

PARISH BULLETIN

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

Ceann Loch Chille Chiarain

19th July 2026

The 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

St. Kieran's, Campbeltown, Kintyre

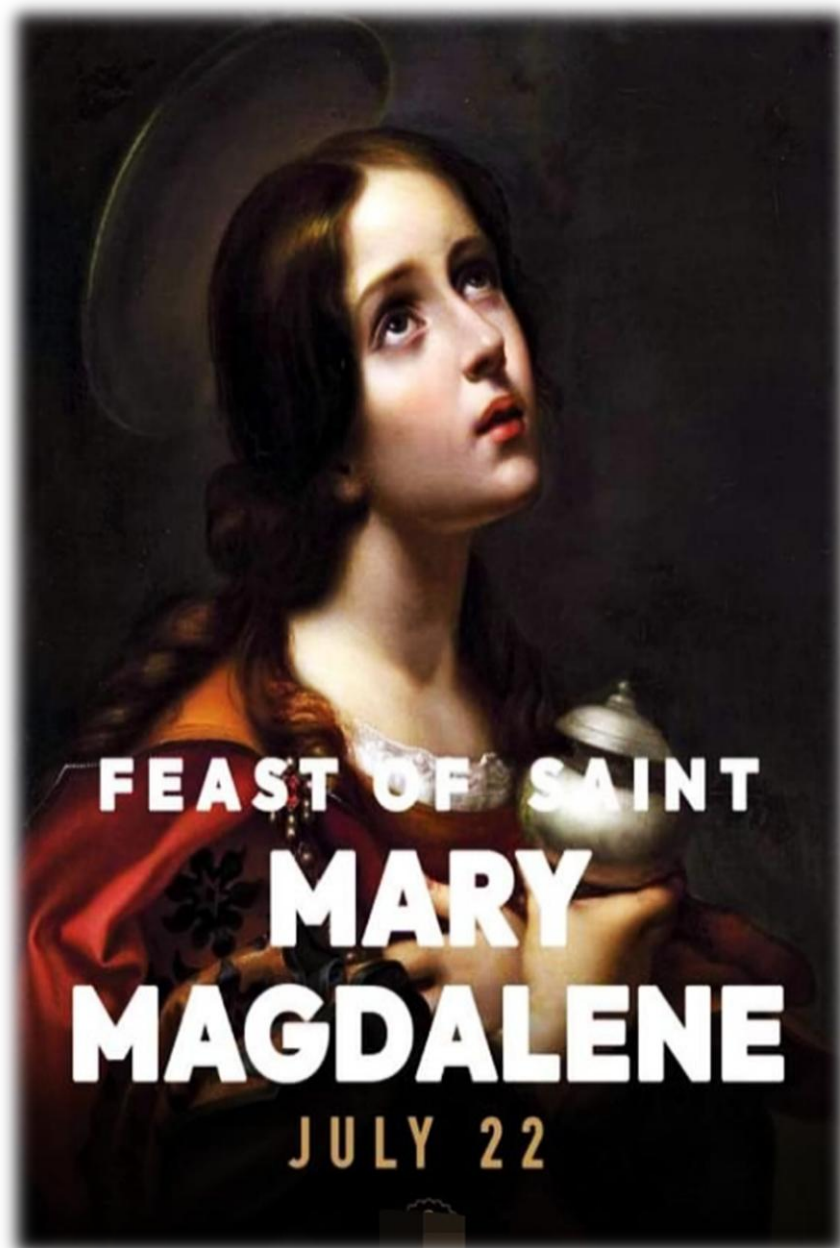
Week 16 of Ordinary Time

Tuesday: Holy Mass, 6pm

Wednesday: Adoration and Mid-morning Prayer, 9.30am; Holy Mass, 10am

Coffee and Discussion Group: 10.30am

Friday: Mid-morning Prayer, 9.50am; Holy Mass, 10am



Hymns/Music for Sunday

Proclamation

82 Christ is made the sure foundation

Offertory

158 Gifts of bread and wine

Communion music

Възвеличай, о, душа моя – Magnify, oh my Soul

Post Communion

Sheet Be still for the presence of the Lord

Recessional

147 Forth in the peace of Christ we go

Next weekend:

Saturday, 25th of July, Vigil Mass, 6.00pm

Sunday, 26th of July, 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Holy Mass, 10.00am.

Sacrament of Reconciliation: Saturday 17.30-17.50 or anytime on request.

St. Columba Episcopal Church, Bridgend, Isle of Islay

19th July: **Holy Mass, 4pm**

2nd August: **Holy Mass, 4pm**

Psalm response

O Lord, you are good and forgiving.

Gospel acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.

*I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
you have revealed the secrets of the kingdom to little children.
Alleluia.*

Communion Antiphon

*The Lord, the gracious, the merciful,
has made a memorial of his wonders;
he gives food to those who fear him.*

Take Five

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

MONDAY OF WEEK 16

20 JULY 2026

No qualifications needed

The scribes and Pharisees were “formally trained” religious leaders, and they took offence with this upstart Jesus. Without degree or pedigree, he appeared out of nowhere (or so it seemed) and began teaching with authority. They wanted to “see his papers,” to be given some proof, and then they would believe him. The operative phrase here is “and then.” How many times in our own faith journey have we uttered that qualifier? Help me get well, “and then” I will believe; find me a job, “and then” I will have faith; answer my prayers, “and then” I will believe. Isn’t it time we dropped the qualifier, stopped demanding signs, and let the truth of Jesus’ message speak for itself in our hearts? As Blessed Benedetta Bianchi Porro says, “For those who believe, everything is a sign!”

