

# **Sunday Notes – Advent Sunday 2009 to the feast of Christ the King, 2010**

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## **"Seek that which is above"**

Advent Sunday - Year C - 29th November 2009

"The beautiful task of Advent is to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope" this was Pope Benedict XVI in a beautiful book published in 1986 called "Seek that Which is Above" containing mediations on various liturgical seasons and feasts throughout the year.

His thought and insight in the meaning of Advent and Christmastide will be our guide for this "Walk with Me" journey of Advent prayer.

This Journey built on the store of memories each of which is associated with the festivities of Christmas and the preparation needed for that feast and holiday.

The reflections remind us that our hope for the future rests on our memories of goodness from the past. As we explore these memories then goodness, gentleness, forgiveness and acceptance become real again.

What has been experienced can again be true. In remembering an experience of goodness we strengthen the hope of knowing such goodness in the future. The person who has no experience of goodness, or for whom the memory of it has been corrupted or lost, has little chance of nurturing hope for the future.

The most important and powerful memory we recall during Advent is the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, in Bethlehem, in the company of the animals in the stable and the shepherds summoned to greet him.

This Jesus is the Christ. He is the Eternal Word of God, the only Son of the Father. The memory of this incarnation of the Godhead is the source of our hope. In remembering that God has come to be with us, we hope that we may be with him, for the eternity of his life.

I hope that this Walk with Me will help you to reach deeply into your storehouse of rich memories. There will be many prompts to help you to do this in the weeks ahead.

I trust, too, that as you recall the goodness of the past you will grow in your hope for the future. May God guide your minds, and hearts this Advent that you will not forget or dismiss his blessings. May the Holy Spirit strengthen hope in your hearts and bring you to a joyful Christmas celebration.

The birth of this Eternal King is for ever the source of our hope.

*Archbishop Vincent Nichols*

## **Preparing for Christ**

Second Sunday of Advent - Year C - 6th December 2009

Since Advent is a season of hope, then perhaps this would be a good time to ask God to help us put aside any obstacles in our lives that prevent us from fully welcoming His presence. The Psalmist says: "Those who are sowing in tears will sing when they reap ". We need to have a vision of what could be. We know that when we are looking forward to something it can help to change the present difficult situation that we live in. Hope can dramatically affect the life that we are now living.

When we are around hopeful people then life is different. Isolation is a trap that we have to avoid. If we cut ourselves off from people that see differently, we may become very narrow minded and lose the ability to imagine that things could be different. Advent is a season when we are encouraged to dream and hope... to imagine what could be.

The two words, presents and presence, sound the same but they are very different. Which would you prefer: that your best friend comes to visit you? Or that your best friend sends you a gift? Which do you think Jesus prefers? Clearly he wants our "presence", and we may ask how we can do so?

Remember what he said, "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do to me". Do we know people who may find Christmas difficult this year? How might our "presence" help? We do not have to look too far, the people who are asking our presence instead of a present are often within our own family circle or within our parish community. Can we be generous and give of ourselves to them this Christmas?

When we begin to understand that God loves us so much that he would level mountains and valleys for our safe passage we can begin to understand our own call to generosity. We have nothing to fear. We will have enough resources to accomplish God's work if only because it is God himself who will "carry it through to completion, right up to the day of Christ Jesus." We have only to follow in his steps.

If we begin to give of ourselves generously, the Lord will increase our love and help us to make progress in the kind of life we are meant to live. We will be ready to greet Him when he comes to call us to the eternal life.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Do not lose faith.**

Third Sunday of Advent - Year A, 12th December 2010

In the Gospel, John the Baptist sends his followers to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus does not give them a direct answer. Rather, he says to them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me."

It was not what John expected the Messiah to be, but it was what God intended the Messiah to be.

John knew the reading from Isaiah which we read today. It opens his eyes and he accepts and surrenders his life. In our time, many people have such moments when certainty gives way to doubt, enthusiasm is replaced by a need for reassurance, commitment is undermined by a sense of betrayal. They ask who will confirm our faith and rekindle our hope?

John the Baptist dealt with his doubts by being open to what Jesus had to say. He listened to Jesus, prayed to God, and allowed the Spirit to enlighten him. This is how we too should act. Our doubts can help us to become closer to Christ. But the important thing here is to continue to search. It is important to keep listening to Jesus, praying to God and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us.

Today the church offers us a choice of two very different responses to the responsorial psalm: one is a cry for help, "Lord, come and save us", the other a joyful outburst of praise, "Alleluia". Which response will you choose?

Both responses are very appropriate for today's psalm which is a rich expression of faith in God. The sacred writer praises God who keeps faith forever, who cares for the oppressed and marginalised, who heals the sick and who sees justice done. When we respond, 'Lord, come and save us', we are saying, 'Lord, we believe you are such a God and we ask you to reveal your saving power and faithful love in our present difficult circumstances'. When we select the joy-filled response of 'Alleluia' we are saying, 'Lord, we believe you are such a God because we are presently experiencing your wonderful saving love'.

Whatever our circumstances, faith in God who keeps faith in us is what is most important. As Jesus says in today's Gospel, "Happy the one who does not lose faith in me."

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **A Time to Choose!**

Fourth Sunday of Advent - Year A - 19th December 2010

As we reflect on the story of the Nativity during these final days of Advent, we are also being challenged to ponder the contrasting reaction of those involved.

On the one hand, we have King Herod who feigns interest in the birth of Jesus but in reality feels threatened by the news and immediately conspires to eradicate the child Jesus by killing every infant under 2 years born in Bethlehem.

Then there's Zachary. When the angel invites him to play his role in the story of salvation and gives him the good news that his wife's Elisabeth is pregnant he becomes hesitant and doubtful. For his lack of faith he is struck dumb until the birth of the child.

Herod and Zachary remind us of our own tendency to retain absolute control over whatever happens within of our petty domain; to cling to a comfortable routine; to "appear" proper rather than risk participation.

On the other hand, the Gospel writers present us with the Magi who are not at all reluctant to follow a star across miles of desert in expectation of some grand discovery-to risk their lives in search of a

greater good.

And then there's Joseph, at first he is perplexed and wants to do the prudent thing and to disengage from Mary but then he trusts in God and lets his dreams overrule his prudence and generously takes Mary as his wife. It will not be easy for him as he will have to protect the mother and child from the tyranny of Herod but that is still unknown to him.

And, of course, there's Mary, the truly pivotal character of the whole account. In contrast to Zachary she is simply an affirmative soul: "Be it done to me according to your word." Though she does not understand, she's quite ready to let God's Spirit infiltrate her very being and truly become the "handmaid of the Lord".

At the heart of the drama is Joseph and Mary saying YES to God, when it was not all that easy to speak that yes. It was agreeing to say yes for the rest of their lives.

As we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth at the end of this week let us consider not only the choices made by Joseph and Mary but the choices we have made in the past and will make in the future.

Confronted by these different responses, are we prepared to come out of our precious privacy, to go that extra mile and let God lead us in His ways? God is asking for our yes.

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## ***Verbum Domini***

(The Word of the Lord).

The Baptism of the Lord - Year A - 9th January 2011

"The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church." was the theme discussed by the Synod of Bishops in 2008. Last November, the Holy Father issued his reflections on the work of Synod in his exhortation *Verbum Domini*. During the coming weeks I hope to present selected extracts from *Verbum Domini*. I do hope they will be helpful and give us all a deeper love of the scriptures.

In his introduction, Pope Benedict writes:

"How can we not be moved by St Paul's stirring words about his mission as a preacher of the word of God: 'I do everything for the Gospel' (1 Cor 9:23); or, as he writes in the Letter to the Romans: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith' (1 : 16).

"Whenever we reflect on the word of God in the life and mission of the Church, we cannot but think of Saint Paul and his life spent in spreading the message of salvation in Christ to all peoples. I would like the work of the Synod to have a real effect on the life of the Church: on our personal relationship with the sacred Scriptures, on their interpretation in the liturgy and catechesis, and in scientific research, so that the Bible may not be simply a word from the past, but a living and timely

word.

"To accomplish this, I would like to present and develop the labours of the Synod by making constant reference to the Prologue (Introduction) of John's Gospel (Jn 1: 1-18), which makes known to us the basis of our life: the Word, who from the beginning is with God, who became flesh and who made his dwelling among us (cf. Jn 1:14).

"This is a magnificent text, one which offers a synthesis of the entire Christian faith. From his personal experience of having met and followed Christ, John, whom tradition identifies as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" came to a deep certainty: Jesus is the Wisdom of God incarnate, he is his eternal Word who became a mortal man.

"May John, who "saw and believed" (Jn 20:8) also help us to lean on the breast of Christ (Jn 13:25), the source of the blood and water (Jn 19:34) which are symbols of the Church's sacraments.

Following the example of the Apostle John and the other inspired authors, may we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit to an ever greater love of the word of God."

## **Logos - The Word**

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A - 16th January 2011

The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us. "From the fullness of his love, God addresses men and women as his friends, and lives among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company". (Second Vatican Council).

Not only does God enter into loving communion with us, but in reality, the Word of God, through whom "all things were made" and who "became flesh", is the same Word who is "in the beginning". If we realise that this is an allusion to the beginning of the book of Genesis (cf. Gen 1:1), we find ourselves faced with a beginning which is absolute and which speaks to us of the inner life of God.

St John wants us to realise that the Word is truly eternal, and from eternity is himself God. God was never without his Word. The Word exists before creation. Consequently at the heart of the divine life there is communion of love: "God is love ..."

God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Word, who from the beginning is with God and is God, reveals God himself in the dialogue of love between the divine persons, and invites us to share in that love.

Created in the image and likeness of the God who is love, we can thus understand ourselves only in accepting the Word and in docility to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of these considerations, the Synod Fathers affirmed the different ways in which we speak of "the word of God". They rightly referred to a symphony of the word, to a single word expressed in multiple ways: "a polyphonic hymn". They pointed out that the expression word of God, while referring to God's self-communication, also takes on a number of different meanings

which need to be carefully considered and related among themselves.

St John clearly tells us, the Logos refers in the first place to the eternal Word, the only Son, begotten of the Father before all ages and consubstantial with him: the word was with God, and the word was God. But this same Word, Saint John tells us, "became flesh" hence Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, is truly the Word of God who has become consubstantial with us. Thus the expression "word of God" here refers to the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, made man.

