

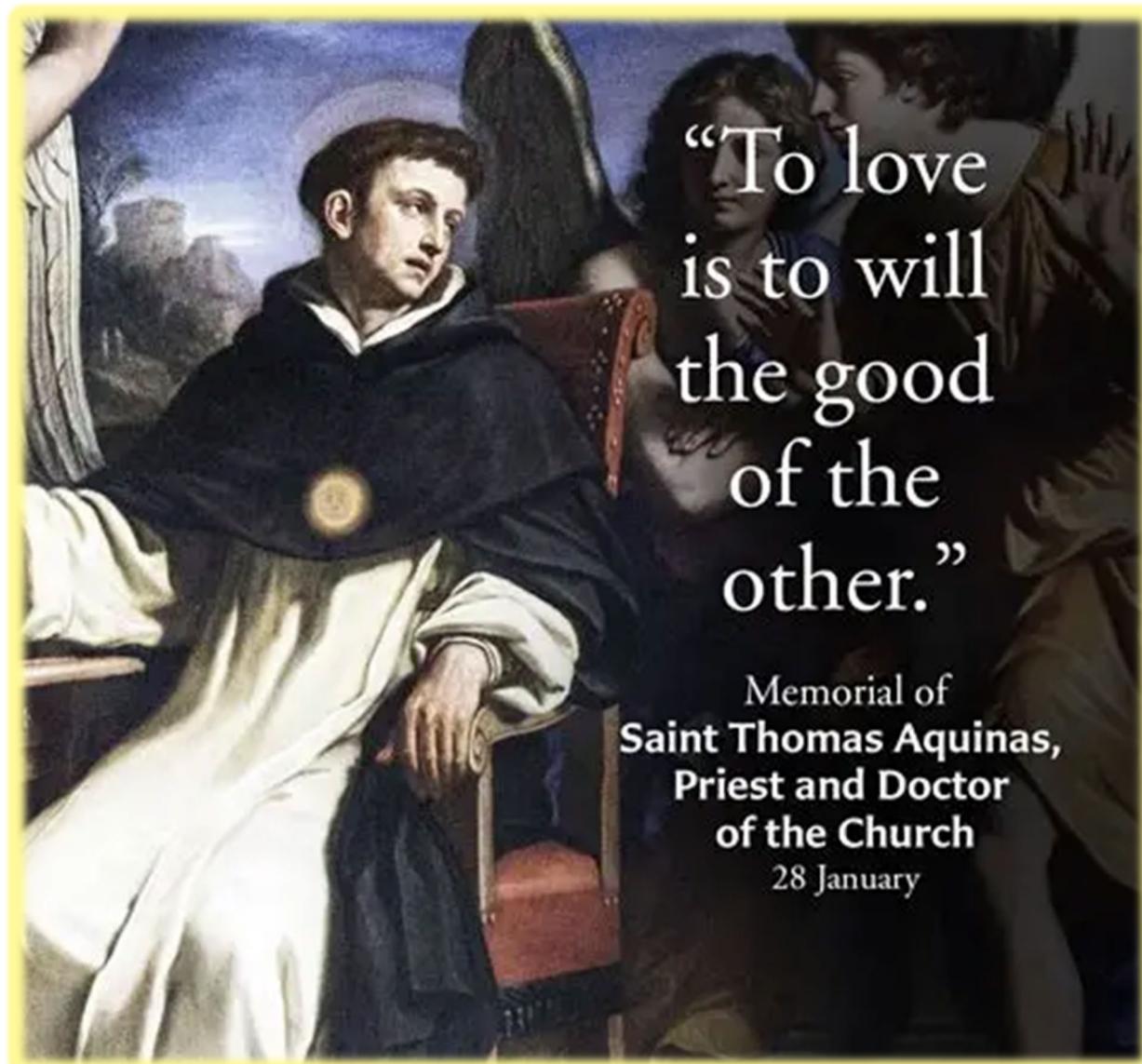
PARISH BULLETIN

**St Kieran's, the Catholic
Church** in Campbeltown and
Islay

Ceann Loch Chille Chiarain

25th January 2026

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



Hymns/Music for Sunday

Processional (Sunday only)

116 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Offertory

67 Blest are you, Lord

Post Communion

677 Bless the Lord, my soul

Recessional

62 Bind us together Lord

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.**

Next weekend:

Saturday: **Vigil Mass, 6.00pm**

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time: **Holy Mass, 10.00am**

Sacrament of Reconciliation Saturday 5.00pm-5.30pm or anytime on request.

St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Bridgend, Islay

Sunday, 1st February: Holy Mass, 4pm

Psalm response

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Gospel acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom and healed every affliction among the people.

