel. The theme of Hannah's song will also become the structure for the whole book of Samuel.

Chapters 4-7 — Samuel becomes a great prophet and leader while the Philistines grow into the archenemy of Israel. Israel becomes arrogant and instead of praying to God for victory over their enemies, they use the Ark of the Covenant as a magic talisman that will give them victory automatically. To break their pride, not only God allows Israel to lose the battle but the Philistines steal the Ark and put it in the temple of their deity, Dagon. But God defeats both the Philistines and Dagon, without the help of Israel, by sending plague on them. The Philistines, scared of God, send the Ark back. The message couldn't be clearer: God is not Israel's trophy, he resists the pride both in Israel and everywhere else.

Chapters 8-15 — Israel come to Samuel with the request of having a king "as every other nation." Samuel consults God who says: their reasons are all wrong but fine, if that's what they want, give them a king. And so Saul

appears on the scene. He is a tragic person. Very tall, good looking and popular, he starts with great promises and seemingly is the best candidate to be Israel's king. But he is dishonest, has no integrity and cannot see his own faults and mistakes. He wins some battles at the beginning but he is too proud and blatantly disobeys God's commandments. Samuel confronts Saul and Israel: I warned you, a king will only benefit you if he is humble and obedient, otherwise he will be your ruin. Samuel tells Saul that God will choose a new king... and so Saul's downfall begins.

Chapters 16-20 — God is already at work in background to raise up a new king and he chooses the least likely candidate: an insignificant shepherd boy, David. The famous story of David and Goliath show why God chose David: because of his radical and humble trust in God. In these chapters we see the themes of Hannah's song fulfilled. Saul descends into madness while David raises to power.

Chapters 21-26 — With God's help, David, as Saul's general, is winning all the battles and all the fame. Saul is becoming more and more jealous, up to the point when he starts a hunt for David, trying to kill him. David runs away, into the wilderness, and there he waits.

Chapters 27-31 — Here, in the wilderness, we can see David's true character. He has many opportunities to kill Saul but he doesn't. David, who never did anything wrong and is now persecuted unjustly, puts his trust completely and humbly in God. It is interesting to note that many of the Psalms written by David (see for example Psalms 18, 52, 53, or 57) can be linked to this period in David's life and have for their main theme trust in God. David puts his trust in God not only for himself but also for Israel. He knows that God is always faithful and at work and will give Israel a good king. This part of the story, and with it 1 Samuel, ends with Saul's death after a battle with the Philistines.

1 Samuel is the best-told story in the Bible. Saul and David are portrayed very realistically and they are showed in such a way that we can (or at least should!) see ourselves in them. Saul is clearly a warning to us all about the importance of reflecting honestly and humbly on our own faults and mistakes so we can see how they harm us and others. It is also an invitation to learn how to deal with our faults with God's help so that Saul's story does not become ours.

David, on the other hand, is the example of patient trust in God and in his timings. David refused to think that God had abandoned him. Instead, he knew that despite human evil, God is working his purposes and will always oppose the pride and exalt the humble.

Saint of the month: St. Casimir

4 March



The life of St. Casimir was a life well spent. It was also a short life. This Prince of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania died at the age of 25 and yet had achieved more, from a Christian point of view, than many of us ever will during a much longer life. “Father of the poor”, “Peacemaker”, “Prince of Piety”, “Miracle-worker” are only few of the titles given to him by Christians who for centuries asked for his prayers and tried to imitate his virtues, just as we should. Let’s see then briefly the life of this great Saint.

St. Casimir was born on 3 October 1458, into the royal family of Poland. He was the second of thirteen children to King Casimir IV Jagiellon and Queen Elizabeth of Austria. From a young age, Casimir was noted for his religious inclination and devotion. Amid the opulence that surrounded him, Casimir remained grounded in the virtues of humility and charity.

Rather than seek comfort, Casimir embraced an ascetic lifestyle, much to the astonishment of his contemporaries. He spent considerable time in prayer and meditation, often sleeping on the floor to practice self-denial. His love for the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary formed the cornerstone of his deep spiritual life.

When nobles in Hungary became dissatisfied with their king, they prevailed upon Casimir’s father, the king of Poland, to send his son to take over the country. Casimir obeyed his father, as many young men over the centuries have obeyed their governments. The army he was supposed to lead was clearly outnumbered by the “enemy”; some of his troops were deserting because they were not paid. At the advice of his officers, Casimir decided to return home.

