

# PARISH BULLETIN

**St Kieran's, the  
Catholic  
Church** *in*  
*Campbeltown and Islay*  
*Ceann Loch Chille*  
*Chiarain*



22<sup>nd</sup> February 2026

## *1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent*

### Hymns/Music for Sunday

#### Processional (Sunday only)

150 Forty days and forty  
nights

#### Offertory

67 Blest are you Lord

#### Post Communion

141 Fill my house

#### Recessional

455 Praise to the Holiest

St. Kieran's, Campbeltown, Kintyre

Tuesday: **Holy Mass, 6.00pm**

Wednesday: Adoration and mid-morning prayer, 9.30am;  
**Holy Mass, 10.00am**

Friday: Mid-morning Prayer, 9.50am; **Mass, 10.00am.**

*Discussion Group:* the scriptures during Lent, 10.30am in  
the Chapel House

### Next weekend:

Saturday: *Vigil Mass*, 6.00pm

*2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent:* Holy Mass, 10.00am

**Sacrament of Reconciliation** Saturday 5.15pm-5.45pm or anytime on request.

St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Bridgend, Islay

Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> March, Confession, 3.30pm; Holy Mass, 4pm

### **Psalm response**

*Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.*

### **Gospel acclamation**

*Glory and praise, to You, O Christ.*

*One does not live by bread alone,*

*but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*

*Glory and praise, to You, O Christ.*

### **Communion Antiphon**

*One does not live by bread alone,*

*but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*

# Take Five

*Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow – a day at a time.*

## MONDAY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF LENT

23 FEBRUARY 2026

### The least we can do

The vivid biblical descriptions of the Last or Final Judgment are designed to impress upon us the importance of taking our obligations to the less fortunate very seriously indeed. “But where to begin?” you might ask. The Corporal Works of Mercy are a pretty good place. If we each do our part, we can hope for the day when there will be no more hungry to feed, homeless to shelter, prisoners to visit, and the like. Then we can welcome that Final Judgment with confidence. But let’s get started today – after all, none of us knows the day or the hour.

**Today’s readings:** Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25:31-46. *“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”*

## TUESDAY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF

### LENT

24 FEBRUARY 2026

### Listen with your heart

One of the cornerstones of Lent is prayer, something we often consider our job: talking to God, pouring out our hearts, asking for what we need. It is all that, but more. If we compare prayer to the living intimacy between people who love each other, we will see clearly that if their conversation is one-sided, if they do not let the other speak, if they do not listen with the same intensity with which the other pours out their needs, then something is wrong. Someone put it this way: Show up. Shut up. Pay attention. Crude, but true. To spruce up one’s spiritual life is to consider how one prays. Is there room in my time with God just to be? Must I always be talking or reading or planning? Can I simply wait? Listen?

**Today’s readings:** Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15. *“My word . . . shall not return to me void.”*

## WEDNESDAY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF

### LENT

25 FEBRUARY 2026

### God is already here

When you hear the name Jonah you may automatically think about his encounter with a whale. As spectacular as that story was, Jonah

did one better. He went to a land that was not his own, announced a message that was an indictment of the evil ways of its people, and lived to tell about it. Many times, prophets are rejected because the truth is hard to bear and change is difficult. The readiness of the Ninevites to take in Jonah’s message illustrates that God had prepared the way. God was already with the Ninevites, even in the midst of the struggles. Pay attention to the ways that God is reaching out to you through the Jonahs in your own life.

**Today’s readings:** Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32. *“They proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.”*

## THURSDAY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF LENT

26 FEBRUARY 2026

### Persistence pays off

The story of Queen Esther told in the Bible book that bears her name is a fascinating novella filled with subterfuge and intrigue. Esther uses her wit and wiles to get what she wants from the king, but her masterstroke is to use prayer and petition to get what she needs from God: namely a plan for deliverance for herself and her people. As we begin our Lenten journey, our first step should be to ask God to help us chart our course. Then, like Esther, we must fast, pray, and wait, and soon God’s plan for us will be revealed.