Alleluia.

Communion Antiphon

Look toward the Lord and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed.

Take Five

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

MONDAY: MEMORIAL OF SAINTS

TIMOTHY AND TITUS, BISHOPS

26 JANUARY 2025

Get fired up

Saint Paul – Apostle to the Gentiles – knew how to paint with words. He urges us to “fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim 1:6). Picture a smouldering fire: you stir the embers, sparks fly, and a steady glow becomes a bright, welcoming blaze. Our hearts can be like that. Life gets noisy. We forget what God has already planted in us. The warmth seems to fade. But His grace isn’t gone; it’s waiting to be stirred. With a little attention – a memory of His faithfulness, a whispered prayer – the glow returns. If your spirit’s flagging today, take a quiet minute. In your mind’s eye, pick up a simple stick and gently rouse the embers of your heart. Breathe, slowly. Say, “Come, Holy Spirit.” Remember a moment when God met you, even in small ways. Let that memory feed the flame.

Don’t force it. You’re not lighting this fire by yourself. God has already kindled it in your baptism and strengthens it in the Eucharist. Ask Him to make it burn bright again – giving you warmth for the day and light for the people around you.

Let His presence in you become a steady blaze – heat for your hope, light for your steps, and a gentle glow for others to find their way.

Today's readings: 2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5; Mark 3:22-30. *“If a kingdom is divided against itself, the kingdom cannot stand.”*

TUESDAY: MEMORIAL OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI, VIRGIN

27 JANUARY 2026

Step out and step up

Saint Angela Merici did two things that may seem small now but in her time (16th-century Italy) were huge: She organized a group of single laywomen to teach the uneducated girls of her town. In her time, very few women had any schooling, let alone became

teachers, and the ones who did have some education were nuns, who, like other unmarried women, rarely went out on their own. Her community eventually became the Ursuline religious order. It’s easy to ignore the fact that things people now take for granted came about because of someone who had a daring idea and the courage to carry it out. Their example can also serve to inspire you as well to take a bold step to do good in the world.

Today's readings: 2 Samuel 6:12b-15, 17-19; Mark 3:31-35. *“Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”*

WEDNESDAY: MEMORIAL OF SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, PRIEST, DOCTOR

28 JANUARY 2026

Faith can be an open question

Last November, an Oxford-style debate asked whether the world would be better off without religion. In the end, the audience backed the idea. I can almost see Saint Thomas Aquinas watching on – curious, calm, and ready to engage. If he’d taken the floor, the result might have shifted, but he certainly wouldn’t have dodged the hard questions. Aquinas once warned: “The truth of our faith becomes a laughing matter among nonbelievers if a Catholic lacking proper scientific knowledge insists as dogma on something that the evidence clearly disproves.” He had a point. Our Catholic tradition treasures reason as God’s gift. We truly honour the patron of schools, colleges and students not only by praying, but by studying well, asking big questions, and learning without fear.

So don’t shy away from the tough conversations. Seek the truth with a humble mind and a brave heart – trusting that all truth leads us to God. Saint Thomas Aquinas, pray for us.

Today's readings: 2 Samuel 7:4-17; Mark 4:1-20. *"He was teaching them many things in parables."*

THURSDAY OF WEEK 3

29 JANUARY 2026

No comment

Scroll through almost any comments thread and, if you're a thoughtful sort, you probably won't last long. It quickly becomes obvious: many of us speak before we think. We live in a world where tossing out opinions and feelings – however shallow, uninformed or off-topic – seems to be everything.

But that won't do with the Gospel. Jesus wants His disciples to slow down: to learn, to ponder, to explore His message before they start sharing it. And even then, keep sharing as a journey of ongoing learning, letting your words be shaped by prayer, Scripture, and the wisdom of the Church.

Today's readings: 2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29; Mark 4:21-25. *"Take care what you hear. The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you."*

FRIDAY OF WEEK 3

30 JANUARY 2026

Live on the edge

Farmers have to have a high tolerance for uncertainty, and that hasn't changed since the time of Jesus. An unpredictable storm, an early frost, an unseen blight could ruin a crop, a season, a livelihood, then and now. Yet farmers keep farming (and the rest of us hungry souls are grateful they do!). Where in your own life is the edge of uncertainty, the

scary place where you can no longer fool yourself into believing that you are fully in control? That is where you are likely to find God, who comes at what theologian and storyteller John Shea called the "hour of the unexpected." Embrace your uncertainty, God will meet you in the midst of it.