Today’s readings: Micah 6:1-4, 6-8; Matthew 12:38-42. *“The Lord requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.”*

TUESDAY: OPTIONAL MEMORIAN OF SAINT LAURENCE OF BRINDISI, PRIEST, DOCTOR

21 JULY 2026

A second language should be second nature

Perhaps the most remarkable quality of the 16th-century Franciscan Lawrence of Brindisi was his outstanding gift for languages. In addition to his native Italian, he could read and speak Latin, Hebrew, Greek, German, Bohemian, Spanish, and French. Few of us are blessed with such ability, but just about everyone can learn a second language. As technology shrinks the world, it becomes all the more important to reach across barriers that divide, and language is a big one. Hone your skills in a second language. Whether sharing the Good News or chatting with a neighbour, it’s the only catholic (universal) thing to do!

Today’s readings: Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Matthew 12:46-50. *“Shepherd your people with your staff . . . show us wonderful signs.”*

WEDNESDAY: FEAST OF SAINT MARY MAGDALEN

22 JULY 2026

Count on me

Mary Magdalene is the subject of much conjecture, but what is known about her for sure is that she was a sinner who became part of Jesus’ inner circle. She was also one of the few of his followers who stayed with him during his Crucifixion, and she was the first to find his tomb empty and the first to see him after his Resurrection. Her simple presence shows the extent of her love and devotion – she was there for him. How often do you show up for the people who need you?

Today’s readings: Song of Solomon 3:1-4a; Ps 63(62):2. 3-4. 5-6. 8-9. R2b; John 20:1-2, 11-18. *“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”*

THURSDAY: FEAST OF SAINT BRIDGET OF SWEDEN, PATRONESS OF EUROPE

23 JULY 2026

My other friend is a book

Any mother with a brood of eight children may look with longing at the contemplative life. In the early 14th century Bridget and Ulf made a happy couple, married at the ages of 14 and 18 respectively, but later in life with the children grown, the widow Bridget found herself ready for a career change. The contemplative Order of the Most Holy Saviour, or Bridgettines, gave any yearly surplus to the poor and kept their facilities simple. The one luxury was books: Each member of the order could have as many as she liked. By library card, e-reader, or bookstore, make a new friend and keep on learning.

Today’s readings: Galatians 2:19-20; John 15:1-8. *I am the vine; you are the branches.*

FRIDAY: OPTGIONAL MEMORIAL OF SAINT SHARBEL MAKHLOUF, PRIEST

24 JULY 2026

The saint of sitting

The ancient Maronite Christian community, with

its origins in Lebanon and now a 3.5 million-member worldwide church in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, has a strong monastic tradition, and one of its more well-known monks is Saint Sharbel. At 23 he entered the monastery of Our Lady of Mayfouq and spent the next 16 years in community life, but in 1874 he withdrew to a hermitage where he lived for the next 23 years. During this time many thousands of people visited him for his spiritual counsel, and after his death both Christians and non-Christians made pilgrimages to his tomb, which became associated with miracles. Simply taking some time to stay prayerfully in one place is something easily lost in the modern world, but, as Saint Sharbel's life shows, it can have great power.

Today's readings: Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22, 7-8; Matthew 12:1-8. *"I say to you, something greater than the temple is here."*

SATURDAY: FEAST OF SAINT JAMES, APOSTLE

25 JULY 2026

Willing, ready, and able

How do you steel yourself for the tasks that lie ahead? A healthy supper, a good night's rest, and your lucky socks? The disciples had the supper and a nap before Jesus was arrested and the situation melted into chaos. Yet not long before, the "Sons of Thunder" James and John had hankered for positions of privilege in the future awaiting Jesus. How could they guess those "seats" would be crosses? James got one thing right: In 42 A.D. he was privileged to be the first apostle martyred. When you're sure you're ready, rise to the challenge.

Today's readings: 2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Matthew 20:20-28. *"Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They said to him, 'We can.'"*

Readings for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

A just judge might condemn us, but God's great might also enfolds great clemency.

Psalms 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16

God's forgiveness is quicker than divine anger, and so we lift our prayers in confidence.

Romans 8:26-27

We don't know how to pray or what to pray for, but the Spirit covers everything for us.

Matthew 13:24-43 or 13:24-30

"An enemy has done this": We have met him, and is he us?

Words on the Word

A Sacred Ache: Finding Hope in a Groaning World

A deep and restless groaning echoes through our modern world. We hear it in the anxiety over our planet, the anger in our politics, and the personal ache for meaning in our own hearts. In a world that often feels broken, it is easy to lose hope.

Yet, the Word of God, spoken through the Apostle Paul, gives us a divine lens to see this reality. This universal groaning is not the sound of death, but the sound of a world in labour, filled with the painful but powerful hope of a new birth.

Our Pain in God's Plan

Saint Paul makes a bold and certain declaration: **"the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."**

This is not a dismissal of our pain. God sees our every sorrow. Rather, this is the truth that puts our suffering in its proper place within His eternal plan. Our trials – illness, loss, and inner struggles – are temporary. The glory that awaits us in Christ is everlasting.

This is the Catholic virtue of hope in action. It is the confident trust that God's promises are true. When we unite our personal crosses to the Cross of Christ, our suffering is no longer meaningless. It becomes redemptive, a small share in His saving work, and it is utterly dwarfed by the promise of eternal life with Him.

A World Waiting with Us

This longing for wholeness is not just a human feeling. St. Paul reveals a profound mystery: **"The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth."** The sin of Adam and Eve did not just wound humanity; it fractured our relationship with the created world, subjecting it to decay and futility. The storms, the decay, and the disorder we see in nature are echoes of that first sin.

