

PARISH BULLETIN

March 22, 2026

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

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

Hymns/Music for Sunday

Processional (Sunday only)

70 Breathe on me breath of God

Offertory

226 I am the bread of life

Post Communion

176 Godhead here in hiding

Recessional

188 Go forth the Mass is ended

St. Kieran's, Campbeltown, Kintyre

Tuesday: **Holy Mass, 6pm**

Wednesday: Chrism Mass in Oban Cathedral,
12.30pm

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

Next weekend:

Saturday: Vigil Mass, 6.00pm

**Passion Sunday: Blessing of Palms, 10.00am;
Holy Mass, 10.10am**

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

St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Bridgend, Islay

Easter Sunday, 5th April, Holy Mass and the blessing of Easter Water, 4pm

Psalm response

*With the Lord there is mercy,
and fullness of redemption.*

Gospel acclamation

*Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.
I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord.
Everyone who believes in me shall never die.
Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.*

Communion Antiphon

*Everyone who lives and believes in me
will not die for ever, says the Lord.*

Take Five

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

MONDAY OF THE 5TH WEEK OF LENT

23 MARCH 2026

Take a shine to it

Few words in the English language have as many positive connotations as light. Pull out your dictionary and see for yourself: “radiance or illumination,” “daybreak or dawn,” “a person who is an outstanding leader – a leading light,” “a gleam or sparkle, as in the eyes,” “to brighten with animation or joy,” “spiritual illumination or awareness.” We begin to see the wisdom of describing Jesus as the light of the world, the one who brings the light of life. That’s good news to brighten any day. Let it brighten yours!

Today’s readings: Daniel 13:41c-62; John 8:1-11. *“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.”*

TUESDAY OF THE 5TH WEEK OF

LENT

24 MARCH 2026

Cross purposes

The idea of homeopathic medicine is that one can use a small amount of a pathogen to fight off what, in full strength, would make you ill. In mainstream medicine a similar idea lies behind immunization. In both cases the very thing that can cause disease becomes the means of healing. The bronze serpent that Moses crafted to cure his people if they looked at it, as well as Jesus’ vision of himself lifted on the cross and drawing all people to himself, evoke the same idea: The very instrument of bitterness and death, through grace, becomes the source of life. During your Lenten prayer spend some time simply gazing at a crucifix, not to dwell on the agony of Jesus but upon the “wondrous love” and healing that the sign of the cross has become.

Today’s readings: Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30. *“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.”*

WEDNESDAY: SOLEMNITY OF THE

ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

25 MARCH 2026

March through time

March 25 has an interesting history. Early mathematicians calculated and thought this to be the day on which Jesus died. They believed

the creation of the world started on this day as well, which made it a natural date for the first day of the New Year. Thus, for several hundred years March 25 was New Year’s Day. Mary’s willingness to bear the son of God also ushered in a new year, a new era. Every “yes” does that. Celebrate Mary’s “yes” with one of your own today. Before you say an automatic “no” to your child, your spouse, your coworker, your neighbour, take a deep breath and reconsider whether you might say “yes.”

Today’s readings: Isaiah 7:10-14, 8-10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38. *“May it be done to me according to your word.”*

THURSDAY OF THE 5TH WEEK OF LENT

26 MARCH 2026

Leave this stone unturned

Death-by-stoning is an ancient form of execution. Because it is slow, most would call it torture. Biblical examples are sparse but they do exist, though later limits on the practice in Jewish law and tradition became so restrictive as to prohibit it for all practical purposes. Sadly, this cruel punishment is still legal in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and some states in Nigeria. Occurrences are documented as well in Afghanistan and Somalia. Stoning has been universally condemned by human rights groups and most nations and faiths. As Lent is a time of repentance, add your voice to the chorus calling the world to repent and do away with this and other cruel punishments.

Today’s readings: Genesis 17:3-9; John 8:51-59. *“They picked up stones to throw at him.”*

FRIDAY OF THE 5TH WEEK OF LENT

27 MARCH 2026

How do you live beyond fear?

