

The Diocese of Banjul NEWSLETTER

Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter

Diocese of Banjul Newsletter Writes to President Adama Barrow and His Team

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The Sacred Journey of Lent

The Season of Lent is a solemn and reflective period in the Catholic Church that precedes Easter, the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

It is a time of spiritual preparation, prayer, fasting, and repentance that serves as a reminder of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, where He fasted and prayed before beginning His public ministry.

The exact duration of Lent varies from year to year, but it typically lasts for 40 days, not including Sundays.

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ASH WEDNESDAY

God Loves Us Even In
Our Dustiness



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New Constitution Still in Coma *Why Our Dream of Freedom Remains Elusive*

DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER

Our Mission and Vision

We entertain, we encourage, and we enlighten. More so, Diocese of Banjul Newsletter gives you the tools you need to feed your faith life, nurture our society and relationships, care for your family, and bring the light of Christ to others. We connect with our readers through personal stories of triumphs and struggles, joys and challenges, and the lighter side of Christian living.

Dioocese of Banjul Newsletter is a source of support and encouragement for our society, especially those who love their faith, those who struggle with their faith, and those who long to learn more about the richness of Catholic tradition. More so, we strive to build a healthy society for the welfare of all.

Dioocese of Banjul Newsletter seeks the positive in the world and in our Church. It emphasizes those things that our society is doing right and well, as a means of inspiring and encouraging others to do the same. It is hope-filled, optimistic, and forward-looking. In the main, the newsletter moves our readers beyond inspiration and toward action, and gives them the information, tools, and resources they need to answer God’s call to holiness and bring the light of Christ to others.



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EDITORIAL HINT

New Constitution Still In Coma

Why Our Dream of Freedom Remains Elusive

The proposed new Constitution of The Gambia, also known as the Draft Constitution, was finalized in 2021, after a lengthy consultation process that involved various stakeholders, including citizens, civil society organizations, and international partners. However, the status of the proposed Constitution remains uncertain, and its adoption has been stalled due to several reasons.

The Draft Constitution, enshrining the principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, seeks to strengthen the independent institutions, such as the Judiciary, the Electoral Commission, and the Anti-Corruption Commission, to ensure accountability and transparency. The proposed Constitution guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association. It promotes decentralization and local governance, giving more autonomy to regions and municipalities; economic development and reduce poverty by empowering local communities through land reform, natural resource management, and social services. Despite its progressive features, the proposed Constitution faces significant obstacles to its adoption. Despite earlier commitments to reform, some politicians have been criticized for not doing enough to expedite the adoption of the proposed Constitution. Why is the proposed Constitution being suppressed?

Many believe the Legislators and the Executives are hesitant to surrender some of the entrenched powers and privileges in the current 1997 constitution. There is also a perception that many Gambians are not fully aware of the content and implications of the proposed Constitution. This has led to concerns about the potential for misinformation and manipulation. Some politicians and interest groups may be resisting the proposed Constitution due to fear of losing their power, influence, or control over the people and the nation's resources.

Some argue that external actors, including foreign governments and institutions, are exerting pressure to keep the status quo and maintain the existing power dynamics. And, who are these so-called external forces? The 1997 Constitution, also known as the Transitional Constitution, was drafted under pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) following the military coup that overthrew President Jawara in 1994. This document contains several provisions that are perceived as limiting the rights and freedoms of Gambians. The transitional Constitution grants the President (both the former and the current) extensive powers, including appointment of some National Assembly members, the ability to dissolve the National Assembly, appoint the Cabinet without parliamentary approval, and declare a state of emergency. The document does not adequately provide for accountability mechanisms, allowing the officials of the state to operate with impunity.

The present Constitution provides for disproportionate representation in the National Assembly in favour of the ruling party. The Constitution also contains provisions that can be used to limit freedom of expression and the media.

On the other hand, the proposed Constitution aims to correct these shortcomings and establish a more inclusive, equitable, and participatory governance system.

However, without a clear commitment from the leadership, and the ruling coalition to adopt the new Constitution, the future of democratic reform in The Gambia remains uncertain.

THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER

APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

We have a small favor to ask. Many people are beginning to turn to the Diocese of Banjul Newsletter for vital, independent, and quality journalism. Therefore, readers around the world now need to support us financially.

We would like to invite you to join the myriad of readers who have taken the step to support us financially – keeping us open to all, and fiercely independent. In 2021, this support assisted in sustaining our work in diverse spheres. It enabled diligent, fact-checked, authoritative journalism to thrive in an era of falsehood, sensation, hype and breathtaking misinformation and misconception. In 2022, we will be no less active.

With no shareholders or billionaire owner, we can set our own agenda and provide trustworthy journalism that's free from commercial and political influence, offering a counterweight to the spread of misinformation. When it's never mattered more, we can investigate and challenge without fear or favour.

Unlike many others, Banjul Newsletter journalism is available for everyone to read, we do this because we believe in information equality. While others commoditize information, we seek to democratize it. Greater numbers of people can keep track of societal issues, understand their impact, and become inspired to take meaningful action.

If there were ever a time to join us, it is now.

Every contribution, however big or small, powers our journalism and sustains our future. Support the Banjul Newsletter for as little as any amount.

If you can, please consider supporting us with a regular amount each month. Thank you.

COVER STORY

Diocese of Banjul Newsletter Writes to President Adama Barrow and His Team

Dear Esteemed President Adama Barrow and Respected Members of the Gambian Leadership Team,

As we usher in the New Year of 2025, the Diocese of Banjul Newsletter extends heartfelt greetings and prayers for wisdom, strength, and unity in your leadership. The dawn of a new year brings renewed hope and an opportunity to reflect on the pressing challenges facing our nation and its families. It is with sincere concern and unwavering faith in your ability to lead that we write to you regarding issues that impact the security, well-being, and future of our beloved nation.

Across The Gambia, many families grapple with mounting difficulties in meeting basic needs. This stark reality calls us to reflect deeply on the moral purpose of governance: to serve the common good and uplift those most in need. Let the decisions made in 2025 echo the enduring principles of justice, compassion, and human dignity.

From ancient Greece to the modern era, philosophers have grappled with the purpose of governance. Aristotle viewed politics as the means to cultivate virtue and ensure human flourishing, while John Rawls emphasized fairness as the cornerstone of justice. The economist Amartya Sen reminds us that a nation's true wealth lies in the capabilities of its people. These perspectives converge on one profound truth: leaders are stewards of the collective good.

Sociologically, the family is the nucleus of society. A strong family system fosters community resilience, social stability, and national progress. Policies must strengthen intergenerational bonds and provide resources that allow families to thrive. Conversely, neglecting the family unit risks deepening social fractures, from youth unemployment to poverty cycles. Let 2025 be a year when Gambian families feel the tangible support of compassionate and inclusive governance.

The Religious Mandate for Justice and Compassion

The Gambia's cultural and spiritual heritage is deeply rooted in the principles of compassion and justice, upheld by Christianity, Islam, and indigenous traditions. The Christian scripture in Proverbs 31:8-9 urges, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Defend the rights of the poor and needy." Similarly, Islamic teachings on zakat highlight the moral duty of aiding the underprivileged. These values are echoed in the Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes our shared humanity and interdependence: "I am because we are."

In a world often driven by individualism, The Gambia can shine as a beacon of communal care and solidarity. Let this be a year when spiritual principles guide policies, fostering an economy and society that place human dignity at their core.

Lessons from History and the Path Forward

Our nation's history offers lessons in resilience and community solidarity but also cautions against the perils of

inequality and neglect. The colonial legacy of exploitation and the recent struggles with economic disparity remind us of the urgent need for policies rooted in equity and inclusion. Leaders who prioritize the needs of the vulnerable above personal or political gain leave a legacy that history celebrates.

We urge your administration to seize this pivotal moment to address the challenges that undermine our shared future. Let 2025 be remembered as the year The Gambia embraced fairness, transparency, and accountability to propel the nation toward a brighter and more inclusive tomorrow.

Principles for 2025

Policies must affirm the sanctity of life and ensure that no child, family, or community is overlooked. Addressing poverty and safeguarding the rights of the unborn and the underprivileged must remain a priority.

Strengthen family-oriented initiatives, including child support programs, affordable healthcare, and education funding. These are not acts of charity but investments in the nation's foundation.

A progressive tax system that places greater responsibility on those with higher incomes is vital. This approach reduces inequality and fosters social cohesion, aligning with both moral and democratic principles.

Essential programs addressing healthcare, nutrition, and poverty alleviation must be protected from budget cuts. Such measures are lifelines for vulnerable citizens and reflect the government's commitment to its people.

Tax policies should incentivize charitable acts, enabling organizations dedicated to helping the poor to thrive. A culture of giving strengthens the social fabric and promotes mutual care.

Open dialogue with civil society and accountability in governance are cornerstones of trust. Engage communities in decision-making processes to ensure policies reflect the needs and aspirations of the people.

We acknowledge the immense challenges you face in balancing competing priorities. Yet, we urge you to let compassion and justice guide your decisions. By prioritizing the common good and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, your leadership can inspire hope and unity across The Gambia.

The Diocese of Banjul Newsletter reaffirms its readiness to support you in this essential endeavor. We continue to keep you and your team in our prayers, trusting in your commitment to building a nation where every Gambian can thrive.

May the New Year bring wisdom, courage, and blessings to you and all those entrusted with the leadership of our nation.

Sincerely,
The Diocese of Banjul Newsletter

The Pope's Prayer Intentions 2025

FEBRUARY—For vocations to the priesthood and religious life

Let us pray that the ecclesial community might welcome the desires and doubts of those young people who feel a call to serve Christ's mission in the priesthood and religious life.

MARCH—For families in crisis

Let us pray that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts, even in their differences.

NEW YEAR MESSAGE 2025

A NEW JUBILEE YEAR OF GOD'S BLESSINGS AND GUIDANCE FOR HIS FAITHFUL PEOPLE

We welcome and celebrate every New Year because each year is a different and special period in our lives that offers us the opportunity to experience God's goodness, blessings, assistance, and guidance and grow in our various works of life. There is no year, in that respect, that is the same regardless of our situation and status in life.

We should not, consequently, take every New Year for granted without discovering the blessings and favours that God is offering us each year. This New Year is another special year but it is very unique because it is a Jubilee Year that His Holiness, Pope Francis designated a Jubilee Year of Hope in God who has poured out his love into our hearts through his Spirit. We are, therefore, invited to renew our faith, hope, and confidence in God during this Jubilee Year. So, my New Year's message in view of this year's extraordinary significance is: "**A New Jubilee Year of God's Blessings and Guidance for his Faithful People.**" As a good, generous, and merciful God, God has blessed, assisted, and guided us in the past. If we equally reaffirm our faith, hope, and love for him, we will experience his infinite blessings and guidance throughout this Jubilee Year. We should, for that reason, be very positive and confident as we begin the Year 2025 and be disposed to recognize and appreciate God's divine gifts in our various works of life. For, a Jubilee Year is always a year of God's favour, forgiveness, freedom, and redemption.