This truth gives ultimate meaning to our call to care for the environment. Creation is not a disposable object but a fellow victim of sin, waiting with us for liberation. Its destiny is tied forever to our own. The Catechism affirms that when we, the children of God, are fully redeemed in the resurrection, creation itself will be gloriously renewed as a **"new heavens and a new earth"** (CCC 1042-1050).

The Hope Within Us

Most powerfully, Saint Paul assures us that even we who have the Holy Spirit within us still groan. If you feel a deep ache for something more, do not think your faith is weak. That feeling is a holy sign. It is the Holy Spirit Himself within you, yearning for the completion of your salvation: **the resurrection of your body.**

We live in the sacred time of "already, but not yet." We have *already* been saved through Baptism, but we do *not yet* experience the fullness of heaven. This inner groaning is the holy tension of a soul that knows it was made for God but still lives in a fallen world.

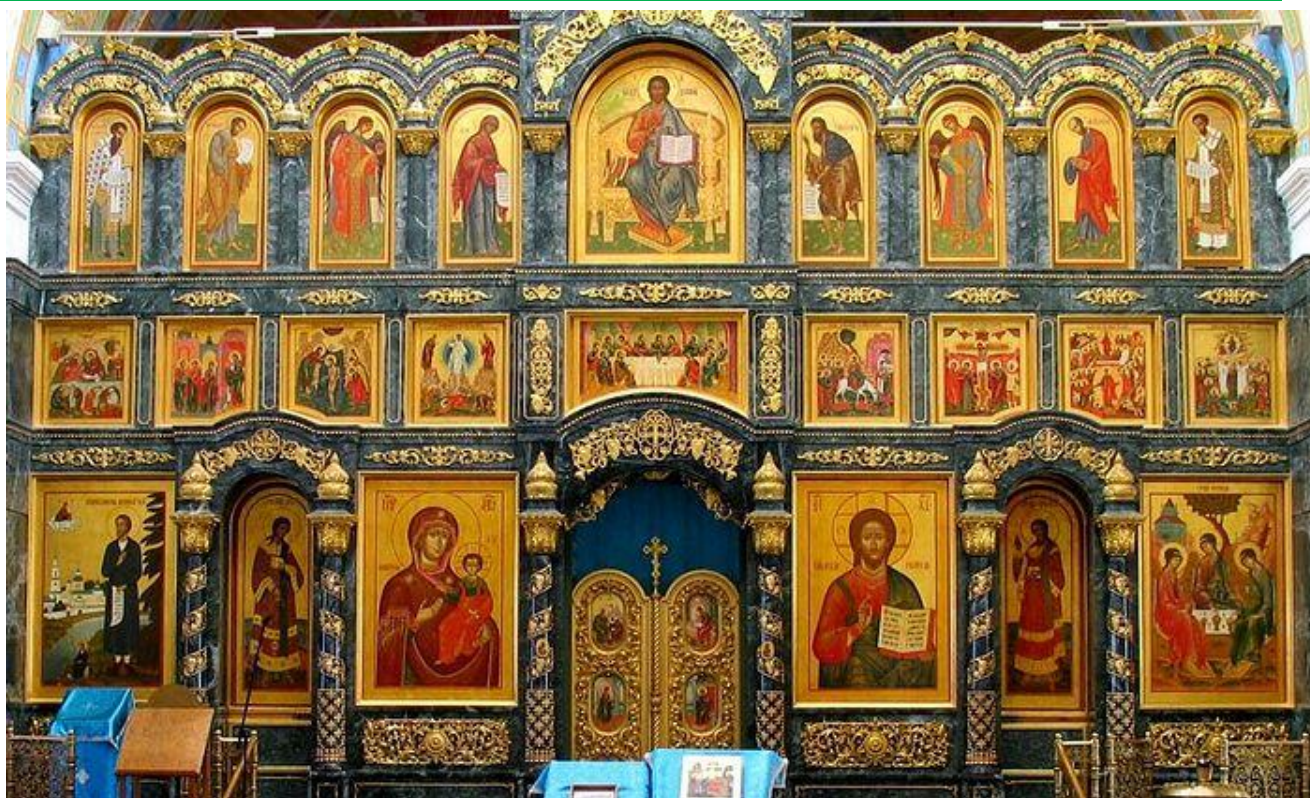
Let us, therefore, embrace this sacred ache. It is not the groan of despair, but the groan of childbirth. Let us face the challenges of our time not with fear, but with the steadfast hope of a child awaiting the glorious dawn of their Father's eternal Kingdom.

In Christ's love,
Fr Anthony

36 THE ICONOSTASIS

The iconostasis is a special place in every Eastern church. It symbolizes the presence of God and Heaven; it separates the altar area (sanctuary) from the area intended for the faithful (nave). The icons adorning the iconostasis allow one to experience the mystery of the Eucharist.

Initially, the element separating the sanctuary from the nave consisted of partitions or grilles, which over time began to be decorated with icons. In this form, the iconostasis, through Byzantine culture, was adopted in Rus'.



The classical layout of a Rus' iconostasis includes five rows. A cross is placed at the top of the iconostasis. In the highest, fifth row, there are icons depicting the Old Testament patriarchs, with an icon of the Holy Trinity in the centre. The fourth row is intended for New Testament prophets. The third row is occupied by the Deesis and figures associated with this group: archangels, Fathers of the Church, and saints. The second row is made up of festal icons, depicting the most important feasts of the year – scenes connected with the life of the Mother of God and Christ. In the first row are the so-called local icons, dedicated to the saint patronizing the church, the Mother of God with the Child in the *Hodegetria* or *Eleusa* type, and Christ Pantocrator. The central axis of the first row is formed by the Royal Doors, intended only for the priest, symmetrically flanked by a pair of Deacon's Doors.

