



3rd SUNDAY OF LENT

YEAR C

19th-20th March 2022

*A Parish of the Diocese
of Motherwell.
The Bishop;
Rt. Rev. Joseph A. Toal
www.rcdom.org.uk
Scottish Charity No
SC011041*

FIRST READING

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

"I AM" sent me to you.

A reading from the Book of Exodus

Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro,
the priest of Midian.

Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb,
the mountain of God.

There an angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of a bush.

As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush,
though on fire, was not consumed.

So Moses decided,

"I must go over to look at this remarkable sight,
and see why the bush is not burned."

When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely,

God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

He answered, "Here I am."

God said, "Come no nearer!

Remove the sandals from your feet,

for the place where you stand is holy ground.

I am the God of your fathers," he continued,

"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

But the LORD said,

"I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt
and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers,
so I know well what they are suffering.

Therefore I have come down to rescue them

from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious
land,

a land flowing with milk and honey."

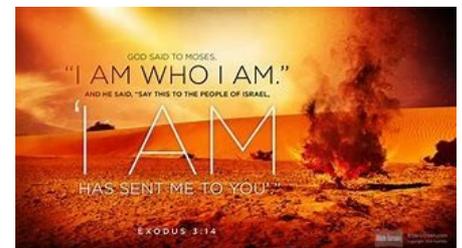
Moses said to God, "But when I go to the Israelites

and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,'
if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?"

God replied, "I am who am."

Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites:

I AM sent me to you."



God spoke further to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites:
The LORD, the God of your fathers,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,
has sent me to you.
“This is my name forever;
thus am I to be remembered through all generations.”
and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills,
He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

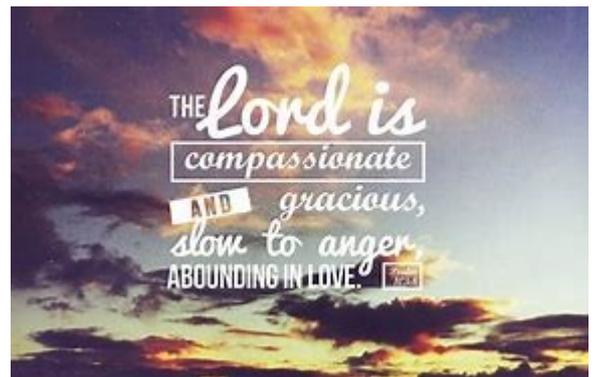
R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

The LORD secures justice
and the rights of all the oppressed.
He has made known his ways to Moses,
and his deeds to the children of Israel.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.



SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

The life of the people with Moses in the desert was written down as a warning to us.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,
that our ancestors were all under the cloud
and all passed through the sea,
and all of them were baptized into Moses
in the cloud and in the sea.

All ate the same spiritual food,
and all drank the same spiritual drink,
for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them,
and the rock was the Christ.

Yet God was not pleased with most of them,
for they were struck down in the desert.

These things happened as examples for us,
so that we might not desire evil things, as they did.

Do not grumble as some of them did,
and suffered death by the destroyer.

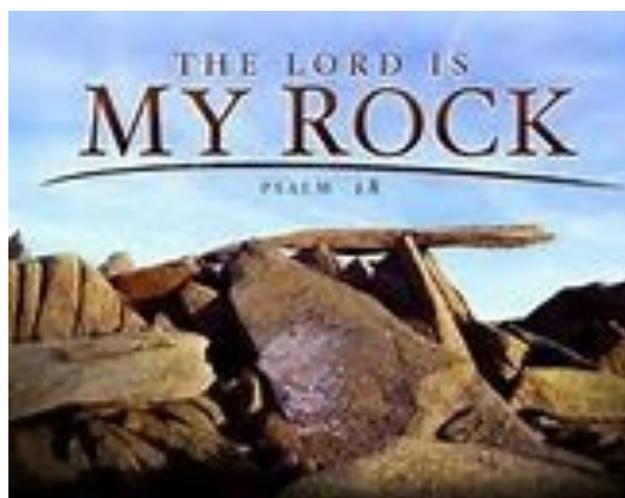
These things happened to them as an example,
and they have been written down as a warning to us,
upon whom the end of the ages has come.

Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure
should take care not to fall.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL

Mt 4:17

Repent, says the Lord;
the kingdom of heaven is at hand.



GOSPEL
Luke 13:1-9

If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did.



A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans
whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.
Jesus said to them in reply,
“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way
they were greater sinners than all other Galileans?
By no means!
But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!
Or those eighteen people who were killed
when the tower at Siloam fell on them—
do you think they were more guilty
than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem?
By no means!
But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable:

“There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard,
and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none,
he said to the gardener,
‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree
but have found none.
So cut it down.
Why should it exhaust the soil?’
He said to him in reply,
‘Sir, leave it for this year also,
and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it;
it may bear fruit in the future.
If not you can cut it down.’”



THIS WEEK'S READINGS

In the scriptures this week, we read of God's self-revelation and of his relationship with his people. This relationship is one of great love, but also contains an awareness of our fragility. Hence we heard of God's warnings, his continuous forgiveness and patience, and his offers to us to start again.