**Today’s readings:** Esther C 12, 14-16, 23-25; Matthew 7: 7-12. *“Turn our mourning into gladness and our sorrows into wholeness.”*

## FRIDAY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF LENT

27 FEBRUARY 2026

### Out of the depths I cry to you

For some, prayer seems like a natural talent. For others, pulling teeth is easier! But for all, prayer is a necessary component of the life of faith. We seek a vital relationship with our Maker, and no relationship is complete without deep and meaningful communication. God begins the conversation with the words of scripture. You add your part in interceding for needs, offering thanks for gifts received, and singing praise for a world of wonders. As you abstain from meat on this World Day of Prayer,

recommit yourself to the ways of fairness in family, work, civic, and international relationships.

**Today's readings:** Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26. *"Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?"*

## **SATURDAY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> WEEK OF LENT**

**28 FEBRUARY 2026**

**You've got to love 'em**

Christian love is much more difficult to practice when it lives next door in the form of the noisy

neighbour who lets his dog run wild and plays loud music late at night, but he's the guy the gospels are written for. As Jesus pointed out, you don't need any help learning to love those who are good to you. You're no dummy and you know which side your bread is buttered on. It's the burnt toast that is more difficult to swallow. Chew slowly; it does go down, and it does nurture you as a Christian. You don't have to like someone to love them.

**Today's readings:** Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48. *"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."*

## *Readings for the First Sunday of Lent*

**Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7**

Listening to the serpent gets the first couple into a world of trouble.

**Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17**

The joy of salvation returns to those who admit their faults and accept God's mercy.

**Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19**

The original transgression leads to death; the gift of grace in Christ alone brings life.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

When the tempter is banished, angels come to minister in his place.

## *Words on Word*

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*We have the impression that through some crack there has crept into the Church of God the stench of Satan. It is doubt, uncertainty, questioning, anxiety, discontent, scrutiny. A lack of trust in the Church. Meanwhile, trust is given to the first lay "prophet" speaking through the press or addressing us in some social movement—and one demands from him formulas for true life! One does not think that we already possess those formulas! (Pope Paul VI, homily on the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, 1972).*

*The Antichrist is among us. The beginning of the new year opens horizons which, though not devoid of flashes of light, are dark and threatening; we cannot close our eyes to what surrounds us. We must call by name the Evil One! We cannot overlook the fact that along with the civilization of love and life another civilization spreads throughout the world, the civilization of death, being the direct work of Satan and constituting one of the signs of the coming Apocalypse (John Paul II, 1993).*

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This Sunday's Gospel really drives home the reality of Satan's presence in our world, a truth that

the Catholic Church takes to heart. Just think about it: during baptism, we're asked, "Do you renounce Satan, the author of sin?" This isn't just a formality; it's a serious commitment. Sadly, one of Satan's biggest triumphs today is that so many people don't even believe in him. When we look back at history, at figures like Hitler and Stalin and the chaos they unleashed, it's chilling to see how evil can manifest in our world. Even now, after all the wars and treaties meant to protect us from madmen, we still witness horrific acts that make it seem like Satan is constantly taking on new forms. And it's not just about war; it's disheartening to see a lack of compassion and selflessness. In our success-driven society, it seems like external achievements have become the yardstick for a person's worth, sidelining our intimacy with God and moral values.

Every day, the devil whispers temptations in our ears: "Why should I be the one to tackle confession, attend Holy Mass, or stick to moral principles? Why is it my job to uphold fidelity in my marriage or to guide my kids in faith?" It's easy to feel overwhelmed, and the devil exploits that weakness, nudging us towards sin with justifications and doubts. As Saint Paul reminds us, "Through the envy of Satan, sin entered the world."