Today's readings: 2 Samuel 11:1-4a, 5-10a, 13-17; Mark 4:26-34. *"He spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it."*

SATURDAY: MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO, PRIEST

31 JANUARY 2026

Love and support your local child

Saint John Bosco was born in Italy in 1815, into a family of farm workers. He became a priest and a teacher, and devoted his life to caring for and educating children who were abandoned or neglected. His approach was unusual for the time: instead of using threats and punishment, he shaped his students with love, encouragement, and firm guidance. He embraced the spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales and, in his honour, founded the Society of Saint Francis de Sales (the Salesians of Don Bosco).

- How can you support teachers and those who care for children?
- In the spirit of John Bosco, how can you extend love, compassion, and respect to children, especially those most in need?

Today's readings: 2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 10-17; Mark 4:35-41. *"Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"*

Readings for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 8:23-9:3

The people of God walk beyond darkness and gloom into light and joy.

Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

Those who wait on the Lord will one day see the beatific vision.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Needless factions threaten to divide those who do not embrace the unity of Christ.

Matthew 4:12-23

Without hesitation fishermen leave the sea to follow the call of Jesus.

Words on Word

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What is a vocation? It is a gift from God, that is, it comes from God. If it is a gift from God, then we should take care to discern God's will. We must set out on this path: if God wills, when God wills, as God wills. (...) Every vocation is a vocation to motherhood – physical, spiritual, moral. God has placed within us the instinct for life. The priest is a father; religious sisters are mothers – mothers of souls. Woe to those young people who do not accept the call to parenthood. Everyone must prepare for his or her own vocation: prepare to be a giver of life through the dedication required by intellectual formation; know what marriage is – "sacramentum magnum"; learn about other paths; shape and come to know one's own character (Saint Gianna Beretta Molla).

* *

Ever noticed how those who believe are also the ones who get called? In today's reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we hear: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone" (Is 1:9). Then, in the Gospel, we see the story of the apostles' calling. Two reflections naturally come to mind.

REFLECTION ONE

Here we have a people who know God's law, yet they still walk in darkness. Christ's Gospel is the true light, pointing out where we're meant to go in life. Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom of God – this is our moment for real transformation. God's grace can turn our hearts around so powerfully it bears fruit, just like we've seen in the lives of Saint Benedict, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Saint John Paul II, and many more.

REFLECTION TWO

God calls new people to shine light on "the inhabitants of the land of darkness." Amazingly, He doesn't focus on the famous or the well-educated. Instead, He picks those who treasure God's ways in their hearts – just like many of us do. Every one of us is called to keep that tiny seed of faith alive and growing. Think of it as a little torch in a world that's losing itself in gloom. It's threatened by doubt and carelessness, often born out of having too many worldly comforts. When you've got everything, you can get so caught up in it that you forget to pray or think about what comes after this life. You start worrying that old age is creeping up and your hard-earned possessions might go to waste. But for those who are called, Christ gives us both light and strength.

Pope Benedict XVI put it this way: "Only by helping others to be saved do we ourselves experience salvation. Only by protecting others do we ourselves find protection. Only by caring for others do we ourselves become the object of care." Having a conscious faith frees us to decide what truly matters, what's trivial, and what lifts us beyond the limits of this world towards an immortal horizon. It gives us hope for the future, where the One who brought us the Light is waiting.

Answering Jesus's call often means changing how we think and live. It's not about jumping blindly into the abyss – it's about trusting in God. That trust changes the way we approach our everyday lives. What might a modern follower of Christ look like? You'll spot them by their

openness to others, their willingness to help those in need, their readiness to stand firm in their convictions, and the generous way they share their time. Even small things – simple, humble acts – can turn someone's misfortune into joy and another's frustration into peace. In fact, these acts often do the same for us, too.