The **First Reading** from Exodus recounts the call of Moses and the revelation of God's sacred name.

First Reading Exodus 3: 1–8, 13–15 The Book of Exodus is the second of the group of five books of the Old Testament called the Pentateuch, which form the Jewish Torah. The word Exodus means 'going forth' and refers to the main event in the book: the flight of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Moses's life parallels that of the Jewish people. He was rejected by the Hebrews, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter as a baby, then banished from Egypt and reduced now to tend a flock of animals in Midian. He has no home to call his own. Moses's life can be seen as a model for subsequent prophets and for Jesus. He shares people's plight, but through his actions and his words, people develop a close relationship with God. Horeb, the mountain of God The same place is also called Sinai and is variously thought to be in the South or in the North-East of the Sinai peninsula. It was probably a sacred place. A flame of fire coming from the middle of a bush Fire, symbolising passion, purity, light, or mystery is often used as an indication of God's presence (e.g. Genesis 1: 17). Take off your shoes This is an action which acknowledges being in a holy place: to this day, it is still carried out by Muslims entering a mosque, but it is also what many people do on coming home. Moses is finding his true home. Moses covered his face People believed that one could not look at God and live (see Ex. 33: 20). A land where milk and honey flow The milk would be provided by ewes and goats; the honey was in fact grape juice reduced to a sweet fermented syrup. Both of these would seem like Paradise for semi-nomadic groups. I Am who I Am Much has been written about the origins of this expression, written originally as YHWH, thus making it impossible to pronounce. Later, vowels were added to make the word Yahweh, but mindful of the holiness of the word, many translations of the Bible prefer to use the expression 'the Lord'.

Jesus, in the **Gospel**, calls us to repentance, but reminds us, in the parable of the fig tree, that God is slow to anger and rich in mercy.

Jesus is addressing a large crowd and his disciples, including Peter. The passage focuses on the unpredictability of the end of one's life and the need to be prepared through repentance of one's sins. The first verses of this chapter are only to be found in Luke's Gospel. The Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. There are no historical records of this event; however some scholars think it might refer to an episode recorded by Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian. Galileans were leading a rebellion against Rome, protesting about Temple funds being used to pay for an aqueduct for the town. Pilate ordered his men to attend the Temple in disguise. At a given signal, they attacked the Jews in the Temple. Others suggest it might refer to the massacre of Samaritans climbing their holy mountain, Mount Gerizim, in 35 AD. Pilate was recalled to Rome to explain his actions. At all events, the episode is in keeping with the character of Pilate as we know it. Those eighteen on whom the Tower of Siloam fell. Nothing is known about this event but clearly it was familiar to Jesus's listeners. Jesus probably refers to one of the towers on the South-East corner of Jerusalem guarding an aqueduct bringing water to the pool of Siloam. Were they more guilty than the people living in Jerusalem? At the time people believed that there was a relationship of cause and effect between sin and punishment. Pain and premature death were seen as signs of God's displeasure. Jesus is keen to refute that idea. Whatever the cause of death, the people did not die because they were sinners, nor do their deaths indicate that they were sinners. Parable of the barren fig tree This parable is designed to give people hope. It is possible to see the landowner as symbolising God; the fig tree as the Jewish people; and the gardener as Jesus. The fig tree: A common plant in this area. In the Old Testament, it is often seen as a symbol of safety and security (1 Kings 4: 25) or of the people of Israel (Hosea 9: 10, Micah 7: 1). 'Dig round it and manure it': A reprieve for the tree is negotiated. We can see in this a symbol of God's mercy and the fact that we will have help when we endeavour to bear fruit. Some scholars also see in this parable an example of a favourite idea of Luke in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, that of Christ delaying his return (also called the Parousia) in order to give more time for the Gospel to be preached and for people to repent. *St Beuno's Outreach*

GOD AS THE GARDENER

It doesn't take much effort these days to bump into tragedy. You don't have to look very far to see bad news. As a former journalist, I can attest that the old adage is true: if it bleeds, it leads. In our information age, we are more aware of the bad stuff in the world than ever.

And these are only the public tragedies in our world. They speak nothing of the personal tragedies we all experience and are weighed down by, that keep us awake and haunt as at night.

It is easy when we turn on the news to ask ourselves, "Why?" or maybe even, "Why God?"

Why those innocent children in an elementary school? Why God? Why does everything in this world, sometimes, feel so God-forsaken?

It is the same question the townspeople in our story ask Jesus. It seems Herod had yet again slaughtered religious pilgrims, slaughtered them while they were making sacrifices to God. Horrific wouldn't begin to describe it. It was sacrilegious. These questions are our questions. We have had our own falling towers just as they did in the first century.

Why? they ask. Why? we ask.

Now, in the first century, most people believed that when tragedy struck it was a punishment, a warning, the judgement of God. They believed that good things happened to good people. And when bad things happened, it was a reflection of your character.

Those Galileans that Herod slaughtered? They must have sinned something terrible. Those who died in the tower? They must have angered God. This was the conventional wisdom of the day, and we are not so far removed from this line of thinking in our own modern culture. Those children slaughtered? We had voices that told us it was because we've turned away from God, because we've banned prayer in schools, because we've let people own guns, because we've let our children play video games. Those towers fell in New York City? It was God's judgement on a corrupt nation. We must have angered God.