Fear is a reasonable response in an unreasonable time. Check the daily news and within minutes you’ll have a long list of motivations for barricading the door to keep the spirit of vengeance, violence, and evil away from yourself and those you love. But fear is not a Christian response to the world or toward your fellow human beings. “Fear is useless,” Jesus once told a man despairing for his

daughter's life. "What is needed is faith." As you surrender the option of meat today you might also opt for courage over fear – a courage born of your trust in God.

Today's readings: Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42. *"I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side!'"*

SATURDAY OF THE 5TH WEEK OF LENT

28 MARCH 2026

Bread for the world

As Christians prepare for Palm Sunday and Holy Week, Jews prepare for the beginning of

Passover this coming week. There are many traditions that led to the Jewish use of unleavened bread, or matzah, during this feast. One of the most interesting is the usage of the Hebrew term *lechem onii*, "the bread of poverty," for matzah. This hard, flat bread is said to remind Jews of what it was like to be poor captives in Egypt and to promote humility and a greater appreciation of the gift of freedom. Food for thought for one and all – and for gratitude!

Today's readings: Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-56. *"Now the Passover of the Jews was near."*

Readings for the Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:12-14

The death that is exile will end as the people return to the land of promise.

Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

From the depths of despair, God will hear and answer those who call.

Romans 8:8-11

Sin is also a depth from which God can restore us to life without limits.

John 11:1-45 or 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

A friend of Jesus finds his life restored when Jesus rescues him from the dark..

Words on Word

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Two hermits found themselves at a poignant crossroads as they prepared to say goodbye. The younger one was battling a rapidly advancing, incurable illness. As the older hermit watched his friend, he couldn't help but marvel at the joy that radiated from the dying man, even in his final moments. Curious about this extraordinary calm, the older hermit asked him how he could remain so cheerful in the face of death. The young hermit smiled softly and replied, "Well, to love God means to joyfully await meeting Him." (R.B.).

* *

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by fears – whether it's about illness, loss, or the uncertainties of life. When adversity strikes, despair can creep in, and sometimes even the support of close friends feels inadequate; sometimes, our mere presence is all we can offer.

We might try to reassure ourselves with Scripture, like when Martha and Mary faced the death of their brother Lazarus. They were heartbroken, and Martha's words, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," reflect a pain we can all relate to. Yet even in her grief, there was a flicker of faith – a belief that Jesus held power over death. And he responded with a

profound truth: "I am the resurrection and the life."

Life is full of losses – dreams, relationships, opportunities – but what if we used these experiences to grow? Saint Padre Pio encouraged us to reflect on our lives and consider how we can do good. Think about it – when faced with hardships, we often rethink our priorities, shedding what holds us back and embracing what truly matters.

This awareness of life's fleeting nature can be liberating. So, as we navigate our challenges, let's strive to let go of the unnecessary, cherish what is meaningful, and live with purpose. Embrace the journey, knowing that even in pain, we can find wisdom and strength.

* * *

What we need to remember is that this isn't just about what happened way back in Bethany; it's about what's happening in our lives right now. "The hour will come when the dead in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of Man" (cf. Jn 5:28). This isn't some distant promise; it's a reality we're all going to experience. The voice of God, the ultimate source of life, is reaching out to each of us, ready to lift us from our graves, both literal and spiritual.

That moment is already unfolding. We might feel spiritually dead at times, but we have the Word of God – our lifeline! If we embrace it with true faith, we can already move from darkness to light. Those who hear and believe the Gospel will truly live. This is what we call our first resurrection. It happens when we open our hearts to Christ's message, responding to His call with a simple, "I believe, Lord." In that instant, we step from death into life. Let's hold on to that incredible promise! (F. Blachnicki).

In Christ's love,
Fr Anthony

THE MOTHER OF GOD IN ICONS: 22. ELEUSA – SHE WHO HAS COMPASSION



Dionizy - Mother of God Hodegetria, 1502, the Russian Museum of St. Petersburg

The title of "Eleusa," meaning "the Loving One," is often linked to Saint Luke the Evangelist, who is believed to have created the first icon of this kind, supposedly in Nazareth. However, it's widely thought that the Eleusa style really originated in Coptic art, likely popping up around the 5th to 6th century. The earliest known example of the Eleusa type comes from Syria and dates back to the 9th century.