The origin and intention of a Jubilee Year for God's chosen people is fully explained in Lev. 25:8-14, 20-22. God's chosen people were required in this passage to observe a Jubilee Year every fifty (50) years. They were expected on the forty-ninth year before the Jubilee Year to blow the trumpet throughout the land on the tenth day of the seventh month of the year and declare the fiftieth year a



Jubilee Year. The year will then be a Holy Year for them when all the inhabitants of the land will be granted freedom. Their servants will be free to return to their families and properties. They will not sow or reap anything that grows on its own or gather grapes from untrimmed vines. They will eat what the land yields instead during the Jubilee Year. God's chosen people were forbidden in a Jubilee Year to retain their servants and cultivate the land. But they were assured by God that they will be nourished and sustained throughout the year when the land is uncultivated. He testified in verse 20-22 that he will command his blessings upon them that will bring fruits for years. A Jubilee Year was, therefore, intended to relieve God's people, their servants, and land. At the same time, to inspire them to depend on God's blessings and generosity in their lives. Our Pope's intention for this Jubilee Year of 2025 is to create, "a moment of genuine and personal encounter with Jesus, the door ... and be renewed in hope." But he clearly noted that, "hope dwells in the heart of each person as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite not knowing what the future may bring." We should also desire and hope for God's blessings and guidance during this Jubilee Year just as God's chosen people hoped in him in the Scriptures.

Since God created humanity in his image and likeness, he never ceased to bless his faithful people. He freely bestowed his blessings and favors on creation and humanity at different times in history. God is, therefore, the primary source of every blessing and good gift and he is generous with his divine gifts that his faithful people experienced in their lives. For, God's blessings and gifts do not solely depend on our condition, conduct, and actions in life. The psalmist clearly identified God as the source of all blessings. He said in Ps. 67:1 and 6, "may God be gracious to us and bless us and let his face shed its light upon us ... For, God our God has blessed us. May God still give us his blessings till the ends of the earth revere him." We should not, therefore, expect blessings and rewards from any other source, power, or agent but God who blesses his faithful people out of love. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* rightly noted in nos. 1078-1079, "blessing is a divine and life-giving action that originates from God, the Father. His blessing is both word and gift ... the whole of God's work is a blessing ... From the very beginning God blessed all living beings, especially, man and woman." We cannot, for that reason, devise, provide, or purchase our own blessings, in order to, be successful, healthy, intelligent, or rich because God is the source of all good gifts. We simply need to renew our hope, faith, and trust in God's benevolence and generosity and be disposed for his blessings and rewards during this Jubilee Year we are fortunate to witness in our lifetime.

As human beings, we are not always sure of what the future holds for us, especially, at the beginning of a New Year. We always have our fears, doubts, and uncertainties even when we look to the future in hope. Pope Francis fully acknowledged this in his Papal Bull *Spes Non Confundit* nos. 1. He said "the uncertainty about the future [often] gives rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt." But he strongly believed that, God's word helps us to find reasons to be hopeful so we should be guided by God's word in our journey through life. So, this Jubilee Year of Hope is both a year of God's blessings and God's guidance if we trust in God's goodness and generosity and be receptive to his message. We will experience and enjoy God's guidance and enlightenment throughout this New Year if we put into practice his divine word that is recorded in the Scriptures, proclaimed in the Church's liturgy, and revealed in the events and signs of our times. So, in times of doubts, uncertainties, and fear, we should seek and rely on God's guidance and assistance and be obedient to his inspiration and message for us. As Pope Francis rightly said in nos. 6 of his Papal Bull, "we are about to make a pilgrimage marked by great events, [but] God's grace precedes and accompanies his people as they press forward firm in faith, active in charity, and steadfast in hope." (Cf. 1Thess. 1:3) We should not be disappointed, as a result, because we will experience God's grace and guidance in this Jubilee Year.

When God inspires, guides, and blesses us, we should also express our gratitude, offering, and thanksgiving to him for his goodness and assistance because we do not deserve or merit God's favor, gifts, rewards, and inspiration. We should equally be grateful for God's blessings and guidance instead of being passive and indifferent. This Jubilee Year should, therefore, be a year of thanksgiving and appreciation when we cherish God's goodness and rewards and offer our praise and gratitude to him in the Eucharist we celebrate on Sundays and weekdays. This is clearly explained in nos. 1083 of the CCC that the dual dimension of the Christian liturgy [is] a

response of faith and love to the spiritual blessings the Father bestows on us. On the one hand, the Church united with her Lord and in the Holy Spirit blesses the Father for his inexpressible gift in her adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. On the other hand, the Church ... presents to the Father the offering of his own gifts and begs him to send his Spirit upon her offering, herself, and the faithful."

We should freely respond to God's blessings and guidance in this New Year by offering part of his gifts to him in the liturgy we celebrate. But we can also respond to God's goodness and generosity by sharing our spiritual and material gifts and riches with those who are yet to experience God's blessings and assistance in their lives. If we express our praise and gratitude to God in these ways and obey his word, we are assured in Deut. 28:1-6 that God will bless and enrich us more than we expect. He said, "blessed shall you be in the city and ... in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts ... Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out."

As we begin this New Jubilee Year of Hope, we are assured of God's blessings, guidance, assistance, and protection. For, God is the source of all good gifts and he is good, generous, and gracious to his faithful people. We should equally renew our faith, hope, and trust in God's love and benevolence throughout this Jubilee Year. At the same time, be disposed and willing to respond to the needs of others when we experience God's blessings and guidance in our lives. As we look forward to God's gifts during this Jubilee Year, we thank him for his special blessings and guidance on Rev. Fr. Reginald Gillooly C.S.Sp. our dear, dedicated, and admirable former parish priest of St. Peter's Parish, Lamin. He will honourably celebrate his centennial birthday anniversary on 15th January, 2025, that is, hundred years since he was born on 15th January, 1925. It is an exceptional milestone for a Spiritan religious missionary priest who was ordained on 15th July, 1951, arrived in The Gambia in 1952 and worked in Banjul, Bwiam, and Lamin until he finally returned to Ireland in October, 2006. We thank God for his legacy, exemplary life, pastoral ministry, service, and sacrifice in our country, The Gambia and we pray that God will grant him many more healthy, peaceful, and happy years ahead.

Our dear, distinguish, and noble Alma Mater St. Peter's Technical High School in Lamin, now St. Peter's Junior and Senior Secondary School will also celebrate its Golden Jubilee Year, that is, fifty years of its existence in September, 2025. I fervently wish all its Alumni at home and abroad, especially, the first set, that is, the class of 1975/76 and the staff members, especially, the pioneer staff a jubilant, exciting, and memorable celebration of the School's existence and achievements. We commend into God's hands those who have died, especially, Rev. Fr. Vincent Comer C.S.Sp, the founding principal of St. Peter's that God will reward them for their sacrifice and dedication. As the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Banjul, I wish you all, the priests, deacons, religious, lay faithful, our brothers and sisters in Christ, our President, His Excellency Adama Barrow and his family, our political and traditional leaders, our Muslim friends, and believers of other faiths, Gambians at home and abroad a very blessed, peaceful, prosperous, healthy, and memorable New Jubilee Year.

Your Servant in Christ,

Most Rev. Dr. Gabriel Mendy C.S.Sp.
Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Banjul, The Gambia.

Opinion



Concerns over The Gambian and Saudi Arabian Bilateral Labour Agreement for Domestic Workers

By Philip Saine

On Tuesday, 24 September, 2024, The Gambia National Assembly ratified a bilateral labour agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. According to the document, the purpose of the Agreement “is to recruit domestic workers from the Republic of The Gambia to legally work in Saudi Arabia”. The Signed Agreement specifies The Gambia’s responsibilities which include the following:

Article 5 - Provide qualified and medically fit domestic workers without derogatory records needed by Saudi Arabia according to job specification requirement. Ensure that prospective domestic workers are trained on housework in specialized institutes and have received orientations on Saudi Customs and Traditions and terms and conditions of the employment contract.

Article 7 – Settlement of Disputes - Any disputes arising from the agreement shall be settled amicably by consultation between both parties through diplomatic channels.

Threats & Risk:

Culture Shock & Language Barrier – Some individuals do not easily adapt to unfamiliar environments. Extreme socio-cultural variations may give rise to stress, confusion, disorientation, instability and ill-health. Proper orientation (*particularly on dress code*) is required for all selected workers, especially those that had never traveled abroad.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a Labour Office whose operations and practices are quite unlike that of The Gambia. Employment is usually through a Kafala/Sponsor Agent: meaning that the employer communicates directly with the government and other authorities on behalf of the employee. The employee has restricted or no access to the Labour Office. The Kafala/Sponsor has full control of the employee. The domestic worker would not be able to access services such as healthcare, immigration, rental agreement, vehicle ownership or licensing or seek other employment without the Kafala/Sponsor’s approval.

Exploitation & Abuse - It is not unknown for a domestic worker to be forced to comply with excessive work hours, beatings and even demands of sexual favours

by a Kafala/Sponsor. This can be a prolonged and painful experience. There would be little or no ability for the employee to communicate and report the issue. Therefore, the periodical monitoring of the worker cannot be understated.

Travelling Documents - Upon arrival in the Kingdom, the Kafala/Sponsor takes the passport or similar documents into his custody throughout the period of living in the Kingdom. The prospective employee must understand and mentally be ready for this. It goes without saying that the employee couldn’t do anything without the Kafala/Sponsor; and as such, a very cordial or servitude attitude is demanded.

Recommendations

The domestic worker should be attentive not to be tricked. A salary pay expressed in foreign currency namely Pound Sterling, Euro or US Dollars should be paid or its equivalent local currency. Payment in local currency should be correctly valued: Always insist on official exchange rates.

The employer must clearly specify the accommodation for the employee. A toilet room, kitchen or corridor is not a substitute for a bedroom. The room provided, therefore, must be conducive for sleeping.

The recruitment, hiring and placement agents must make an undertaking to monitor the safety and comfort of the employee. It is necessary to protect the employee’s dignity and virtue. This should be done directly or through the Gambian Embassy and avoid indirect monitoring. Establish a system of periodical communication with the employee and do not rely on third party or indirect communication; hear directly from the employee. There must also be evidence of monitoring on health and safety of the worker.

Working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be rewarding, providing religious fulfilments, enhance earnings and experience. This will happen if the Kafala/Sponsor is kind, decent and God-fearing. The employee may however, be confronted with unimaginable challenges if the Kafala/Sponsor is not of such character. The welfare of Domestic Workers, including drivers and gardeners, is of paramount importance and should concern all who participate in their recruitment.