And so these voices spray blame around in the face of tragedy in order to avoid dealing with it. Tragedy is much easier to stomach when there is someone to blame. So they call on us to repent, to be better people, so that maybe next time we can prevent tragedy, maybe next time God won't get so mad, maybe next time we can control the uncertainties in our world.

Jesus in this story, too, calls us to repent. But for something different.

He calls us to repent of the belief that God is a God who sends violence, tragedy and death upon those who have sinned. He calls us to repent of making God into a monstrosity whose anger burns white hot at our mistakes and missteps. He calls us to repent of believing that God repays evil with evil, violence for sin.

God is not so petty and small a god as to do that.

In our lives, though, we want a God who takes that kind of vengeance. We want a God who gets even. We want a God who triumphs over enemies.

We don't want a God who washes feet. We don't want a God who loves enemies. We don't want a God who, instead of getting even, stretches out on a cross to be executed.

So, as the people are asking Jesus whether tragedy is God's judgement, Jesus in response tells them a story about who God really is. He tells a story about a vineyard owner, a fig tree and a gardener.

See this fig tree, it wasn't doing what it was supposed to do. Fig trees are supposed to produce figs, but this tree wasn't. It wasn't following the rules of a fig tree. And so the vineyard owner comes in, angry at the tree for its lack of production, and calls for it to be completely uprooted, chopped up and used for firewood. It was good for nothing. It did nothing but take up space, take nutrients from the soil and waste them, take up the vineyard owner's time. It wasn't doing what it was supposed to do, and the vineyard owner was tired of all the taking. He wanted some making. He needed a fig tree that was a maker, not a taker. But the fig tree is saved by an unconventional gardener.

The problem is, though, we still view this story and God through the lens of the vineyard owner, through the lens of a God who punishes us for not doing what we are supposed to do, who sends tragedy and calamity our way when we mess up. We think that God is the vineyard owner, angry at our sin, our lack of production, our lack of fruit. And we see Jesus as the gardener, standing between us and an abusive father's rage, saying, give them one more chance, one more year to get their stuff together.

And we miss the point. God is not the vineyard owner. No, the vineyard owner is the wisdom of the world. It is the wisdom of the world that measures our value in how good we are, if we are following all the rules, if we are doing what we are supposed to. It is the wisdom of the world that says that our value is in how much we produce for the vineyard owner, how much profit we can make for the person in charge, how much we can put out for families, our churches, or communities. It is the wisdom of the world that says if you are not a maker, then you are a taker and good for nothing.

The wisdom of the world lionizes and values competency and success. It doesn't value suffering or pain or failure or falling apart. It doesn't value lament. It considers weeping a weakness. When tragedy happens, it wants to fix it and if it can't fix it, it wants to find someone to blame. When grief happens, it wants us to get over it and move on. When it sees us fall, it tells us to get right back up and try, try again. It admonishes us that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. And if you don't get back up and if you don't get going, then you are good-for-nothing.

It is the wisdom of the world that sees such a vulnerable tree and demands that it be uprooted and throw into the fire.

Thanks be to God that God is not the vineyard owner. Rather, God is the gardener. God is the gardener who says no to the wisdom of the world. God is the gardener whose love rejects the wisdom of the world. God is the gardener who proclaims our value not in terms of whether we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, not in terms of what we produce, what we make or even what we take. God the gardener tells us, "All that doesn't matter. I don't care about all that. What matters is how much I care."

And God says I care so much that not only am I not going to send punishment down on you for missteps, not only am I not going to uproot you when life seems to have sapped the life from you, but I am also going to get down there with you, in the dirt, in the manure, in the places where it smells and stinks and gets overwhelming.

God says, "I care enough to get dirty!"

And so Jesus is saying, in the midst of news of tragedy, don't look to place blame on the victims of violence, the victims of hunger, the victims of poverty, the victims of grief, the victims of suffering. Don't try to explain away tragedy by finding a convenient place to put the blame for it. And don't put it on God. Don't look for tragedy and trauma as evidence of the vineyard owner who has come and gotten even, offered retribution for wrongdoing.

Amid tragedy, if you want to find God, look where the suffering is. God is there suffering with us. This is the message of the Incarnation. That God is with us. So don't look at the heavens and shake your fist. Look at the dirt. And the manure. The earth. And dig your hands in. For that is where God is, with us in the midst of it all. In this parable, Jesus is telling us that God, when we feel most lifeless and hopeless and worthless, isn't going to leave or forsake us or send us to the fires. Rather, God is entering into our lifelessness, hopelessness and worthlessness with compassion and love.

God will see us and not want to rid the land of such wastefulness. Rather God will see us and start getting dirty, smelling to high heaven, amid the crap that life throws at us, piles on us, shovels on us. And God is working. With us. Tending the soil. Creating life, from lifelessness. Creating life with us in the midst of manure, waste and dead things.