This iconography goes by various names; for instance, in Russia, it's referred to as *Umilenije*, while modern scholars have also introduced the term *Glycophilousa*, which translates to "endowed with a sweet kiss."

In Eleusa icons, the Mother of God is depicted in a half-length portrait, leaning toward her Child, Jesus, who is cradled in her left arm. He tenderly presses His cheek against hers and reaches out to wrap His arms around her neck, showcasing their deep bond. The art features soft, flowing forms and

evokes a gentle yet contemplative sadness in their expressions. Unlike the more rigid Hodegetria style, Eleusa allows artists a creative flexibility resulting in a wide variety of interpretations.

This style really took off in Rus', where some of the most exquisite examples were produced, such as *the Vladimir Mother of God*, *the Don Mother of God*, *the Belozersk Mother of God*, and *the Podkubensk Mother of God*. In the iconostasis, you'd typically find the Eleusa icon nestled in the lower row, to the left of the Royal Doors, inviting a closer, more personal connection for the faithful.

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 in certain seasons, e.g. Easter, Christmas.

Chapter 15

A Stone's Throw

John 8:1-11

In the wake of the parable of the murderous tenants, Jesus shares a compelling image of himself as the stone that builders rejected (Luke 20:17). This analogy of a rejected stone serves as a poignant reminder of how many individuals, too, might find their rightful place with Him, provided they endure some form of rejection themselves. When we consider Jesus' retreat to the Garden of Olives, as noted in Luke 22:41, it becomes clear that He sought solitude just a stone's throw away from His apostles. It is here, in this sacred place, that the seeds of rejection were planted for the One who sought to bring the outcast closer to the Heavenly Father, fulfilling the promises of the Scriptures.

Marie-France Fortin draws our attention to the word "Torah," which in Hebrew originally meant "the direction of a stone's throw." This truly deepens our understanding of how the pursuit of holiness can sometimes lead to hurtful experiences. Regardless of the rejections we face, they can ultimately shape our place within the Body of Christ. Saint Peter, in his first letter, captures this brilliantly, portraying the rejection of the Son of God as a path towards our own adoption as children of God. As rejected stones, we rise to form a precious edifice in the sight of the Father (1 Peter 2:4-10).

Those who, like Jesus, have experienced rejection often find solace in Him, rejoicing in the fullness of God's glory. The foundation of this divine structure includes figures such as the woman caught in adultery – whom Jesus liberated from condemnation – and Lazarus, whom He called forth from a tomb sealed by a heavy stone. Just as they could not free themselves from their burdens, neither could Jesus move the stone from His own tomb by human means. These powerful symbols illustrate a profound truth: while we are liberated by Christ, no one can deliver Him – He is, after all, the ultimate Deliverer!

Salvation encompasses more than mere rescue from sin; it invites us into the fullness of joy. In Revelation, it is promised that each person saved will receive a white stone with a new name, known only to them (Rev 2:17). In ancient judicial practice, white stones signified acquittal, while black stones foretold condemnation. So, why a secret name? Well, it conveys the profound intimacy of our unique relationship with God, echoing the Jewish reverence for God's

Name, which remains unspoken and sacred. The Scripture's silence over the name of the woman Jesus freed perhaps invites us to ponder our own identities in the light of His mercy.

Let's take a step back for a moment. Have you ever noticed how we often project our inner turmoil onto others? Just as children might torment insects in an attempt to cope with familial pain, so too can we inflict our suffering upon those we perceive as weaker. The men who accused the woman of adultery, driven by their own desires, sought release through her condemnation. Yet, this act merely provided a fleeting relief. I recall a time when I lashed out at an innocent creature out of frustration I felt from arguing with a family member. The weight of that guilt followed me, transforming a moment of pain into a burden I carried for years.

In this encounter, Jesus dismantled the judgments that even those who thought they were acting righteously brought upon the woman. He frees her not just from guilt, but from shame and the fear of punishment. The men who confronted her believed they held the authority to impose penance, failing to realise that true penance springs from one's own heart rather than being forced upon another. If their judgment had not surfaced, this provocative incident might never have unfolded.