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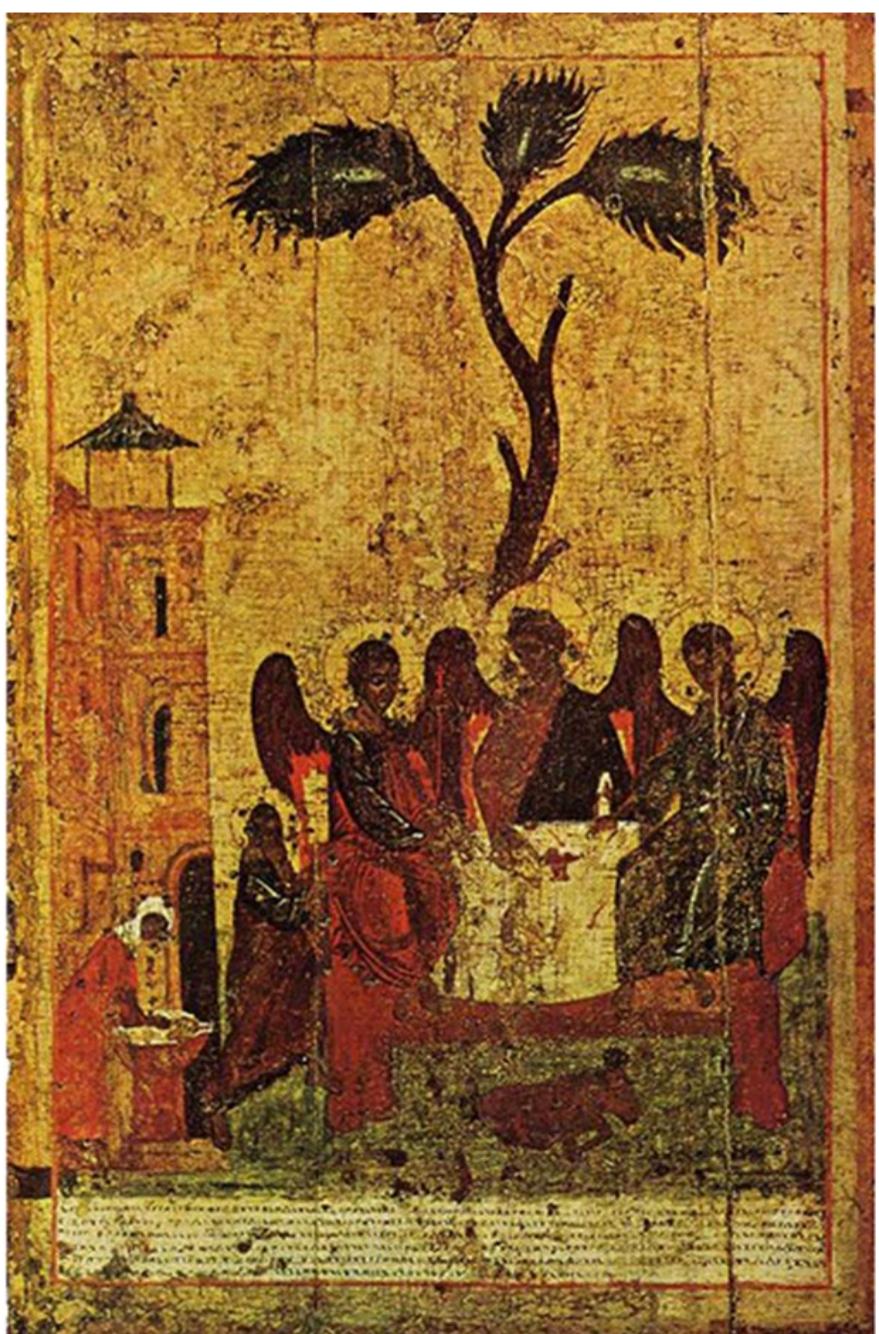
*Vocation – solemn, holy, wise,
A lamp that lifts our clouded eyes.
Believe, or else we drift and fall,
And live as if He were not All.
We cradle hearts that scarcely live,
They beat yet beg for One to give;
We press them to the Sacred Side,
And find their peace in the Crucified.
God dwells on high; we tread the earth,
Yet grace makes near what seems of worth.
What light-years count as far above,
A heartbeat spans through faith and love.*

(A.W.)

In Christ's love,

Fr Anthony

CHRIST IN ICONS: 15. ICONS OF THE HOLY TRINITY



If you've ever marvelled at those iconic images of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – then you might be surprised to learn that, in Eastern Christian tradition, they're closely tied to the story of Abraham's hospitality in the Book of Genesis (18:2). That's where three angels visit Abraham and Sarah, announcing the birth of their long-awaited son. In the earliest depictions of this scene, artists showed these heavenly guests joined by Abraham and Sarah, with a table spread for a meal. Over time, the human figures faded away, leaving just the three angels, typically set against a backdrop of a house (representing God the Father and the Church), a tree (symbolising God the Son and echoing the Tree of Paradise), and a rocky outcrop (often linked to the Holy Spirit).

One of the most beloved representations of the Trinity is, of course, Rublev's famous icon. Rublev kept architectural details to a bare minimum, focusing on the profound connection between the three Divine Persons. Arranged in a circular composition, they subtly suggest unity, movement, and equality, while the table points to

the altar, and the chalice calls to mind the Eucharist. It doesn't hurt that Rublev's use of soft, understated colours adds an extra layer of gentle elegance.

Another common way of showing the Holy Trinity might be more familiar in Western churches: God the Father and God the Son seated side by side, with a dove floating above to symbolise the Holy Spirit. Whichever rendering speaks to you, these icons serve as a powerful, visual reminder of the mystery and majesty shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in perfect unity.