But let's not forget how Jesus, the Son of God, faced His own temptations as He began His public ministry. He confronted desires for physical satisfaction, the craving for glory, the allure of power—all the things we struggle with daily. Jesus didn't fall for Satan's tricks; instead, he leaned into suffering, aligning Himself with our human experience to bring us salvation. The path to that salvation isn't about taking shortcuts; it requires our perseverance and faith in Him. We have to make the conscious choice to follow Him every day.

So remember, when you feel the darkness creeping in, that's where Satan lurks, but we can conquer him by stepping into the light of Christ. The light is where we find safety from the shadows. Stay close to God, and you'll find your way!

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*Satan stalks in shadows, like a creature of the night;  
But step into the sunlight, and he'll vanish from your sight.*

In Christ's love,  
Fr Anthony

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## THE MOTHER OF GOD IN ICONS: 18. THE ANNUNCIATION

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The Annunciation, celebrated on March 25 during the season of Great Lent, is a profound feast that invites us to reflect on the moment that changed the course of history. In Russia, this day is marked by the joyous release of birds from their cages, symbolising freedom and hope—a beautiful gesture that echoes the spirit of this sacred event.

In Orthodox iconography, the scene of the Annunciation unfolds within a majestic palace, symbolising the rich and noble spiritual life of the Mother of God. It is an intimate yet solemn portrayal that resonates deeply with our faith. Seated upon a throne adorned with cushions, the Mother of God encounters the Archangel Gabriel, the divine messenger, graced in a tunic that signifies his heavenly mission.

Interestingly, unlike the depictions in Western art, here the angel does not hold a lily, a symbol of purity and the Immaculate Conception. Instead, he carries a staff, perhaps signifying his authoritative role as God's messenger. Above this sacred exchange, the Holy Spirit is beautifully

rendered as a dove, rays of light streaming toward the Mother of God, symbolising divine presence and guidance.



Andrej Rublev: *The Annunciation*, 1405 The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

This icon, reminiscent of the revered style of Andrei Rublev, radiates gentleness and grace. Its elegant forms, subtle colour palettes, and harmonious modelling create a composition that captivates the soul. The triangular structure formed by the figures of Gabriel, the Mother of God, and the dove draws our eye and heart into the scene, encouraging us to contemplate its significance.

Notice the dynamic portrayal of the Archangel, depicted in motion with billowing robes that emphasise his vigour and divine strength. In contrast, the Mother of God responds to the angel's message with serene humility, her gentle bow reflecting pure submission to God's divine will. This poignant juxtaposition reminds us of the beautiful balance between strength and surrender that we are called to embrace in our faith journeys.

The artist's skill in depicting depth and space through accumulated volumes is not merely technical. It pulls us in, inviting us to explore the profundity of this encounter. As we contemplate the Annunciation, let it inspire us to open our

hearts to God's call, just as Mary did—embracing our purpose with faith, hope, and unwavering trust in His divine plan.

May this reflection on the Annunciation encourage us to carry the spirit of this feast into our lives, fostering a deeper connection to our faith and inspiring us to respond to God's voice with love and humility. As we navigate our own journeys, may we remember the courage of the Mother of God and the power of faith in our lives.

## Wounded Light

Commentaries on the Gospel of St John

Saint John's Gospel is used in the lectionary for Sundays on particular occasions, feasts and solemnities, and also in certain seasons, e.g. Easter, Christmas.

**Chapter 11**  
**Only Scraps**  
John 6:1-15

### Unity in Communion: A Journey Beyond Limits

Unity – this profound communion we share as followers of Christ – empowers us to transcend even the most rigid laws of nature. When we unite with the Son of God, we partake in His divine strength, enabling us to rise above our physical limitations. This extraordinary gift is

bestowed upon us through our communion with God, particularly when we receive the Body of Christ. It is also realised in our connections with one another, as the Apostle Paul urges us to cultivate a spirit of unity, peace, and love.