While the Christ event is at the heart of divine revelation, we also need to realise that God speaks to us in His creation and through His word in salvation history; "he has spoken through the prophets". Then too, the word of God is that word preached by the Apostles in obedience to the command of the Risen Jesus: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation". The word of God is thus handed on in the Church's living Tradition...

All this helps us to see that, while in the Church we greatly venerate the sacred Scriptures, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book": Christianity is the "religion of the word of God". It is important that we study how the different meanings of this expression "word" are interrelated, so that the unity of God's plan and, within it, the centrality of the person of Christ, may shine forth more clearly.

(Selected extracts from Pope Benedict - *Verbum Domini*)

## **Creation**

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A - 23rd January 2011

Saint John says of the divine Word, that "all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" and in the Letter to the Colossians it is said of Christ, "the first-born of all creation" that "all things were created through him and for him".

Scripture tells us that everything that exists does not exist by chance but is willed by God and part of his plan, at whose centre is the invitation to partake, in Christ, in the divine life.

All reality expresses this mystery: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" Thus sacred Scripture itself invites us to acknowledge the Creator by contemplating his creation.

Contemplating creation from the perspective of salvation history, we come to realise the unique and singular position occupied by man in creation: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them"

This enables us to acknowledge fully the precious gifts received from the Creator: the value of our body, the gift of reason, freedom and conscience. Here too we discover what the philosophical tradition calls "the natural law". Listening to the word of God leads us first and foremost to value the need to live in accordance with this law written on human hearts.

Jesus Christ then gives mankind the new law, the law of the Gospel, which takes up and eminently fulfils the natural law, setting us free from the law of sin, as a result of which, as Saint Paul says, "I

can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Rom 7:18). It likewise enables men and women, through grace, to share in the divine life and to overcome their selfishness.

Those who know God's word also know fully the significance of each creature. For if all things "hold together" in the one who is "before all things" then those who build their lives on his word build in a truly sound and lasting way.

The realist is the one who recognizes in the word of God the foundation of all things. This realism is particularly needed in our own time, when many things in which we trust for building our lives, things in which we are tempted to put our hopes, prove ephemeral. Possessions, pleasure and power show themselves sooner or later to be incapable of fulfilling the deepest yearnings of the human heart. In building our lives we need solid foundations which will endure when human certainties fail. Truly, since "for ever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens" and the faithfulness of the Lord "endures to all generations" whoever builds on this word builds the house of his life on rock.

Selected extracts from Pope Benedict's *Verbum Domini*

## **Christ the Word of God**

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A - 30th January 2011

It is very beautiful to see how the entire Old Testament already appears to us as a history in which God communicates his word: indeed, "by his covenant with Abraham" and, through Moses, with the race of Israel he gained a people for himself, and to them he revealed himself in words and deeds as the one, living and true God.

It was his plan that Israel might learn by experience God's ways with humanity, by listening to the voice of God speaking to them through the prophets, might gradually understand his ways more fully and more clearly, and make them more widely known among the nations.

This "condescension" of God is accomplished surpassingly in the incarnation of the Word. The eternal Word, expressed in creation and communicated in salvation history, became a man, "born of woman". Here the word finds expression not primarily in discourse, concepts or rules: Here we stand before the very person of Jesus... We can see, then, why "being Christian" is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a definitive direction".

The constant renewal of this encounter and this awareness fills the hearts of believers with amazement at God's initiative, which human beings, with our own reason and imagination, could never have dreamt of "the word became flesh and dwelt among us".

Our faith testifies that the eternal Word became one of us. The divine Word is truly expressed in human words.

The Son himself is the Word became small - small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the word could be grasped by us. Now the word is not simply audible; not only does it have a voice, now the word has a face, one which we can see: that of Jesus of Nazareth.

Reading the Gospel accounts, we see how Jesus' own humanity appears in all its uniqueness. In his perfect humanity he does the will of the Father at all times; Jesus hears his voice and obeys it with his entire being; he knows the Father and he keeps his word he speaks to us of what the Father has told him.

Jesus' mission is ultimately fulfilled in the paschal mystery: here we find ourselves before the "word of the cross". The word is muted; it becomes mortal silence, for it has "spoken" exhaustively, holding back nothing of what it had to tell us.

In the most luminous mystery of the resurrection, this silence of the word is shown in its authentic and definitive meaning. Christ, the incarnate, crucified and risen Word of God, is Lord of all things; he is the Victor, and so all things are gathered up forever in Christ who is thus "the light of the world", the light which "shines in the darkness" and which the darkness has not overcome.

From the beginning, Christians realized that in Christ the word of God is present as a person. The word of God is the true light which men and women need. In the resurrection the Son of God truly emerged as the light of the world. Now, by living with him and in him, we can live in the light.

(Selected extracts from Pope Benedict's - *Verbum Domini*)

## **The word of God and the Holy Spirit**

Fifth Sunday of Year A - 6th February 2011

God's self-communication always involves the relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit, whom Irenaeus of Lyons refers to as "the two hands of the Father". Sacred Scripture itself speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in salvation history and particularly in the life of Jesus. As his mission draws to an end, according to the account of Saint John, Jesus himself clearly relates the giving of his life to the sending of the Spirit on those who belong to him.

The Risen Jesus, bearing in his flesh the signs of the passion, then pours out the Spirit, making his disciples sharers in his own mission. The Holy Spirit was to teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Christ had said. Finally, in the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the Spirit descended on the Twelve gathered in prayer with Mary on the day of Pentecost, and impelled them to take up the mission of proclaiming to all peoples the Good News.

The word of God is thus expressed in human words thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit. The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable and constitute a single economy of salvation. The same Spirit who acts in the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary is the Spirit who guides Jesus throughout his mission and is promised to the disciples. The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets sustains and inspires the Church in her task of proclaiming the word of God and in the preaching of the Apostles; finally, it is this Spirit who inspires the authors of sacred Scripture.

Hence Synod Fathers highlighted the importance of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the Church and in the hearts of believers in relation to sacred Scripture: without the efficacious working of the Spirit of Truth, the words of the Lord cannot be understood. Just as the word of God comes to us in

the body of Christ, in his Eucharistic body and in the body of the Scriptures, through the working of the Holy Spirit, so too it can only be truly received and understood through that same Spirit.

Saint John Chrysostom states that Scripture "needs the revelation of the Spirit, so that by discovering the true meaning of the things enclosed therein, we can reap abundant benefits".

The prayer of invocation before the Gospel is proclaimed affirms this same thought. "Send your Spirit into my heart and make me understand the Scriptures which he has inspired; and grant that I may interpret them worthily, so that the faithful assembled here may profit thereby".

This makes it clear that we cannot come to understand the meaning of the word unless we are open to the working of the Spirit in the Church and in the hearts of believers.

Ultimately, it is the living Tradition of the Church which makes us adequately understand sacred Scripture as the word of God.

By the work of the Holy Spirit and under the guidance of the magisterium, the Church hands on to every generation all that has been revealed in Christ. The Church lives in the certainty that her Lord, who spoke in the past, continues today to communicate his word in her living Tradition and in sacred Scripture.

Selected extracts from Pope Benedict - *Verbum Domini*

## **Sacred Scripture, inspiration and truth**

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - year A - 13th February 2011

Sacred Scripture is "the word of God set down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit". In this way one recognizes the full importance of the human author who wrote the inspired texts and, at the same time, God himself as the true author.

Whenever our awareness of its inspiration grows weak, we risk reading Scripture as an object of historical curiosity and not as the work of the Holy Spirit in which we can hear the Lord himself speak and recognize his presence in history.

As the cross of Christ demonstrates, God also speaks by his silence. The silence of God, the experience of the distance of the almighty Father, is a decisive stage in the earthly journey of Jesus. Hanging from the wood of the cross, he lamented the suffering caused by that silence: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This experience of Jesus reflects the situation of all those who, having heard and acknowledged God's word, must also confront his silence. This has been the experience of countless saints and mystics, and even today is part of the journey of many believers. God's silence prolongs his earlier words. In these moments of darkness, he speaks through the mystery of his silence. Hence, in the dynamic of Christian revelation, silence appears as an important expression of the word of God.

Mary "Mother of God's Word" and "Mother of Faith".

The interplay between the word of God and faith was brought to perfection, in the Virgin Mary, "who by her 'yes' to the word of the covenant and her mission, perfectly fulfils the divine vocation of humanity." From the Annunciation to Pentecost she appears as a woman completely open to the will of God. Her obedient faith shapes her life at every moment before God's plan. A Virgin ever attentive to God's word, she lives completely attuned to that word; she treasures in her heart the events of her Son, piecing them together as if in a single mosaic.

Mary stands at the heart of Christian truth. The incarnation of the word cannot be conceived apart from the freedom of this young woman who by her assent decisively cooperated with the entrance of the eternal into time. Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God, which took flesh in her. Mary also symbolises openness to God and others; an active listening which interiorises and assimilates, one in which the Word becomes a way of life.

Mary's familiarity with the word of God is clearly evident in the Magnificat. There we see in some sense how she identifies with the word, enters into it; in this marvellous canticle of faith. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Thus, what took place for Mary can daily take place in each of us, in the hearing of the word and in the celebration of the sacraments.

Selected extracts from Pope Benedict - *Verbum Domini*

## **The Prayerful Reading of Sacred Scripture: Lectio Divina**

Seventh Sunday In Ordinary Time - Year A - 20th February 2011

The word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality. "Let the faithful go gladly to the sacred text itself, whether in the sacred liturgy, which is full of the divine words, or in devout reading, or in such suitable exercises and various other helps which, with the approval and guidance of the pastors of the Church, are happily spreading everywhere in our day".

One must be careful to avoid the risk of an individualistic approach, and remember that God's word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the Truth along our path to God. While it is a word addressed to each of us personally, it is also a word which builds community, which builds the Church. Consequently, the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church.

For this reason, the privileged place for the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture is the liturgy, and particularly the Eucharist.

The Bishops at the Synod strongly recommended Lectio Divina (Reading the Divine) as a method of reading the scriptures. This method is truly "capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God's word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God".

I would like to review with you the basic steps of this procedure. It opens with the reading (lectio) of a text, asking what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas.

Next comes meditation (*meditatio*), which asks: what does the biblical text say to us? Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged. What is the text saying to me?

Following this comes prayer (*oratio*), which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us.

Finally, *lectio divina* concludes with contemplation (*contemplatio*), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us? Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16).

We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity. Here Mary is our model.