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 8 Heavenly feast

John 2:1-11

At Cana, an ordinary village wedding became something far more. At Mary's request, Jesus worked a sign that points us to the Eucharist and, beyond that, to the eternal banquet of Heaven.

This is the pattern of the Christian life: what looks everyday and small is, in God's hands, is charged with meaning. We often imagine our choices and sufferings don't matter much. But in Christ, nothing is trivial. Marriages, wounds and healings, work and rest, sorrows and reconciliations, debts and alms, funerals and weddings – all of it shapes not only our journey to Heaven but also touches the lives of others. We exude what we carry within. All the more, then, do the sacraments matter. We call them "mysteries" because our minds see only the surface while God does the deep work.

Now, the details at Cana are full of meaning. Saint John notes six **stone jars** for Jewish purification, with a total capacity of around 500 litres – lavish abundance. Water used for ritual washings becomes, at Jesus' word, a noble wine. This is not a mere symbol: Christ's purification actually cleanses. Baptism does not just hint at forgiveness; it washes. The Eucharist does not merely suggest a feast; it gives us Christ Himself.

Who sets this in motion? Mary. She is the pure, Immaculate Woman, prepared by God in advance – *ante Crucem* – so that through her "yes" the work of our purification might begin. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." At the Last Supper Jesus could call the apostles "clean" because His word had been washing their hearts. Saint Paul often links purity with a clear conscience and an unblemished heart, a resistance to the grime of the world. The Letter to the Hebrews calls Christ's work "purification from sins." So, Mary's presence at Cana is no accident: here begins the long work of cleansing a people for God – linked to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan and fulfilled in His baptism on the Cross. She was made immaculate before the Cross; we are washed after the Cross, by that hour when blood and water flowed from His side.

Standing beside the jars for purification, Mary shows us the place of the Church. Ivo of Chartres put it neatly: *Sicut Maria, ita et Ecclesia* – As with Mary, so with the Church. What we admire in her we should recognise, in grace, in the Church. Like Mary at Cana, the Church continually

brings our need to Jesus and asks Him to cleanse and fill. At every font the Church prays that a child be freed from original sin and from the power of Satan. Caesarius of Arles once wrote beautifully: *Mary gave the Saviour to the peoples; the Church gives the peoples to the Saviour*. No wonder Saint John starts the Cana account with Mary. As in the beginning was the Word, so at the beginning of this “wedding of Heaven” stands Mary, pointing us to her Son. Heaven without Mary would be missing the Mother’s touch. Her intercession, stretched across time, hastens graces: she never stops asking her Son to turn the guilt of sin into the wine of grace.

Wine, in Scripture, often symbolises the Holy Spirit. He fills the heart as wine fills a cup; He stirs joy, courage and love. At Pentecost, the onlookers joked, “They are filled with new wine” (Acts 2:13) – and they weren’t entirely wrong, for “new wine is put into fresh wineskins” (Lk 5:38). At Cana Jesus says His “hour” has not yet come, yet He grants Mary’s request. When is that hour? On Calvary: “Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own” (Jn 19:27). In that hour, from the third to the ninth hour, Jesus pours out the wine of His Blood – transforming our faults by His mercy.

Those six jars at Cana were for ritual washings, not for storing drinking water. They were empty. Jesus chooses ordinary, workaday vessels to hold a supernatural gift. That’s wonderfully typical of God. If we’re empty and cleansed, He will fill us with the Holy Spirit. Weddings in that culture involved ceremonial handwashing (cf. Mk 7:3), a reminder that we come to God’s feast with clean hands and a faithful heart. Saint John adds that each jar held “two or three measures.” If you like spiritual hints, you can hear an echo there: faith in the Holy Trinity – Three – and the two great commandments of love. However, you read it, Mary watches over the measure of faith and charity within us, helping us towards the moderation and humility that make room for grace.

Notice too how Saint John singles out a handful of people from the crowd: the steward, the bridegroom and Jesus, alongside Mary, the servants and the disciples. The rest pass by unnamed. Here’s a gentle lesson: if we recognise even one of these figures rightly, we begin to understand the whole scene. For Christians, the steward – the ARCHITRIKLINOS, literally the “master of the three-couch dining room” – can suggest God the Father who presides over the feast. Jesus, of course, is the Son, the true Bridegroom (cf. Jn 3:29), even if the human bridegroom is barely noticed. And the superabundant wine points to the Holy Spirit, poured out without stint. Wherever Mary is, the ordinary becomes extraordinary, because she always directs us to the Trinity at work.