Consider the moment when Jesus broke the loaves of bread after giving thanks. This act serves as a powerful metaphor for the shattered experiences of life. Can we truly give thanks for brokenness, for wounded hearts, or for dreams in disarray? Yet, in our gratitude, we have the ability to transform suffering into something miraculous. By thanking God for our trials, we make them sacred – and thus, it becomes apparent that even in darkness, beauty can emerge. When I reflect on Jesus commanding His disciples to gather the fragments, I am deeply moved. I once perceived this as an image of the Church, with the twelve baskets symbolising each apostle. The phrase “that nothing be lost” resonates with mystery, hinting at a deeper truth that surpasses the mere collection of leftover food after a meal. Why should there be such diligence in gathering scraps? These leftover pieces become a poignant symbol of all those who feel discarded, overlooked, or unworthy. Yet, within the nurturing embrace of the Church, they find their rightful place of belonging.

Imagine those scraps of bread, once deemed useless, now cherished and gathered into baskets by the apostles. The Didache reminds us, “As the broken bread scattered upon the mountains, and gathered became one, so let Thy Church be gathered from the ends of the earth.” This collection of leftovers unveils a profound consolation: every individual – no matter how broken, rejected, or seemingly insignificant – has a valued place in the heart of Christ's Church. We must not forget that Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners, demonstrating that God longs for no one to be lost, but instead wishes for us all to be enveloped by His love and mercy.

Paul boldly declares that we, the Lord's chosen people, are called to a higher purpose – even to judge the world. “Not many of you,” he reminds us, “were wise by human standards, not many powerful, not many of noble birth.” Yet it is precisely those who seem insignificant that God chooses to uplift. In our lives, we must recognise this singular grace hidden in our invitation to partake in God's Kingdom. It reaches out especially to those whom life often forgets or ignores. In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are commanded to bring forth the first fruits of their harvest in a wicker basket, signifying their gratitude for God's provision. But Jesus, in His divine wisdom, asks for the gathering of leftovers – those pieces of bread that others may consider worthless. This reflects a profound truth: God abhors pride and delights in humility. When Jesus sensed that the crowd wished to make Him king, He retreated to the mountains, teaching us that true elevation comes from selflessness, not self-importance.

Humility begins at the very moment when, being able to say: instead of “pause”, I decide to say: “cease”, and when instead of saying: “repeating”, I say: “finishing”. And so, acknowledging our true selves. It allows us to openly express our fragility – yes, I am but a scrap! When I chat with others, how often do I find myself yearning for their admiration, only to realise that the pursuit of self-promotion leaves me feeling empty? It is a relief to embrace the truth of our existence and acknowledge our fragility.

Consider the boy with the five loaves – the unsung hero of the miraculous feeding. His name may remain unknown, but his act of generosity became pivotal in a moment of divine abundance. This teaches us that God has an extraordinary penchant for exalting the humble and lifting up those who feel inadequate. Indeed, the generosity of the Son of God is marked by what Dr. Michael Ball (evangelist) calls “unrestrained extravagance.” Miracles often reveal that God's heart overflows with love, extending far beyond our wildest imaginations.

Let us take heart, dear friends. Our own experiences of brokenness and feeling insignificant do not diminish our worth; rather, they prepare us to be vessels of God's grace. There is a place for each of us in the grand tapestry of His Church – a sacred invitation to partake in a love that knows no bounds, a love that gathers even the smallest fragments into something truly magnificent. May we rejoice in our unity and embrace the powerful communion that guides us on our journey, lifting us beyond our earthly confines into a realm of divine possibility!