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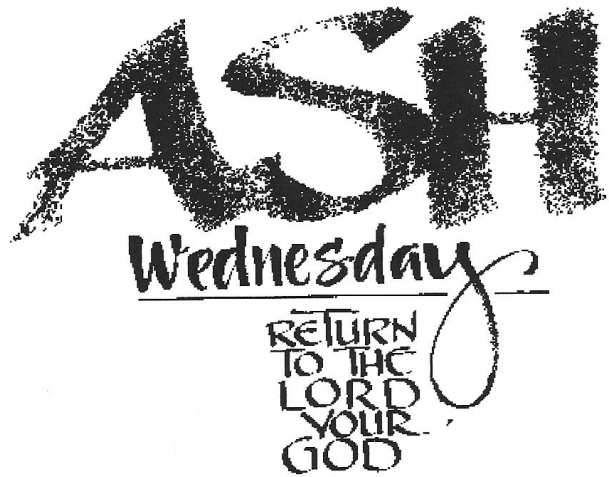
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The Sacred Journey of Lent

The Season of Lent is a solemn and reflective period in the Catholic Church that precedes Easter, the celebration of Christ's resurrection. It is a time of spiritual preparation, prayer, fasting, and repentance that serves as a reminder of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, where He fasted and prayed before beginning His public ministry. The term "Lent" is derived from the Old English word "lencten," which means "spring season" or "lengthening of days," reflecting the time of the year when days grow longer after the winter solstice. The history of Lent dates back to the early Christian Church, where it was observed as a period of fasting and prayer to prepare for Easter. The exact duration of Lent varies from year to year, but it typically lasts for 40 days, not including Sundays. These 40 days symbolize the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, where He fasted, prayed, and resisted temptation.

The Sundays during Lent are considered by Catholics "Little Easters" or "Sundays of Resurrection," as we anticipate and prepare for the ultimate Easter celebration. Spiritually, Lent is a time for Catholics to reflect on their relationship with God, themselves, and others. It is an opportunity to examine their lives, acknowledge their sins, and seek forgiveness. The season of Lent serves as a reminder that we are all sinners in need of redemption and that we must continually strive for spiritual growth and development. Through prayer, fasting, and acts of charity, Catholics are encouraged to imitate Christ's self-denial and sacrifice, ultimately preparing themselves for the joy and celebration of Easter.

Lent is a time for spiritual conversion, where Catholics are called to turn away from sin and towards God. This involves a genuine willingness to change one's life, acknowledging past mistakes, and seeking forgiveness. It is a period that emphasizes the importance of penance, which involves making amends for past sins through prayer, fasting, and acts of charity. Penance is not just about punishment but about healing and growth. It is a season that encourages Catholics to practice self-denial, relinquishing worldly attachments and desires in order to focus on spiritual growth. This can involve fasting, abstaining from meat on Fridays, or giving up other comforts. The season of Lent also emphasizes the importance of charity and service to others. Catholics are encouraged to engage in acts of kindness, volunteer work, and generosity to those in need.



To observe the season of Lent, Catholics can engage in various practices, such as:

Fasting: Fasting involves abstaining from food or drink for a period of time, typically on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Catholics can also fast on other days during Lent.

Abstinence: Abstinence involves giving up certain foods or activities, such as eating meat on Fridays or abstaining from social media.

Prayer: Prayer is an essential aspect of Lent, involving daily devotions, praying the Rosary, or attending Mass.

Charitable acts: Engaging in acts of charity, such as volunteering or donating to those in need, is an important aspect of Lent.

Reflection: Taking time for reflection and examination of conscience is crucial during Lent. This involves examining one's actions, acknowledging past mistakes, and seeking forgiveness.

Scripture reading: Reading Scripture daily can provide guidance and inspiration during Lent.

Community involvement: Participating in parish events, attending confession, and engaging in community service can help deepen one's spiritual experience during Lent.

In conclusion, the season of Lent is a profound and meaningful time in the Catholic Church that offers an opportunity for spiritual growth, reflection, and renewal. By engaging in practices such as fasting, prayer, charity, and self-denial, Catholics can deepen their relationship with God and prepare themselves for the joy and celebration of Easter. As we journey through the 40 days of Lent, may we be mindful of our spiritual growth and strive to become more like Christ in all we do.

As we approach & embark Lent, we wish our dear Christians a blessed Season of sacrifice, meditation, alms and reflections, etc.

KAADU DUNDA GI - The Living Word

Every Sunday at 12:00hrs on GRTS. Keep up-to-date with your Diocese!

Visit: www.banjuldiocese.gm

*PILGRIMAGE
PICTORIAL*

THIRTY-SIXTH ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF PEACE, KUNKUJANG MARIAMA





The author

Marshall Plan for The Gambia's Development

The Gambia, located on the west coast of Africa, is one of the smallest countries on the continent, both in terms of land area and population.

Despite its potential-boasting a rich cultural heritage, a strategic geographical location, and a relatively peaceful political history-the country continues to face significant economic challenges in development. These include poverty, unemployment, low levels of industrialization, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to quality education and healthcare. Development assistance from international donors and organizations has been a critical source of funding for government budgets and infrastructure projects.

However, such dependence cannot be a sustainable model for long-term growth. The need for a comprehensive, homegrown development plan is essential-one that is founded on self-reliance, resilience, and a balanced approach to economic and social development.

This plan must address the country's unique needs while building an inclusive and prosperous future.

This Marshall Plan proposal for The Gambia aims to transform the country's economy by fostering self-sufficiency, addressing key development challenges, and creating opportunities for all Gambians. The following sections outline the major goals and strategies for The Gambia's development, inspired by historical precedents like the post-World War II Marshall Plan and current sustainable development frameworks.

Goals and Vision

The overall vision of The Gambia Marshall Plan is to create a self-sustaining, diversified economy that improves the standard of living for all Gambians, reduces dependence on foreign aid, and ensures long-term stability. Specifically, the goals of the plan are:

1. **Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth:** Achieve measurable reductions in poverty through job creation, inclusive social policies, and equitable distribution of resources.

2. **Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Development:** Shift away from dependency on agriculture and tourism by developing sectors such as manufacturing, technology, andrews renewable energy, and improving the country's infrastructure.

3. **Sustainable Education and Health Systems:** Ensure access to quality education and healthcare to build human capital and improve public well-being.

4. **Good Governance and Institutional Strengthening:** Strengthen institutions and the rule of law to promote transparency, accountability, and effective service delivery.

5. **Regional Integration and International Partnerships:** Position The Gambia as a leader in regional integration, contributing to the wider development of West Africa while strengthening international partnerships with donors, investors, and multilateral institutions.

CORE PILLARS OF THE GAMBIA MARSHALL PLAN

1. Agricultural Modernization and Food Security

Agriculture remains the backbone of The Gambia's economy, with over 70% of the population depending on it for livelihood. However, the sector is underdeveloped, and the country faces recurring challenges in food security. The plan will prioritize modernizing agriculture through:

- **Irrigation and Climate-Resilient Farming:** Invest in irrigation infrastructure and support the adoption of climate-resilient farming practices to protect against the increasing frequency of droughts and floods.
- **Agribusiness Development:** Encourage agro-processing and agribusiness ventures to add value to raw agricultural products, thus creating employment opportunities and enhancing export capacity.
- **Land Reform:** Improve land tenure systems to encourage investment in agriculture, ensuring that smallholder farmers can access land and the benefits of their labour.

"The battle against hunger must be fought in the field of agriculture." – UN Secretary-General, António Guterres

2. Education and Skills Development

A well-educated population is crucial for sustainable development. The Gambia must invest heavily in its education system at all levels, emphasizing technical skills, critical thinking, innovation and invention.

- **Universal Primary and Secondary Education:** Ensure access to free and quality education for all children, with an emphasis on gender equality in enrolment and retention rates.
- **Vocational and Technical Training:** Create training programmes to equip young people with the skills needed for employment and empowerment in key sectors such as construction, healthcare, and technology.
- **Higher Education and Research:** Foster research and development at universities and institutions to create homegrown solutions to local problems, and strengthen ties with international academic and research networks.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." – Nelson Mandela

3. Infrastructure Development

The Gambia's physical infrastructure is inadequate to support economic growth. This plan will prioritize the development of critical infrastructure in the following areas:

- **Energy:** Expand access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy sources by investing in renewable energy (solar, wind, and hydro), which can reduce dependency on expensive fossil fuels and improve energy security.
- **Transport:** Develop the transportation network, including roads, ports, and airports, to facilitate domestic

and international trade, reduce transaction costs, and stimulate economic activity.

- **Digital Infrastructure:** Promote internet access and digital literacy as critical components of economic modernization. By improving digital infrastructure, The Gambia can better integrate into the global digital economy, promote e-commerce, and attract foreign investment in tech-related industries.

“Infrastructure is the foundation for economic growth.” – Former U.S. President, Barack Obama.

4. Healthcare System Strengthening

Health is a fundamental pillar of human development, and The Gambia must invest in building a robust and equitable healthcare system to improve the quality of life and life expectancy of its citizens.

- **Universal Health Coverage:** Ensure that all Gambians, regardless of their socio-economic status, have access to essential health services without financial hardship.
- **Preventive Healthcare:** Focus on preventing diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, which disproportionately affect the population.
- **Health Workforce Development:** Increase the number of healthcare professionals through training and retention programmes to address the shortage of doctors, nurses, and medical technicians.

“The health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their other happiness and all their power as a state depend.” – Benjamin Disraeli

5. Good Governance and Transparency

Effective governance and strong institutions are key to ensuring the success of any development plan. The Gambia must invest in strengthening its political and institutional frameworks to ensure that public resources are managed efficiently and equitably.

- **Anti-Corruption Initiatives:** Implement measures to reduce corruption and improve accountability in both the public and private sectors.
- **Judicial Reforms:** Strengthen the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary to promote justice and safeguard human rights.
- **Decentralization:** Empower local governments and communities to take control of their development, ensuring that resources are allocated equitably and in line with local and regional needs.

“Good governance is the key to economic and social development.” – Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary-General

6. Environmental Sustainability

Given the increasing challenges posed by climate change, The Gambia must prioritize sustainable development. This includes:

- **Renewable Energy Transition:** Invest in solar, wind, and other renewable sources to reduce reliance on imported fuels.
- **Sustainable Land Use and Forest Management:** Encourage sustainable farming, reduce deforestation, and promote reforestation efforts.
- **Waste Management:** Improve urban and rural waste management systems, focusing on recycling and reducing plastic waste.

“The environment is where we all meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share.” – Lady Bird Johnson

Financing the Plan

The success of this Marshall Plan for The Gambia will require substantial investment. Given the country’s current financial limitations, it is crucial to mobilize both domestic and external resources. These may include:

1. **International Development Partnership:** Leverage funding from multilateral organizations such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), World Bank, and international donors, while advocating for more targeted and efficient aid allocations.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Foster partnerships with the private sector to fund infrastructure projects, agribusiness, and renewable energy initiatives.
3. **Domestic Resource Mobilization:** Implement reforms to increase domestic revenue collection and reduce reliance on external aid. This includes improving tax collection mechanisms and promoting local investments.

“Investing in the future is always the best investment you can make.” – Warren Buffet

The Gambia’s path to development requires a bold, comprehensive, and inclusive strategy. Drawing from the past, this Marshall Plan aims to empower Gambians to transform their own future. It is a long-term vision, requiring commitment, collaboration, and persistence from the government, development partners, and the private sector. If implemented effectively, this plan can position The Gambia as a beacon of development in West Africa, serving as a model for other nations in the region.