For most of the year, the Royal Doors are closed; they are opened only during services and during Paschal Week, when they remain open day and night, symbolizing the open Tomb of the Lord.

God's Guide

Relations with Angels: To Be Closer to Our Guardians

Chapter 2

UNITY IN GOD and MEETING WITH A GUARDIAN ANGEL – A TESTIMONY

In the times in which we live – the end times – that horned scoundrel, rascal, and traitor to God especially hates women, because they continually remind him of our beloved Mother Mary. Therefore men, in a special way and with all their hearts, should surround all women with prayer, and women should pray for protection to Archangel Michael, also supporting men in apostolic work. Let us stay together and support one another, Brothers and Sisters, uniting ourselves in the Lord Jesus, for such is His will. Amen!

**IF GOD
EVEN FOR A MOMENT,
WERE TO STOP
THINKING
ABOUT YOU
YOU WOULD CEASE
TO EXIST . . .**

At the end of 2012, I was in my room in the Pontificio Collegio Beda, praying in my room before supper, then as I left my room, I saw for several seconds, a meter in front of me, a beautiful, magnificent, ephemeral image of a person. Transparent and floating. To this day I do not know whether it was my Guardian Angel or another angel. It was an experience that will remain in my heart until the end of my life. From the time I was born anew until that memorable day, there was faith in my soul that angels exist. From that day until my departure from this world, it has become knowledge and absolute certainty of the existence of the spiritual world. I am aware that an angel stands beside me all the time, caring for me and supporting me. The angel I saw was about three meters tall, reaching almost to the ceiling. The angel's colour was incredibly beautiful: grey in various shades. Yet it was not the sort of grey or silver-grey that we know or see every day. I am not able to describe that colour in words as I would like. It was the colour of humility, however that may sound. I knew that it was humility, and then for the first time I

realized that such things also have colours. This is strange and very surprising to me. My mind is too narrow to reflect on it more deeply. So, it was grey in various shades, the colour of humility. The angel shone with an extraordinary light, which I also cannot describe in human words. I can only say that it was not the sort of light we have in a bulb, a flashlight, a lamp, any reflector, nor was it like the light given by the sun or the moon. It was something entirely different, and yet it was light. It was the radiance of Love penetrating my whole soul. In those seconds I felt as if I were transparent. This radiance awakened in my soul a joy different from the one we usually experience. This joy was the joy of the soul alone, interior, as if isolated. I had the impression that for those few seconds I was outside my body, or that I was looking for the first time in my life with the eyes of the soul. This too is indescribable, yet it was a wonderful experience of being immersed, as it were, in other senses and other understandings of which I had had no idea. At the very moment I saw him, the angel immersed me in an incomprehensible silence, although I know that the word “silence” does not define what I experienced then.

I once liked discovering new places when on holiday in Poland, and that has remained with me to this day but I don't have the energy anymore to do all the travelling. I went to Wieliczka. It is where the famous UNESCO world heritage site salt mines are. This is among the largest underground network of passages and chambers totalling 178 miles at a depth of over 1000 feet. Only 2% of the underground passages are accessible to the tourist. After descending dozens of meters. Sometimes you could stop motionless, listening to the extraordinary silence. Yet after a moment I discovered that I could hear my breathing, the sound of blood flowing in my ears, the swallowing of saliva, and so on. The silence in which that wonderful angel enclosed me, however, was somehow completely absolute, while at the same time pleasant, soothing, and unearthly. It was simply shocking that something so beautiful exists. Thus the colour of humility, the radiance of Love, and a state of silence beyond definition were the main things I remembered. What I saw, and these new sensations, were as if recorded within me so that I could now share them. I first saw the angel as if with my heart, with my soul, with inner sight – I truly do not know how to describe it – and then with my bodily eyes. It is amazing who we are, whom God has created us to be. This goes beyond our ideas about ourselves. We are someone far greater than we could ever comprehend in our human understanding, as the Sign of the Cross bears witness.

**IT IS MADNESS
TO BE SATISFIED
WITH KNOWING ONLY THE
TEMPORAL LIFE,
THINKING
THAT IT ENDS
IN THE COFFIN.**

READ THE BIBLE!

Fr Anthony



Around the World

The sometimes-missed news

TRUTH, PRUDENCE, AND PAINFUL HISTORIES

ZELENSKY ESCALATES

The European Parliament's recent resolution concerning Ukraine's naming of a military unit after the "Heroes of the UPA" is a study in diplomatic caution, but it falls short of moral clarity. The EP expressed only "regret," noting the decision is "sensitive and painful for Polish society" given the tens of thousands of Polish victims of the UPA during the Volhynian Massacres.

From a Catholic perspective, true reconciliation – a cornerstone of Christian social teaching – cannot be built on ambiguity. It demands a courageous pursuit of truth, what Saint John Paul II called a "purification of memory." While Ukraine's valiant struggle for survival understandably fuels a search for national heroes, both justice and prudence must guide this process. Glorifying an organization responsible for the systematic slaughter of innocent civilians is a grave moral misstep that wounds the memory of the dead and harms the living.

The resolution's failure to use the term "genocide" or demand accountability is a disservice to the victims. As Polish MEPs noted, Croatia was required to distance itself from the Ustaše regime before EU accession, setting a clear standard of historical integrity. Solidarity with Ukraine in its just war is a moral imperative, but it cannot require abandoning the truth about past atrocities. A lasting peace between neighbours must be founded on justice.