*Fr Anthony*

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## A Testimony

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# Satan took advantage of my indifference

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Honestly, there are times I wish I could just wipe my past clean. But I've come to realise that it's important to share my story, especially to warn you about how easily we can get caught up in Satan's traps. When I first started my faith journey, it was pretty much just a façade. I'd pray—not because I really wanted to, but so my parents would see me doing it. Confession? I'd only own up to the minor stuff, the easy bits. Then came the slippery slope. I was about 15, and it all kicked off with music. I started with some edgy tunes, but before I knew it, I was all in with satanic bands. My room? It turned into a dark shrine, filled with

all sorts of creepy posters. I even flipped the cross that used to hang over my bed upside down. I got sucked into the world of occultism, dabbled in magic, and let me tell you, it was a wild ride.

This phase lasted for about three years, and then I went even further astray. A friend introduced me to a satanic group, and while I recognised some faces around, I had no idea about the darkness lurking beneath. I became obsessed with their rituals, the offerings they made—all the stuff I'd seen in music videos and movies. And boy, did it feel intense. Looking back, I can see just how much I was turning my back on Jesus, who sacrificed so much for us.

For over a year, I was knee-deep in Satanism. It's hard to explain, but I felt this twisted kind of pride. I scoffed at Catholics and mocked anyone who lived differently than me. I was involved in things that, truthfully, would make most people's stomachs turn. Those so-called black masses? They were an outright mockery of God and everything sacred. We'd set up shop in graveyards or forests, using graves instead of altars. I mean, we'd talk about good things we'd done while tormenting animals and drinking their blood. It's mind-blowing to think how numb I was to the gravity of it all.

But eventually, a few key people nudged me back towards God. There was this girl I liked, and while she didn't convert me, she got me thinking about the direction my life was going. My parents played a huge part too, and maybe it was all orchestrated by God. One night, during Walpurgis Night, I came home just before dawn, looking a bit worse for wear. My mum noticed the blood on me from some rituals, and I can only imagine what was going through her mind. The next day, both my parents practically dragged me to church. I wasn't keen, but I figured I'd go along to avoid being kicked out.

In church, I sat there, trying to be nonchalant, but then my gaze landed on the cross. That moment? Game changer. I looked into the eyes of Jesus and, for the first time, I saw the Truth.

It hit me hard, and I ended up crying in that pew. Later that day, I went to confession and received the Eucharist. But, let me tell you, breaking away from Satanism wasn't easy. Old friends were still around, and memories flooded back. I tried to pray more, but temptation was lurking everywhere. I had to throw out all the posters and records, keep myself indoors at night, and yeah, I was a bit scared of the Satanists I'd left behind.

Things got tough when I faced ridicule from others, especially those who weren't caught up in Satanism. It was the strangest thing—people laughed at me when I tried to pray, but they weren't around when I was spiralling down. Gradually, though, I realised I was moving in the right direction. I got involved with that girl who had sparked my interest in God, and we've been together for a few years now.

So, I ask for your prayers to keep me strong and to hold on to this new life I've worked so hard to rebuild. And listen up: don't be shy about sharing your faith. Be real about it! Tell your non-believing friends about my story, and maybe it will resonate. Trust me, indifference towards God was where my troubles began.

I'm grateful for my conversion and hope my testimony can help at least one of you steer clear of Satan's snares.

*Mark*

# Around the World

## THE MIDDLE EAST

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### He knew, but he didn't say anything

In April 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu allegedly received intelligence regarding a potential Hamas attack, as reported by Ynet, which cited intelligence documents and input from high-ranking officials. Fast forward to October 7, 2023, and Hamas launched an offensive, leading to a major escalation in conflict and subsequent Israeli military retaliation, resulting in significant devastation in Gaza.

Ynet claimed that prior to 2023, Netanyahu had been privy to multiple warnings about Hamas's strategies to infiltrate Israel across various points of the Gaza border, involving thousands of fighters. This extensive plan was referred to as "The Walls of Jericho." Yet, in a surprising twist, Netanyahu asserted he had never seen this document or had any knowledge of such a massive infiltration scheme – something that runs counter to his own recent report submitted to the State Audit Office.