His father was irked at the failure of his plans, and confined his 15-year-old son for three months. The lad made up his mind never again to become involved in the wars of his day, and no amount of persuasion could change his mind. He returned to prayer and study, maintaining his decision to remain celibate even under pressure to marry the emperor’s daughter.

St. Casimir became well-known for his generosity and concern for the poor; he was often seen distributing food and clothing to the needy. In fact,

he is often depicted in iconography as having three hands, which is meant to emphasize his exceptional generosity toward the destitute and politically oppressed. His commitment to the downtrodden was not just limited to material help. Casimir was also a voice of moral guidance, encouraging those around him to lead lives of virtue and to find strength in their spiritual beliefs.

Many miracles were attributed to St. Casimir during and after his short life. After experiencing symptoms of tuberculosis, Casimir foresaw his death and prepared for it by deepening his devotion to God. He died en route to Lithuania on 4 March 1484, and was buried with a copy of a Marian hymn he frequently recited.

Reports of healings and other miraculous events led to his canonization in 1522 by Pope Adrian VI. St. Casimir's tomb in Vilnius (Lithuania), in the church of St. Stanislaus, became a pilgrimage site and has been associated with numerous signs of divine favour.

Five centuries after his death, Pope John Paul II recalled how St. Casimir “embraced a life of celibacy, submitted himself humbly to God's will in all things, devoted himself with tender love to the Blessed Virgin Mary and developed a fervent practice of adoring Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. To all, he was a shining example of poverty and of sacrificial love for the poor and needy.”

St. Casimir is the Patron Saint of Poland, Lithuania and Russia. Only in Poland there are at least 50 churches dedicated to him. In Vilnius, his feast day is marked annually with Kaziuko mugė (a trade fair) held on the Sunday nearest to 4 March. The fair features traditional Lithuanian crafts, folk art, and street food. Young men would give gingerbread hearts to their beloveds, with the girl's name or a declaration of love written on the heart in icing. The girl who received the most hearts was named the Kaziuki Queen.



A procession is held, too, in honour of St. Casimir with a giant figure of the Saint being carried around (*see previous page*). Many young people will dress as St. Casimir (*see above*). As his feast is relatively close to Holy Week, richly decorated palms (“Vilnius palms”) are prepared in St. Casimir's memory for Palm Sunday.



What happened in March in days gone by — for avid historians

Jeanne James writes:

- 1 March - National Day of Wales. Feast day of St David.
- 2 March 1969 - Concorde, the Anglo-French supersonic airline, roared into the skies on its maiden flight, at twice the speed of sound.
- 3 March 1985 - Members of Britain's National Union of Mineworkers returned to work after voting to end their unsuccessful year-long strike.
- 4 March 1681 - King Charles II granted a Royal Charter to William Penn, a Quaker, entitling Penn to establish a colony in North America (Pennsylvania).
- 5 March 1936 - Powered by a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, the British fighter plane Spitfire made its first test flight from Eastleigh, Southampton.
- 6 March 1987 - A British-owned ferry ('Herald of Free Enterprise') left Belgium, with its bow doors open; it capsized, killing over 180 passengers.
- 7 March 1876 - The Scottish Alexander Graham Bell, patented the telephone.
- 8 March 1702 - Anne became Queen of Britain after William III died in a riding accident. He was thrown from his horse after it stumbled on a molehill.
- 9 March 1074 - Pope Gregory VII excommunicated all married priests.
- 10 March 1886 - Cruft's Dog Show was held in London for the first time instead of Newcastle. Now it is at National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham.
- 11 March 1858 - Indian sepoy's mutiny ended after 10 months. They believed rifle cartridges had been lubricated in animal fat.
- 12 March 1904 - Britain's first mainline electric train ran from Liverpool to Southport.
- 13 March 1900 - British forces under the command of Field Marshall Roberts take Bloemfontein in the Second Boer War.
- 14 March 1757 - British Admiral John Byng was executed by firing squad at Plymouth, for having failed to relieve Menorca from the French fleet.
- 15 March 44 BC - Julius Caesar is stabbed by his son, Marcus Brutus.
- 16 March 1872 - The Wanderers beat the Royal Engineers 1–0 in the first English FA Cup Final, at Kennington Oval.
- 17 March 1766 - Parliament in London votes to repeal the controversial Stamp Act in an attempt to stifle rebellion in the American colonies — "Taxation without representation is tyranny."