FRENCH ELEGANCE

LE PEN'S STAR

A French court's decision to shorten the ban on Marine Le Pen seeking public office clears a path for her presidential candidacy, despite a conviction for the improper employment of parliamentary assistants. While the sentence and the requirement to wear an electronic bracelet remain obstacles, the former National Rally leader has signalled her intent to run, with her successor's endorsement.

This situation presents a significant moral question. From the perspective of Catholic social teaching, public office is a form of stewardship – a sacred trust granted for the service of the common good, not personal or political gain. A conviction for misusing public funds, which are derived from the labour of the people, strikes at the very heart of this principle.

While the legal system has determined a penalty, voters are left to grapple with the ethical implications. The narrative of being a "victim" of the system, as some commentators note, sidesteps the crucial issue of accountability. True leadership requires integrity and a clear admission of wrongdoing when trust is broken. This case forces a necessary reflection on whether legal eligibility alone is a sufficient measure for a nation's highest office, or if a proven commitment to justice and truth is the more essential standard.

We Read Pope Leo



When we imitate Christ, our path is not a tormenting asceticism: it is a school of freedom.

God always loves us first. The beauty of the sea, of this island, and of your faces is a reflection of His gratuitous initiative: love precedes us, embraces us, and gathers us together. I am grateful to the Lord that I can visit you, following in the footsteps of Pope Francis, who on July 8,

2013, chose to come to Lampedusa during his first journey as the Successor of Peter. (...) I have come to thank you, brothers and sisters of Lampedusa, for the closeness that many of you have chosen to show. The miracle of compassion has happened anew: "When he saw him, he was moved with compassion"; this is an inner revolution that draws out of us God's sensitivity and broadens our thoughts, our hearts, and our lives. I thank the volunteers, the associations gathered in the "Forum Lampedusa Solidale," the civil institutions, the Coast Guard, the mayors and successive administrative authorities; I thank the deacons, priests, religious, doctors, psychologists, educators; I thank the services responsible for security and all those who, with or without the gift of faith, have chosen to love together. Yes, because among you love has taken on an organized form, that love whose compassion, seeing a brother at sea, is like the first stirring, like a deep summons to dare to do what you would never have imagined. I greet the migrants present here: they themselves have not only received help, but many times have shown solidarity along their journey, like the poor who help those even poorer. Thank you, brothers and sisters, because in becoming neighbours there is nothing obvious, nothing automatic. (...) Because of its geographical position and institutional form, Europe is in a position to face the crisis in this area in a comprehensive way: by including first aid within a long-term strategic plan capable of welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants, while at the same time working for development so that no one is forced to emigrate.

Visit to Lampedusa, July 4, 2026.

How can the weight of the cross be "light" and "sweet"? For one reason only: because the Lord carries it first and together with all of us, never leaving us alone in what burdens us. As the true Teacher, Jesus takes upon Himself humanity wounded by evil in order to care for it. The wisdom He gives us is therefore a message of salvation, and His yoke raises us up from every fall. When we imitate Christ, our path is not a tormenting asceticism: it is a school of freedom, which takes seriously the drama of history and always illumines its meaning (...). Indeed, only in the cross of Jesus is evil redeemed; only in His Passion does our mortal weariness find consolation and liberation.

In captivity, Christ is liberation. Under the scourge of war, Christ is hope. In the hour of sin, Christ is forgiveness.

Angelus, July 5, 2026.

In order to build a civilisation of love, we must practice dialogue. It is the principal instrument of coexistence among persons and among nations, and an alternative to open conflict. Pius XII already recalled this on the threshold of the Second World War, when he said that nothing is lost by peace, whereas everything may be lost by war, and that people should begin speaking with one another again, because a sincere and persevering exchange of views always opens the possibility of finding an honourable solution. Dialogue is an ordinary dimension of human life and does not concern only relations between states. It is a matter of acquiring an attitude capable of building bonds of fraternity, born of listening, of a sincere gaze, and of time given (...). For if we experience an authentic encounter with another person – with one who is different, a foreigner, a migrant – then it becomes much more difficult even to imagine war.

Encyclical Magnifica humanitas, nos. 219-220.

TESTIMONY

Saint Sharbel's "Signature"



Saint Sharbel [whose feast day is on Friday] was completely unknown to me until, in an extraordinary way, he entered the life of our family.

On the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2015, my wife and I were on a retreat with our Neocatechumenal community. It was a time meant for spiritual renewal, a brief respite from the daily rhythm of life while our children were safe at home with a childminder. During one of the sessions, the catechist spoke words that would soon echo with a terrifying and profound significance.

“If you had the spirit of Jesus Christ,” he said, “and something difficult happened – you lost your job, you were robbed – you would leave here saying: ‘Glory to You, Lord Jesus. I thank You for this, because You are doing something new for me.’”

The words struck me as a powerful, if challenging, ideal. We broke for a short recess, and I was still mulling them over when my phone rang. It was our daughter, Anna. Her voice was a frantic, broken torrent of words. I could barely understand her, but I caught the most important ones: our son, Paul, wasn't breathing.

We jumped into the car, my heart pounding against my ribs. On the frantic drive home, the horrifying story came together in pieces. Paul had been playing in a large pile of sand behind our house, a favourite spot where he loved to dig tunnels. When Ania called the younger children for dinner, everyone came running except Paul.

He had fallen backwards into one of his own tunnels. In an instant, the heavy, damp sand collapsed, burying him completely. All that remained visible were his two small feet, sticking out from the mound.

Ania, alarmed by his absence, searched everywhere – the back garden, the neighbours', his grandmother's house. She passed the sand pile several times, never imagining the horror that lay just beneath the surface. After what felt like an eternity, but was likely several long minutes, she finally noticed his feet.