In that report, he admitted to receiving an intelligence brief in 2018 but chose to emphasise its cautious assessment, which suggested Hamas had the "basic capability" for simultaneous attacks but deemed it "not currently likely." This has raised eyebrows and led to accusations from Israeli society that Netanyahu and his government mishandled crucial intelligence, allowing Hamas to execute their surprise raid effectively. As frustration mounts, there are growing calls for a state commission to investigate the failures that led to the shocking events of October.

## NATO GEOPOLITICS

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### Mission in the Arctic

NATO is kicking off a new initiative called Arctic Sentry, aimed at bolstering security in the Arctic

and Far North. This move seems to be partly influenced by President Trump's push for greater U.S. interest in Greenland, but it also reflects the growing geostrategic competition in the region. Russia's military presence is on the rise, and China's keen interest adds another layer of complexity to the mix.

The mission reportedly sprung from discussions between Trump and NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, where they agreed that NATO should step up and take a more active role in Arctic defence. While that sounds straightforward, there's an underlying motivation here: it's meant to smooth over any frictions between the U.S. and its European allies concerning Greenland's geopolitical significance.

General Alexis G. Grynkewich, who leads NATO forces in Europe, highlighted that Arctic Sentry is about reinforcing the Alliance's commitment to safeguarding its members and ensuring stability in one of the most crucial and challenging environments on the planet. Essentially, it aims to apply lessons learnt from the Baltic Sentry mission launched last year, which focused on protecting essential infrastructure in the Baltic region. It's all about adapting strategies to current realities in an ever-evolving geopolitical landscape.

## NORWAY

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### They will transfer soldiers

The UK government's decision to boost the number of British soldiers stationed in Norway to 2,000 is a clear response to the escalating geopolitical tensions surrounding Russia. NATO's growing concerns over Russian activities in the Arctic region underscore the importance of maintaining security for crucial infrastructure like undersea cables and pipelines. As UK Secretary of Defence, John Healey, pointed out, the threat from Russia is now greater than it has been since the Cold War.

This increase in troop presence is not just a numbers game; it reflects a strategic shift towards enhancing military readiness in extreme conditions. The planned deployment of 1,500 Royal Marines commandos for NATO exercises in Norway, Finland, and Sweden highlights the ongoing commitment to training and collaboration amongst allied forces. These military drills are essential for ensuring that the allies can effectively operate together in challenging environments.

Moreover, the establishment of a defence pact last year between the UK and Norway signals a proactive approach to monitoring Russian submarine movements and securing vital communication lines. All of this points to a robust stance from NATO countries in the face of heightened security threats, signalling to Russia that their actions are being closely watched and will not go unchecked.

## POLAND

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### The majority support Military conscription

According to a recent survey by Opinia24, 52% of Poles are in favour of bringing back mandatory military service. Interestingly, the support for conscription is especially strong among PiS voters, with a staggering 73% backing the idea. However, opinions seem to shift across different age groups. For instance, around 43% of those aged 25 to 29 oppose mandatory military service, while support peaks at 61% among people aged 50 to 59

Reinstating military service in Poland wouldn't be out of character. Many countries in the region are either already doing it or are considering it, including Germany. Experts are sounding

the alarm, suggesting that without conscription, Poland may struggle to defend itself against potential threats.

## ABORTION TOURISM

### Campaign of opposition

The recent move by the European Parliament to back financial mechanisms for facilitating abortion access abroad has stirred quite the debate. Essentially, this initiative aims to support women in countries like Poland and Malta, where abortion is either heavily restricted or outright banned. They want to include the right to legal abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is a significant step from the Parliament.

In December, they adopted a resolution supporting the "My Voice, My Choice" campaign, calling for EU budget funds to cover the costs associated with obtaining an abortion – think travel and accommodation. However, it's important to note that these resolutions aren't legally binding; it's up to the European Commission to make the final call.

Opponents, particularly conservative groups, see this as an overreach, arguing it undermines national laws regarding abortion and infringes on women's freedom to choose, as well as the right to protect unborn life. They assert that it interferes with the sovereignty of member states.