Why all this wedding imagery? Because God’s plan is nuptial: He weds Himself to His people. In Jewish life, marriage was a vocation and a communal joy, the living out of the first command to be fruitful. For centuries weddings took place beneath the *chuppah*, a shared canopy, and the couple drank from one brimming cup. “Fill the jars with water,” Jesus says, “and they filled them to the brim” (Jn 2:7). From then on, the couple would share every taste of life. Genesis says, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). That’s true of human love – and even more true of our relationship with God. Without Him, we are desolate.

In rabbinic language, the first stage of marriage is *kiddushin* – sanctification – which sets the bride apart for her husband. There is also *erusin* – binding or betrothal – by which the two are joined. Both ideas help us read Cana spiritually. The wedding at Cana is a sign of God re-binding Himself to humanity in Christ, consecrating a people for Himself. Mary herself shows what this looks like in its fullness: Daughter of the Father, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Mother of the Son. The unity lost by sin is rebuilt in her and, through her Son, offered to us. So, the point at Cana was never simply the lack of refreshments. God did not come to rescue the drinks table. Wine

stands for love; and at Cana, divine love begins to flow in a new and never-ending way.

Grace, though, is given in measure, because we are different vessels. St Paul urges us to think “soberly, according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Rom 12:3). He refuses to “boast **beyond measure**” (2 Cor 10:13–18) and reminds us that “to each one grace was given according to the **measure of Christ’s gift**” (Eph 4:7). Even the placename QANA hints at measurement: in Hebrew *qaneh* is a reed used as a measuring stick, like the reed with which the angel measures the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:15–17). Heaven, in a sense, is measured to fit the human person, and the human person is made for Heaven. If only we could see that Heaven begins in the kitchen and the backyard, at a parish coffee morning or a village wedding. Today, too many weddings feel frantic rather than foretaste. But the true measure of our Heaven includes our sufferings as well – our own passion. Remember, the soldiers struck our Lord with a reed (Mk 15:19). Even the instruments of derision are taken up into the mystery and given new meaning.

Finally, linger with the setting. Banquets in the ancient Near East were often held in enclosed gardens, overflowing with scent and song – henna, nard, myrrh, cinnamon, lilies around a pool, **a single gate** and a cypress-lined path. The Hebrew PARDES – garden-park – became *paradisus* in Latin: Paradise. Among the many good paths of Christian life, there is always one that bears the fragrance of Paradise. “Stand at the crossroads and look,” says the Lord through Jeremiah. “Ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jer 6:16). Pilgrims know this well at Marian shrines, where so many roads meet before the icon of the Mother of God, the HODEGETRIA¹ – the One who points the Way, who is her Son.

So, the invitation of Cana remains wonderfully simple. Let Mary point; let Jesus speak; let the servants obey (“Do whatever He tells you”); and let the Spirit fill. Then even a village wedding – or your kitchen table – becomes a sketch of Heaven.

Fr Anthony

We Read Pope Leo

Let us not waste time and energy chasing after mere appearances...



The constitution *Dei Verbum* [of the Second Vatican Council] reminds us: God speaks to us. It is important to see the difference between a word and chit-chat: the latter remains on the level of superficiality and does not create communion between persons, whereas in authentic relationships the word serves not only to exchange information and messages, but also to reveal who we are. The word has a revelatory dimension that creates a relationship with another person. In this way, by speaking to us, God reveals Himself to us as an Ally who invites us to friendship with Him. From this perspective, the first attitude to cultivate is

¹ Hodegetria – the name of the oldest type of icon, derived from the Greek word HODOS – "way", defines the Mother of God as the Pointing Way. Another name for the icon, the Guide, refers to the guide monks of the Ton Hodigon Monastery.

listening, so that the word of God may penetrate our minds and hearts. At the same time, we are called to converse with God – not to tell Him what He already knows, but to reveal ourselves to ourselves. Hence arises the need for prayer, in which we are called to live and foster friendship with the Lord.

General Audience, 14 January 2026.

We often ask ourselves: "Why, Lord?" (...) These are moments of great pain and suffering. One of the people closest to you, the most beloved, has lost their life in a catastrophe of enormous violence or is hospitalized for a long time, with a body mutilated as a result of a terrible fire that stirred the imagination of the whole world. (...) What then can be said in such a situation? (...) Perhaps there is only one word that is fitting: the word of the Son of God on the Cross – with whom you are today so close – who, from the depths of His abandonment and pain, cried out to the Father: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mt 27:46). I cannot explain to you (...), why you and your loved ones have been subjected to such a trial. The love and words of compassion that I address to you seem very limited and powerless. The Successor of Peter, whom you met today, assures you with strength and conviction: your hope is not in vain, because Christ has truly risen! (...) Be certain of His closeness and tenderness (...). Be assured of the prayer of the whole Church – and of my personal prayer – for the peace of your deceased, for relief for those you love who are suffering, and for you yourselves, accompanying them with your tenderness and love.