Jesus calls us to repent of our image that sees God as a vineyard owner who sows and reaps tragedy when we mess up. And he calls us to be gardeners, too. He calls us to follow him, to dig into the soil and the manure of what life can throw at people, to care about them, love them and stand with them. Repent not by saying your sorry. Repent not by saying all the right words. Repent by standing with those who are suffering, stagnant or stuck. Not to save them, or make their lives better, but to enter into their reality with them. God doesn't want us to have the answer to suffering. God doesn't want us to be the solution to suffering. God wants us to do exactly what Jesus did with us: to enter into the suffering of others and suffer with them.

David Roberts

Time for Change: Reflections on Lent

Seeing the devastation that Putin's war is wrecking on a country and on individual lives is alarming. Hearing the stories of just some of the 2 million persons who have been forced to flee their country and leave loved ones behind is equally disturbing. It renders one speechless that so much suffering can happen at the hands of one person.

We see images of wives and girl friends and mothers and children escaping the violence of the war while the men stay behind to fight it, some in their teens, some in their fifties. We see old people being left behind because they cannot make the arduous journey; and others doing their best struggling to make it. We see children crying in the basements and metro stations.

How can life be so cruel and how can humans be so cruel to other humans?

What price we are willing to pay for our ideologies? What is the ease with which we surrender our humanity for...what? Victory? Hatred? Power? The thrill of seeing others suffer? The triumph of a belief? An idol? What's it all about? How many others will suffer in the process?

To grasp the meaning of war, it behoves us to think about our relationships. Think about just one person fleeing the country and leaving behind the following:

A loved one, a husband or lover.
A parent or grandparent.
Friends.
A pet.
A place.
A home.
One's plants. One's photographs and memories.
One's possessions.
One's yard and one's neighbourhood.
One's job and one's co-workers.
One's workplace



The list can go on and on. It is a list of relations.

Meister Eckhart says, "relation is the essence of everything that exists." This is echoed by today's physics as well. That is why we are all "interdependent." And it is also why we are capable of compassion which is the working out of our interdependence in both joy and sorrow.

Until we choose otherwise. And choose to treat others as objects, not as subjects we are in in relationship with. One cannot wage war without stepping outside the circle of "all our relations" and into a box of "us vs. them," of subject vs. object.

Is war the opposite of relationship, the opposite of honouring the sacredness of beings and our being-with other beings? Evil and War are efforts to destroy the Sacred, to rupture *all our relations*. *What drives humans to that end?*

Matthew Fox



THE
FORTY
DAYS
of LENT

RETURN
to the
LORD
YOUR
GOD



FAST

FORGIVE

REPENT

PRAY

LOVE

SHEDDING OUR FALSE SELVES

I learned over the weeks and months of sitting [in nature] in quiet solitude that I am a lot like the oak tree that clings so fiercely to its leaves. I suspect a lot of us are. We, too, clutch our camouflage—the person we present to the world, to our own selves, and even to God. We, too, are unwilling to shed our false selves, to let go, to live vulnerably and authentically. . . .

Sitting in silence every day helped me see that my “leaves” of choice are busyness and productivity, drive and efficiency, achievement and success. . . . I clung with an iron grip to my false self, to the false identity I’d meticulously crafted over the years. I was busy, productive, and driven. I pushed myself to accomplish, achieve, and succeed. . . .

Marsha [a tour guide] explained that a particular Japanese gardening technique called “open center pruning” was responsible not only for the sculptural appeal of this maple, but also for the uncluttered space and serenity in the garden as a whole.

When a Japanese gardener “prunes open,” Marsha explained, he or she cuts away not only dead branches and foliage, but also often a number of perfectly healthy branches that detract from the beauty inherent in the tree’s essential structure. Pruning open allows the visitor to see up, out, and beyond the trees to the sky, creating a sense of spaciousness and letting light into the garden. It also enables an individual tree to flourish by removing complicating elements, simplifying structure, and revealing its essence. The process of pruning open turns the tree inside out, so to speak, revealing the beautiful design inherent within it. . . .



The truth is, God does not wish for us to stand stubborn like the autumn oak tree, cloaked in a façade of protection, our truest, most authentic selves obscured beneath a tangled bramble of false security. Rather, [God] desires us to live like the Japanese maple tree, our true essence revealed and flourishing, our true self front and center, secure and thriving. God yearns for us to live wholeheartedly and truthfully as the unique, beautiful, beloved individuals [God] created us to be. Most of all, God’s deepest desire is for us to know [God], to root our whole selves in [God] like a tree rooted by a stream, and to know [God’s] deep, abiding love for us. . . .

God invites us into intimate relationship . . . so that we may then live more compassionately and intimately with those around us. We are the windows, as Henri Nouwen [1932–1996] said, through which others may glimpse God. They are windows through which we might glimpse God. *Michelle DeRusha*

Opening to God: Ilia Delio

Prayer is the longing of the human heart for God. It is a yearning and desire for relationship with God, and it is God's attention to our desire: God-in-communion with us. The great spiritual writer Augustine of Hippo [354–430] captured the longing of the human heart in the beginning of his *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” [1] We long for God because we are created by God, and this longing is both the source of our hope in God and the very thing we resist. Prayer is an awakening to the fact that the fulfilment of my life lies in God.