I also urge that the Rosary be encouraged among the faithful, above all in life of families, since it is an aid to meditating on the holy mysteries found in the Scriptures. A most helpful aid to ponder the mysteries of Christ's life in union with Mary. It is fitting that each mystery be accompanied by a brief biblical text pertinent to that mystery.

Selected extracts from Pope Benedict - *Verbum Domini*

## **Revised Edition of the Roman Missal.**

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A - 27th February 2011

Beginning on the first Sunday of Advent 2011 a new English translation of the Roman Missal is being introduced. Please note that it is not a new missal but a new translation of the Latin Roman Missal which was announced by Pope John Paul II during the Jubilee year 2000.

The process implementing revised edition of the prayers of the Mass is not new, but has occurred many times throughout the history of the Church as the Liturgy developed and was adapted to particular circumstances and to meet the needs of the Church. In the earliest centuries of the Church, there were no books containing prescribed liturgical prayers or texts.

But as time progress and because the faith of the Church was (and still is) articulated in liturgical prayer, there was a need for consistency and authenticity in the words used in the celebration of the Liturgy especially the Mass. Collections of prayers (Collects) developed gradually for use in particular locations and situations such as for a particular monastery, for other local churches. Such collections were contained in booklets which over centuries were drawn together into larger collections of prayers.

After the Council of Trent Pope Pius V promulgated an edition of the Roman Missal that was to be in obligatory use throughout the Latin Church (except in cases where another rite had been in place

for at least 200 years).

Since that time, to accommodate the ongoing evolution and development of the Liturgy, new editions of the Roman Missal were promulgated by Popes for use in the Church.

Many of us can still recall the introduction of the English translation of Roman Missal that was prepared in the light of Vatican II. For some 40 years we have been using this edition.

Pope Benedict's desire is that this edition will restore greater mystery, transcendence, and reverence to the Mass and better communicate the mysteries of salvation.

I urge all our parishioners to see this as an opportunity to deepen, nurture, and celebrate our faith through the renewal of our liturgies.

As we proceed through the coming year, please be open minded about these changes; absorb them into your mind, heart and soul so that they may meet the Church's desired objectives to deepen faith; nurture Christian hope; and celebrate the boundless love of God, shown most profoundly in the Eucharistic Liturgy.

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Welcoming the Revised Roman Missal**

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A - 6th March 2011

For many people, change does not come easy. Change requires us to stop doing things in a certain way in order to do something else. We all find comfort in familiar routines and known ways of acting. Change interrupts those familiar routines. But change is also an opportunity to stop and reflect on what we are doing and to come to a better understanding of God, who does not change.

One of Pope Benedict's desire is that this new edition of the Roman Missal will restore greater mystery, transcendence, and reverence to the Mass and better communicate the mysteries of salvation. His dream is that the weekly celebration of the Eucharist will be a source of renewal. This demands a personal response from each of us.

We could spend much time on discussing the pros and cons of the new translation and overlook the wonderful gift that God gives us in the Mass. In considering this new edition of the Roman Missal let us see it as an opportunity to deepen our personal understanding of the Mass. To assist us in our reflections the Diocese has produced five booklets. The first of these, "Praying the Mass", is available in the narthex. I also recommend the booklet "Understanding the Revised Mass Texts" which is available in the narthex - £2.00 each. Taking the time to learn more about our faith, including the Mass and Scripture, can help us appreciate the new texts more fully.

If we use the time of preparation well, we will make the changes with a deeper understanding of the Liturgy and a renewed reverence for and appreciation of the Mass. We will hear the prayers with new ears and with new hearts. Our Liturgy will be filled with new life and new spirit as we celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Christ made present for us. Some suggestions:

Read & study the new texts of the people's parts at Mass, so that you will be able to pray them well when they are introduced.

Be very intentional about celebrating the Mass each Sunday. Arrive on time, (even a few minutes early). Stay focussed on the action of the Mass rather than letting your mind wander. Hold the Sacrament of the Eucharist in great reverence. Finally, give thanks to God in your heart for so great a gift.

Times of change are always a challenge. But from this challenge can come a deeper appreciation of who we are as the Body of Christ, gathering each Sunday to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of the Lord.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **My sin is always before me?**

First Sunday of Lent - Year A - 13th March 2011

Lent is a time of penance and self denial offered to us by the Church to deepen our relationship with Christ. We are invited to enter with Jesus into the desert as we begin this Lenten season.

Perhaps the first step is to be honest with ourselves and with God.

It is very easy to be in denial about our failings. We can find all sorts of reasons to explain or justify our behaviour. We can blame others for our actions.

Or, like the author of today's responsorial psalm, we can be honest enough to admit our faults: 'my offences truly I know them, my sin is always before me'. What a contrast to today's society where any idea of sin or the possibility of being alienated from God is air brushed from our thinking. We are lead to believe that morality is a personal choice. I am responsible only to myself.

The story of creation is about two people in denial. Adam and Eve are creatures, dependent on God for their very being. But the serpent, the father of lies, tempts them with an illusion of self-sufficiency: "Eat of the tree and your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods." This is not a piece of ancient history but a description of the human condition, and it is very up-to-date. Like the serpent, some people today present God as one who is jealous of our happiness. They tell us to be free - and to choose without guilt. Right and wrong are whatever we decide. We are accountable to no one but ourselves. "You will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." "If you think it's right, it's right for you." "Don't impose your morality on others." These messages come to us mainly from mass media and the entertainment world, and it is so easy for us to run along with this line of thinking.

However it is a subtle denial of the true reality for the roots of the seven deadly sins: pride, greed, anger, lust, gluttony, envy and sloth, are within all our lives. Today's gospel is a reminder that unless we tackle our selfish tendencies head on, our true greatness as children of a loving Father will be irreversibly eroded.

Lent has just begun. It is time for us to take an honest look at ourselves, to admit our limitations, and to reach out to God for help. With the psalmist, we pray:

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Washed clean in the waters of forgiveness we will be ready to celebrate with great joy Christ's resurrection at Easter.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea C.M.

## **Fasting and Feasting in Lent.**

Second Sunday of Lent - Year A - 20th March 2011

Having spoken on fasting during the first days of Lent I was given the following reflection by a parishioner and though we are now ten days into the season of Lent, I think it will help us to see that our Lenten fast is not confined to fasting from food but that there are other areas of our lives that need attention.

The message is that Lent can be more than a time of fasting; it can be a season of feasting.

Lent is a season in which we can:

- Fast from judging others; feast on the Christ that lives in them.
- Fast from emphasis on differences; feast on the unity of all life.
- Fast from apparent darkness; feast on the reality of light.
- Fast from thoughts of illness; feast on the healing power of God.
- Fast from words that pollute; feast on phrases that purify.
- Fast from discontent; feast on gratitude.
- Fast from anger; feast on patience.
- Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism.
- Fast from worry; feast on divine order.
- Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation.
- Fast from negatives; feast on affirmatives.
- Fast from unrelenting pressures; feast on unceasing prayer.
- Fast from hostility; feast on non-resistance.
- Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness.
- Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.
- Fast from personal anxiety; feast on eternal Truth.
- Fast from discouragement; feast on hope.
- Fast from facts that depress; feast on truths that uplift.
- Fast from lethargy; feast on enthusiasm.
- Fast from suspicion; feast on truth.
- Fast from thoughts that weaken; feast on promises that inspire.
- Fast from shadows of sorrow; feast on the sunlight of serenity.
- Fast from idle gossip; feast on purposeful silence.
- Fast from problems that overwhelm; feast on prayer that sustains you.

William Arthur Ward (1921-1994.)

So rather than focusing on the negative let us focus on the positive and seek to make the remaining days of Lent fruitful.

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Learning to Trust**

Third Sunday of Lent - Year A - 27th March 2011

Today's first reading recalls a crucial moment in the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness to the promised land. With mighty signs God had freed them from the slavery of Egypt. However, when a water shortage crisis arose, the Israelites lost faith in God. At a place called Massah (conflict) and Meribah (grumbling), they quarrelled among themselves and put God to the test asking, 'Is the Lord with us, or not?'

The Lord, the rock who saves the people, was certainly with them. From a most unlikely place, a dry rock, water flowed. God proved faithful to the people in spite of their own lack of faith.

In today's psalm this crisis moment in the wilderness is recalled and its lessons applied. Speaking through the psalmist the Lord cries out: 'Have faith in me!':

Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah in the desert when your fathers put me to the test; when they tried me, though they saw my work.

We all experience crisis moments in our lives when our faith in God is tested. When things are going badly, let us not imitate the Israelites and conclude that God has deserted us. Let us instead listen faithfully for the voice of God that speaks to us in the midst of our difficulties. Let us not demand that God solve all our problems but seek rather to hear what God is saying to us in and through this difficult situation.

During these forty days in our Lenten journey towards Easter, let us not lose heart, but rather let us put our doubts to one side and listen to the scriptures recalling God's deeds in the past.

The beautiful gospel shows Jesus himself longing for water to slake his thirst after he has been trudging through desert places. He asks the Samaritan woman to give him a drink, assuring her that he himself has a gift to offer her, the gift of 'living water', water 'welling up to eternal life'. She proves to be a woman who does not harden her heart but listens carefully to all that Jesus has to say to her and ends up not only acknowledging him as Saviour but also by bringing that good news to her fellow citizens.

As we look forward to Easter let us listen with ever greater keenness for God's voice inviting us to come to Him. Let our hearts ring out in joy to the God who saves us.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Lenten Service of Reconciliation**

Fourth Sunday of Lent - Year A - 3rd April 2011

Not many go to confession frequently (or even regularly) on Saturday mornings as once was the case. There are reasons for this.

It might be that, during the last 50 years or so, we have discovered a new God - the God who is the source of unfailing light, the God who, by the death and resurrection of Christ, has cast out the darkness of hatred and lies and poured forth the light of truth and love upon the human family.

It might be that, in recent years, people have been encouraged to develop a more mature understanding of sin. The emphasis is now on being more honest, in contrast to the human temptation to disguise and hide away from failings, and to become more Christ-centred in relationships with others. The fact that the Sacrament is more usually known as Reconciliation suggests that a relationship is repaired through grace rather than confession solely being about listing our faults.

Our parish, like many others, has a Service of Reconciliation each year in Lent (and in Advent). These services are opportunities to celebrate the Sacrament with the parish community. These services are reminders that we are all part of one human family living together and sharing responsibility for the ways in which our world is sinful. We ask God to help us to see how we have harmed our brothers and sisters in Christ. We seek God's forgiveness for our failure to act on behalf of poor and marginalised communities and we ask for help to commit ourselves to working for a better world for all.