Address of Leo XIV to the families of the teenagers who died in Crans-Montana (Switzerland), 15 January 2026.

Our joy and greatness do not rest on the passing illusions of success and fame, but on the awareness that we are loved and wanted by our Father who is in heaven. This is the love of which Jesus speaks to us: the love of God, who even today comes to us (...), to share our struggles and take upon Himself our burdens, showing us who we truly are and how much we mean in His eyes. (...) Let us not waste time and energy chasing after mere appearances. Let us learn from John the Baptist how to keep watch in spirit, loving simple things and sincere words, living in a moderate way and with depth of mind and heart, being content with what is necessary, and striving each day to find a moment in silence for prayer, reflection, to listen...

Angelus, 18 January 2026.

In my opinion

Having already written an 'In My Opinion' column, I believe a recent action by Donald Trump directed at Iran raises serious concerns, which I also address here.

Let us be . . .

Goodness – it's the one thing you can't mock without consequence. You see, it never really fades; it always finds a way to come back around. Hatred, though? That stuff's addictive.

And it's everywhere these days, isn't it? So, here's the thing: we've got to stick together, cling to each other like our lives depend on it, because let's face it – they're trying to pull us apart. And by "they," I mean whoever benefits from keeping us at each other's throats. Yeah, this isn't some pretty sentiment wrapped up with a neat little bow – it's raw, designed to sting. Imagine a splinter shoved under your fingernail, the kind you can't ignore. That's the feeling we're wrestling with here.

Let's be close to each other, because they are dividing us. This is not a pretty sentence. The late poet Ernest Bryll, whose words I'll admit I miss, didn't write poetry to stir your soul over a

morning coffee. His words are more like a slap – direct, unflinching, impossible to shrug off. When he says, “they are dividing us,” it’s not flowery imagery. It’s fact. It’s what’s happening right here, right now. You feel it too, don’t you? They pit us against each other – breaking us into factions, parties, tribes, into “us” and “them.” The modern and the backward. Those of faith and those who label it a relic of the past, something to discard. It’s deliberate. A strategy. The more divided we are, inwardly focused on our own infighting, the less anyone has to actually defeat us – because we’re doing their work for them. And every time we take the bait, the ground shifts under our feet. Our world fractures, and we drift further into the void.

First, they say: “It’s only a symbol.” Then: “It’s just history.” Before you know it, real things – your land, your identity, your faith – start slipping through your fingers. It isn’t just about politics or globalism or “European values,” no. It’s a simple, cold trade: giving up sovereignty for a bit of elbow room in the salons of the elite. A thousand years of Christianity? Oh, too much effort to hold onto, too old-fashioned, too “limiting.” But Bryll? He saw this coming. He didn’t start with politics; he started with us – our relationships. Our connections. It’s as if he’s looking us straight in the eye and saying, “They can’t break you with laws or policies if you don’t let them break you from within.” That’s where the real tearing begins – inside our hearts, in our choice of words, in the contempt we sometimes fling so easily, thinking it’s catharsis or debate. This, friends, is where we must hold fast. Think about it: civilizations don’t fall because someone strolls in with an army. They collapse when the people lose faith in themselves, when they stop believing there’s anything worth putting on the line. When kindness fizzles out. We rot from within long before anyone from the outside knocks on the door.

Goodness is precious. Mock it all you want, but it stands firm. It always comes back. Hatred? Oh, it’s tempting, isn’t it? It gives you a sharp sense of purpose, makes you feel alive for a moment. But then it leaves you empty, drained, surrounded by the wreckage of relationships, community, trust. A divided people loses its ability to speak, connect, *to be*. What’s left after that? It’s a nation of individuals acting on instinct, fighting phantom enemies, losing sight of who they really are.

So, what do we do? Well, here’s my take. Let’s stick together. Let’s hold fast to one another when fear creeps in, when the weight of uncertainty feels too much to bear. Let’s lean into each other when the dark, looming challenges of the world make us feel small and powerless. Because in the end, we’re only as strong as what we can give each other, the warmth we share. And we lose the battle – not because evil is oh-so-powerful, but because we’ve allowed cracks to form among us. They win when we stop seeing each other as brothers and sisters and start seeing enemies everywhere we turn.