God delights in creation and loves each of us with a personal love. Prayer, therefore, is God's desire to breathe in me, to be the spirit of my life, to draw me into the fullness of life. When I pray—when I breathe with God—I become part of the intimacy of God's life. The Franciscan theologian, Saint Bonaventure [c. 1217–1274], wrote in his *Soliloquy*, “[God] is the One who is closer to you than you are to yourself.” [2] Prayer is recognizing the intimate in-dwelling of God in our lives, the One who remains faithful in love even when the world around us may fall apart. . . .

To pray is to open up oneself to God who dwells within us. It means holding back nothing from God and sharing everything with God. . . . Only the grace of God can enable us to let go of our fears and allow God to be the God of our lives. True prayer is fundamental for life in God. It is that grace of conversion that opens up our hearts



to realize the humble presence of God in our lives. Prayer of the heart is unceasing prayer, where God breathes in us and our hearts are turned toward God. This deepening of our lives in the divine life is the path to self-discovery. In and through prayer we discover our true selves, the self that God has created each of us to be. . . .

Life in God should be a daring adventure of love but often we settle for mediocrity. We follow the daily practice of prayer but we are unwilling or, for various reasons, unable to give ourselves totally to God. To settle on the plain of mediocrity is to settle for something less than God, which leaves our hearts restless and unfulfilled. . . . Prayer is that dynamic, life-giving relationship with God by which we grow deep in God's Word, strong in God's grace, and free in God's love to dream with God the unimaginable.

ON MEDITATING

When we meditate, we enter the mind of Christ from the ground up. We settle into the mystery of the concrete immediacy of our breathing and our bodily being. We are quietly attentive to the thoughts and feelings that arise, endure, and pass away within us. Sitting in this way, we do not fly off into some eternal realm. Rather, we enter into the mind of Christ, which knows and is the divine generosity of the concrete immediacy of ourselves just as we are.

This is why we sit in meditation: so that we might settle into this ordinary mind; so that in becoming, at last, just ourselves, we might realize our eternal oneness with God.

There is no single way to meditate. However, there are certain components that facilitate the process:

Body Posture: Sit still. Sit straight. Place your hands in a comfortable or meaningful position in your lap. Close your eyes or lower them toward the ground. Breathe slowly and naturally

With respect to **your mind**, be present, open, and awake, neither clinging to nor rejecting anything. Take a stance of observing all your thoughts, feelings and reactions as they pass through you rather than responding unconsciously from them.

And with respect to **attitude**, maintain nonjudgmental compassion toward yourself- as you discover yourself clinging to and rejecting everything - and nonjudgmental compassion toward others in their powerlessness that is one with yours

In this stance of humble acceptance, simply re-instate the meditative stance of being present, open and awake each time you realise you've drifted off yet again into the clinging and rejecting of your wandering mind.

There are two methods to help stabilise meditative awareness. The first is to use your awareness of your breathing as an anchoring place in present moment awareness. Each time you realise you have once again drifted off into sleepiness, day-dreaming, or clinging to this or that sensation, thought or feeling, simply renew your awareness of your breathing as a way of re-grounding yourself in meditative awareness of the present moment. The silent, interior repetition of a word or phrase is another traditional method for sustaining present-moment attentiveness.

The ego self struggles in its efforts to sit present and awake, as a way of being open to God's presence, until the ego exhausts all its own means of overcoming its inability to realise oneness with God. Then, just as all seems lost, we look up to see God with us with open arms. Suddenly, we realise there is no place within us that is not encountered, embraced, and made whole in a love that does not even care to hear our litany of shortcomings and regrets. We are profoundly loved by God without any foundations for being loved, except divine love itself. *Anne Solomon*

On Wednesday, 12th January, His Holiness Pope Francis issued the Call to Prayer below and invited us to respond by praying and sharing the prayer as widely as possible:

" Eternal Father, You have made the whole world stop walking for a while.

You have forcibly silenced the noise that we have all created around us.

You have made us bend our knees and ask for miracles.

You closed Your Churches so that we realize how dark our world is without You in it.

You humiliated the proud and powerful. The economy is collapsing, businesses are closing.

We have been very proud to think that everything we have, everything we own, have been the result of our hard work.

We have forgotten that it was Your grace, Your mercy, that made us who we are and has given us everything we have.

We are going around in circles looking for some cure for this disease, when in fact we need to humble ourselves and ask for guidance and wisdom only from You.

We have been living our lives as if we are here on Earth forever, as if there is no Heaven, no Purgatory, no Hell.

Perhaps this virus is actually Your way of purifying and cleansing our souls, bringing us back to You.

Today, as these words travel the internet, may all who see them join their hearts and hands in prayer, asking for forgiveness, asking for healing and protection against this virus, but above all, asking that Your Holy and Divine Will be done and not ours.



GOD we beg You, deliver us from all evil on Earth if it is Your will!

Father, You have been patiently waiting for us to turn our faces to You, to repent of our sins. We are sorry to ignore Your voice! Selfishly, sometimes we have forgotten that You are GOD!! Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my house, but one word from you will be enough to heal me!

You Lord only need to say the Word and our souls will be healed.

We ask You for healing and deliverance in Jesus' name! By the infinite merits of his Most Sacred Heart and of the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Amen.