Her scream for help pierced the evening air. A neighbour, who was usually operating loud machinery, happened to be on a break. He heard her cry and came running. Together, they dug frantically, pulling Paul from his premature grave. By the time they unearthed him, an estimated 17 minutes had passed. The neighbour immediately began CPR, but Paul remained lifeless.

When the ambulance arrived, the paramedics worked swiftly, intubating him. A helicopter was called to transport him to a specialised hospital. I will never forget the look on the flight doctor's face as he turned to us before take-off. He gently suggested we say goodbye to our son.

At the hospital, the news was bleak. Paul's condition was critical. The doctors, kind but direct, gave us no hope for his recovery. The lack of oxygen for such a prolonged period had likely caused irreversible brain damage.

While Paul lay in the paediatric intensive care unit, my wife and I entered a spiritual ICU of our own. We stayed with a wonderfully hospitable couple from the local Neocatechumenal community, Matt and Marge. They opened their home and their hearts to us, but their spiritual support was not the gentle, consoling kind I expected.

On that first dreadful day, Mark insisted we go to Mass. I didn't want to go. I was angry, broken, and terrified.

"My son is dying," I told him, my voice thick with grief.

"What are you worried about?" he replied, with an almost jarring certainty. "Christ has risen!"

His words felt like a slap in the face. It irritated me beyond belief. Here I was, facing the greatest tragedy of my life, and he was hitting me with theology! But in my anger, a painful truth was laid bare: my own profound lack of faith. I knew the words of the Creed, but in the face of real suffering, did I truly believe in the Resurrection?

In the days that followed, a network of people praying assembled for Paul. His school, our community, and communities everywhere began to pray. I could feel it. I would wake in the morning, crushed by the weight of despair, and feel a strange buoyancy, as if the prayers of hundreds were physically lifting me up. I was beginning to learn what faith felt like.

Our community priest, Fr. Luke, suggested we choose a specific saint to intercede for Paul. We collectively decided on Saint Sharbel, the great Lebanese hermit and miracle-worker.

We spent our days at Paul's bedside, praying, talking to him, reading to him, acting as if he could hear every word. But each evening, we had to leave by 8 p.m., returning to the silence and the struggle.

One afternoon, I had a terrible confrontation with the consultant. She told me, with clinical

finality, that if Paul survived at all, he would be “like a little plant.” The phrase shattered what little composure I had left.

Shaken, I went back to Mark and Marge’s house and poured out the story, expecting sympathy. Instead, Mark took me aside. His words were like steel.

“Listen, Pete,” he said firmly. “If she tells you he is going to die, then that is probably what will happen. Your job now is to show your family that you believe this is a good from God. You have to pull yourself together.”

That night was my Gethsemane. I wrestled with God, feeling like Abraham on Mount Moriah, commanded to sacrifice his only beloved son. I raged, I wept, I bargained. How could this be a “good”? How could God ask this of me? The catechist’s words from the retreat haunted me: “Glory to You, Lord Jesus. I thank You for this...” Could I say that? Could I mean it?

Sometime in the dark hours before dawn, a profound peace settled over my soul. The struggle ceased. In an act of pure, agonizing will, I surrendered. I gave Paul back to God. If He truly wanted to take him, I would accept it. I began to think about the funeral, to plan the readings. I had made my sacrifice.

Normally, visiting hours began at 1 p.m. But the next morning, around 9 a.m., the hospital called, asking us to come in immediately. This is it, I thought. This is the end.

As we rushed to the hospital, Fr. Luke arrived from our hometown. He had brought with him a relic and the holy oil of Saint Sharbel. We went straight to Paul’s room, and Fr. Luke anointed my son’s head with the oil, praying for the saint’s intercession.

An hour later, Paul opened his eyes.

He was awake. He was alert. He looked around the room and then pointed to a spot on the wall.

“Dad,” he kept repeating, his voice weak but clear. “Dad, he is there!”

He saw Saint Sharbel.

The doctors were stunned. Medical examinations, scans, and tests all came back with the same impossible conclusion: Paul was perfectly healthy. There was no brain damage. No lingering effects. Nothing. He was completely normal.

Praise be to the Lord, who, through the powerful intercession of a saint, gave us back our son.

Today, as I write this testimony, Paul is a happy, healthy 11-year-old boy. The only physical trace of his ordeal is a mysterious, faint mark on the back of his head, almost like a scar from a surgery that never happened. I sometimes think of it as Saint Sharbel’s signature, a small reminder of the day heaven touched earth for our family.

I often think back to the catechist’s words on that retreat. I now understand them not as a pious platitude, but as the deepest truth of our faith. In the heart of our greatest suffering, God was truly doing something new. He was teaching a father to believe.

Pete

How did the idea of the Crusades take shape?

The religious motive – that is, love for the Holy Land as the earthly homeland of Christ and reverence for His Tomb, the first witness of the Resurrection – lay at the deepest foundations of the calling of the Crusades and of their enduring popularity through the centuries.



Émile Signol, Saint Bernard Preaching the Second Crusade at Vézelay, March 31, 1146.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux – Doctor of the Church and great promoter of the Second Crusade in the first half of the twelfth century – wrote: “Hail, holy city, which the Most High consecrated as His dwelling, through which and in which this generation shall be saved. Hail, city of the great King, in which new and joyful wonders have never been lacking... Hail, promised land, which, flowing with milk and honey, provides nourishment and medicine – formerly for your inhabitants, today for the whole world. Most excellent land, which received the heavenly seed from the granary of the Father’s heart, bore fruit in an abundance of martyrs, and then sent forth across the whole earth a harvest of the faithful from every nation.”