Our Lenten Service of Reconciliation will take place on Wednesday, 6th April at 7:30 pm. Our young people are ready to accept the idea of reconciliation from school chaplains, from their teachers and catechists; but they will be far more convinced of the importance of celebrating this Sacrament if they see their parents and other adults in the parish celebrating it together as a parish family.

Parish Liturgy Group

## **Called now to Eternal Life.**

Fifth Sunday of Lent - Year A - 10th April 2011

No matter how we may choose to plan our lives there are certain aspects which are inevitable. Death is one of these. In the springtime of life it's easy to convince ourselves that we are invincible; nothing stands in our way. Our modern culture has a tendency to reinforce this mindset.

In the Gospel today, on the contrary, we are invited to look at the only One who is able to address the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. Jesus Christ came to show us the way to freedom.

A common mindset today is that all suffering is without meaning. Our faith, on the other hand, teaches us that pain helps us to look beyond ourselves and recognize that even God's Son suffered.

Death, dying, decay: this human vulnerability in all its remorselessness is what Jesus Christ has come to confront. The story of Lazarus and his restoration to life is a hint, a pointer forward, to the resurrection of Christ himself.

But it is also a reminder that Christ is on our side. He goes to Bethany to meet Mary and Martha in the rawness of their grief, and to show that God is with his people in their suffering. Jesus weeps and is greatly distressed at what this family is going through.

In the light of Christ, death is not the final despair but the opportunity to be called to eternal life. We believe that Jesus Christ conquered sin and death. In doing so we are privileged to share in this gift.

This means that we are invited this Lenten season, especially this week, to approach the tomb with Jesus as He calls forth Lazarus. It is interesting that he was bound, we should ask, how am I bound? What is it in me that needs to be set free to experience the new life that only Jesus Christ can offer?

The experience of resurrection begins now! The Lord is calling each one of us to be released from some bondage of sin. Let us open our hearts and minds to the call that Jesus extends to Lazarus and be freed to live more deeply the victory that made it possible to have life and not be afraid of death.

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also through his Spirit dwelling in you" (2nd reading)..

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **No Greater Love Than This!**

Palm Sunday - 17th April 2011

Today is known both as Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday, two titles expressing contrasting themes.

Reading the passion draws attention to the suffering and death of Jesus. But the palms express his triumphal entry in to Jerusalem and the singing of Hosanna anticipates his ascension into heaven. The events of this week form a story which must be read on two levels of human suffering and divine triumph.

Holy Week is an invitation to recall, remember and make present the central mystery of God's total commitment to us and our world in the person of Jesus. As we participate in the sacred ceremonies we acknowledge how nothing was spared by Jesus to set us free from sin and evil. But Jesus was not only liberating us he was offering us new life.

That Jesus went through suffering and death to the Risen life, does not imply that Jesus wanted suffering or was oblivious to it. He would have avoided it if he could, but when challenged by evil He did not shirk. His Passion is the total immersion into the darkness of alienation that is sin, to bring us into the light that comes with total obedience and fidelity to the Father's will.

When reading the passion story we should not be highlighting the cruelty of the Jews and the Romans, severe though it be, but rather to recall in faith WHO suffered and why HE went through it

all, not only freely but with a sense of genuine fulfilment.

Love was his motive. Love is always a mystery and God's love more so than any other. While we can never fully understand such total self-giving, we can grow in appreciation and begin to imitate it. That is the opportunity of passion time, to allow our coarsened hearts to be touched again by the overwhelming love of Jesus Christ. In our busy and distracted lives, it is important to make time for such a change of heart. To fail to do so is to live un-enriched by the most stupendous reality this world has ever known.

Through our celebrations of the Easter Triduum let us open our hearts, in faith, to the transforming power of God's love. In the face of human betrayal he proved that God's love for us is endless.

The fullness of life comes through the self-emptying of Jesus and is fulfilled by our identity with this self-emptying. As Christ gave himself for us, we give ourselves for others. We shall never be nailed to a cross, but we all share in some form of Jesus' suffering. And when we see the pain in our neighbour's face, hopefully we will respond.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **The Lord is truly risen. Alleluia!**

Easter Sunday - Year A - 24th April 2011

This is our proclamation on this Easter morning. All our attention is drawn to the One who has been raised from the dead.

It's more than a story. We are drawn into the ultimate meaning of life. Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death. In Him all is made NEW; this is our joy.

By raising Christ from the dead, God our Father has conquered the power of death and opened for all of us the way to eternal life. Christ still lives among us as the cornerstone on which our Christian community is built.

Easter is the height of our Christian celebrations because it represents the ultimate breakthrough - from death to new life. No such breakthrough had ever occurred before. Now it has, Jesus has risen from the dead.

In Easter light, and in that light alone, the shadows and darkness of life receive new meaning. They become part of the breakthrough to new life, just as the pains of childbirth do. Moments of joy and happiness likewise take on newness, for in Easter light they foreshadow the unspeakable joy and happiness still to come.

Easter assures us that we will find the strength we need to follow Christ through life and through death into resurrection. As Paul puts it, God "gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

Easter is also a challenge. In its light and strength we are to view life anew, to live it with new purpose, to share it with more zeal.

As we renew our baptismal vows this Easter Sunday, let us do so with clear mind and full heart, for in Christ we can overcome evil in ourselves and in the world.

May the Risen Lord truly give us the courage and conviction to live out the hope to which we are called. He has left us the Holy Spirit to carry the divine will to completion. On this Easter day let us give thanks to God whose saving love has no end.

Happy Easter.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **A Time of Grace**

Second Sunday of Easter - Year A 1st May 2011

This year's Holy Week Liturgy drew great numbers to our church and I am most grateful to all who assisted in making it such an enriching, inspirational & spiritual celebration.

Easter is the greatest feast in the Church's calendar. This is the feast from which all others stem. The Resurrection is so important that the Lord's followers observe every Sunday as the Lord's Day, as a 'little Easter'.

The Easter Season, which lasts for 50 days, is the liturgical continuation & prolongation of this greatest of feasts and a time when we look forward expectantly to the Holy Spirit and Pentecost.

There are two special characteristics of the Easter Season. First the Paschal Candle, which will burn brightly until Pentecost reminding us of the presence of the Risen Lord.

Second is the 'Alleulia' - our victory cry, or acclamation, because the Lord has risen. 'Alleluia' or 'Hallelujah' is a Hebrew word meaning 'Praise the Lord.' As Augustine said, 'We are Easter people and Alleluia is our song.'

Traditionally the Second Sunday of Easter has been called "Low Sunday," but in recent years it has been designated as the Feast of Divine Mercy. Many Catholics begin preparation for this Sunday's Feast of Divine Mercy on Good Friday with a novena in which the Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayed for nine days. On February 22, 1931, a Polish sister, now Sr Faustina, saw a vision of Jesus with rays of mercy streaming from the area of his heart. He told her to have an image painted to represent this vision and to sign it "Jesus I trust in you!"

The Second Reading this Sunday affirms this dimension of divine mercy: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading."

The choice of the Feast of Divine Mercy, for the beatification of Pope John Paul II is not accidental. He had a deep devotion to his fellow Pole Sr. Faustina and to the Divine Mercy devotion identified with her. In August 2002, in Lagiewniki, Poland where Sr. Faustina lived and died, John Paul II

entrusted the entire world "to Divine Mercy, to the unlimited trust in God the Merciful." Through the intercession of Blessed Pope John Paul may this be truly season of renewal and grace for the Church.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Fourteen Stations of Light**

3rd Sunday of Easter - Year A - 8th May 2011

We are all familiar with the Passion and death of Christ, but how much time have we spent reflecting on the resurrection account?

It is far easier for us to comprehend Christ's suffering and death, than his resurrection. We have all experienced our own suffering lost loved ones; we know how this feels and these emotions are integrated into our daily lives. The promise of a resurrected body and a life after death is one which is more challenging emotionally and intellectually.

Shortly after Pope John Paul introduced the mysteries of light in the recitation of the rosary, a Salesian priest Fr Sabino Palumbieri prepared The Stations of the Resurrection, or Via Lucis.

Jesus rises from the dead (Matthew 28:5-6).

Women find the empty tomb (Matthew 28:1-6).

The risen Lord appears to Mary Magdalene and she proclaims the resurrection to the apostles (John 20:16-18).

The risen Lord appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-27).

The risen Lord is recognized in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:28-32).

The risen Lord appears to the disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36-39).

The risen Lord gives the disciples the power to forgive sins (John 20:22-23).

The risen Lord confirms the faith of Thomas (John 20:24-29).

The risen Lord meets his disciples on the shore of Galilee (John 21:1-19).

The risen Lord confers primacy on Peter and says, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

The risen Lord entrusts to his disciples the mission to the whole world (Matthew 28:16-20).

The risen Lord ascends to the Father (Acts 1:9-11).

Waiting for the Holy Spirit with Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Upper Room (Acts 1:12-14).

The risen Lord sends the Holy Spirit promised to the disciples (Acts 2:2-4).

There is no fixed form, but as with the stations of the cross, each station usually has a reading from scripture, a meditation, and a prayer. CTS has produced a booklet on the Via Lucis.

Extract from an article in Faith Today April 2011

(See also: <http://www.itmonline.org/bodytheology/vialucis.htm> )

## **Our Children**

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Year A - 15th May 2011

This weekend and next we are rejoicing with the children who are making their First Communion. We pray that for all of them it will be the beginning of a loving and trustful relation with Jesus. Those preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation celebrate their Mass of Commitment this Sunday. These young people will be asked to reflect upon and prepare to take over as their own the promises made at their Baptism.

Parents are the first shepherds of their children, it is they who protect, nourish and guide them in their early life. It is from their parents that children first experience, love and compassion. As children grow older they meet other shepherds in the form of teachers, catechists, priests and their close relatives. Hopefully all of them will help and encourage our young people to form a living relationship with Jesus the Good Shepherd and to listen to His Voice.

Unfortunately in the world of today they will encounter other voices. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. They will hear other voices that deride our Christian beliefs. Voices that will mislead them ... into foggy thinking that all religions are the same ... into a moral vagueness which has got rid of sin ... towards materialistic progress as the goal of life ... or to idolise the cult of celebrities which offers no sense of lasting values. Hence Christ needs committed people so that his voice can be heard by our children.

To me this why Godparents and Sponsors are so important. Through their companionship and guidance they can be a positive influence in the lives of our children during their formative years.