Pope Francis

SUMMARY REPORT OF OUR FIRST SYNODAL SESSION

COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In our church, as individuals and a community we should welcome strangers and newcomers. Get a feel for being together with others. We can put barriers in our head which prevents us reaching out – that people will feel patronised, that they view things differently, that they are too difficult. A need to put ourselves in others shoes, to recognise that they can find themselves in quite different circumstances. Conversation is vital to community. Together we can accomplish so much more than by ourselves.

The daily, morning Mass gives a real sense of togetherness and community. This is what we want from the whole parish. This synodal experience is also what we want everyone to experience. Awareness of our spiritual journey together is growing.

A sense that we don't walk together – people are prepared to walk away for fickle reasons eg they don't like the singing or attend only because of the Sunday obligation. A feeling that people just do what they want. There is a reluctance among many practising Catholics to take more part in their parish. What exactly does walking together mean and what does it hope to achieve? Do we simply leave behind those we deem not "true" Catholics?

We must be as inclusive as possible in our parish life and find ways to reach out especially to young people. Are clubs and Masses for them the way forward? The obstacles to young people attending are great – mental health issues, peer pressure, social media. There is a generational change in people's attitude to the Church. The SVDP is a good example of inclusion and reaching out as are the Mini-Vinnies in the primary school.

There are perceived obstacles blocking certain people from attending: the divorced, the poor, the unemployed, gay people. Some even don't come because they can't afford to. How does the Church look from the outside: old, white, male-run, hetero-normative?

Covid has made people wary of reaching out. Once the emergency has passed we need to make more effort to let people know they are not alone and to identify those who are not coming back.

LISTENING

We need to slow down and give ourselves enough time to truly listen and pick up how people are feeling deep-down. Loneliness and poverty are barriers to being listened to. We might think some people are difficult to approach but we can be surprised by the welcome reaction. The parish is there for all of us in hard times. How can we best get this across to everyone especially if they feel the community is not very welcoming?

We can develop the art of listening through prayer when we hear both God and ourselves. This creates the peace within us which enables us to listen.

The voice of the world is very loud and can drown out the Church's voice. The Church's teaching should be explained more clearly and though this might mean some people don't accept it, a stronger church will emerge. Fear that the Church's message is being diluted and fear for the future of the Church.

Refreshing to hear other people express their fears and hopes and to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. Good, too, to listen and identify with the prayer experiences of others.

SOME WORDS USED DURING THE MEETING

Relaxed, comfortable, peace, quiet. Reassured at the presence of the Spirit. Hopeful. Experience the presence of Jesus – given an image. Confirmed. Feeling of being relieved at “getting prayer out”. Sense of yearning, awareness of something deeper, desire to be closer to the Lord. Self-knowledge – word from scripture focussed into a moment of self-knowledge. The Emmaus walk - disciples thought they knew and the Lord didn't – in fact the reverse. Security in the sense of Jesus walking with us – we all walk together with Jesus.

OTHER COMMENTS

It is so encouraging to be given chance to share - to be asked about views. Good to meet others and discuss things. Reassurance that we're not alone – sense of community. “We're not mad” – individuals independently all identifying similar themes - initially afraid to speak out in case they were thought to be 'mad'. Worried about the challenges ahead – how to reach young people. Sense of welcome in the group and from the parish – what about the 'lapsed'? the marginalised – need to reach out to them. We need to represent the 'voiceless'. How do we 'tap into' the “middle group”/young adults?

SUMMARY REPORT OF OUR SECOND SYNODAL SESSION

SPEAKING OUT

Some voices in the church speak more loudly than others and may not best represent the Church – Sancta Familia Media could be an example of this. Spokespeople for the Church must represent the different voices in the Church and not simply take one line. We need truly representative advocates formed in the spirit of the 2nd Vatican Council.

It can be difficult to discard old attitudes which discouraged speaking out. Perhaps this reflected an understanding of God as a God of fear. There is a cultural issue, too, where speaking out was discouraged. We must recognise that the “official” Church hasn’t always got things right and so it’s important that other voices be heard. We need to hear deeply Christ’s words “You foolish men!” More women’s voices!

The youth are “speaking” with their feet. Cajoling and threatening words no longer work. Ways should be found which encourages them to find their voice in the Church. They don’t expect adults not to talk about their faith or be embarrassed about going to church. We can be more direct with them in inviting them to come along.

Speaking and listening are first steps to a new way of being Church. The willingness to speak out to the larger world prevents the Church from becoming inward-looking. We need to recognise the authority the Church can have in speaking to the world and serving the common good of all especially the marginalised of today eg immigrants. Would a Christian political party help?

The Holy Spirit is with the community when it speaks in unity. The Spirit will also lead us to see what we have in common with other faiths and find ways to speak together.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

There can be no room for a “holier-than-thou” attitude – this discourages and marginalises. A move from an individualised and privatised faith to an evangelising one will make us more confident in speaking about our faith. Also this prevents the Church from being seen as a “closed shop.” This requires a new mindset and a desire to leave our comfort zone.

People do want to be involved but are not sure how to go about it. In which ways do we address this? Is this our only opportunity? What is hindering deeper involvement?

DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

There are many issues which bring together Church and society – climate change, poverty, asylum seekers, food banks. There are good people outside the Church doing good things and they too are led by the Holy Spirit. Love is what there is in common and is what unites church goers and non-goers.