Simultaneously, the European Federation ONE OF US has launched an awareness campaign at [www.NoAbortionTourism.eu](http://www.NoAbortionTourism.eu), aimed at rallying citizens to voice their opposition to these proposals. The campaign encourages individuals to reach out to key Commission members, advocating for respect of EU treaties and the principle of subsidiarity before the official Commission's position is announced in February 2026.

### *We Read Pope Leo*

#### **Abstinence from food serves to discern and put order in our “desires.”**

Lent is a time when the Church, with maternal care, invites us to re-place the mystery of God at the center of our lives, so that our faith may regain its fervor, and our hearts may not be distracted by daily worries and dispersions. (...) This year I would like to draw attention to the importance of giving space to the Word through listening, because readiness to listen is the first sign by which the desire to establish a relationship with another person reveals itself. God Himself, revealing Himself to Moses in the burning bush, shows that listening is a characteristic feature of His being. (...) This is an engaging God, who today also reaches out to us with thoughts that cause His heart to quake. Listening to the Word in the liturgy teaches us to listen more truly to reality: amid the many voices that run through our personal and social lives. (...)

If Lent is a time of listening, then fasting is a concrete practice that prepares us to receive the Word of God. Abstinence from food is a very ancient and irreplaceable ascetical practice on the road of conversion. Precisely because it involves the body, it makes visible what we feel we “hunger” for and what we consider essential for our sustenance. It thus serves to discern and organize our “desires,” to sustain a watchful hunger and thirst for justice, tearing them away from resignation, teaching them to become prayer and responsibility toward our neighbor. (...) Our parishes, families, church groups and religious communities are called in Lent to undertake a common journey, in which listening to the Word of God and the cry of the poor and the earth will become a form of shared life, and fasting will support genuine penance. From this perspective, conversion concerns not only the conscience of the individual, but also the style of relationships, the quality of dialogue, the ability to

open oneself to questions flowing from reality, and to discern what drives desire, both in our church communities and in humanity thirsty for justice and reconciliation.

***Lenten Message, 5 February 2026.***

Authentic life of faith cannot be reduced to bodiless spirituality, but must give rise to sensitivity to the needs of others and generous service, without reservations. I think of so many of your brothers and sisters who have paid dearly for faithfulness to the task entrusted to them: we offer them our heartfelt thanks and we pray for them.

***Address to the members of the National Conference Misericordie, 14 February 2026.***

Jesus teaches us that true justice is love, and that in every commandment of the Law we ought to perceive the demand of love. Indeed, it is not enough physically not to kill a person, if afterwards I kill them with words or fail to respect their dignity. Likewise, it is not enough to be formally faithful to one's spouse and not commit adultery, if in that relationship there is a lack of mutual tenderness, listening, respect, caring for him or her, or pursuing together a shared project. (...) Minimal justice alone is not sufficient – great love is needed, which is made possible by God's power.

***Angelus, 15 February 2026.***

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## *In my opinion*

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### ***A Weakened Russia is Dangerous***

After four long years of conflict, there's a palpable fatigue hanging in the air – from Ukraine and Poland to Russia and across Western Europe and the USA. However, just because Moscow appears to be weakened doesn't mean it's given up on its ambitions for dominance in Central Europe. Poles understand all too well that a stable, sovereign Ukraine emerging intact from this war is crucial not only for Poland's own security but for the broader interests of Europe.

If Ukraine were to fall to Russian control or become politically subservient to Moscow, Poland would be facing hostile forces along a staggering 1,200-kilometre border with Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

#### ***The Military Landscape***

By 2025, Ukraine found itself in a tough spot, grappling with shortages in both personnel and supplies while facing relentless drone and rocket assaults from Russia meant to terrorise civilians. While both sides engage in positional warfare, Russians retain an advantage in numbers. In response, Ukraine has adjusted its tactics to counteract this numerical disparity. "Our strategy is focused on inflicting heavy casualties on Russian troops as they enter what we call the 'death zone,' starting about 19 km from the front line. For 2026, we aim to increase our monthly Russian soldier kill count from 35,000 to 50,000," said Ukraine's new Defence Minister, Mykhailo Fedorov.