Love for Jerusalem and the Holy Land understood in this way was the cause of the revival, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, of the pilgrimage movement from the West to the earthly homeland of Christ. Its particular intensification fell in the years around 1000 and 1033 – the millennium of Christ’s birth and the millennium of His Passion and Resurrection. Pilgrims were often exposed, already within the Holy Land, to attacks by Muslims, and, moreover, they could see with their own eyes what Muslim rule over the Holy Places meant in practice.

At the beginning of the eleventh century, by order of Caliph Al-Hakim, the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was destroyed. These devastations were seen by pilgrims from the Latin West, who were arriving in the Holy Land in ever greater numbers. For example, in 1065, more than ten thousand pilgrims arrived there in a single pilgrimage under the leadership of Bishop Günther of Bamberg.

The revival of the pilgrimage movement from the West to the Holy Land coincided with the maturation within Latin Christendom of two important processes without which the idea of the Crusades could not have arisen: the movement for the reform of the Church and the emergence of the ethos of Christian knighthood.

Every crusade was proclaimed by the pope. At the words of successive bishops of Rome, knights from all over the West – from Scotland to Sicily, from Portugal to Norway and Poland – “took

the cross.” Yet this could not have been imagined in a situation in which the bishops of Rome had been deprived of the authority due to the successors of the Prince of the Apostles.

The ninth and tenth centuries were the “dark centuries” of the West, marked not only by the progressing decline of the Carolingian monarchy, but also by a radical lowering of the authority of the bishop of Rome, who at that time became an object in the game played by powerful Roman families. In addition, serious vices and sins were spreading among the clergy: simony, nepotism, and in many cases licentiousness. The Church therefore needed reform in capita et in membra – in head and members. Renewal was accomplished through holiness and a return to tradition.

In 911 the Abbey of Cluny was founded, which over the following decades became the chief centre of renewal not only for the entire congregation of Benedictine monasteries, but also for all Latin Christianity.

The abbots of Cluny in the tenth and eleventh centuries – Saint Odo, Saint Odilo, Saint Majolus, and Peter the Venerable – were not only symbols of the renewal of the work of Saint Benedict, but also of the renewal of the whole Church in membra. It is not without significance for people of our time that the reformers of Cluny also regarded the restoration of the beauty and splendour of the liturgy as an indispensable element in the renewal of the entire Church.

Equally characteristic and worth remembering is the fact that precisely within the Cluniac milieu in the first half of the eleventh century there first appears the idea of bringing armed assistance to Christians fighting against Islamic aggression. In this context, writers associated with Cluny pointed to the fate of the Spanish kingdoms undertaking the work of the Reconquista. The culmination of the renewal movement was the rebirth of the Church in capita.

Beginning in the mid-eleventh century, successive pontificates led to the renewed strengthening of the authority of the Apostolic See as an unquestioned authority for all the faithful of the Roman Church.

A breakthrough came with the reign of Blessed Leo IX (1046–1054), associated with the so-called Lotharingian circle of Church renewal, and Saint Gregory VII (1073–1085), associated with Cluny. From this centre also came Blessed Urban II – the continuator of the reforming work of his predecessors and the creator of the First Crusade.

Successive popes undertook the task of systematically cleansing the Church of the plagues caused by the moral degradation found among some clergy; a degradation rooted not only in entanglement in sin, such as simony, but also in excessively close ties with secular power, that is, with the empire.

Freeing the Church from the latter was one of the chief achievements of the reforming popes. A decisive step in this regard was the decision of Pope Nicholas II in 1059 – still binding today – which entrusted the election of the bishop of Rome solely and exclusively to the college of cardinals gathered in conclave.

Saint Gregory VII remained unyielding in defending the Church against the claims of secular power. He paid for his steadfastness with exile from Rome, to which he never returned, dying in Salerno; yet this perseverance in the face of opposition brought final victory.

At the moment when the First Crusade was called, papal Rome had shown itself to be an uncompromising opponent of the moral evil affecting some men of the Church and an equally uncompromising defender of the Church’s independence. The voice of the bishop of Rome was therefore heard, because it was not merely the voice of an office, but also a credible voice.

At the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries, a new ethos of knighthood developed within Latin Christendom, understood as “the knighthood of Christ.” At that time the term *miles Christi* no longer meant – as it had earlier – a monk engaged in a spiritual struggle. It increasingly began to mean a knight drawing his sword in defence of the Church or in defence of Christians threatened by Islamic aggression.

It is worth emphasizing the great importance of the Church’s work in forming the ethos of Christian knighthood. From the end of the tenth century, bishops, chiefly in France, initiated “Truces of God” (*treuga Dei*), which effectively limited local wars between feudal lords arising from the weakness of royal power. The *treuga Dei* were concluded for the period of the great feasts of the Church, and were systematically extended, for example to cover the whole of Lent. On this occasion, a new interpretation of the concept of the “knight of Christ” was spread from church pulpits: one who was not only brave, but also obedient to the calls of the shepherds of the Church.

Their calls – it must be recalled here once again – would not have found the proper response if the Church had not proven, through its own process of self-purification, that it could make demands not only of others. Once again we see the interweaving of these two processes: the Gregorian reforms, the rise of the Christian knightly ethos, and the Crusades.

The sermon of Urban II delivered at Clermont in 1095, recorded by Fulcher of Chartres, in which the pope called the knighthood of the West to take part in the crusade, is in a sense a résumé of the vision of Christian knighthood that the Church had been teaching for several decades: “Let those who once were robbers now become knights of Christ; let those who once fought against brothers and relatives now fight justly against barbarians; let those who once were mercenaries for a few coins now obtain an eternal reward; let those who once desired to risk their life and soul now wage battle for a twofold honour.”