18 March 978 - Edward, King of England is murdered at Corfe Castle. The murder is thought to have been ordered by his stepmother Aelfryth, mother of Ethelred the Unready.

19 March 1834 - Six farm labourers from Tolpuddle, Dorset, were sentenced to seven years' transportation to Australia for forming a trade union.

20 March 1653 - Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, dissolves the Long Parliament.

21 March 1556 - England's first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer is burnt at the stake as a heretic, under the Catholic Queen Mary I, also known as "Bloody Mary".

22 March 1824 - The British Parliament voted to purchase 38 paintings at a cost of £57,000, to establish a national collection which is now housed in the National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London.

23 March 1956 - Queen Elizabeth II laid the foundation stone of a new cathedral in Coventry. The new building was erected next to the remains of the 14th-century cathedral destroyed by the German Luftwaffe in 1940.

24 March 1603 - The crowns of England and Scotland were united when King James VI of Scotland succeeded to the English throne.

25 March 1306 - The eighth Earl of Carrick, Robert the Bruce was crowned King of Scotland at Scone Palace near Perth.

26 March 1902 - British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes died in Cape Town aged 48. Rhodes who controlled 90% of the world's diamond production, was influential in establishing the British crown in South Africa and Rhodesia.

27 March 1871 - Legalised warfare – England and Scotland played their first rugby football international, in Edinburgh; first blood to Scotland.

28 March 1912 - Both the Oxford and the Cambridge boats sank in the annual Varsity boat race.

29 March 1461 - Over 28,000 people are said to have been killed in the bloody Battle of Towton, N Yorkshire; the Lancastrians under Henry VI were crushed.

30 March 1856 - The Crimean War between Russia and Europe was brought to an end by the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

31 March 1855 - Charlotte Bronte, the reclusive Yorkshire novelist and author of Jane Eyre, died today.

Customs and traditions on the Feast of St. Joseph

from various sources

The feast of St. Joseph, foster father of our Lord Jesus Christ and patron of the Universal Church, falls during Lent. Yet, despite the necessity of maintaining Lenten penance in the form of fasting and abstinence, St. Joseph's Day still provides ample opportunities for celebrating.

The Church celebrates St. Joseph a few times during the year: March 19th, Wednesday preceding the Third Sunday after Easter (up until the 1955 changes), and May 1st (starting with the 1955 changes).

Who is Saint Joseph? — St. Joseph is one of the greatest saints. His life is recorded partially in Scripture, where we see a man dedicated to the Lord, a man eager to do the will of God. What we know of St. Joseph comes from the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke. St. Joseph owned little possessions, but he was a descendant of David.

There is not one recorded sentence spoken by St. Joseph, but the Gospels are clear that he acted kindly towards Mary and Jesus. He cared for them when Herod sought to kill Our Lord, and after the threat passed, he quietly passed away. For that reason, he is frequently recognized as the patron of a peaceful death.

St. Joseph and Sicily — St. Joseph's Day is a big Feast in the region because in the Middle Ages, God, through St. Joseph's intercessions, saved the Sicilians from a very serious drought. So in his honour, the custom is for all to wear red, in the same way that green is worn on St. Patrick's Day.

St. Joseph's Table — In many parishes a big altar ("*la tavola di San Giusè*" or "St. Joseph's Table") is laden with food contributed by everyone: minestrone, pasta with breadcrumbs (the breadcrumbs symbolize the sawdust that would have covered St. Joseph's floor), seafood, a special sweet pastry called *Sfini di San Giuseppe*, and, always, fava beans, which are considered "lucky" because during the drought, the fava thrived while other crops failed.

The table – which is always blessed by a priest – will be in three tiers, symbolizing the Most Holy Trinity. The top tier will hold a statue of St. Joseph surrounded by flowers and greenery. The other tiers might hold, in addition to the food: flowers (especially lilies); candles; figurines and symbolic breads and pastries shaped like a monstrance, chalices, fishes, doves, baskets, St. Joseph's staff, lilies, the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts, carpentry tools, etc.; 12 fishes symbolizing the 12 Apostles; wine symbolizing the miracle at Cana; pineapple symbolizing hospitality; lemons for "luck"; bread and wine

(symbolizing the Last Supper); and pictures of the dead. There will also be a basket in which the faithful place prayer petitions.