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The advertisement shows a collection of grocery items: a large white sack of flour, a yellow plastic jug of vegetable oil, a white container of Armani Mayonnaise, a wooden crate filled with fresh onions, and a white egg carton containing several brown eggs.

Daily Mass Readings**February & March****1 February, 2025 – Saturday**

Ordinary Weekday/ Optional Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary

First Reading: [Hebrews 11](#): 1-2, 8-19

Responsorial Psalm: [Luke 1](#): 69, 70-72, 73-75

Alleluia: [John 3](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 4](#): 35-41

2 February, 2025 – Sunday

Presentation of the Lord Feast

First Reading: [Malachi 3](#): 1-4

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 24](#): 7, 8, 9, 10

Second Reading: [Hebrews 2](#): 14-18

Alleluia: [Luke 2](#): 32

Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 22-40 or [Luke 2](#): 22-32

3 February, 2025 – Monday

Ordinary Weekday/ Blase, Bishop, Martyr/ Ansgar, Bishop, Missionary (Fourth Week in Ordinary Time)

First Reading: [Hebrews 11](#): 32-40

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 31](#): 20, 21, 22, 23, 24

Alleluia: [Luke 7](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 5](#): 1-20

4 February, 2025 – Tuesday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 12](#): 1-4

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 22](#): 26b-27, 28 and 30, 31-32

Alleluia: [Matthew 8](#): 17

Gospel: [Mark 5](#): 21-43

5 February, 2025 – Wednesday

Agatha, Virgin, Martyr Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 12](#): 4-7, 11-15

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 103](#): 1-2, 13-14, 17-18a

Alleluia: [John 10](#): 27

Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 1-6

6 February, 2025 – Thursday

Paul Miki, Priest, Martyr, & Companions, Martyrs Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 12](#): 18-19, 21-24

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 48](#): 2-3ab, 3cd-4, 9, 10-11

Alleluia: [Mark 1](#): 15

Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 7-13

7 February, 2025 – Friday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 13](#): 1-8

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 27](#): 1, 3, 5, 8b-9abc

Alleluia: [Luke 8](#): 15

Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 14-29

8 February, 2025 – Saturday

Ordinary Weekday/ Optional Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary/ Jerome Emiliani, Priest, Religious Founder/ Josephine Bakhita, Virgin

First Reading: [Hebrews 13](#): 15-17, 20-21

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 23](#): 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Alleluia: [John 10](#): 27

Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 30-34

9 February, 2025 – Sunday

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Isaiah 6](#): 1-2a, 3-8

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 138](#): 1-2ab, 2cd-3, 4-5, 7c-8

Second Reading: [First Corinthians 15](#): 1-11 or [First Corinthians 15](#): 3-8, 11

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 19

Gospel: [Luke 5](#): 1-11

10 February, 2025 – Monday

Scholastica, Virgin, Religious Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Genesis 1](#): 1-19

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 104](#): 1-2a, 5-6, 10 and 12, 24 & 35c

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23

Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 53-56

11 February, 2025 – Tuesday

Ordinary Weekday/ Our Lady of Lourdes

First Reading: [Genesis 1](#): 20 – 2: 4a

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 8](#): 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Alleluia: [Psalms 119](#): 36, 29b

Gospel: [Mark 7](#): 1-13

12 February, 2025 – Wednesday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Genesis 2](#): 4b-9, 15-17

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 104](#): 1-2a, 27-28, 29bc-30

Alleluia: [John 17](#): 17b, 17a

Gospel: [Mark 7](#): 14-23

13 February, 2025 – Thursday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Genesis 2](#): 18-25

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 128](#): 1-2, 3, 4-5

Alleluia: [James 1](#): 21bc

Gospel: [Mark 7](#): 24-30

14 February, 2025 – Friday

Cyril and Methodius, Bishops Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Genesis 3](#): 1-8

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 32](#): 1-2, 5, 6, 7

Alleluia: [Acts 16](#): 14b

Gospel: [Mark 7](#): 31-37

15 February, 2025 – Saturday

Ordinary Weekday/ Optional Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary

First Reading: [Genesis 3](#): 9-24

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 90](#): 2, 3-4abc, 5-6, 12-13

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 4b

Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 1-10

16 February, 2025 – Sunday

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Jeremiah 17](#): 5-8

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 1](#): 1-2, 3, 4 and 6

Second Reading: [First Corinthians 15](#): 12, 16-20

Alleluia: [Luke 6](#): 23ab

Gospel: [Luke 6](#): 17, 20-26

17 February, 2025 – Monday

Ordinary Weekday/ Seven Founders of the Order of Servites, Religious

First Reading: [Genesis 4](#): 1-15, 25

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 50](#): 1 and 8, 16bc-17, 20-21

Alleluia: [John 14](#): 6

Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 11-13

18 February, 2025 – Tuesday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Genesis 6](#): 5-8; 7: 1-5, 10
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 29](#): 1a and 2, 3ac-4, 3b and 9c-10
Alleluia: [John 14](#): 23
Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 14-21

19 February, 2025 – Wednesday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Genesis 8](#): 6-13, 20-22
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 116](#): 12-13, 14-15, 18-19
Alleluia: [Ephesians 1](#): 17-18
Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 22-26

20 February, 2025 – Thursday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Genesis 9](#): 1-13
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 102](#): 16-18, 19-21, 29 and 22-23
Alleluia: [John 6](#): 63c, 68c
Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 27-33

21 February, 2025 – Friday

Ordinary Weekday/ Peter Damian, Bishop, Doctor
First Reading: [Genesis 11](#): 1-9
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 33](#): 10-11, 12-13, 14-15
Alleluia: [John 15](#): 15b
Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 34 – 9:1

22 February, 2025 – Saturday

Chair of Peter, Apostle Feast
First Reading: [First Peter 5](#): 1-4
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 23](#): 1-3a, 4, 5, 6
Alleluia: [Matthew 16](#): 18
Gospel: [Matthew 16](#): 13-19

23 February, 2025 – Sunday

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
First Reading: [First Samuel 26](#): 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 103](#): 1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13
Second Reading: [First Corinthians 15](#): 45-49
Alleluia: [John 13](#): 34
Gospel: [Luke 6](#): 27-38

24 February, 2025 – Monday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Sirach 1](#): 1-10
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 93](#): 1ab, 1cd-2, 5
Alleluia: [Second Timothy 1](#): 10
Gospel: [Mark 9](#): 14-29

25 February, 2025 – Tuesday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Sirach 2](#): 1-11
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 37](#): 3-4, 18-19, 27-28, 39-40
Alleluia: [Galatians 6](#): 14
Gospel: [Mark 9](#): 30-37

26 February, 2025 – Wednesday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Sirach 4](#): 11-19
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 119](#): 165, 168, 171, 172, 174, 175
Alleluia: [John 14](#): 6
Gospel: [Mark 9](#): 38-40

27 February, 2025 – Thursday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Sirach 5](#): 1-8
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 1](#): 1-2, 3, 4 and 6

Alleluia: [First Thessalonians 2](#): 13
Gospel: [Mark 9](#): 41-50

28 February, 2025 – Friday

Ordinary Weekday
First Reading: [Sirach 6](#): 5-17
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 119](#): 12, 16, 18, 27, 34, 35
Alleluia: [John 17](#): 17b, 17a
Gospel: [Mark 10](#): 1-12

1 March, 2025 – Saturday

Ordinary Weekday/ Optional Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary
First Reading: [Sirach 17](#): 1-15
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 103](#): 13-14, 15-16, 17-18
Alleluia: [Matthew 11](#): 25
Gospel: [Mark 10](#): 13-16

2 March, 2025 – Sunday

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
First Reading: [Sirach 27](#): 4-7
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 92](#): 2-3, 13-14, 15-16
Second Reading: [First Corinthians 15](#): 54-58
Alleluia: [Philippians 2](#): 15d, 16a
Gospel: [Luke 6](#): 39-45

3 March, 2025 – Monday

Ordinary Weekday/ Katharine Drexel, Virgin, Religious Founder
First Reading: [Sirach 17](#): 20-24
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 32](#): 1-2, 5, 6, 7
Alleluia: [Second Corinthians 8](#): 9
Gospel: [Mark 10](#): 17-27

4 March, 2025 – Tuesday

Ordinary Weekday/ Casimir
First Reading: [Sirach 35](#): 1-12
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 50](#): 5-6, 7-8, 14 and 23
Alleluia: [Matthew 11](#): 25
Gospel: [Mark 10](#): 28-31

5 March, 2025 – Wednesday

Ash Wednesday, Begin Lenten Preparation For Theeaster Triduum, Not a Holy Day of Obligation, Day of Fast (Ages 18-59) and Abstinence from Meat(Age 14 and up)
First Reading: [Joel 2](#): 12-18
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 51](#): 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17
Second Reading: [Second Corinthians 5](#): 20 – 6:2
Verse Before the Gospel: [Psalms 95](#): 8
Gospel: [Matthew 6](#): 1-6, 16-18

6 March, 2025 – Thursday

Thursday After Ash Wednesday
First Reading: [Deuteronomy 30](#): 15-20
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 1](#): 1-2, 3, 4 and 6
Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 17
Gospel: [Luke 9](#): 22-25

7 March, 2025 – Friday

Friday After Ash Wednesday/ Perpetua and Felicity, Martyrs, Day of Abstinence from Meat (Age 14 and up)
First Reading: [Isaiah 58](#): 1-9a
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 51](#): 3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19
Verse Before the Gospel: [Amos 5](#): 14
Gospel: [Matthew 9](#): 14-15

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8 March, 2025 – Saturday

Saturday After Ash Wednesday/ John of God, Religious Founder

First Reading: [Isaiah 58](#): 9b-14

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 86](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Verse Before the Gospel: [Ezekiel 33](#): 11

Gospel: [Luke 5](#): 27-32

9 March, 2025 – Sunday

First Sunday of Lent

First Reading: [Deuteronomy 26](#): 4-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 91](#): 1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15

Second Reading: [Romans 10](#): 8-13

Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 4b

Gospel: [Luke 4](#): 1-13

10 March, 2025 – Monday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Leviticus 19](#): 1-2, 11-18

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 19](#): 8, 9, 10, 15

Verse Before the Gospel: [Second Corinthians 6](#): 2b

Gospel: [Matthew 25](#): 31-46

11 March, 2025 – Tuesday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 55](#): 10-11

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 34](#): 4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19

Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 4b

Gospel: [Matthew 6](#): 7-15

12 March, 2025 – Wednesday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Jonah 3](#): 1-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 51](#): 3-4, 12-13, 18-19

Verse Before the Gospel: [Joel 2](#): 12-13

Gospel: [Luke 11](#): 29-32

13 March, 2025 – Thursday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Esther C](#): 12, 14-16, 23-25

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 138](#): 1-2ab, 2cde-3, 7c-8

Verse Before the Gospel: [Psalms 51](#): 12a, 14a

Gospel: [Matthew 7](#): 7-12

14 March, 2025 – Friday

Lenten Weekday, Day of Abstinence from Meat (Age 14 and up)