We need to remember the good things we are doing however small and the contribution they make to society. Actions speak louder than words.

What is the purpose of reaching out to society – is it simply to bring more people to church?

Dialogue with society will not always be about agreement. How do we handle different views?

There is a need to develop spaces and times for people to meet and reflect on issues in the Church and in society. Promoting fellowship within the parish will foster our understanding of how we can serve society. "Parish" rather than "Church" is a better way to refer to our faith community.

Parish – Fellowship – Community – Sharing – Dialogue: these are key words for the sort of community we desire.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MEETING

Totally relaxed – came in mind buzzing – time passed so quickly

Renewed

Sense of searching going on – sense of something going on

Anxious coming in to find the tables had been mixed up – now relaxed with newer people

Calm – was downcast from the reading until saw a vision of angels

Overawed – "the only one" – aware of the mysteries of faith. Sense of unity

"Getting myself out of the way" – feeling the Spirit beginning to speak through me

Anxious coming in – listening to the passage made me more relaxed and happier – sense of permission to say what I felt I should say

Confused – the Emmaus walkers 'are the church', but in spite of all they had heard

SOME SPECIFIC ISSUES

Do we need more opportunity for discussion beyond these 4 meetings?

Many issues – a new way of being church – need for more ongoing dialogue leading to concrete outcomes

Practical support to enable people to come to Mass eg creches

We are church- we have the responsibility to be church – need for more discussion leading to practical outcomes

Noted the commonality of the church- what is church? – we are church – there should be more emphasis on Parish and what that entails – people rather than bricks and mortar – fellowship and community

What if another parish priest comes along and dismantles everything?

Eucharistic ministers not being used: that pastoral activity needs to be re-instated
Is lunchtime on a Saturday a good time to meet?

SUMMARY REPORT OF OUR THIRD SYNODAL SESSION

CELEBRATION

Our Servers, Readers & Eucharistic ministers all encourage others to fuller participation in the Mass. Parishioners, in particular women, should be officially appointed to the ministries of Reader and Eucharist. Is there a place for more lay-led celebrations in which parishioners could come together to reflect, for instance, on the Sunday readings?

The Mass is a celebration with others alongside our celebration with the Lord. Gathering for Mass brings us together as a community. How do we encourage more active participation by families? Do the demands of work and family prevent this? How do we bring our celebration out of the church and into the world?

Lockdown did have some positive benefits – it helped us realise that we were missing something good when we couldn't attend Mass; it gave more time for us to reflect and pray; we became more aware of the beauty of this God-given world.

Mass gives us a clearer focus -- we can see the Lord more clearly in the Eucharist, in others and in ourselves. Our understanding of the Scriptures deepens. There is a sense of renewal and willingness to reach out to others.

ECUMENISM

Bigotry and sectarianism have sharply declined but, alongside that, religion is rarely a topic of conversation with non-Catholic friends and family.

There is ecumenical work in our town – Streetlevel, joint services, World Day of Prayer, Christian Aid, Scouts, CHOICES shop. Good progress has been made but it could be seen as superficial. Could more be done together especially in the work of evangelisation? Together we could have a stronger Christian voice – there is more that unites than divides. We must focus on what we agree on rather than where we differ. We can learn from other churches especially regarding synodality.

AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

Do we need a different model of being church especially in the light of child abuse? Governance is all top-down, and all by men. A priest coming newly into a parish can abolish the parish structures on his own authority. Everything is too priest-dependent. This needs to change. The role of women must be expanded.

Have we become a middle-class Church so that unintentionally others feel excluded? Everyone is involved in the work of encouraging and reaching out, ready to promote and explain our faith. Sometimes when help is offered the priest it is refused and this can cause lasting hurt.

The parish retreat was a good experience of participation but it wasn't followed through. What are the ways to involve the wider parish community?

All of us need to discern together the “signs of the times.” Often society moves more quickly than the Church with the result that the Church looks left behind on certain issues eg women, sexuality, injustice.

There is some division in the Church at present crystallised in pro- and anti- Pope Francis.

We know that change is needed but it is difficult to know where to start at parish level. But already in these weeks, people feel that they have been given a voice and have the confidence to speak. As we proceed, it will be important to have clear structures which invite the people to participate and to develop team-work. A clearer idea that all are the church, not just the clergy, will foster co-responsibility. From this will emerge that every individual has gifts which must be recognised and used. Succession planning is also needed as priest and parishioners move on. The role of the Parish Pastoral Council needs reviewing.

Partnership, co-responsibility, team-work, participation were all key-words which emerged.

SUMMARY REPORT OF OUR FOURTH SYNODAL SESSION

DISCERNING AND DECIDING

This depends on listening to the Holy Spirit and to be open to his guidance. It involves hearing as many voices as possible and establishing the platform for people’s voices to be heard with the view to establishing some consensus about the way forward. A love of the Scriptures and prayer together are also essential parts of this process. Listening also to other Christians and hearing their experience is required.

Part of this is discerning what belongs to the heart of the faith and what are human traditions which can be changed and developed eg celibacy, artificial contraception. This requires an openness on the part of all members of the Church and not a retreat into opposing factions. The time of top-down decision making is over.