St. Joseph's Tables, because of Lent, were always meatless. For centuries, even Sundays in Lent were days of abstinence (=no meat) – just not fasting.

Zeppole, sfinci, frittelle... — Various forms of sweet pastry (baked, fried, filled, etc.) and deep-fried doughnuts are associated with St. Joseph's Feast. The dough often contains rice, sometimes ricotta cheese, resulting in a light and airy texture. After frying, they are coated with powdered (vanilla) sugar or drizzled with honey, providing a sweet and indulgent flavour.

Many parishes set up temporary stalls or visit pastry shops where these sweets are prepared and sold. Every region has their own variation of zeppole, with specific ingredients or shapes unique to the local tradition.

In many places there is the "lucky fava bean" tradition, where a dried fava bean is hidden in one of the zeppole. The person who finds the bean is believed to receive good luck.



The Tuscan version (Frittelle di San Giuseppe) — 500 ml milk; 100 g rice ; 30 g sugar (plus extra for covering); 60 g flour; 25 g butter; 1 egg (separate yolk and white); 1 tablespoon of rum; 5 g baking powder; lemon peel; 1 pinch of salt; oil for frying.

PREPARATION: Pour the milk and the sugar in a saucepan with a pinch of salt the grated zest of a lemon. Heat on medium gas. Once it starts to boil, add the rice. Cook until all the liquid has been absorbed (it should take around 30 minutes). Stir often, especially towards the end, so that the rice does not stick to the bottom.

Once the rice is ready, take the saucepan off the heat and add the butter. Mix well. Transfer the rice mixture into a cold bowl and let it cool to room temperature before putting it in the fridge. Leave the rice mixture in the fridge for overnight or, if you are in a rush, at least for 3-4 hours.

Once your mixture is cold, add to it: the egg yolk, the rum, the sifted flour and the baking powder. Mix it well. Whip the egg white and incorporate it gently into the mixture. With a tablespoon, place portions of the mixture into hot oil and deep-fry it for 4-5 minutes, turning them time to time so they fry evenly. One ready, dry them on paper towel to get rid of the excess oil. Coat them with granulated (vanilla) sugar and serve them while still hot. (In some places, once fried, they fill them with custard.)

Prayer to St. 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.

Salmon and shrimps/prawns pasta



As Lent is approaching, why not prepare this fish-based pasta. You may consider having it on a Sunday thus keeping even Sundays meatless, following ancient traditions, but without fasting; on the contrary, having something delicious on the table.

Put enough salty water on the hob for your pasta. By the time the water boils and the pasta is cooked, your dish should be ready. Cook 250 g of dried pasta (ideally *farfalle* or *fusilli*).

For the “sauce” (*enough for 2 persons*) you will need: 1 onion or leek; 200 g shrimps or prawns; 100 g smoked salmon; 100 ml (double)cream; fresh parsley or fresh dill; 2 tablespoons of tomato concentrate; olive oil; salt and pepper.

Chop your onion or leek finely together with the parsley or dill (*any possible combination of these ingredients is fine!*) and fry them in olive oil, on medium heat, until the onion/leek is tender. Add the shelled (cooked or raw) shrimps/prawns to the pan and cook for 2-3 minutes while stirring them so they cook evenly.

Now add the tomato concentrate and a small amount of (pasta cooking) water. Salt and pepper to taste.

In a blender, blend into a fine paste half of the cooked shrimps/prawns (*it's ok to put some leek/onion into the blender as well*) and half of the smoked salmon. Put this paste into the frying pan, together with the rest of the smoked salmon (cut into pieces) and the cream (*single, double, plant based, whatever you prefer*). Heat it until it starts simmering. Once it simmered for a minute or so, your “sauce” is ready. If you find it too dense, add to it some pasta water.

By now your pasta should be ready, strictly *al dente*, so you can add it to your sauce in the frying pan and simmer/mix it together well for a few seconds. It's ready so *buon appetito* ... and for the love of pasta, I beg of you, no cheese!!