Companionship is a source of great comfort to us all. It is consoling to have someone with us in times of difficulty & uncertainty, Young people will value the companionship of Godparents and Sponsors not so much for what they can give or do for them but simply for their presence and concern. Having someone as a companion during the challenging years of adolescence can help greatly in creating a healthy self image.

Whatever role we play in the formation of our young people, may the Lord's presence comfort and transform us and enable us to fulfil our responsibilities. And let us give thanks for good parents and friends along the way who have incarnated the presence of the Good Shepherd in our lives.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Trust in God**

Fifth Sunday of Easter - Year A - 22 May 2011

Running through today's liturgy is a beautiful theme of trust in God. In the Gospel the risen Christ, who is about to depart from his disciples, urges them not to be afraid: 'Trust in God still, and trust in me'.

Two words still and me catch the eye. Still hints that our world abounds with conflict and division, with repeated cases of injustice, discrimination and intolerance. Faced with this, it can be increasingly hard to trust anyone or anything. Still asks us to cling on. It reminds us that in the end, all will be well. Yes, He will come back for us.

But still means more. It speaks of heavenly reassurance to earthly disciples. Jesus must have wondered at times at his choice of apostles. Think of the endless hours of explanation he could have saved himself had he chosen more brilliant men. And yet because Thomas needed reassurance we have Christ's beautiful words, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' Because Philip needs to have things spelled out, Christ reminds that 'whoever has seen me has seen the Father.'

Sceptical Thomas, obtuse Philip, hot-headed Peter. And yet, they found favour with Christ. Can we, in all our muddled lives, not hope for as much?

Then the word Me. Here we are invited to put our trust in the person of Jesus. He is the One who is able to lead us to the truth. This means that we need to take the time to know Him. It's not so much that we have information about Him but that we listen to Him as the One who is able to help us make sense out of life.

Trust in Jesus opens up our minds to the larger picture of life. This life on earth is but a journey to an eternal home. The journey of Jesus through death unto glorification sets out the map for us.

I am the way. Our life has come from God - and must return to God. Jesus points the way in his teaching and example, provides food and companionship for the journey.

I am the truth. In a world of rapid change and passing fads, a house built on his truth will withstand all storms.

I am the life. Through faith and baptism we become children of God, sharers in divine life ...

The Psalmist sings 'The word of the Lord is faithful, and all God's works to be trusted', To which we respond: 'Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place all our trust in you'.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **We are the Church**

Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year A - 29th May 2011

The emphasis in our Sunday readings now begins to shift from Easter to Pentecost, and the sending

of the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Church, as the visible presence of Christ in the world. It is an opportunity for us to examine our relationship with our community of Faith, the Church. Do we love our Faith, and our Church, and see ourselves as an integral part of it? Having received the Holy Spirit we share in the Spirit's mission of advocacy (spokesperson) for Christ. It is our responsibility to plead the cause of Christ before our world.

We live in a difficult time for the Church. Its frailties are always on public view. What do we say when asked why we believe in Christ, why we belong to the Church?

We could learn from how the author of today's psalm does it. Firstly, he speaks of the great deeds of God among men and women. Then he speaks of God's personal intervention in his life. In an intimate moment, captured in the final verse of today's psalm, he invites the people to come close to him. "I will tell what God did for my soul" he says. He then tells the story of how in a time of distress he prayed to God who lovingly heard his prayer. Today, it is still our personal stories rather than theological debates or doctrines that attract most people to Christ.

The second reading offers us some wise rules for being advocates of Christ. Firstly, we should be ready to respond when people ask us about our faith and hope. Secondly, our speech should always reveal courtesy and respect of the other person. Thirdly, we should practice what we preach by living a good life. Finally, we should be willing to suffer as Christ did.

As we near Pentecost, the birth of the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church, it seems timely to use the opportunity of the traditional Pentecost Novena to pray to overcome the usual obstacles that tend to limit the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Pentecost Novena extends nine days from Ascension Thursday, (next Thursday although we now celebrate the Feast on next Sunday) to Pentecost. This was the first and original novena as the disciples gather with Mary in prayer to await the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **The Ascension of the Lord**

Year A - 5th June 2011

The central idea in the scripture readings for today's feast is the raising of our hearts toward heaven, so that we may begin to dwell in spirit where Jesus has gone before us.

"Christ's Ascension", says St Leo, "is our own ascension; our body has the hope of one day being where its glorious Head has preceded it". In fact, Our Lord had already said this in His discourse at the Last Supper, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself; that where I am, you also may be" (Jn 14:2-3). The Ascension then is a feast of joyful hope, a foretaste of heaven. By going before us, Jesus our Head has given us the right to follow Him there.

Our right to heaven has been given us, our place is ready; it is for us to live in such a way that we may occupy it some day. Meanwhile, we must actualize the beautiful prayer St Paul gives us in the second reading. "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with they eyes of your heart

enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immensurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power". This beautiful and inspiring prayer gives us courage.

The ascension is not an end, but a beginning: the beginning of a new manner of Christ's activity among the apostles and in us his church.

However like the apostles our gaze must not only be toward heaven but to the mission that God has given us. All the preparation has been done. Now it's up to us. Today, we are the ones entrusted with this task. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we are now the hands and the feet and the heart of Christ in our world.

Our situation is similar to that of a student who has been assiduously prepared for an examination by her teacher. When exam day arrives, the student must write the examination. No one else can do it in her place. However empowered by the knowledge and the self-belief that her teacher has imparted, she can confidently respond. This is what Ascension Day is all about. The Christian vocation is learning to live this new relationship with Christ and witnessing to God's love to the world that still awaits its redemption.

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Send forth Your Spirit**

Pentecost Sunday - Year A - 12th June 2011

At times we can all feel anxious about the future. As we see news reports of wars and crimes we can worry that our world is going from bad to worse. We can fear for our children's children. Such anxieties while understandable, neglect one very important fact. That God's Spirit is alive and active among us creating and re-creating our world. As today's responsorial psalm exclaims "How many are your works O Lord! The earth is full of your riches".

The great gift that is ours is that God does not leave us to our own resources, but empowers us with His Spirit. As Jesus filled the disciples with his Holy Spirit on Pentecost, he will also send His Spirit upon us, provided we have made room for him in our lives.

Like the disciples going to the upper room in Jerusalem, we must go to a place where Jesus can appear to us. Such a place might be at our church, but it could just as well be the silence of our heart. Wherever it is, there we must wait in joyful hope for his coming.

As we wait, we must clear our minds to receive the Holy Spirit. Hearts that are full of other wants and desires are like busy schedules with no time left to receive visitors. We must make room in our hearts for the Holy Spirit. It is much easier to just say this; but much more challenging to live it.

In our local parish, we have a tremendous opportunity to share the wonders of God that the Spirit gives us. Let us pay attention to Paul's words from "To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." Note the Spirit comes for the common good. The Spirit calls us beyond ourselves to cooperate with others in the work of justice, peace and caring. We are being

asked to deepen our sense of responsibility toward our brothers and sisters and seek to help them to become disciples of the Risen Lord.

We are invited to see the many signs of God's Spirit among us and give thanks. The great sign and expression of God's Spirit is love. We experience love, and witness love, and give love, we know that God is among us. Filled with God's Spirit we can play our role in creating a better world. The expression of evil that we encounter should not dishearten us but spur us on to pray with confidence. "Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth".

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **The Mystery of Love**

Trinity Sunday - Year A - 19th June 2011

The mystery we celebrate today is summarised in the greeting at the beginning of Mass. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (Cor. 13.13).

Mother Teresa once said that the great illness of our age was loneliness. So many people live lives of isolation, experiencing alienation and estrangement.

The call to belong is deep in the human psyche. Could it be otherwise? We are made in the image and likeness of God who has shown himself to be a community, a family, in other words the Trinity. It is to a sharing in this divine life that God invites each one of us.

Like the three strangers who became Abraham's guests at the oaks of Mamre, so too God wants us to be his companions in this life and eternity. This is why Jesus revealed to us the inner life of God and asked us "Make your home in me, as I make my home in you".

Just as Moses bows down to worship God. On this feast of the Holy Trinity we also bow down and worship. We say simply: 'Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: to God who is, who was and who is to come'.

This prayer, the 'Glory be', is a hymn of praise to God as is our responsorial psalm today. It comes not from the Book of Psalms but from the book of Daniel, chapter three. This chapter tells the story of three young Jewish men who were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship pagan gods. However they were not destroyed in the fire. The angel of the Lord went down into the furnace creating a breeze that cooled the fire. Having been saved from the fire the young men praise the God of heaven who gazes into the depths.

Their sentiment captures an important aspect of the feast of the Holy Trinity. As we bow down to worship God on this feast we marvel in God who first bends down to us, who loved the world so much as to send the beloved Son to share our human condition.

The almighty God has made a dwelling place with us. To this God we pray: 'You reveal yourself in the depths of our being drawing us to share in your life and your love. One God, three persons, be near to the people formed in your image, close to the -world your love brings to life' (Opening

prayer).

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Bread of Life**

Corpus Christi - Year A - 26th June 2011

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Corpus Christi - the Body and Blood of Christ. This is a feast that celebrates the mystery of the Lord's enduring presence in our midst through the gift of His body and blood given in the Eucharist.

In the readings for today's feast God is pictured feeding His people, graciously and powerfully, across the ages of salvation history. The gift of manna sustained the Israelites in the wilderness. Like them, we too need to be sustained and nourished on our journey of life with the "living bread come down from heaven."

"We cannot live without the Eucharist!" This was the conviction of the early Christian Community. It was a conviction that came from a deep awareness of their own spiritual hunger to be nourished by the Lord's Eucharist and the vital importance of gathering as a community of faith around the table of Word and Eucharist.

Jesus said. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever... Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day".

These are extraordinary words! They promise that in and through the Eucharist we are being introduced into an ever-closer union with Jesus and with one another. This is a promise the world cannot make. However, the Eucharist, like all interpersonal relationships, works mysteriously, not magically. To participate fully in this meal we must constantly strive to put on the mind and heart of Christ. The more we do so, the more nourishment we will receive from the Eucharist.

This special gift is not for us alone. No. God's love is for all peoples. In our fragile existence we are the bearers of God's salvation to the ends of the earth. The grace of Christ should flow from us to all we meet.