The importance of developing and growing one’s spirituality was mentioned; becoming aware of the different types of spirituality within the Church eg Ignatian. This could be a way of engaging those whose faith is weak – showing the practical results of faith. Creativity in the practice of the faith should be encouraged. On-going renewal in faith is needed to future-proof the parish and build resilience – for instance, if the time comes when the parish no longer has a residential priest.

The scandals in the Church show how the present decision-making and discerning process is flawed.

Active participation by all should be the presumption in the life of the Church. This will strengthen the leadership roles of priest and bishop.

FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

The decision by the bishops to re-introduce the Sunday obligation is an example of a Church without synodality. Getting the thoughts of parishioners to the hierarchy is an uphill struggle.

Everyone has to be receptive to change and growth if synodality is to take root. How exactly will a synodal Church look like?

We must avoid creating the feeling that nothing will change. But change can happen immediately if and when we become a welcoming parish – saying hello to the newcomer, creating a supportive space for the single mother, the divorced, the widowed, the unemployed. Meeting socially after Mass for a cup of tea, spending some time talking to people are powerful ways to encourage belonging.

Mass, although the central act of our faith, cannot be the only place we meet. New ways of meeting and talking about our faith need to be found. We will understand more deeply what synodality is by doing it -- coming together. A stronger connection with our schools is required. Social media must be part of our synodal experience.

THE DAILY EXAMEN

A great way to pray is to look for God's presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Daily Examen. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us. Try this version of St. Ignatius's prayer.

- 1. Become aware of God's presence.** Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.
- 2. Review the day with gratitude.** Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.
- 3. Pay attention to your emotions.** One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

- 4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.** Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

- 5. Look toward tomorrow.** Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. End the Daily Examen with the Our Father.

UPDATED GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MASS

Many of the restrictions we have grown used to in the past year and more have now been lifted.

However, we are still required to sanitise our hands on entering and leaving the church, wear face-coverings and practise respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

If you attend the same daily, Vigil or Sunday Mass each week, there is no need to book or sign in. If you come to a Mass which you don't usually attend, you are asked to leave your name. There will be a sheet at the entrance for this purpose.

The distribution of Holy Communion will revert to its previous place in the Mass. Please wait until the usher invites you to come forward. You are still asked to receive the Sacrament in the hand. At present, the Sign of Peace is still prohibited

The Collection during Mass and the Procession of the Gifts are now re-instated.

The use of hymn books and Bulletin sheets is permitted.

The longer version of the Bulletin will still be published on-line.

May I thank all of you for your support and dedication during these months of lock-down. In particular, thanks to our ushers and sanitizers. And thanks to all those who quietly helped their neighbours and took steps to make that need known or found them support.

The church is now fully open for private visits. The Sanctuary area is roped off and alarmed so it is not possible to light votive candles.

Remember there are many resources to foster your prayer and spiritual life. Please continue to check our parish website and Facebook page for new materials. Each week I post a video with a little reflection on the Sunday Gospel. Also check out our Links page on the website and you will be directed to other useful sites. Remember our twitter account too—[@saintaths](#). Some beautiful prayers and reflections can be accessed there.

Our diocesan website also has online prayer resources—go to <https://www.rcdom.org.uk>

There is also a closed Facebook group you might wish to join—Contemplative Theology. All you have to do is ask to join. There are also Twitter accounts you may find helpful: [@LectioMotherwel](#), [@rcmotherwell](#) and [@motherwellRE](#) Recently a new Facebook page has been opened: Motherwell Diocese Adult Formation. You'll find material there aimed at deepening our understanding of the faith.

The Liturgy of the Hours, the prayers and readings of the Mass and much more can be found at www.ibreviary.com

Beautiful reflections for all seasons and times can be found at www.thesacredbraid.com

Another good resource is <http://www.catholicireland.net> Reflections on the readings of the Mass, suggestions for children's faith formation and lots more.



LIVE STREAMING

WE USE LIVE STREAMING TO ENABLE:

1. HOUSEBOUND PARISHIONERS TO ENGAGE WITH MASS FROM HOME RELATIVES/FRIENDS WHO CANNOT ATTEND A BAPTISM / WEDDING / FUNERAL TO VIEW IT
2. EVANGELISATION: ENABLING THOSE WHO CANNOT OR DO NOT ATTEND CHURCH TO ENGAGE WITH ACTS OF WORSHIP.

THESE REASONS ARE NECESSARY IN THE LEGITIMATE INTERESTS OF THE CHURCH. THE IMAGES ARE MADE AVAILABLE LIVE ONLINE AND CAN BE ACCESSED BY ANYONE. LIVE STREAMING IS CARRIED OUT CONTINUOUSLY FROM OUR CHURCH. YOU MAY LOG ON AT ANY TIME TO PAY A VIRTUAL VISIT.

THE CAMERA FOCUSES ONLY ON THE SANCTUARY AREA AND THE AREA IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF IT. IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO HAVE YOUR IMAGE LIVE STREAMED PLEASE BEAR THIS IN MIND.

About Us This Parish is part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of MOTHERWELL, registered charity number SC011041. If you have questions about this notice, please contact frmagill@rcdom.org.uk