According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the US, the number of Russian soldiers killed and wounded has ballooned to nearly 1.2 million, while Ukrainian casualties are estimated between 500,000 and 600,000. Despite these grim statistics, Russia continues to draw volunteers from its impoverished regions, eager to join the front lines. The question remains whether Ukraine's increased effectiveness in eliminating these recruits can outpace Moscow's ability to replace them.

"While Ukraine's situation is dire compared to Russia's, it still possesses the resolve and capability to defend itself for the long haul. There's no indication that this resistance will simply fold," states the head of the Russia team at the Centre for Eastern Studies.

#### ***Economic Underpinnings***

Ukraine's ability to sustain its fight relies heavily on external financial assistance, and while Moscow isn't the picture of self-sufficiency either, it has managed to stay afloat by dodging European sanctions and exporting resources to India and China. Although Europe has slashed its imports of Russian oil, it continues to rely on gas and steel from Russia.

“Initially, Russia seemed to weather the storm quite well at the onset of the war, but by 2025, its financial health began to deteriorate significantly as its budget deficit widened,” notes head of the Russia team at the CES. U.S. secondary sanctions are bearing fruit; India has reduced its Russian oil imports significantly, while a fleet of tankers laden with unwanted Russian oil pollutes the seas. Currently, Moscow’s main lifeline seems to be its exports to China, although even this relationship is facing strain as demand for fossil fuels dwindles due to the rise of electric vehicles.

Interestingly, trade between China and Russia experienced its first drop in five years by 2025, largely due to reduced oil imports and Russian consumers’ lack of cash for new Chinese products.

### ***Potential NATO Conflict on the Horizon?***

Despite its military and economic troubles, there are rising concerns that Russia is eyeing a new front – a confrontation with NATO. Some might dismiss such claims, reasoning that if Moscow can’t handle Ukraine, why would it take a swing at the Alliance? However, the reality is that Russia is busy training new soldiers and building a military system not currently engaged in Ukraine. Experts warn that by 2027, Russia could be ready to challenge NATO.

"There's a real concern that the Kremlin could decide to act now, seeing NATO as divided and internally weakened," an OSW analyst warns. Russia might consider launching small incursions into the Baltic states to reinforce its demands made back in 2021, reminding the West of its intentions under the threat of nuclear escalation.

Putin appears all in on this gamble. The Kremlin knows its survival hinges on the war in Ukraine, and recent statements from Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reinforce that any peace settlement without Russia’s demands will be unacceptable. According to Moscow, countries, including Poland, that joined NATO after 1997 should not have NATO troops or missile systems on their land. Succumbing to such demands would leave Poland vulnerable, essentially inviting a return of Russian influence over the region – an outcome that must never be overlooked when considering this.

*Tony Wood*

## **Prayer**



**Please remember to pray for those who are unwell, in need, or have requested our prayers:** Andrew McLaughlin, Claire Wiggins, Russell Carroll, Lucy Cunningham, Tommy McGrory Senior, Sarah Carmichael, and Doleen Durnin.

**Please keep in your prayers** William Brannigan (1969), Francis McWhirter (2019), James Wilson (1966), Sharon Howie (1991), Iain MacPherson (2025), Catherine Robertson (2015) **and all those whose anniversaries fall around this time.**

## **News and Events**

**Tea and coffee** this Sunday after Mass in the parish hall, all welcome.

**SCIAF boxes** are available in the porch.

**The bishop’s visit:** Bishop Brian will be making his parish visit to Campbeltown on 7/8<sup>th</sup> March.



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