First Reading: [Ezekiel 18](#): 21-28

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 130](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Verse Before the Gospel: [Ezekiel 18](#): 31

Gospel: [Matthew 5](#): 20-26

15 March, 2025 – Saturday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Deuteronomy 26](#): 16-19

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 119](#): 1-2, 4-5, 7-8

Verse Before the Gospel: [Second Corinthians 6](#): 2b

Gospel: [Matthew 5](#): 43-48

16 March, 2025 – Sunday

Second Sunday of Lent

First Reading: [Genesis 15](#): 5-12, 17-18

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 27](#): 1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14

Second Reading: [Philippians 3](#): 17 – 4: 1 or 3: 20 – 4: 1

Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 17](#): 5

Gospel: [Luke 9](#): 28b-36

17 March, 2025 – Monday

Lenten Weekday/ Patrick, Bishop, Missionary

First Reading: [Daniel 9](#): 4b-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 79](#): 8, 9, 11 and 13

Verse Before the Gospel: [John 6](#): 63c, 68c

Gospel: [Luke 6](#): 36-38

18 March, 2025 – Tuesday

Lenten Weekday/ Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop, Doctor

First Reading: [Isaiah 1](#): 10, 16-20

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 50](#): 8-9, 16bc-17, 21 and 23

Verse Before the Gospel: [Ezekiel 18](#): 31

Gospel: [Matthew 23](#): 1-12

19 March, 2025 – Wednesday

Joseph, Husband of Mary Solemnity

First Reading: [Second Samuel 7](#): 4-5a, 12-14a, 16

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 89](#): 2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29

Second Reading: [Romans 4](#): 13, 16-18, 22

Verse Before the Gospel: [Psalms 84](#): 5

Gospel: [Matthew 1](#): 16, 18-21, 24 or [Luke 2](#): 41-51a

20 March, 2025 – Thursday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Jeremiah 17](#): 5-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 1](#): 1-2, 3, 4 and 6

Verse Before the Gospel: [Luke 8](#): 15

Gospel: [Luke 16](#): 19-31

21 March, 2025 – Friday

Lenten Weekday, Day of Abstinence from Meat (Age 14 and up)

First Reading: [Genesis 37](#): 3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 105](#): 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

Verse Before the Gospel: [John 3](#): 16

Gospel: [Matthew 21](#): 33-43, 45-46

22 March, 2025 – Saturday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Micah 7](#): 14-15, 18-20

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 103](#): 1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

Verse Before the Gospel: [Luke 15](#): 18

Gospel: [Luke 15](#): 1-3, 11-32

23 March, 2025 – Sunday

Third Sunday of Lent, First Scrutiny of the Elect

First Reading: [Exodus 17](#): 3-7

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 95](#): 1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Second Reading: [Romans 5](#): 1-2, 5-8

Verse Before the Gospel: [John 4](#): 42, 15

Gospel: [John 4](#): 5-42

23 March, 2025 – Sunday

Third Sunday of Lent, First Scrutiny of the Elect

First Reading: [Exodus 3](#): 1-8a, 13-15

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 103](#): 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11

Second Reading: [First Corinthians 10](#): 1-6, 10-12

Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 17

Gospel: [Luke 13](#): 1-9

24 March, 2025 – Monday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Second Kings 5](#): 1-15

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 42](#): 2, 3; 43: 3, 4

Verse Before the Gospel: [Psalms 130](#): 5, 7

Gospel: [Luke 4](#): 24-30

25 March, 2025 – Tuesday

Annunciation of the Lord Solemnity

First Reading: [Isaiah 7](#): 10-14; 8: 10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 40](#): 7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11

Second Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 4-10

Verse Before the Gospel: [John 1](#): 14ab
Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 26-38

26 March, 2025 – Wednesday

Lenten Weekday
First Reading: [Deuteronomy 4](#): 1, 5-9
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 147](#): 12-13, 15-16, 19-20
Verse Before the Gospel: [John 6](#): 63c, 68c
Gospel: [Matthew 5](#): 17-19

27 March, 2025 – Thursday

Lenten Weekday
First Reading: [Jeremiah 7](#): 23-28
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 95](#): 1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Verse Before the Gospel: [Joel 2](#): 12-13
Gospel: [Luke 11](#): 14-23

28 March, 2025 – Friday

Lenten Weekday, Day of Abstinence from Meat (Age 14 and up)
First Reading: [Hosea 14](#): 2-10
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 81](#): 6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14 and 17
Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 17
Gospel: [Mark 12](#): 28-34

29 March, 2025 – Saturday

Lenten Weekday
First Reading: [Hosea 6](#): 1-6
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 51](#): 3-4, 18-19, 20-21ab

Verse Before the Gospel: [Psalms 95](#): 8
Gospel: [Luke 18](#): 9-14

30 March, 2025 – Sunday

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Second Scrutiny of the Elect
First Reading: [First Samuel 16](#): 1, 6-7, 10-13
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 23](#): 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
Second Reading: [Ephesians 5](#): 8-14
Verse Before the Gospel: [John 8](#): 12
Gospel: [John 9](#): 1-41

30 March, 2025 – Sunday

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Second Scrutiny of the Elect
First Reading: [Joshua 5](#): 9a, 10-12
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 34](#): 2-3, 4-5, 6-7
Second Reading: [Second Corinthians 5](#): 17-21
Verse Before the Gospel: [Luke 15](#): 18
Gospel: [Luke 15](#): 1-3, 11-32

31 March, 2025 – Monday

Lenten Weekday
First Reading: [Isaiah 65](#): 17-21
Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 30](#): 2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a and 13b
Verse Before the Gospel: [Amos 5](#): 14
Gospel: [John 4](#): 43-54

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February & March

Gambian Christian



10th February, 1876: Departure for Senegal of Fr. Jean Lacombe, who had spent 12 years in Gambia, 10 of them as Superior.

19th March, 1886: Death at the age of 47 of Brother Florentine Matthews, who had taught in Banjul for 23 years.

24th March, 1911: Death in Dakar from yellow fever of Brother André, who taught in the boys' school in Banjul with the Superior, Fr. John Meehan.

15th March, 1914: Consecration of the rebuilt church in Hagan Street by Bishop Hyacinth Jalabert.

11th March, 1934: Fr. Harold Whiteside celebrated the first Mass in Old Jeshwang in a hut used for catechism classes.

2nd February, 1947: Ordination as Anglican deacon of the Revd John Colley Faye, who served on the Legislative Council and the Executive Council between 1947 and 1957.

18th February, 1947: Opening of the Convent at Basse with Sr. Lawrence and Sr. Brigid in charge of the school.

6th February, 1949: The Superior, Fr. Matthew Farelly CSSp, celebrated the first Mass, outdoors, in Lamin.

20th February, 1955: Marriage at St. Cuthbert's Anglican Church, Basse, of David Jawara (later, President of The Gambia) and Augusta Hannah Mahoney.

8th March, 1955: Opening of the Catholic primary school at Sambang, Upper River Division.

26th February, 1959: Arrival of Fr. Geoghehan and Fr. Thomas Tarmey.

10th February, 1960: Arrival of Fr. Seán Little.

February, 1962: Completion of the tower at the Cathedral.

16th March, 1966: In response to liturgical reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council, the high altar in the Cathedral was moved forward so that Mass could be celebrated facing the people.

March, 1966: The Gambia Christian Council was founded, made up of the three main-line churches – Anglican, Catholic and Methodist. Affiliate members include the YMCA, YWCA, the Baptist Mission, YWAM and over 50 evangelical churches.

February, 1975: Fr. Michael Flynn became Parish Priest at Star of the Sea, Bakau. He was the first District Superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers to live in the priests' house at Bakau.

5th February, 1976: The House of Representatives approved the new constitution of the St. Anthony of Padua Society, thus making it a registered society. Its predecessor, the St. Anthony of Padua Friendly Society, had been founded in 1907.

24th-27th February, 1979: Bishop Moloney hosted the Bishops' Conference of The Gambia, Liberia & Sierra Leone.

27th March, 1979: Alhaji Baboucarr Ousman Semega-Janneh presented his credentials to Pope John Paul II as The Gambia's first Ambassador to the Holy See.

29th February, 1980: Archbishop Johannes Dyba presented his credentials to President Jawara as first Papal

Nuncio to The Gambia.

4th February, 1981: Funeral in Banjul, following her death in Britain, of Augusta Mahoney, former wife of Sir Dawda Jawara.

15th February, 1981: It was announced that Fr. Michael Cleary was to become Second Bishop of Banjul in succession to Bishop Michael Moloney (*who had resigned due to ill health*).

25th March, 1981: (Feast of the Annunciation) Consecration of Bishop Michael Cleary at St Augustine's High School, Banjul.

23rd February, 1992: Visit of Pope John Paul II to The Gambia.

28th February, 1996: Death of Fr. James White in The Gambia.

27th March, 1997: Opening of St. Joseph's Church, Jarjil.

31st March, 2001: Death in Britain of the last Governor and first Governor-General of The Gambia, Sir John Paul.

21st February, 2003: Bishop Cleary returned from a visit to Rome.

2nd February, 2006: Death in Ireland of Fr Myles Fay.

30th March, 2008: Opening of the Diocesan Assembly.

2nd – 4th March, 2009: A group of young Piarist priests from Senegal met at GPI as part of their formation permanente. The Piarists work in Dakar, Oussouye and Sokone.

6th March, 2009: A talk on 'The Gambia, our homeland' was given at GPI by T.G.G. Senghore, regarded as historian of the Catholics in The Gambia.

18th February, 2010: Death, aged 50, of Francis Kenneth Balucan, Head of St Therese's Upper Basic School, Kanifing.

8th March, 2010: Death, aged 86, of Dr. Samuel Palmer. His funeral was at St. Mary's Anglican Cathedral and was attended by his close friend, Bishop Emeritus Michael Cleary, along with Bishop Ellison and other Catholic clergy.

6th February, 2011: The youth group of the Christian Community of Latrikunda (CCLK) celebrated its 10th anniversary with a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Therese, Kanifing. The parent group of CCLK was formed in 1997.

4th March, 2011: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy celebrated their order's 50th year in The Gambia at a Mass in Holy Rosary, Lamin.

15th March, 2011: Imam Baba Leigh of Kanifing addressed a meeting at GPI of priests, sisters and catechists.

During February, 2012: Fr. Tommy Conray, Chaplain of Gorey Community School, Ireland, paid his tenth annual fortnight's visit to The Gambia, accompanied by a group of pupils.

3rd February, 2013: Fr. Pius Gidi and his parishioners celebrated the 8th anniversary of Holy Cross Church, Brusubi.

1st March, 2013: Fr. Joseph Gough, Principal of St.

Augustine's High School Banjul in the late 70s and early 80s, finally left, after a series of long annual visits, during which he had given substantial aid to sports endeavours in this country.

21st February, 2014: Funeral at the Independence Stadium, Bakau of the Most Revd. Tilewa Johnson, Bishop of The Gambia and Archbishop of the Anglican Province of West Africa, who had died suddenly on 22nd January.