It should also be noted that the influences of Eastern Christianity had no small impact on the emergence of this knightly ethos within Latin Christendom. Precisely at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries, one can observe in the West a true renaissance of the cult of warrior saints, the great majority of whom are connected with the tradition of Eastern Christianity.

It is enough to mention figures such as Saint George, Saint Maurice, Saint Theodore, and Saint Procopius. One may say that to a large extent it was from Eastern Christians that the “Latins” learned who the *miles Christi* should be in practice.

In my opinion

The Hidden Epidemic: A Spiritual Sickness in a Connected World

Loneliness is a misfortune which in the twenty-first century has reached epidemic proportions. Thousands of people live with the crushing sense that they are important to no one, that no one cares about their fate.

We live in a world of constant communication, with more ways to connect than ever before. Yet, for many, a deep feeling of isolation has become a part of daily life. This is the great paradox of our time: we are surrounded by people, but we have never felt more alone.

This isn't just the loneliness of someone who lives by themselves. It's the quiet pain felt by a spouse in a loveless marriage, or a child who feels more like a burden than a blessing to their parents. It is a loneliness of the heart.

This growing problem was recognised by Pope St. John Paul II, who warned that behind a

surface of material comfort, many children were growing up in a sad loneliness. He noted: *"...with no one who would lovingly show them the right path and provide proper moral upbringing. Left to themselves, they usually find their main point of reference in television, which often promotes patterns of life that are unreal or demoralized..."*

This deep, internal ache can become so unbearable that people are willing to break God's laws to escape it. A person might think, "I have to have someone close to me," even if it means destroying another family's marriage.

This epidemic of loneliness is a key driver behind many of society's most visible struggles. These are not just moral failures; they are often desperate and misguided attempts to fill an empty space inside.

- Promiscuity: A frantic search for closeness, even if it only lasts for a moment.
- Drug Addiction: An escape into a fantasy world where the feeling of being alone temporarily disappears.
- Violence and Gangs: An attempt to matter to someone and to escape being invisible, even if it is through fear and intimidation.

How did we become so vulnerable to this spiritual sickness? The answer is simple: the curse of loneliness grows from everything that destroys authentic love.

Modern society promotes many good values, such as good manners, tolerance, and respect for human rights. But these virtues become a threat when we believe they are a substitute for real love.

- Tolerance that stops us from caring about another person's spiritual well-being – even our own child's – is not a virtue. It is indifference.
- Good manners that simply teach us how to be polite while remaining cold and distant are just a mask.
- Human rights become twisted when the term is used to defend an action that harms another human being.

When authentic love – what the Church calls charity – disappears, the world becomes a colder, more inhuman place. We must not only critique the world, but also look at our own part in it. When we advise young people on their careers, how often do we suggest that serving others should be a primary goal? Cursed loneliness is not just about carrying my own burden alone; it is about only carrying my own burden.

For centuries, our culture has tried to build a world of virtue and happiness without God. The 19th-century Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz gave a warning that still rings true today:

*You say: "Let men forget their God,
If virtue and their land they laud."*

*The fool cries: "Let the mountain spring run dry,
So long as city pipes my thirst supply."*

The modern plague of loneliness comes from our attempt to live as if God does not exist. But we are made in God's image, and we cannot change that fundamental truth. It should be no surprise that we suffer when we try to live in a way that goes against our very nature.

Through this pain, we can rediscover a core truth about ourselves. As the future Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, wrote, man's whole existence is a cry for a relationship with another. We are not made to live only for ourselves.

A lonely person rightly seeks a connection with another human being. But even the best human relationships point to something more. Spouses in a long and loving marriage often find that their deep unity still feels mysteriously incomplete. They realize that even the most beautiful earthly love cannot be the final goal of life. This experience echoes the famous words of Saint Augustine:

"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You."

This points to a final, crucial difference. The painful loneliness of the world is not the same as the chosen solitude of someone consecrated to God. A priest or religious sister who lives out their vocation faithfully is not a lonely person. Their solitude is filled with prayer and service for others. In this way, even the quiet life of a hermit becomes a profound gift to the world.

Ultimately, the ache of loneliness is a spiritual homing signal. It is the pain of a soul created for God that is trying to live without Him. The solution is not a new social programme, but a return to the source of all love, who alone can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart.

Prayer



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

Please keep in your prayers Please keep in your prayers John Giffen (2017) **and all whose anniversaries fall around this time.**

News and Events

Join us for tea and coffee in the hall after Sunday Mass. We warmly welcome visitors and would be delighted to share our hospitality with you. We hope to see you there!

COFFEE MORNING: is being planned for SATURDAY 15TH AUGUST. Anyone able to help in any way contact Cathy or Fiona Fox, or Fr Tony.

World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly: Everyone is warmly invited to a special celebration of the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly at Carfin Grotto on Sunday 26 July 2026. Bishop John Keenan will celebrate Holy Mass at 3:00pm, as we give thanks for the invaluable contribution of grandparents and elderly to our families, parishes and communities. Please bring your grandparents, family members and friends. All are welcome.

Pilgrimage for Life 2026: The annual Pilgrimage for Life will take place at Carfin Grotto on Saturday 1 August 2026. Led by Bishop John Keenan, the day offers an opportunity for prayer, reflection and witness to the dignity and sanctity of every human life. The programme includes: 12:00 noon – Holy Mass; 2:00pm – Eucharistic Adoration; 2:15pm – Stations of the Cross; 2:45pm – Divine Mercy Chaplet; 3:30pm – Holy Rosary; Families are especially encouraged to attend. All are welcome.



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