It is only when people have experienced unconditional love and service from the followers of Jesus that they will seek out the source of such love in the Eucharist. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go and meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to being his instruments of love to the world.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Our Lady and the European Flag**

Fifteenth Sunday of Year A - 10th July 2011

On December 8th 1955, Delegates of the European Ministers, officially adopted the European flag designed by Arsène Heitz, a French artist. He had entered a competition in 1950, to design a flag for the emerging European Community. Heitz submitted several designs, one of which was chosen, 12 stars on a blue background.

In 1998, Heitz revealed to a French magazine the source of his inspiration. At the time he was reading the history of the Blessed Virgin's apparitions in the Rue du Bac, known today as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

According to the artist he thought of 12 stars in a circle on a blue background, exactly as represented in the traditional iconography of the images of the Immaculate Conception. At first he considered it as a flight of fancy, but the idea caught his attention and gradually became the subject of his meditation.

Arsène Heitz is a deeply religious man. He is devoted to Our Lady and never allows a day to pass without saying the rosary with his wife. He believes that the inspiration was not just from his artistic talents, but from the silent voice of Heaven which has always spoken to people of goodwill among them Arsène can be numbered.

Neither the 12 stars nor the blue of the flag are particularly religious symbols, and so they respect the conscience of all Europeans, regardless of their beliefs. Indeed when Paul M.G. Levy, the first director of the Press and Information Service of the European Council explained the meaning of the design, he interpreted the number of stars as 'a figure of plenitude'. At the time there were only six members of the European Economic Community, as it was then called.

However, for Heitz the words of the Apocalypse were very present: 'A great sign appeared in the Heavens; a woman clothed with the sun and with the moon at her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars'.

Perhaps without realising it, the delegates of the European Ministers officially adopted the design on the feast of Our Lady, 8th December 1955. Is it just coincidence?

We should discover the smiling face of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Europe, and pray that Europe might once again rediscover and live by her Christian heritage.

Mary Immaculate, Patroness of our parish, pray for us.

Vincentian News Spring 2000

## **The Kingdom is within you**

Sixteenth Sunday of Year A - 17th July 2011

This weekend's Gospel contains three parables:

The weeds and the wheat.

The mustard seed.

The yeast and the dough.

All of these parables are descriptions of the Kingdom of God, our initiatives and God's responses.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "through his parables Jesus invites people to the feast of the kingdom, but he also asks for a radical choice: to gain the kingdom, one must give everything. Words are not enough; deeds are required."

In the first parable, Jesus was using a familiar everyday image to make a point. At that time the only way of eliminating weeds was to pull them up one by one and that obviously endangered the wheat crop itself.

This was especially true in the very dry climate of Palestine where every disturbance of the soil led to the evaporation of precious moisture. So on balance, it was better to give the whole field a chance until the harvest and Jesus had confidence that the wheat crop would win out.

The lesson for us is not to rush to judgement. It tells us that we are in a mixed world, in which good people and bad people are side by side. We look around us and we see saint and sinner, spiritual people and unspiritual people, good and evil.

One of the oldest temptations is what some people call 'the sorting myth'. This is the belief that we can live in a perfect world, and that we can create that world if we get rid of certain types of people. Sometimes this kind of belief has resulted in horrible violence, even genocide. 'Zero tolerance' is a popular buzz word to day. It has no place in the gospel. Here and now there is no pure, righteous people: not even ourselves. If we consider others as beyond the pale, outside the community, then we are becoming judgemental and self-righteous. We must leave the judgement to God.

On mature reflection we all acknowledge that within us there is a mixture of goodness and selfishness. We struggle to develop the better side and to curb our weaknesses. It will be so until we die. God allows it that way.

He invites us to produce a great harvest of generosity towards others, even though we fail in a thousand ways. He has great confidence in the seed of love that he has planted in us at baptism. It will win out.

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Not a Thing to Wear**

Seventeenth Sunday of Year A - 24th July 2011

Archbishop Nicholls' reminder of the need for a devout approach to the reception of the Eucharist is an opportunity to consider our overall approach to attending Mass.

The observances recommended by the Archbishop are but external expressions of our deep wonder and reverence for the Eucharist in which we are united body and soul with Jesus really and substantially present in Holy Communion. Our preparation for Mass should anticipate this great

moment of communion with God.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the central event of Catholic life when the community gathers to worship God. It should not be approached casually but with forethought and planning. We are again to be present to hear the same words of consecration, as were the Apostles at the Last Supper, with the priest representing Christ and the gathered community an extension of that apostolic group.

With such thoughts giving meaning to our attendance we may turn our attention to the externals. How often have we heard the cry "but I don't have a thing to wear" when an invitation arrives. The anguished guest is not to be taken literally but as meaning that suitable things are required.

It is not a question of fashion or newness but that our clothes show the respect due to God, His priest and our fellow parishioners. It is not acceptable to attend Mass wearing a T-shirt with a double meaning slogan or carrying an inappropriate image. It is equally out of place to wear clothes that reveal midriffs, too much thigh or shoulder. Consideration for others and respect for God and His church will guide our choice of attire.

Consideration should also encourage us to arrive in time for Mass; we don't wish to appear impolite by a late arrival and the inevitable bustle of getting a seat. Having made sure our mobile phones are switched off we need a short while to gather our j thoughts and remember why we here in God's house and to place ourselves in His presence.

A Parishioner

## **"Give them something to eat yourselves"**

Eighteenth Sunday of Year A - 31st July 2011

Today's Gospel presents us with one of the accounts of the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. (There are actually six accounts in the four Gospels of a feeding of a multitude.) The frequency of this story testifies to its importance for the early Community, and the importance due to its connection with the Eucharist. Whereas we tend to see the origin of the Eucharist exclusively in the Last Supper, the early Church laid at least as much stress on Jesus' eating with his disciples in Galilee, to say nothing of the post-resurrection eating meals.

Thankfully we have moved away from the idea of the Eucharist being a private devotion between God and me and have begun to acknowledge the importance of community. However, even here our idea of community can be limited and we think only in terms of those in church with us or at most the members of our parish. We are called to be the agents of God's universal care and abounding generosity to all people.

When Jesus asked the disciples to feed the hungry crowd, their first reaction was to point out the difficulties. The little food they had would make so little difference to the throngs and there was no point in even making a start. Their answer was to send the people away and to let others care for them. Jesus would not accept that viewpoint. He prodded them into sharing even the little they had and he multiplied it a thousand fold.

These paralysed disciples only saw the difficulties, whereas Jesus was opening up an opportunity to

them. He blessed and broke the bread but he asks his disciples to distribute it among the people. He asks the same of us 'give them something to eat yourselves'. We are only too well aware of the many forms of hunger in our world. God is asking us to use our gifts to help the lonely, the hungry, the grieving, those who have lost their way in life. Today's Gospel is a call to be especially aware of the little opportunities where we can enrich even one of our brothers and sisters and to realise that God will bless our efforts beyond all our expectations. Let us trust him and know that we too are to be bread given for others.

If we open wide our hands and our hearts to the lost and the needy we can be sure that we will never find our baskets empty but will end up having much more than what we began with.

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **See, I have come to do your will (Heb 10:9)**

These words are taken from a verse of Psalm 40. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts them on the lips of the Son of God in his conversation with the Father. The writer wishes to emphasize the Son of God's love in becoming man and doing the work of redemption in obedience to the Father's will.

These words offer us the key to understanding Jesus' life. They help us grasp its deepest feature and the golden thread that runs through all its stages: his childhood, his hidden life at Nazareth, the temptations, his choices, his public activity, right up to his death on the cross. In every instance, in every situation, Jesus sought only one thing: to do the will of the Father. And he did it in a radical way, that is, he never did anything outside it, refusing even the most attractive propositions that were not in full agreement with it.

The great lesson behind the whole of Jesus' life for us is not to do our own will but the will of the Father - to become capable of saying 'no' to ourselves so as to say 'yes' to God.

True love for God does not consist in beautiful words, ideas and feelings, but in effective obedience to his commandments. The sacrifice of praise he looks for is our loving offering to him of the most intimate thing we have, the thing most truly our own: our will. This contrasts with our most deeply-rooted tendency: to seek our own will, to follow our instincts and feelings.

Such action goes strongly against the grain for people of our times. We live in an age that exalts the ego and promotes self-sufficiency, freedom as an aim in itself, self-gratification as the fulfilment of the person, pleasure as the guide for making personal choices and as the secret of happiness. But we all know the disastrous results that come from pursuing such a culture.

This culture, based on seeking our own will, stands in opposition to Jesus' approach to life, which is totally directed towards doing the will of the Father, producing the wonderful effects he promises.

So let's try to live this Word of Life by choosing the will of the Father, making it the touchstone and guiding force of our whole life, as Jesus did. We will thus set out on a divine adventure that will make us eternally grateful to God. Through it we will become saints and spread the love of God to many hearts.

A commentary on a sentence from the Scripture by Chiara Lubich

## **"9-11" Ten Years Later**

Most of us remember what we were doing on September 11, 2001 when the news of those terrible events in New York and Washington were flashed across our world.

For some, the tragedy still lives on, ten years later. For others, life has returned to normal, and it has faded into the past. For some this event may have left deep scars of fear, anger or grief; for the younger generation, this event may have little personal meaning.

For the days and weeks that followed we read and heard of great deeds of valour and compassion shown by so many. For out of the very worst, man is capable of bringing forth the very best - in this case through the heroic efforts by fire fighters, police and rescue personnel; through the thousands of caring and compassionate volunteers who stepped forward in this time of crisis.

Hopefully the world has learned from this and so many other atrocities and, as we honour those who died, let us reflect prayerfully on Pope Benedict's prayer when he visited Ground Zero in 2008:

O God of love, compassion, and healing, We ask you in your goodness to give eternal light and peace to all who died.

We ask you, in your compassion to bring healing to those who suffer from injuries and illness. Heal, too, the pain of still-grieving families and all who lost loved ones in this tragedy. Give them strength to continue their lives with courage and hope. Our hearts are one with theirs as our prayer embraces their pain and suffering.

God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world: peace in the hearts of all men and women and peace among the nations of the earth.

Turn to your way of love those whose hearts and minds are consumed with hatred.

God of understanding, overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy, we seek your light and guidance as we confront such terrible events.

Grant that those whose lives were spared may live so that the lives lost may not have been lost in vain.

Comfort and console us, strengthen us in hope, and give us the wisdom and courage to work tirelessly for a world where true peace and love reign among nations and in the hearts of all.