2nd March, 2014: Celebration at Kunkujang-Mariama of the Golden Jubilee of Fr. John Sharpe, CSSp.

24th February - 2nd March, 2014: Fr. Peter S. Lopez, Director of GPI, attended a meeting in Rome of SIGNIS, the Catholic Lay Organisation for professionals working in radio, television and other media.

19th March, 2014: Bishop Ellison blessed the new premises at Lamin Wayoto of Holy Rosary Nursery School.

24th January, 2015: Rejoicing at Lamin and throughout the diocese of the priestly ordination by Bishop Robert Ellison of two young Gambian deacons, James Mendy and Tanislas Ndecky.

2nd February, 2015: Death of John Sambou, oldest catechist of the diocese, who had been working in Kuntaur and Kaur since 1983.

22nd February, 2015: Bishop Robert Ellison attended the enthronement in the Cathedral of Notre Dame des Victoires, Dakar, of the newly-appointed Archbishop of Dakar, the Most Revd. Benjamin Ndiaye, who had succeeded Cardinal Théodore Adrien Sarr.

13th March, 2015: A farewell Mass for Bishop Emeritus Michael Cleary was offered by Bishop Ellison at St. Therese's Church, Kanifing.

21st March, 2017: Death in Dublin of Fr. Joseph

Gough, who had served in The Gambia from 1972 to 1983. He was successively teacher and Principal of St. Augustine's High School. In later years, he became an honorary Gambian citizen, raising funds for sports, and until 2013, visited this country regularly.

3rd February, 2018 (St. Blaise): Episcopal Ordination of the Most Revd Dr Gabriel Mendy CSSp as Fourth Bishop of Banjul, at the Independence Stadium, Bakau.

2nd February, 2024: Mass and Burial Rites of the late Fr. Matthew Mendy at the St. Therese's Parish, Kanifing. Interment took place at the Banjul Cemetery and condolences was received at the St. Augustine's Hall in Banjul, where thousands of the faithful gathered to pay their last respect and condolences to the Catholic Diocese of Banjul.

1st March 2024: The Ecumenical worship and prayer service for the Women World Day of Prayer took place at the Trinity Methodist pro-cathedral Serrekunda, The Gambia at 4:00pm where the Palestians women staying in the Gambia were in attendance.

2nd March, 2024: Reconciliation Pilgrimage mass at Kunkujang Mariama, among the Lenten principles that Catholics takes to do meditation and prayer reflections.

21st March, 2024: The obituary announcement of Sister Bernadette Bah, (PM) *commonly known as Leo*.

22nd March, 2024: Synodality meeting of the Diocese took place at GPI. Fr. Sam Ugogbo was the moderation of the day.

25th March, 2024: The obituary announcement of Fr. Bruno Toupan of the Holy Spirit Parish and the Principal of St. Augustine's High School, Banjul.

Priests' Annual Retreat

6th to 10th January, 2025

The Diocese of Banjul clergy retreat focused on our journey together as pilgrims of hope. Proclaiming the Year of the Lord's favour – Luke 4:18-19.

From 6th to 10th January, 2025 diocesan and religious priests of the Diocese of Banjul gathered at the Gambia Pastoral Institute (GPI) for their annual clergy retreat. The retreat was facilitated by Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Obeng Codjoe from the Archdiocese of Accra – Ghana.

Each day commenced with morning prayers, holy mass, meditation and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Fr. Emmanuel delivered two conferences daily offering reflections on the theme and encouraging



participants to engage into personal introspection and a prayerful way of life.

The retreat ended with a joyful gaudium where the Bishop invited us to a dinner at the GPI garden in a relaxed and informal setting strengthening bonds of fraternity and fellowship.

**Weekday
Celebrations**

SAINTS

**February
&
March**

6TH FEBRUARY

ST. PAUL MIKI & HIS COMPANION, MARTYRS

PAUL Miki was born around 1562, educated by Jesuits, then joined the Society of Jesus. The Japanese government feared the influence of the Jesuits. Miki and others were imprisoned. He and fellow Catholic prisoners were forced to walk 966 kilometres from Kyoto to Nagasaki, the city with the most Christian converts. There, on 5th February, 1597, Miki was crucified. From the cross, he assured his executioners that he forgave them. Alongside Paul Miki, died two other Jesuits, and 23 others, known collectively as the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan, canonised by Pope Pius IX in 1862. *(In 1945, the Second World War was brought to a close when the USA dropped a nuclear bomb on Nagasaki.)*

8TH FEBRUARY

ST. JOSEPHINE BAKHITA, RELIGIOUS

JOSEPHINE was born around 1869 in Darfur, Sudan. At the age of nine, she was kidnapped. Working as a slave for the mother of a general, she was flogged every day, and bore 144 scars throughout her life. In 1882, she was bought by the Italian consul, who took her to Italy. Bakhita came to know a totally different kind of 'master': Jesus Christ. 'I am definitively loved, and whatever happens to me, I am awaited by this Love.' In January 1890, she was baptised and confirmed and received her first Communion. In December 1896, she took vows in the Canossian Sisters, and thereafter, journeyed round Italy to promote the mission. She died in 1947, and was canonised in 2000.

11TH FEBRUARY

OUR LADY OF LOURDES

IN 1858, the Immaculate Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous, near Lourdes in France. Through this poor girl, Mary called sinners to repentance, and there arose in the Church a marvellous spirit of prayer and charity, especially in helping the poor and the sick. This day is observed as World Day for the Sick.

22ND FEBRUARY

THE CHAIR OF ST. PETER

THE FEAST OF THE CHAIR OF ST. PETER has been kept in Rome since the 4th century. It invites us to give thanks for our unity with the Pope and with Catholics throughout the world, and to pray for the preservation and strengthening of this unity.

17TH MARCH

ST. PATRICK, BISHOP

PATRICK was born in Wales in the 390s. He was taken as a slave to Ireland, but after six years, escaped to Gaul (presentday France). Having been ordained, he returned to Ireland, founding the Diocese of Armagh and spending the rest of his life preaching the Christian faith. He is the principal patron of Ireland.

19TH MARCH

ST. JOSEPH

JOSEPH was the husband of the Virgin Mary, with whom he lived in chastity. He was descended from the House of David (Matthew 1:15; Luke 2:14). Joseph is described in many English translations of the Bible as a carpenter, though the original Greek calls him a tekton (craftsman). Because the family could only offer two doves at the presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2: 22-39), Joseph is thought of as a poor man. He is revered as a model of poverty, chastity and obedience, patron of priests and religious, and as a model father and artisan.

25TH MARCH

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

ST. LUKE'S account of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) and her acceptance of God's role for her, 'Be it done unto me according to your word,' is unforgettable.

Mary's acceptance was the prelude to Christ's birth, ministry, passion and resurrection. It prefigured Christ's own acceptance of the Father's will in the 'agony in the garden' (Luke 22:39-44).

(We pray especially for the late Bishop Emeritus Michael Cleary CSSp, episcopally ordained on this day in 1981 as Bishop of Banjul).

**GPI PAVEMENT WORK
ONGOING.**

**AS YOU CAN SEE, IT'S
BEAUTIFUL, SO LET'S
ALL SUPPORT A
WORTHY CAUSE IN
ANYWAY YOU CAN.**



February & March

Saviour of the world, by Your Cross and
Resurrection You have set us free.

Our Sunday Readings

2nd February, 2025
Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

1st Reading: Malachi 3:1-4
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 24:7, 8, 9, 10
2nd Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18
Alleluia: Luke 2:32
Gospel: Luke 2:22-40 or Luke 2:22-32

Homily Theme: Presentation of the Lord at the Temple –
Luke 2:22-40

Verse of the Day Reflection: It was a standard among the Jews that the first son in a family was to be taken to the Temple in Jerusalem. There his parents would make an offering to the Lord to show that the child belonged to the Lord. At that point Simeon favored Joseph and Mary. He likewise disclosed to Mary a portion of the things the future would hold, for her child and for her. He advised her of the significance her child would accomplish, yet he included that distress, like a sword, would pierce her heart. This is the revelation given to Mary. What is God's revelation to you today?

Prayer: Lord, I am Your servant. I seek Your will. Help me to respond to You in faith and openness and help me to say "Yes" to You so that my life will achieve the purpose for which I was made. I thank You for the witness of Simeon and pray that I, too, will one day rejoice that my life has been fulfilled. Jesus, I love You. Amen.

9th February, 2025
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

1st Reading Isaiah 6:1-2A, 3-8
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8
2nd Reading 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 11
Alleluia: Matthew 4:19
Gospel Luke 5:1-11

Homily Theme: Put into Deep Water and Lower Your Nets – John 21:1-14, Luke 5:1-11

Verse of the Day Reflection: How difficult for us to submit ourselves to the person who sacrificed himself for our own sake? Jesus always reminds us, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." We are always afraid of what will happen to us because in our minds it is implanted already that what our decisions now will affect our future. Human beings are always busy fighting for the demands and standards of life, we tend to forget that Jesus is waiting and hoping that we can still submit ourselves to him and to God's plan. From the Gospel today, it reminds us that everyday is a calling and challenges for us as Christians. Remember as Jesus had said, "Do not be afraid", in the world it is not always being alone. We work

together, we trust, and we journey together following the footsteps of Jesus. God has a plan and has promising abundance if we will just leave everything and followed him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I long to step out of my comfort zone, then put out into deep water, and wholeheartedly engage in evangelization as You have called me to. Please guide me to be obedient in all circumstances. Amen.

16th February, 2025
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

1st Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-8
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 1:1-2, 3, 4 AND 6
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20
Alleluia: Luke 6:23AB
Gospel: Luke 6:17, 20-26

Homily Theme: The Beatitudes Explained – Luke 6:20-26, Matthew 5:1-12

Verse of the Day Reflection: The Gospel's message reminds us that despite all of the challenges that we are faced with in this battlefield, we are continuously being blessed by our God, who is full of grace and mercy. In this life on Earth, some are fortunate enough to feed themselves with three full meals and be able to live under their own roofs while others cannot. Some are crying their hearts out because of pain and grief while others shout for joy. Jesus calls on each one of us, especially those who are capable to give, offer and share what they can to those who are in need—may it be financially, physically, emotionally, or mentally. As an individual, how are you going to respond to this calling?

Prayer: Dear Lord, give me the fortitude to persevere the hatred and ridicule from others as I continue knowing, loving, serving, praising, and glorifying you. Help me to identify my blessings in the challenges and hardships I face in life. Help me to see your moulding hand in the crosses I experience in life. Jesus, I love you. Amen.