When it comes to judgment, we must recognise that harshness seldom yields positive results. Just as throwing stones harms, so too does hurling accusations. True penance is an internal journey, a personal transformation in the presence of God. Jesus' words resonate: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." Each of us carries our own sins, and if Jesus chose to extend mercy to the guilty, how dare we wrap ourselves in suspicion towards others?

Suspicion is a dangerous game, opening the door for the enemy's accusations. Jesus calls us to a higher standard of love – a love that even embraces enemies. It challenges us to pursue goodness and uphold others' dignity. As He reminds us, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48), and in Luke, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). These teachings invite us into the heart of Scripture, where mercy reigns supreme.

As we explore these truths, we might find ourselves grappling with the stones we clutch in our hands, stones of judgment and suspicion that we need to let go of. Conversion to Jesus involves shedding the desire to punish and choosing instead to embrace a posture of mercy. No one, after all, is free from guilt – they might just not recognise it yet. Yet, when we extend forgiveness, we find that God holds us to the same standard with which we treat others.

Think about the profound insight from the Desert Fathers: "He who does not control his anger does not control his lust." This truth speaks to the superficiality of judgment. The accusers of the woman saw only her sin, failing to recognise the darkness within themselves – hidden desires that perhaps informed their outrage. How often do we recoil at someone else's shortcomings while ignoring our own? Like Judas, outraged by wasteful acts while secretly stealing, or King David, indignant at Nathan's parable, we can be blind to our hypocrisy. The incidents of old reflect a timeless reality of human nature.

Reflecting on this, I firmly resolve not to impose penance upon others again. Let me instead be committed to my own, even for sins not my own. The crowd that sought to stone the woman lacked the spirit of the law grounded in mercy. Jesus came to fulfil the law, not by rigid adherence to commands but through embodying love and compassion! The Law isn't merely a set of do's and don'ts; it's a loving dialogue inviting us closer to God.

Our essence lies not in checking boxes of compliance, but in forming genuine connections with

God and each other. Following the spirit of the law means understanding God's deepest desire: that we act as brothers and sisters – not judges. Every soul has a spark of the Divine; when we see someone struggling, rather than casting stones, may we choose compassion.

As we journey through life's challenges, picture the woman returning through the city after her encounter with Jesus. She surely felt overwhelming gratitude but also the sting of her past mistakes. The path to repentance is profound and often painful; however, we realise that just one truthful word spoken in mercy can weave someone back from the brink of despair. It's not stones that bring redemption; it's love and goodness.

In matters of judgment, we need to be cautious. Looking closely at the story, we find a message about the nature of authority. Jesus reminds us that gentleness and understanding are infinitely more powerful than the rigid enforcement of rules. The disposition of one's heart is far more relevant than following the law like a checklist – we need to perceive and act with compassion.

The details of Christ's actions provoke curiosity as He writes in the dust – perhaps a divine act announcing that our names written in the earth, through our judgments, reveal our spiritual state. In Jeremiah, we read that those who forsake God are written in the earth (Jer 17:13). Just imagine the revelation for those present! To see their names in such an impermanent place would surely have carried heavy implications.

Ultimately, we gather that the God who reveals Himself through Christ is one of unfathomable mercy, in stark contrast to the often severe portrayals of deities found in other traditions. Jesus teaches us the power of gentle healing over aggressive dominance. His way is one of love and compassion, inviting us on a journey towards understanding and acceptance.

Let's commit ourselves to becoming instruments of mercy, echoing the compassion of Christ in our daily lives. If we wish to remain free from the stones of accusation on Judgment Day, then we must actively choose to view others through lenses crafted from love and understanding, instead of harshness and distrust. 🧡 accusing!

Fr Anthony



Around the World

UKRAINE

Iranian Risks

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East is throwing a spanner in the works for Ukraine, particularly regarding its ability to defend itself. With the flow of missile deliveries for air defence systems drying up, Ukraine is feeling the pressure. Experts from the Institute for the Study of War have noted a worrying uptick in Russian ballistic missile strikes, causing jitters among Ukrainian defence officials. There's an increasing concern that air defence resources

might be diverted to protect Middle Eastern targets, leaving Ukraine with fewer means to tackle the threats on its own doorstep.