## **You shall love the Lord your God**

When challenged 'Which commandment in the law is the greatest?' Jesus gives an original answer, uniting love of God with love of neighbour. His disciples can never separate these two loves, as the leaves of a tree cannot be separated from its roots. The more they love God, the more intensely they love their brothers and sisters; the more they love their brothers and sisters, the more they deepen their love for God.

Jesus knows, more than anyone, the true nature of the God we must love. And so he knows just how

God is to be loved: God is his Father and our Father, his God and our God (see Jn 20:27). He is a God who loves each human being personally; he loves you, he loves me; he is my God, he is your God. And we can love him because he first loved us. The love we are commanded to have, therefore, is a response to Love. We can turn to him with the same confidence and trust that Jesus had when he called him Abba, Father. We too, like Jesus, can speak with him often, telling him all our needs, our resolutions, our plans, re-declaring our exclusive love for him. We too wish to be eager for the moment when we can come into deep contact with him through prayer, which is conversation, communion, an intense friendship.

In those moments we can let our love really express itself, adoring him beyond creation, glorifying his presence everywhere in the whole of the universe, praising him in the depths of our hearts or living in tabernacles, thinking of him with us wherever we are, in our room, at work, in the office, while we meet with others.

How then can we live this command to love God? Certainly by keeping up a relationship with God as his children and his friends, but above all by doing what he wants. Our attitude to God, like that of Jesus, is to be always turned towards the Father, listening to him, in obedience, so as to carry out his work, that alone and nothing else.

To live this Word of Life it will be useful, from time to time, to examine ourselves to see whether God is truly in the first place within us.

Choose God once more as our only ideal, as the all of our life, putting him back in the first place, living his will with perfection in the present moment. We must be able to say to him sincerely: 'My God and my all,' 'I love You,' 'I am all yours,' 'You're God, you're my God, our God of infinite love.'

From a commentary on a sentence from the Scripture by Chiara Lubich, Founder of the Focolare Movement

## **Friday Abstinence**

26th Sunday of Year A

From Friday September 16th 2011, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have called on all Catholics to abstain from meat on Fridays. The following is an extract from Bishop Regan's pastoral letter to the people of the Diocese of Wrexham.

"God took an awful risk when He gave humanity the power to choose between good and evil, and God paid an awful price for that loving decision. The price was the death and rising of His Son, Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God. Evil tried to twist creation from the loving hands of the Father, but the pierced hands of Jesus kept creation safe within the Father's love.

"We have been brought into that loving plan of God, although we continue to contribute to the chaos of evil. We are sinners, but forgiven sinners. However, we must still fight against the pull of evil in the daily decisions that make up our lives.

"That struggle against sin and evil in our lives is called penitence. That is why from the beginning, Mother Church has told us how important are fasting, prayer and almsgiving, 'which express

conversion to oneself, to God and to Others' (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1434).

"From ancient times, Friday was a day of penitence, for on that first Good Friday, Jesus tore down the curtain of evil that separated us from God. Every Friday is a day of penance for us Catholics; this is nothing new. Since 1985 we have been free to choose how to observe Friday penance.

"However, reflecting on the visit of Pope Benedict last year, the Bishops of England and Wales decided that it would be good to call the Catholic community to a public witness of penance by abstaining from meat on Friday.

"Please take up this invitation from Friday Sept 16th. The obligation flowing from this invitation is a sign of a deeper call to conversion. If not eating meat is no sacrifice for us, then we could consider marking the Friday in another additional way.

"Let us be prudent - if circumstances make it really difficult on occasion to refuse meat on Friday, then be sensible! The important aspect is to make sure that penance is in our lives, especially on Fridays and during Lent. Simple public acts of devotion that show that we are Catholics and love our Faith can be channels of God's grace in the lives of the people amongst whom we live.

"Every Friday points to Sunday, which is the most important day of our week. Regular worship at Sunday Mass, which then flows out into the whole week in the way we live, is at the heart of who we are as Catholics. That is how we respond to God's love for us, who loved us first, 'and sent his Son as saviour of the world'. (1 John. 4, 14)."

Reading the Pastoral letter of Bishop Regan one would interpret this invitation or call as a strong recommendation rather than a compulsory obligation.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Be Faithful and Fruitful**

27th Sunday of Year A - 2nd October 2011

Speaking through Isaiah, God asks, "What more could I have done for you?" The psalmist recalls how God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, and wonders how they could have drifted so far from the Lord. Jesus tells the story again to a hostile audience and points out his own role in the tragedy. He reminds the religious leaders of how God sent prophets to call His people back, and those prophets were rejected and even killed. And what does God do - write them off as a bad investment? No, he sends his only Son. Here indeed is a God who loves extravagantly, but in one final outrage, his people kill his Son, hanging him on a cross.

Jesus concludes the parable by saying "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

Through this parable it is easy to pass judgement on the House of Israel. This avoids the issue that we are often in the same position. True we have been chosen, but that means we have a lot to live up to. Before we congratulate ourselves we must ask whether as Church or as individuals we have lived up to our responsibilities. History and our own conscience forbid us to answer with an

unqualified "Yes".

Today the Church in Europe is experiencing a winter season. We grew up in a church proud of its great calling: very fruitful in vocations and spreading its branches in vigorous mission. How things have changed! Our walls of confidence are broken down, we are ravaged by scandals and devoured by hostile critics. As a church, we have sometimes yielded a rich harvest, but it is also painfully clear that we have fallen far short of what we should be.

We believe it is God's church, planted by his hand and nourished by his grace. So, we call on God to visit us once more, to protect and renew us. Isaiah couldn't imagine what more God could do for us, but he didn't know that God would send his own Son. We do. We know we have been loved far more deeply than we could ever imagine or deserve.

Fidelity to God and a fruitful life is what is being asked of us. Being baptised is no guarantee of heaven. Faith is a gift, a gift to be lived and shared. If we lose the sense of mission and fail to hand on the Faith by our lives, we should remember the warning of Jesus that 'the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit'.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **World Youth Day 2011**

28th and 29th Sundays of Year A - 9th and 16th October 2011

On Saturday, 20th August 2011, 2 million young people from all over the world gathered on an airfield in Madrid to celebrate World Youth Day. I was fortunate enough to be counted among them, shouting our greetings to the Pope.

I travelled with a group from my chaplaincy at the University of Birmingham, and we joined up with a large group from America called FOCUS, the Fellowship Of Catholic University Students, for their first international conference. We flew out to Madrid on Tuesday, 9th and met up with people from Nottingham, Austria, Malaysia, Norway & over 20 states in the US. We then drove north and spent 5 days in the Benedictine monastery in Samos, Galicia on the Pilgrimage route to Santiago de la Compostella.

The conference itself lasted 3 days: a combination of deep prayer, inspirational talks, and relaxing siestas. It was a revelation for all of us, and I think every person in our group was changed by this experience of such strong faith, unity and trust. A highlight for many of us was on the Saturday, when we walked part of the Camino at dawn. We all agreed to do this in silence, and it was a beautiful opportunity to reflect on all we had learnt in the past few days. It was also a chance to practice our faith - at the start it was pitch black, so walking along uneven hill paths was quite a challenge! The following evening we held all-night adoration, all of us taking our turn to get up and witness for an hour. This and the many other opportunities to reflect, whether in silence or almost meditative song, were particularly special to me: a chance to really speak to God and not worry about home stresses - like the shopping list or preparing for the next year at university - which seemed small and out of context in the calm of Samos. The final night there, the local community held a party for us, which was a great chance to celebrate our visit and let off steam before moving back south.

### *Sunday Notes 2009-2010*

On Monday afternoon, en route to Madrid, we stopped in Avila, birth place of St Theresa and St John of the Cross. This was our first time seeing other WYD pilgrims, and experiencing the carnival atmosphere to come - huge international groups of young people would spontaneously dance in circles to the beat of a drum, or yell greetings to each other whilst waving their flags - it was so exciting to know this was just the beginning!

That evening, we met our host families in Santa Teresa Benedicta de la Cruz parish. I was extremely blessed to spend the week with a family who had 8 children of their own, aged from 6 months to 11 years, and took in 8 of us as well! It was incredible to see the love and happiness in that family, and they all showed us such generosity, from the bracelets the children gave us as a leaving gift to the snacks left for us each night when we returned.

From Tuesday to Friday we all went to the Love and Life centre, the English language base for WYD pilgrims. Each day we had an hour's catechesis on the day's theme before Mass, which itself was a wonderful experience with over 300 priests and about 40 bishops from around the world. It was always a fun challenge trying to spot our own Fr. Julian and a few other familiar faces in the group! I found it particularly poignant when they all stood up and together consecrated the hosts: for me this, and hearing 12,000 young people singing together, was a beautiful symbol of what WYD represents. In the afternoons there were many more talks around the theme, and the opportunity to go to confession, while the evenings were lighter and a mix of song and worship with a festival atmosphere. On one afternoon there was adoration, which had become renewed in its importance to us, and that occasion was particularly moving, especially after the intensity of the first week.

Thursday 18th August was a very important day: the Pope arrived! The FOCUS group set up camp along the expected route of the Popemobile, and the atmosphere was electric - everyone joined in chants of "Esta es la juventud del Papa!" - "We are the youth of the Pope!" Unfortunately the Pope didn't pass our way in the end, but just being in that atmosphere was wonderful, and a sign of things to come! On Friday, the Pope led the Way of the Cross, before the main event began the next morning.

On the morning of Saturday, 20th August, all 2 million young people began making their way to Cuatro Vientos airport in south Madrid. The Metro system was as full as a London tube in rush hour, but the atmosphere could not have been more different. The excitement was almost tangible, and even with the sardine-style conditions I couldn't keep the grin off my face - this was it! World Youth Day had arrived! Once off the train, we all walked for 2 hours in the midday sun to our entrance, being sprayed with water from local residents' water pistols and watering cans as we went. Once we reached the airfield, fire crews were on hand with their hoses to keep us all cool in the 42°C heat. Yet everyone remained in high spirits as we collected food packs and settled into our new homes for the night (avoiding the resident ants, of course!) That evening, amidst an endless sea of sleeping bags and flags, we greeted the Pope. As he started the evening service, ominous clouds crept over the horizon, but even as we scrambled for bin bags and plastic sheets, and the first drops of rain fell, we remained joyful and it seemed to me as if everyone present was glowing. I took the chance to wander around the site in the semi-darkness after the service, and saw so many groups celebrating on into the night, dancing in circles with people they had never met before, chatting as if they were life-long friends: we were all one massive family.