23rd February, 2025
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

1st Reading: 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:45-49
Alleluia: John 13:34
Gospel: Luke 6:27-38

Homily Theme: Love Your Enemies and Pray for Those Who Persecute and Mistreat You: Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-38

Verse of the Day Reflection: Love is the greatest commandment that Jesus left us. Today Jesus is giving us enough reasons to extend our love to our enemies. God is the creator of all that is here on earth. He is the same God who created those things we fear or hate like snakes, fierce wild animals and poisonous plants. He also made those people who persecute and hate us. We too, some people fear us and also those we hate. We, in our human weakness, tend to act as victims all the time, forgetting that others are victims of our persecution. They see us as their persecutors. In the above scenario, we neither wouldn't like to be hated by others nor be referred to as persecutors. We want to feel loved by others and others to feel safe when they are around us. The perfect alchemy to this is embracing love. The love we have from God cures all evils in this world. When we fail to love, we hate. When we hate evil propagates among us and we perish. When we love, we eliminate hate and goodness flourishes among us. Let us adhere today to Jesus' call to love our enemies because God loves them with the same measure He loves us. He doesn't discriminate against anybody.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, increase Your love in our hearts so that we can spread this love throughout the world even to our enemies and we will eliminate all evil among us. Jesus, I love you. Amen.

2nd March, 2025

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

1st Reading: Sirach 27:4-7

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Alleluia: Philippians 2:15D, 16A

Gospel: Luke 6:39-42

Homily Theme: Remove the Plank in Your Own Eye First – Luke 6:39-42 and Matthew 7:1-5

Verse of the Day Reflection: The lesson we learn today is about the sin of pride. Pride makes us see the minor faults in others instead of the serious faults that we obviously have. Pride blinds us completely and prevents us from having an honest self-reflection and an examination of our conscience. Pride hides the truth from us. It covers us with a false mask such that we are unable to see ourselves in the light of truth, therefore, preventing us from seeing the log in our own eye. This ugly sin of pride makes us focus on the tiny and insignificant faults of our neighbours and friends. These tiny faults are the splinters in our brothers' eyes. Jesus is keen to teach us this lesson because most of us tend to trivialize the very serious sins that we have and point out the small sins of others and make them seem more serious than they are. Jesus is inviting us to do a thorough introspection of ourselves and realize when, where and how pride starts to influence us. He wants us to change so that, as we undertake our purpose on earth, we don't become blind guides who may lead others into a pit. Therefore, if you realize that you are judgemental and unfairly critical of those around you and especially those who are striving for holiness, you need to change for the better.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray for humility and meekness. Help me to free myself of all manner of pride and being judgmental. Help me to see and judge others in the way You want me to see them. Jesus, I love you. Amen.

9th March, 2025

First Sunday of Lent, Year C

1st Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15

2nd Reading: Romans 10:8-13

Verse before the Gospel: Matthew 4:4B

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

Homily Theme: Jesus is Tempted By The Devil in the Desert – Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-15, Luke 4:1-13

Verse of the Day Reflection: Is temptation good? Certainly it's not a sin to be tempted. Otherwise our Lord could never have been tempted Himself. But He was. And so are we. As we enter into the first full week of Lent, we are given the opportunity to ponder the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. Temptation is never from God. But God does permit us to be tempted. Not so that we fall, but so that we grow in holiness. Temptation forces us to rise up and make a choice either for God or for the temptation. Though mercy and forgiveness are always offered when we fail, the blessings that await those who overcome temptation are numerous. Jesus' temptation did not increase His holiness, but it did afford Him the opportunity to manifest His perfection within His human nature. It is that perfection we seek and His perfection that we must strive to imitate as we face the temptations of life. Let's look at five clear "blessings" that can come from enduring the temptations of the evil one. Ponder these carefully and slowly: First, enduring a temptation and conquering it helps us see the strength of God in our lives. Second, temptation humbles us, stripping away our pride and our struggle of thinking we are self-reliant and self-made. Third, there is great value in completely rejecting the devil. This not only robs him of his ongoing power to deceive us, but it also clarifies our vision of who he is so that we can continue to reject him and his works. Fourth, overcoming temptation clearly and definitively strengthens us in every virtue. Fifth, the devil would not tempt us if he were not concerned about our holiness. Thus, we should see temptation as a sign that the evil one is losing hold of our lives. Reflect, today, upon Jesus facing the devil in the desert after spending 40 days of fasting. He faced every temptation of the evil one so as to assure us that if we but unite ourselves completely to Him in His human nature, so we also will have His strength to overcome anything and everything the vile devil throws our way.

Prayer: My dear Lord, after spending 40 days of fasting and prayer in the dry and hot desert, You allowed Yourself to be tempted by the evil one. The devil attacked You with all he had, and You easily, quickly and definitively defeated him, rejecting his lies and deceptions. Give me the grace I need to overcome every temptation I encounter and to rely completely upon You without reserve. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

16th March, 2025

Second Sunday of Lent, Year C

1st Reading: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14

2nd Reading: Philippians 3:17-4:1 Or Philippians 3:20-4:1

Verse before the Gospel: Matthew 17:5

Gospel: Luke 9:28B-36

Homily Theme: The Transfiguration of Jesus on the Mountain – Mark 9:2-10 and Matthew 17:1-9

Verse of the Day Reflection: The Transfiguration of Jesus on the Mountain was a very powerful moment in His earthly ministry when the divine nature and glory, which He possessed before coming to earth in the human body, was manifested in front of the three disciples Peter James and John. Jesus was transformed into a form that nothing on earth could make dirty. It was a form that we can call heavenly. We also see He was communicating with Elijah and Moses, who are in heaven. So, why was the transfiguration important to Jesus and to the apostles? God Himself took the form of man and came down to earth as His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. So, after Jesus began to gather His disciples for His ministry, He performed many miracles in front of them and the disciples also performed miracles in His name. He told them that He was the Messiah and that He came from God. But three years into the ministry He told them that He would be persecuted and would die but Peter Said that they would not let that happen. Jesus was upset and told Peter that he is thinking like an earthly man and not of what is heavenly. So, Jesus had to manifest Himself to a form that He was, He is, and will always be because He is really God, so that the disciples could finally believe that He really is God and not a mortal man. This is why during the transfiguration, a cloud came, casting a shadow over them, and from the cloud came a voice, “This is my beloved Son. Let us, therefore, have unwavering faith in Jesus because we are lucky to know that He is indeed the messiah who came to save us from our sins.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we believe that You are our Lord and Saviour. We pray that You rekindle our faith and trust in You so that we may continue with the work that You have commanded us to do. Jesus, I love you. Amen.

23rd March, 2025
Third Sunday of Lent, Year C

1st Reading: Exodus 3:1-8A, 13-15
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 103: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12
Verse before the Gospel: Matthew 4:17
Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

Homily Theme: The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree – Luke 13:1-9

Verse of the Day Reflection: This is an image that reflects our souls many times. Often in life, we can fall into a rut and our relationship with God and others struggles. As a result, our lives bear little or no good fruit. Perhaps this is not you at the present moment, but perhaps it is. Perhaps your life is strongly grounded in Christ or perhaps you are greatly struggling. If you are struggling, try to see yourself as this fig tree. And try to see the person who commits to “cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it” as Jesus Himself. It’s important to note that Jesus does not look at this fig tree and discard it as worthless. He is a God of second chances and He is committed to caring for this fig tree in such a way as to offer it every necessary opportunity to bear fruit. So it is with us. Jesus never just throws us away, regardless of how far we have strayed. He is always ready and willing to reach out to us in the ways

we need so that our lives can once again bear much fruit. Reflect, today, upon whether you feel as though you need to allow Jesus to “cultivate the ground” around you. Do not be afraid to let Him provide you with the nourishment you need to once again bear an abundance of good fruit in your life.

Prayer: Lord, I know that I always need Your love and care in my life. I need to be nourished by You so that I can bear the fruit that You desire from me. Help me to be open to how You wish to nourish my soul so that I can accomplish all that You have in mind for me. Jesus, I love You. Amen.

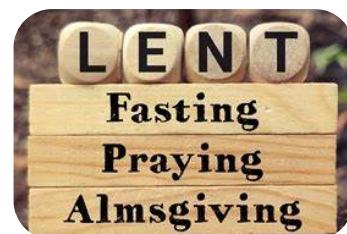
30th March, 2024
Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year C

1st Reading: Josiah 5:9A, 10-12
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7
2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Verse before the Gospel: Luke 15:18
Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Homily Theme: Parable of the Prodigal Son – Luke 15:1-32

Verse of the Day Reflection: Today’s reading begins to teach us about the need to stop being jealous and judgemental of those sinners who have repented, mended their ways, and turned back to the Lord. The Scribes and the Pharisees saw Jesus happily welcoming to His presence the tax collectors and sinners who were seeking His audience. They wondered why Jesus, who “claimed to be the Holy One of God”, could mingle with these sinners. But using several parables including this Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus teaches them about God’s unconditional love and providence, the importance of repentance and forgiveness, the dangers of jealousy and resentment, the value of humility, and the joy that comes from being reunited with God and loved ones. Just like the prodigal son realizes the error of his ways and returns to his father, asking for forgiveness, we too are encouraged today to make a deliberate decision to get out of sin. We are told to go down on our knees, repent and beg for forgiveness from God and literary walk away from that environment that leads us to sin and enter into a different environment that helps us stay away from sin, grow and utilize our talents and ultimately growing rich while still loving, serving and praising God. When we do this, our Heavenly Father forgives us and together with the angels and saints rejoice in Heaven, welcomes us back to His presence where “everything we ask for in God’s name is granted unto us”.

Prayer: Lord, please have mercy upon me and heal me of my sins. Free me from all tendencies toward judgmentalness and help me, in imitation of You, to love and welcome the sinner in my midst so that I, as a sinner, will be welcomed by You. Jesus, I love You. Amen.



A Muslim's Plea For Catholic Priests



It is not every day that a matter of Catholic faith is profoundly inspired by someone from a different religious tradition. Yet, when a Muslim, moved by the struggles faced by Catholic priests, shared her reflections in a trending social media post, it became clear that compassion knows no religious boundaries. This post is born out of her heartfelt words and a deep exploration of the realities that priests endure; a reality often hidden from public view, yet in urgent need of our understanding and empathy.

In today's world, the role of Catholic priests is scrutinized like never before. Misunderstandings, relentless and criticisms, high expectations weigh heavily upon their shoulders. But how much do we truly know about their lives and the challenges they face? Studies reveal that a significant number of priests leave their vocations annually, not due to a lack of faith, financial hardships, or disbelief in their divine calling, but because of overwhelming mental and emotional exhaustion.

Priests dedicate their lives to serving their communities, yet few understand the unique burdens they carry: sleepless nights spent in prayer for their flock; the emotional toll of witnessing the pain and struggles of parishioners; and harsh critiques of their sermons, decisions, and the overall state of the Church.

As the late Pope John Paul II once remarked, "The priest's vocation is to live the mystery of the cross, to bear the burdens of others, and to unite them to Christ's suffering for the salvation of the world." This noble vocation is not without its trials. Priests bear the dual weight of spiritual and human expectations, yet their sacrifices often go unnoticed and their humanity is frequently forgotten. One of the most compelling sources highlighting the need for compassion toward priests comes from the writings of Mutter Vogel. In her revelations, Christ is quoted as saying:

"Criticize no priest. Pray for them instead. Each priest is My chosen one. When a priest falls, I myself fall, but never will you have the right to judge him. A single

criticism of a priest wounds My heart deeply and pierces My heart with thorns."