To add to Ukraine's troubles, the surge in prices and demand for Russian energy is giving Moscow a bit of an advantage. In a striking move, the US has eased some sanctions on Russian oil imports, a decision that could give Russia a financial boost, particularly with the rising tensions in the Strait of Hormuz. This shift might give Moscow the freedom to ramp up its operations in Ukraine, further complicating matters for Kyiv.

However, it's not all bad news for Ukraine. The chaos in the Middle East could open new avenues for innovation, especially in the realm of anti-drone technology. With the demand for these systems on the rise, Ukraine could leverage its expertise and potentially trade tech for essential defensive supplies.

Ukraine has made its supportive stance towards the US clear in this geopolitical chess game. It's more than just a matter of friendship; it's also a response to Tehran's aggressive posture against Ukraine during the Russian invasion. Iran's provision of weaponry to Russia, including those notorious Shahed drones, hasn't gone unnoticed. In retaliation, Kyiv is keen to share its know-how with both American and Middle Eastern allies on countering Iranian drone threats, showcasing its valuable experience in handling these challenges.

While the landscape is indeed complex and fraught with uncertainty, Ukraine is actively seeking ways to adapt and manoeuvre within this evolving situation.

MIDDLE EAST

In response to

In a move that has generated significant international attention, the UN Security Council recently called on Iran to put an end to its attacks on Gulf states and Jordan, particularly in light of its disruptive actions in the Strait of Hormuz. Out of the 15-member Security Council, 13 nations voted in favour of this resolution, with only Russia and China opting to abstain.

What's noteworthy is that the resolution was spearheaded by Bahrain, which is part of the Council as one of the non-permanent members. However, it's interesting to see that the text itself didn't address the ongoing airstrikes carried out by the US and Israel against Iran, which, of course, have played a role in escalating tensions in the region. Many would argue that these strikes have prompted Iran's retaliatory actions against both Israel and its Gulf neighbours, with strikes against American bases and various civilian targets cited.

Despite the precarious situation, the majority of the Iranian ballistic missiles and drones fired at their targets have been intercepted, meaning there hasn't been any catastrophic damage or widespread casualties – at least, not yet. The situation remains tense, and the Security Council's rejection of a Russian-led draft resolution urging all parties to halt military operations only adds fuel to the fire. As the stakes continue to rise, observers are left wondering how long this fragile balance of power can hold before something gives.

THE NET

White List

As internet and mobile networks face serious disruptions, residents of Moscow are trading in their smartphones for an array of retro communication tools, including walkie-talkies, pagers, and good old landline phones. Since early March, people in the Russian capital – and other

major cities – have grappled with connectivity issues that have made everyday life more challenging.

Central Moscow, the heart of the nation's political and economic activity, appears to be hit the hardest. While the Kremlin claims these issues are for 'security reasons', they are keeping details under wraps, leading to speculation. Human rights activists and internet experts suspect that the government might be trialling a controversial network control system. This new setup reportedly involves a 'white list,' which means access is granted only to select websites approved by the authorities, limiting citizens to essential online services like shopping, pharmacies, and delivery platforms.

In response, it's no surprise that sales of vintage communication gadgets have skyrocketed. With trading platforms noting a remarkable increase in demand for these devices, it's clear that residents are looking for ways to stay connected amidst the chaos. Whether it's nostalgia or necessity driving them back to simpler tech, one thing's certain: Muscovites are finding creative ways to communicate in a time of uncertainty.

USA

Able to Live With It

In a statement that has raised eyebrows, US President Donald Trump remarked that he can "live with" whatever conclusions come from the investigation into the tragic attack on a girls' school in southern Iran, which resulted in the loss of at least 175 lives, predominantly young girls aged between seven and twelve. Trump hinted that Iran could potentially be implicated in the shelling of the school in Minab, despite earlier claims suggesting that Iran had mistakenly targeted the facility.

When pressed on footage appearing to show American Tomahawk missiles hitting the school, Trump shrugged it off, asserting that "many countries have Tomahawks," which includes Iran itself. He defended the use of Tomahawk cruise missiles, calling them "one of the most powerful weapons" and highlighting that they are sold by the US and utilized by various nations.

However, investigations by reputable outlets like The New York Times and the Bellingcat centre indicate a different narrative, suggesting that US forces might actually be responsible for the Minab attack. This conflicting information raises serious moral questions about accountability and the consequences of military actions, especially when innocent lives are at stake.