But here’s the good news: it doesn’t have to be that way. We can choose fidelity – loyalty to each other and to the truth. It’s not flashy. It’s not popular. It’s old-school, slow-burning, but oh-so-powerful. It takes courage, selflessness, and let’s be honest – grit. Let’s refuse to be divided. Not because we’ll ever all agree on everything (spoiler: we won’t!), but because we haven’t forgotten that we’re still a community. We’re better together, fractured and complicated as we may be.

“They” divide, but we? Let’s unite. Despite the noise, despite the endless pulling in every direction, let’s pledge to be close, to be good to each other. If we do that, if we aim for kindness and connection, maybe – just maybe – the days ahead will grow brighter and warmer. And that new year you’ve been hoping would be good? It’ll start to look a lot like us. Close. Together. Unbroken.

The Iranian war

With what Donald Trump has called an American “armada” is heading toward Iran and so there is an increasing likelihood of a joint attack by American and Israeli forces on Iran. This, however, will lead not to the emergence of a new system of power, but to internal collapse across the entire country.

The war, alas, continues. It is not the kind of clash we see in war movies.

The thinking in Washington, say many observers, is to limit China’s access to natural resources, especially oil and gas. After squeezing Venezuela, attention has shifted to Iran. For years, Israel’s Mossad and the CIA have reportedly operated inside the country – some even call it “Operation Mosaddegh 2.0”, after the 1953 coup with the CIA and Britain’s MI6. Kurdish militias are said to have had outside help, and during protests some have fired on police and security forces.

Media rhetoric has also hardened, with Iran’s rulers described in increasingly extreme terms.

But Iran isn’t Syria, Lebanon or Venezuela. A single decisive strike is unlikely to bring regime change. Many Iranians are tired of corruption and incompetence, but a return to monarchy doesn’t ring true for most; the late Shah’s son is widely seen as too close to foreign interests.

If a joint attack happens, a long period of instability is more likely than a tidy transition. We could see nationwide chaos and a new wave of migration towards Europe. Alongside routes from post-Libya Africa, an “Iranian gate” from parts of Asia could open. A collapse in Iran could trigger a “war of all against all” and levels of poverty hard to imagine in a country of many tens of millions.

The shock wouldn’t stop at Iran’s borders. The wider Middle East would be further unsettled. Fighting with Kurdish and Baloch militias could ramp up. Tensions over Iranian Azerbaijan – with its large Azeri population – could pull in Azerbaijan, and Turkey would likely back its ally. Some places might stay relatively stable – especially oil-rich regions where international energy companies and their security teams would have strong reasons to keep order. We’ve seen some of that in Iraq and Libya.

Because of Iran’s size, history and strategic weight, the turmoil could be on a new scale. A determined resistance is likely, and extremist violence could spread beyond the region. Efforts to choke China’s access to diverse energy supplies may also push Moscow to act more boldly: if China leans more on Russian oil and gas to fuel its vast economy, the Kremlin will gain fresh money for war and military build-up.

Even Iranians who oppose their government are unlikely to accept a long foreign presence. Pressure would grow on NATO countries to send troops. Britain would almost certainly be among the most involved, and domestic politics across Europe would come under strain. Meanwhile, China – feeling the squeeze – could drop its “smile diplomacy” and test Washington over Taiwan, calculating that the US can’t do everything at once.

For Catholics, the moral contours are clear. The Church’s just war tradition insists on rigorous criteria: just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, proportionality, and last resort. Pre-emptive or punitive strikes that imperil vast numbers of civilians and destabilise a region fail that test. Human life and dignity must not be collateral to geopolitical manoeuvre.

If Afghanistan stretched US capabilities, Iran would be a far bigger test. Technology alone wouldn’t win it; large numbers of troops would be needed. “Divide and rule” wouldn’t easily work in a society with Iran’s cohesion and deep civilisation. The most likely result is a long,

bloody war with global consequences – above all for civilians, whose lives and dignity would suffer most.

And yet, while all this brews, the UK media consumed with Andy Burnham and the Chagos Islands, and Europe is busy with side-shows like the chatter over Greenland's "independence" – another story, and largely a distracting propaganda piece.

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 Johan Theresa MacPherson (2021), Mary McDonald (2016), James Campbell (1999), Maura Cooper (2016) **and all those whose anniversaries fall around this time.**

News and Events

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

Artem and Oleksii: Their many contributions to our church, hall, and chapel house are far too numerous to list, and I remain deeply grateful for everything they've done.

Would you like to join me in showing appreciation? I have left the basket out for anyone who didn't have the opportunity to make donation last Sunday – your gift will be sent on to Artem and Oleksii, helping them get comfortably established in their new surroundings. Thank you for your generous support!

Cleaning rota: there are still spaces on the church cleaning rota.



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