This profound message underscores the spiritual gravity of our words and actions toward clergy. As Catholics, and as human beings, we are called to uplift our priests in prayer and support rather than contribute to their burdens with judgment.

What makes this message even more poignant is its origin: a Muslim woman whose close ties with Catholic friends led her to recognize the universal need for kindness and understanding. Her insight highlights a shared truth across all faiths—the imperative to nurture and uphold those who serve humanity, regardless of creed or calling.

In a world rife with division, her perspective serves as a beacon of interfaith solidarity. It reminds us that empathy transcends boundaries and that the challenges faced by religious leaders are not confined to any one faith. Muslim, Christian, or otherwise, we are united in the human experience, sharing a collective responsibility to uplift one another.

This commentary on the social media post is a rallying cry for Catholics and the world at large:

- Pray for Your Priests – They are not immune to struggle.
- Refrain from Harsh Criticism – Constructive feedback is one thing; judgment and negativity are another.
- Show Appreciation – Simple gestures of gratitude can bring solace to a weary soul.

As the saying goes, "To whom much is given, much is expected." Priests carry immense responsibility, and it is our duty to support them as they fulfill their divine calling.

Inspired by a Muslim and grounded in Catholic truth, this message stands as a testament to the power of unity, love, and understanding. Let it be a reminder that the burdens of those who lead, whether priests, imams, or pastors, are ours to share. In sharing these burdens, we not only find the strength to uplift them but also the grace to uplift ourselves.

KAADU DUNDA GI - The Living Word

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Judgment Day: December 2026

Message to the Corruption Addicts in Our High Places



Corruption has become an unfortunate hallmark of our body-politic, with many of our elected and appointed officials prioritizing personal enrichment over the welfare of the people. Stealing of public funds has been entrenched in their system such that it has become part of their DNA make-up. This manner of betrayal of trust has left the nation grappling with underdevelopment, poverty, and a disillusioned populace. As the December 2026 presidential elections approach the time has come for politicians to reckon with their actions and for citizens to hold them accountable.

For decades, corruption has been an open secret in our nation, permeating every sector of government. Projects that should uplift communities are often used as conduits for siphoning public funds. For example, the poorly managed Kanifing Municipal road project, which saw millions allocated yet remains incomplete, epitomizes how greed and mismanagement trump public service. Traders and commuters bear the brunt of these failures, while those responsible remain untouched by the law. On the other hand, it is being alleged that, the Gambian Printing and Publishing Company (GPPC), for instance, has been stinking with the rot of corruption and inestimable mess, while the leaders of this nation continue to maintain a blind eye over this troubling allegation.

There have been serious accusations regarding corruption within GPPC, such as those concerning the procurement of a bioclimatic printing machine that reportedly cost D50 million. Insiders claim that this machine was overpriced and not new, raising concerns about transparency in procurement processes, among other very serious and embarrassing national shame evident in the parastatal. Yet, the National Assembly member were elected to protect us, and the Executive, seem to be in cahoots with the alleged perpetrators of these heinous crimes. What does it portend?

Similarly, funds intended for critical areas such as healthcare and education have mysteriously vanished over the years. The recent revelations about the misuse of donor funds meant for COVID-19 relief efforts highlight the extent of the rot. Essential medical supplies were diverted, leaving health workers ill-equipped and the public vulnerable during a global crisis. Such actions are a glaring testament to how our politicians have prioritized their

pockets over the lives of their constituents.

The lavish lifestyles of these officials are a stark contrast to the daily struggles of ordinary Gambians. Mansions, luxury vehicles, and frequent trips abroad have become symbols of political success, while many citizens lack access to basic necessities like clean water, electricity, and quality education. The irony is that these same politicians campaigned on promises to eradicate poverty and improve living conditions, yet their actions portray a complete lack of commitment to these goals.

As The Gambia prepares for the December 2026 presidential elections, it is imperative to remind politicians that

the power they wield comes from the people. The electorate is growing increasingly aware of the systemic corruption and its impact on their lives. The call for accountability is louder than ever, and politicians must understand that their positions are not lifelong guarantees. The upcoming elections present an opportunity for citizens to reject those who have failed to serve and to demand leadership that prioritizes national progress over personal gain.

Beyond the ballot box, citizens must remain vigilant and involved in governance. Civic engagement and public scrutiny are critical in ensuring that leaders uphold their promises. The role of civil society, the media, and anti-corruption advocates cannot be overstated. They must continue to expose corrupt practices and pressure the government to implement meaningful reforms.

For the politicians who believe they can continue business as usual, let this be a warning: the tide is turning. Gambians are tired of the excuses and empty promises. They are demanding transparency, accountability, and real progress. The December 2026 elections will serve as a judgment day for those who have squandered public trust and resources.

To combat corruption effectively, The Gambia needs stronger institutions and enforceable laws. The judiciary and anti-corruption bodies must be independent and adequately resourced to investigate and prosecute cases without fear or favor. Technology can also play a vital role in reducing opportunities for graft by ensuring transparency in government transactions and public procurement processes.

Leadership by example is another critical component. Politicians must embody the values of honesty and service. The success stories of nations like Botswana and Rwanda demonstrate that corruption can be minimized when leaders prioritize the greater good over personal enrichment.

The addiction to corruption among our politicians must be confronted head-on. The December 2026 presidential elections are not just another political event; they represent a crossroads for the nation. Will we continue down the path of stagnation and betrayal, or will we rise to demand the leadership we deserve? The choice lies with the people, and the message to politicians is clear: the era of unchecked corruption is over. Judgment day is coming, and the Gambian people will have the final say.

FASTING AND PRAYER

BY FR. GABOU SECKA

The Desert Feast of Fasting

The Son of God began his earthly ministry with a forty-day fast. This should give us pause. Especially if we—who are not God—have moved into ministry heedless of the battle we may have to fight. Why did Jesus do this? Why did God lead him to it? And what about us? Can we really face the superhuman hazards of life and ministry without walking with Jesus through the wilderness of fasting?

I think we must walk there to learn from him, at least, if not to imitate his triumph. He *was* the Son of God, and we are not. But he did say, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). The salvation of the world may not hang on our success, since we are light-years less than he. But that may heighten rather than lessen the need of fasting in our lives. The stakes of *my* warfare are smaller for the world, but my weakness is greater. Why did he fast as he began his great work? What can we learn about our own?

Hungry for All the Fullness of God

My heart is hungry for “all the fullness of God.” I long for a deeper work of God in the midst of his people. I yearn for a mighty tide of missionary zeal to spread a passion for the supremacy of Christ in all things for the joy of all peoples. I long to see unmistakable, supernatural new birth taking place week in and week out through the compelling witness of God’s transformed people wherever he is named. The ministry of Jesus was, and always will be, unparalleled. In some measure, it is a model for us. But in its fullness it bears witness to his utter divine uniqueness. Yet how can we not wonder if this extraordinary fast at the beginning of his ministry was meant for more than his own work?

The Spirit Descended on Jesus Like a Dove

I think there is. Let us go back, then, and learn from him. According to Matthew 3:16, after being baptized, Jesus came up out of the water and the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. What does this mean? The Holy Spirit had always been with Jesus. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in his virgin mother’s womb (Luke 1:35). And for all eternity before that, the Son of God and the Spirit of God had been one, as Paul said so bluntly, “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17). What then does Matthew mean when he reports that “the heavens were opened, and [Jesus] saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him”?

He means that God the Father so loved his Son that he would publicly and powerfully prepare him in this special way for the ministry that lay before him. He would assure him of his favor and his guidance and his sustaining help. As the Spirit comes upon Jesus, God the Father says (in verse 17), “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” In other words, this special manifestation of the Spirit was a demonstration of the Father’s infinite love for his Son (“This is my *loved* son”), and the Father’s great endorsement of his person and ministry (“in whom I am well pleased”).

None Had Ever Ventured Such a Thing, Nor Could They

What Jesus was about to undertake is unique in the history of the world. No other man ever set his face to live and die as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus knew that his task as the Son of Man was “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), and that he “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). He knew from Isaiah 53 that it was the will of God to crush him, and to lay on him the iniquity of

us all, and by his death to justify many sinners (verses 6, 10–11). He knew that God had passed over many sins in former days, and that the vindication of the justice of God was at stake in his life and ministry (Romans 3:25–26). He knew that God’s truthfulness in all his promises rode on Jesus’ faithful and obedient fulfillment of every word spoken in the Old Testament (Romans 15:8). He knew that all this would cost him his life and that the torture would be unspeakably shameful and painful (Mark 10:33–34).

The Father knew this was coming, and the Son knew it was coming. And so the Father commissions the Spirit to fly like a dove upon the Son to assure him of the Father’s love and to make manifest beyond all question the approval of the Father. One of the wonderful effects of the Father’s words, “My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” is to assure Jesus—and us—that the fire of misery that Jesus was walking into was *not* owing to his Father’s displeasure. Already the Father was preparing Jesus—and us—to know that the desperate cry, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” would not be the last word.

The Spirit Leads Jesus into Testing and Fasting

This is especially important to see when we notice in the next verse (Matthew 4:1) what the Spirit’s first act is after coming upon Jesus in this way. It says, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” The first act of the Spirit in Jesus’ ministry was to lead him into the wilderness and to expose him to Satan’s testings.

Under the Spirit’s leading Jesus prepared himself for this testing by fasting. “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. *And after He had fasted forty days . . .*” The Spirit of God willed that the Son of God be tested on his way into the ministry, and he willed that Jesus triumph in this testing through fasting. It must not go unnoticed that Jesus triumphed over the great enemy of his soul and our salvation through fasting.

It seems to me that this story should shake us. Here is Jesus, standing on the threshold of the most important ministry in the history of the world. On his obedience and righteousness hangs the salvation of the world. None will escape damnation without this ministry of obedient suffering and death and resurrection. And God wills that, at the very outset, this ministry be threatened with destruction—namely, the temptations of Satan to abandon the path of lowliness and suffering and obedience. And of all the hundreds of things Jesus might have done to fight off this tremendous threat to salvation, he is led, in the Spirit, to fast.

If Satan had succeeded in deterring Jesus from the path of humble, sacrificial obedience, there would be no salvation. We would still be in our sins and without hope. Therefore, we owe our salvation, in some measure (not to overstate it), to the fasting of Jesus. This is a remarkable tribute to fasting. Don’t pass over this quickly. Think on it. Jesus began his ministry with fasting. And he triumphed over his enemy through fasting. And our salvation was accomplished through perseverance by fasting.

The Reenactment of Israel’s Testing in the Wilderness

Now to see the fuller meaning of this, we must look at the book of Deuteronomy. Each time Jesus responded to the three temptations of the devil in the wilderness he quoted from Deuteronomy. “Man shall not live by bread alone”—Deuteronomy 8:3. “You shall not tempt the Lord your God”—Deuteronomy 6:16. “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve”—Deuteronomy 6:13.

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