### *Sunday Notes 2009-2010*

The next morning, we awoke to a beautiful clear sky. The Pope returned to celebrate Mass with us, and spoke of the importance of faith and the Church, that one is inseparable from the other, and that it is through each other's faith that we grow in our own. We had some time in complete silence, and witnessing so many people become so quiet in prayer for themselves and the Church everywhere was a strong statement for me. At the end of the Mass a huge cheer reminded everyone just how many people were here, when the announcement for the next WYD was announced: Rio!

The next morning, the first few of our group departed. It was a morning of simultaneous joy and sadness, for while we would miss our new friends, this was really just the beginning for us as we returned to our homes, trying to bring the deep joy and beauty of our trip to our friends and families.

Some of us, however, still had a day to explore the city whilst hunting for gifts for our host families. My group decided to travel to Plaza del Sol, a place that just days before had become a centre for those protesting against WYD - but so different when we visited! The protesters had dispersed and instead the streets were filled with groups from Cuatro Vientos, still celebrating, dancing and singing: World Youth Day may have ended on paper but its legacy continues in every person that was present.

Returning to Britain, every person in our group was noticeably different. Words do not quite express it, but essentially we were all now actively living our faith in every moment: it is vital to our lives and permeates through all we do. We try to follow Christ in everything and see through His eyes; it's not always easy but we know that we can trust in God, and if we let Him He will lead us on the right path.

Anna Green

We are most grateful to Anna for sharing a truly memorable occasion with us.  
Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Made to Love**

30th Sunday of Year A - 23rd October 2011

Our Christian mission is to tell in word and deed the story of God's love and to enable the world to know that love. Knowing that we are loved, we are to pass it on to others. Jesus summed up our mission in the two great commandments, love of God and love of the neighbour.

Love of God, whom we have never seen, is false if it is not expressed in love of the neighbour whom we do see. And love of people is incomplete unless it is infused by love of God.

You have heard of the person who said, "I love God alright; it's people I can't stand." On the other hand, there are those who do love people, whom they see, but wonder how they can be asked to love God, whom they do not see.

We must remember that love is more than a feeling. It is often accompanied by warm feelings, but it goes much deeper. Those we love most deeply are sometimes exasperating and disappointing; our love for them resides not in our emotions but in our hearts. Love calls for sacrifice, Jesus himself

once said that there is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for a friend. We will not be called upon to pay the ultimate sacrifice but we will be called upon to die our selves in little things so that we can ensure that there is true love in our family circle.

Sadly some people cannot begin to do so because they do not love themselves. Yet Jesus calls us to Love others as you love yourself.

We must not confuse self-love with selfishness. There is a difference between them. Selfishness makes oneself the centre of things. Its only concern is with one's own success, comfort and wellbeing. The main thrust is inwards.

Selfishness looks outward only to get. Self-love looks outward to give. It first looks inward to recognise its own talents and gifts but sees them as opportunities to enrich the lives of others. It is a realisation that, made and loved by God as we are, we are precious in his eyes and in our own. If we are loved by God, we must surely love ourselves.

True self-love is nurtured through prayer of I thankfulness to God. The hallmarks of selfishness are anxiety and fear. The fruits of I self-love are gratitude and joy.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Servant Leadership**

31st Sunday of Year A - 30th October 2011

Today's Gospel reminds us of the saying "Do as I say not as I do". Jesus is contrasting what the scribes and Pharisees say about the Law - and how they act. They do not, as He says, practise what they preach. Not only that - but their teaching about the Law and its regulations placed great burdens on people while they themselves did nothing to help.

Their role, as they see it puts them above other people and they demand - and obviously get - plenty of attention and respect from those around them. Jesus is not impressed. He turns to His disciples and the people who have gathered to listen and states quite forcibly that this is not how it is to be among them. Their model of leadership was to be that of service.

Today people are more impressed by witness rather than by talk, and if they listen to leaders, it is because they see their leaders practise what they preach.

Sadly in recent years those in leadership in our Church have failed. Frequently we read about the sex scandals among the clergy & the irresponsible response of some Bishops who sought to preserve the status quo rather than let the truth be known. The harsh words from the prophet Malachi of his day echo through the centuries: "And now, O priests, this command is for you .... I will send the curse on you .... You have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble..."

Let us pray God's mercy on our priests who have failed and be grateful those who have witnessed to true leadership through their faithful service. As a result of these scandals many may be tempted to leave the Church but Jesus is asking us to stand firm. Jesus' message is clear: we are a church of

sinners from top to bottom. He warned us that there would be scandals, but we are not to lose heart. The message of the kingdom stands, no matter how corrupt the messenger. "Do what they tell you, but do not follow their example."

Unfortunately the clerical leadership in our church continues despite the call of the Vatican Council to usher in the era of the laity. In my opinion change will begin from the grass roots and not from the top: hence everyone of us must take our call to leadership in this parish seriously and not leave it to others - always remembering that Jesus has called us to servant leadership - those who exalt themselves will be humbled - and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Expect the Unexpected**

32nd Sunday of Year A - 6th November 2011

The Gospel this Sunday is about being prepared to meet the Lord, today and every day. Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish virgins to highlight for us the importance of being spiritually prepared and ready for the great event, the eternal wedding reception. The delayed arrival of the groom is the delayed Second Coming of Jesus. We must not be lulled into carelessness, into thinking that it will never happen. It will - and we do not know when.

Perhaps we think that the wise virgins should have shared their oil, but this would be to misunderstand the story. There are some things in life that we have to do for ourselves. You cannot ask someone else to undertake the process of spiritual growth for you. Thinking that we can 'borrow' from another's store ('my mother goes to Mass for me') is foolishness. The foolish virgins could not ask others to be alert, awake and on their behalf. They had to take responsibility for their own lives.

Prayerfulness is the art of staying awake or being attentive to God: constantly desiring, thirsting and longing for God as in the responsorial psalm. Daily acts of prayer keep the oil topped up and the lamp of faith alight. The prayerful soul is attentive to God's presence but the foolish unbeliever misses the grace of the present moment. 'Prayer is a gift that God gives to those who pray.' (St John Damascene)

Running out of material goods can be unpleasant, but how are we as regards our spiritual stocks? Allowing our spiritual resources to dry up is nothing less than disastrous. The oil in today's passage is our love of God and our neighbour. Can others see that we really yearn for God, and that we live according to the gospel, doing good for others.

In this in-between time we can grow tired of longing for Christ's final coming in glory. We can become accustomed to our present circumstances and forget that something greater awaits us. Like the foolish virgins in today's Gospel we can be caught unprepared when the heavenly bridegroom comes in glory. We need to maintain our longing for Christ and today's psalm reminds us that prayer will help us to do this.

As we await the final coming of Christ, the words 'Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!' should never be far from our lips.

Fr Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **"Use it or Lose it"**

33rd Sunday of Year A - 13th November 2011

'Be fruitful and multiply!' This was the first command given by God to our first parents. It is rightly interpreted as a command to the human race to procreate. However, this command covers much more than child-bearing. Indeed, we can all think of people who lived very fruitful lives, and contributed greatly to their communities, without ever having children of their own.

The command to be fruitful is given to the whole human race. The ways in which each of us contributes to this fruitfulness will vary according to our particular talents and circumstances. The community is built up when each of us makes our unique contribution. Above all Christ wants us to use our gifts to build up the Kingdom of God in this world. It is only when fear or selfishness prompts us to bury our gifts that we fail to fulfil God's first command to us.

Perhaps this week we should evaluate our readiness or preparedness to do so by looking at how we use and multiply the gifts God has given us: the gift for holiness, the gift for community-building, the gift for helping to create a more Christ-like world.

The talent here is the gift of the Gospel given to each of us. God has come to us in his Son, inviting us into this incredibly privileged relationship in life. The word is clear: invest the talent, invest yourself in the gift of the Gospel. Take risks with it, trade with it, enter into deals with it so that it grows in your life. As you and I invest ourselves in the good news, as we give ourselves to it, take risks with it, the kingdom grows, and our faith with it. We learn to appreciate how God has blessed us. We learn how life is an extraordinary gift and how wondrous a journey it can be with God at the centre. As we risk, as we pour ourselves more deeply into what God has asked of us, we find it challenges us to give more and more.

Remember we won't get to heaven on our good looks nor on our promises nor by merely doing our duty. The third servant in today's Gospel stood still, opting for the status quo and burying his gift. His world was a poorer place because he failed to bear fruit in his life. We are being challenged to be generous in our giving and to help in building the reign of God in this parish. Do we bury our gifts and leave it to others to bear fruit? Let us use our gifts not lose them.

As we bring another church year to a close, we should take stock of how we use our gifts.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.

## **Our Shepherd King**

Feast of Christ the King - Year A - 20th November 2011

The Feast of Christ the King was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925 as an antidote to secularism, a way of life which leaves God out of man's thinking and living and organizes his life as if God did

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not exist. In his visit to Britain last year, Pope Benedict asked us to actively witness to our faith as a means of counteracting the current wave of secularism that is overwhelming Europe. Hence although we might not be attuned to the idea of kingship the feast is still relevant today.

We must remember that the Kingship of Christ is far removed from our idea of earthly kings. When we think of a king we think of someone who is a figurehead without power or authority, and if they do have power and authority we see them as very remote from their people and lording it over them. But Christ is not like that. He lives among us, and came not to rule but to serve.

Psalm 23 gives a good understanding of the ways in which Christ is our King. He offers us direction ('you guide us along the right paths'), sustenance ('you have prepared a banquet for us') and protection ('in the Lord's own house shall we dwell'). We for our part must obey the good shepherd which, in the psalm, is equated with a trustful willingness to go wherever the shepherd leads us.

Today's Gospel expands on this. We obey Christ, our shepherd, by ourselves being shepherds to all who are troubled or outcast. We pay homage to our king by serving the less fortunate people with whom he identifies himself. In the judgement scene, people are condemned, not for sins of commission but for sins of omission. We may think we are good simply because we don't do any harm to anyone. But what about the good we fail to do? The sin of omission is one of the worst sins in the world.

From a Christian point of view, there is only one real failure in life - failure to love. We have to concentrate on doing good, rather than on merely avoiding evil. Let us not wait for big opportunities. Let us avail of the little opportunities that come our way every day: opportunities to be friendly, to be helpful, to be considerate, to be compassionate, to serve...

The principal way we witness to our faith is by loving one another. This was the first thing the pagan world noticed about Christians. It should be the same today. Sadly greed, not love, has ruled our lives for far too long.

Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.M.