In light of this tragedy, it's essential to examine not just the facts but also the ethical implications of military engagement and the responsibility that comes with wielding such formidable power.

We Read Pope Leo

We lift up our humble prayer to the Lord, that the roar of bombs may fall silent, the weapons be stilled, and a space for dialogue be opened.

Holiness of the Church consists in the fact that Christ dwells within it and continually gives Himself through the littleness and fragility of its members. By contemplating this ongoing miracle unfolding in it, we understand God's "method": He becomes visible through the weakness of His creatures, ceaselessly revealing and acting. Thus Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* encourages all to learn "to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other"

(no. 169). This also empowers us today to build the Church: not merely by organizing its visible structures, but by raising up that spiritual edifice which is the Body of Christ, through communion and love among us. For love continually begets the presence of the Risen One. “May heaven grant,” said Saint Augustine, “that all keep in view nothing but love: for love alone conquers everything, and without it, everything has no worth; wherever it is found, it draws all things to itself” (Sermo 354, 6, 6).



General Audience, 4 March 2026.

Lent invites us to acknowledge Christ as the highest hope of mankind. I encourage you, dear young people, to be courageous witnesses of the Gospel, to exert a positive influence in the various circles of life. To you, dear sick, I recommend the virtue of patience, so that your suffering, united with Christ’s suffering, may be a sacrifice pleasing to the Father. To you, dear newlyweds, I urge you to discover the value of prayer in the “domestic Church” that you have formed.

Appeal after the General Audience, 4 March 2026.

We live in a society threatened by the loss of memory. Our age has an extraordinary capacity for transmitting information, but an increasingly weak capacity for internalizing it. Memory is often “externalized” and accessible, yet not always internalized and activated. But for the Church it is a living conscience: not an accumulation of data, but a continual summons to responsibility; not nostalgia, but the root from which prophecy springs forth. For Christians memory has a unique character: it is the celebration of God’s entrance into history, for the Christian faith rests on historical fact, and salvation is not an idea, but a living person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Address to participants in the events organized by the Italian Police Ordinariate, 7 March 2026.

From Iran and throughout the Middle East there continue to come reports that cause deep sorrow. To the cases of violence and destruction and to the spreading atmosphere of hatred and fear is added the concern that the conflict may expand and that other countries in the region, including dear Lebanon, may once again be plunged into destabilization. We lift our humble prayer to the Lord, that the roar of bombs may fall silent, the weapons be stilled, and a space for dialogue be opened in which the voices of peoples may be heard. Mary, Queen of Peace, I entrust the following intention: may she intercede for those who suffer because of war, may she guide hearts along paths of reconciliation and hope.

After the prayer The Angelus, 8 March 2026.

In my opinion

Spring and War

The enemy we need to worry about isn’t lurking outside our front doors; it’s brewing within us.

Outside our windows, spring is making its grand entrance, breathing new life into the world. But what about us? We find ourselves in tears, and let’s not just blame it on the birch pollen

– it’s more than that. It’s not an allergy; it’s our eyes adjusting to the glaring light of truth after being lulled by the comfortable twilight of our delusions. We expected things to be good, and frankly, they are – at least on the surface.

Truth, however, isn’t always gentle. It hits like a bucket of cold water for those who have dozed off at their post. Over the last fifty years, modern society has constructed a fortress against everything – diseases, crises, unwelcome emotions, and critical opinions. We’ve insulated ourselves from all these threats, but we’ve overlooked one crucial aspect: the fiercest enemy emerges from within.

We grew up being told that history is a steady climb towards progress and comfort. Yet, if you look closely, you can see the dust being kicked up by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – War, Plague, Famine, and Death – riding closer while we swipe through our smartphones. We stand there, dressed in our finest suits, armed with a digital map of the world, only to realise we’ve charted every inch of the apocalypse without ever getting on our own horse. We’re like knights without any armour, and too often, without any sense. When push comes to shove, our metaphorical swords are just that – metaphors – and our courage is reduced to a social media post.