(*I actually cooked this yesterday but by the time I remembered that I wanted to take a photo, we had finished it... so the illustration is from the internet.*)

The Psalms

Psalms 47: The enthronement of God and of Christ

Psalm 47, which has the form of a hymn, praises God's kingship and was used at the New Year Festival or at the Covenant Festival in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Through its structure, the psalm brings both history (past) and eschatology (future) into the context of liturgical celebration (present). God's actions in the past are the foundation of the future fulfilment of his promises but, through worship, the faithful are made partakers of both: the saving acts of the past and the final salvation yet to come in its fullness.

Psalm 47 is an enthusiastic witness to the biblical faith according to which the Kingdom of the God of history will, at the end of time, embrace the whole world.

Verses 1-2 — Psalm 47 opens with two tremendously great themes: God is proclaimed as the terrible and mighty King of the world and all nations are reminded of their duty to pay him homage. Just as the shouts of joy reclaiming the earthly king surround him at his enthronement, so must now the Temple resound with the rejoicing of the whole world to greet God, who has appeared to reveal his reign over the whole world.

The concept of a "terrible God" may sound strange for us but it is in full accordance with Old Testament theology. For man perceives God's glory and encounters him as Lord in the very things which makes him realise that the power of God—and God himself!—is something quite different. This fills him with holy fear and makes him feel very humble in God's presence.

Verses 3-4 — The same sentiments of awe and fear animate the proud words in the following verses (3-4). Israel knows that history is God's creation as well and is at his service. History, for Israel, reveals both God's might and his love.

The pride these verses contain are not aimed at Israel who, though being a small nation, managed to occupy the land of much greater nations and of forceful warriors. They are aimed at God who, in his love and mercy, chose Israel without any merit on their part and manifested his own might in favour of an otherwise insignificant assembly of small tribes. The gratitude and joy God has thus caused to his people is manifest throughout the whole psalm.

Israel must not, however, keep her history for herself, but is meant to use it for the purpose of her mission amongst the nations. Israel is the

servant of God and her history is the history of salvation, grace and divine love. It is through Israel and her history that the nations must recognise God as the mighty, terrible and loving God of the world so that they may bow down before him.

Verses 5-7 — Seen in this perspective, the whole history has a clear goal towards which it moves: the Kingdom of God. For Israel God has always been the Lord of creation and history who with a definite purpose in view holds the destiny of nations in his strong hands. But this is yet to be clearly revealed to the nations.

When and where is this revelation to happen? In the Temple, during worship, where all can witness and experience the joyful and overwhelming presence of God. In the presence of God, who was, is and who is to come, time sinks into insignificance. Worship takes man out of time and puts him into God's eternity. As mentioned at the beginning, past and future become one present in the Temple worship.

It is worth to remember that the Church has used Psalm 47 from the very beginning in her liturgy to mark the Feast of Christ's Ascension. The fulfilment of all that Psalm 47 is about comes in Christ Jesus and in his enthronement, according to his human nature, on the Father's right hand and all power and might is given to him. Our place in heaven is finally secured when Christ ascends into heaven, taking with him our mortal nature and body.

Verses 8-9 — Psalm 47 pictures the King-God as he ascends his heavenly throne and sits down in his holy majesty. He has inaugurated his reign in the sight of the whole world. Though he has been King since before the creation, this solemn act of enthronement adds a renewed actual significance for the present and for the future. What has been a truth since before the world existed can now, through worship, become the personal truth of every faithful worshipper of the King-God.

The "princes of the nations" (the title "king" is reserved for God only in Psalm 47) gather together, of their free will, to pay homage to their common divine King. They have become one great "people of God" and so the promise given to Abraham—that in him all the nations shall be blessed (Gen 12,3)—has received its fulfilment. Prophecies of salvation are even surpassed in the overflowing generosity of their fulfilment. What we see here realised is why will be promised once more in the New Testament: there will come times when there will be one Shepherd and one flock. All differences, all disagreements will be erased when finally the Kingdom of God will embrace the whole world. For this we pray indeed!

Vicar

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The Vicar's day-off is Tuesday. With enquiries about Baptisms, Weddings, Banns, or Funerals, please, contact the Vicar. If you are in hospital, live in a care home, or are house-bound and you wish to receive Holy Communion and/or Anointing, or to make your Confession, please let the Vicar know and he will be very happy to visit you.

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