I’m experiencing this Lent in Canada – once seen as a land of nearly perfect existence just three decades ago, complete with order, expansive nature, and a peaceful way of life. We’d casually roll out the word “Canada” with an air of reverence, as if it were a treasure. This beautiful country, rich in Christian heritage with churches at its core, has changed. The symbols of faith have begun to fade from the skyline and from the hearts of its people. A society that removes its crosses inevitably loses its way.

Canada has become a testing ground for just how far one can drift from foundational values. The latest experiment? Euthanasia. Now, it’s framed as the go-to solution for suffering, with the Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) programme orchestrating over 15,000 cases a year – about 4-5% of all deaths. In this disturbing trend, Canada has even outpaced the Netherlands, a pioneer in this practice. As society seems to grow indifferent to the elderly and the infirm, a terrible question hangs in the air: when does an older or sick person cease to be considered a person?

It’s a slippery slope, and it mirrors dark chapters from history. When we start labelling lives as ‘not worth living’ based on subjective standards of quality, how far removed are we from the horrors witnessed in the 1940s? Yet, this isn’t just about the disquiet in Canada.

Consider Mary Wagner, the courageous woman serving time for praying outside abortion clinics. She embodies resistance against the idol of convenience that has crept in and caused so much damage to life.

Meanwhile, around the world, wars rage on. Cities crumble, innocent lives are lost, yet if it’s not happening right in our backyard, we gloss over it. A quick flick of the screen, and we’re back to weather updates, completely desensitised. But the battle is closer to home – it’s a struggle for the human soul, and it plays out in our hearts every single day. Each day, we’re faced with a choice: truth or lies, courage or comfort, love or selfishness.

The irony? We’re all too quick to judge others. It’s a distraction, a convenient way to avoid staring our own flaws in the face. That beam in our eye? It’s no longer a hindrance; it’s a viewing platform from which we gleefully point out the splinters in those around us. We’ve forgotten that this beam is made from wood, the kind that should be fashioned into a cross that helps keep our egos in check.

As spring breathes life back into the earth, the real question isn't whether the world will shift. It's whether you will let new life break through the concrete of your heart or continue to linger in the shadows, watching the world's battles and neglecting the most important struggle – the one for your own soul. Will you rise, or will you remain passive in the war that truly counts?

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 Jamey Wike (2025), Maureen McLaughlin (2018), Helen McLaughlin (1986), **and all those whose anniversaries fall around this time.**

Please continue to pray for the innocent people of Iran and Ukraine, that they be protected, courageous and retain hope.

News and Events

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

SCIAF Wee Boxes Please bring them in on Palm Sunday/during Holy Week.

The Chrism Mass will be celebrated on 25th March in the Cathedral, Oban, at 12.30pm.

Palm Sunday: will begin with the blessing of palms at 10.00am – either: outside the church if the weather is fine; or at the back of the church if the weather is inclement.

Bishop Brian requests that the attached message is included in this weekend's newsletter. **Statement from the Bishops of Scotland**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Following a request from the Holy See, the Bishops of Scotland have been invited to reflect on how the structures of the Church in our country can best serve her mission in the years ahead, specifically whether the present situation of eight dioceses is suitable.

We are all aware of the challenges before us — fewer clergy, changing patterns of practice, and increasing pressures on our diocesan resources, among other things. Yet our mission remains unchanged: to proclaim the Gospel and to lead our people to Christ.

Two possible pathways are being proposed for careful discernment: developing deeper cooperation and the sharing of resources across dioceses within our present structures, or the merging of some dioceses.

In order to best inform ourselves and the Holy See, each bishop will engage with his diocese over the coming months for the first part of this process. Everyone will be given the opportunity to pray, reflect, and contribute.

Following-on from the presentation of a discussion paper, responses from each diocese will contribute to the initial findings which will be given to the Holy See in the Autumn.

This is not simply an administrative exercise. It is a pastoral and missionary response to our changing landscape. This process will ensure our Church in Scotland will continue to grow ever more missionary, more Christ-centred, and more collaborative in the service of God's people.

Entrusting this work to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to the intercession of Our Lady, we move forward together with confidence and renewed hope.

There is also a Pastoral letter from the Catholic Bishops of Scotland on the Scottish Parliament Election. Copies are in the church porch.



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