



# The Diocese of Banjul NEWSLETTER

*Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter*

COVER STORY

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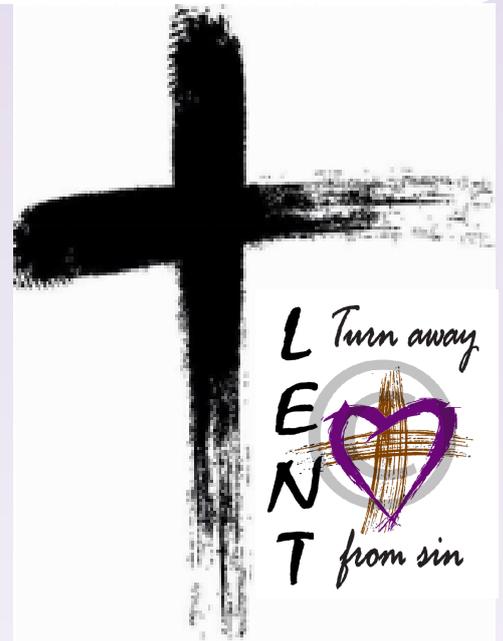
## The Beauty In The Ashes

### Ash Wednesday falls on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026

The annual period of Lent on the Christian calendar will start on **ASH WEDNESDAY** lasting for 40 days (not including Sundays) representing the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness.

It is a time to reflect, fast, and do penance in preparation for the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday.

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The Astonishing Life of The Miracle-Working  
Teen Who Changed the Face of Sainthood, 15-year-old St. Carlo Acutis

**EDITORIAL**

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## Power is a loan, not a possession

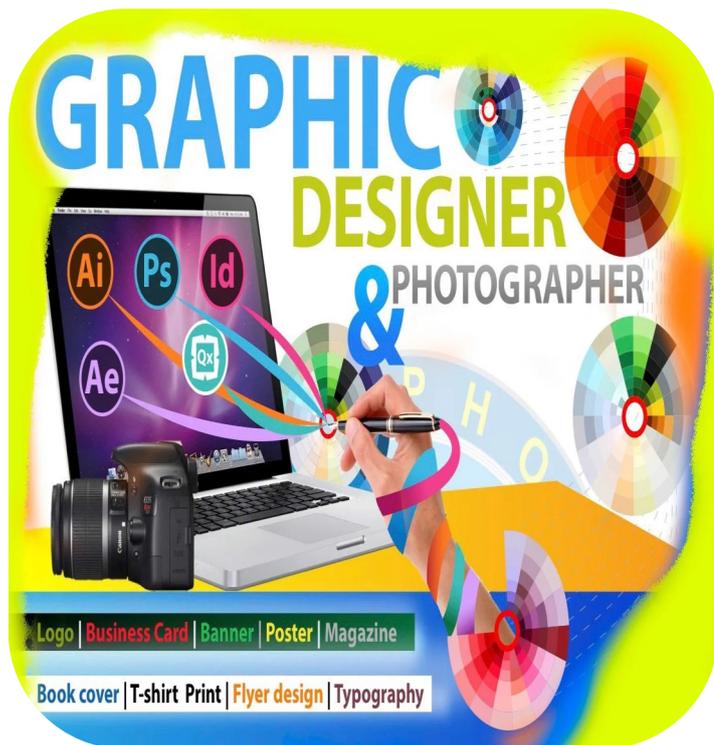
# DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER

## *Our Mission and Vision*

**W**e 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.

**D**ioocese 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.

**D**ioocese 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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*Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter*  
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EDITORIAL HINT

# Power is a loan, not a possession

**P**ower is a loan. It is never truly owned, only held for a while. Whether it comes through politics, position, influence, or privilege, power has an expiry date. Yet, many who ascend into authority forget this fundamental truth. They build monuments to themselves, silence the voices around them, and focus on preserving their grip on power rather than using it to empower others. Unfortunately, by the time the truth becomes evident, it is often too late to do the needful.

Leadership, in its truest form, is not about how long you sit in a seat. Rather, it is about what you do while you are there. The greatest misuse of power is to leave people the same or worse than they were. The greatest honor is to uplift others in your wake, because one day, the spotlight will shift, the position will change hands, and the very people you ignored will become the ones who determine your place in history.

Across all walks of life, government, business, religion, or community leadership, those who succeed in building people are the ones whose relevance outlives their reign. This is because people are legacy. A bridge you built for someone may carry your name longer than any title you ever bore, whether President, Minister, Honorable, among other titles we crave for. An opportunity you created for someone may become the ladder that generations will climb up.

On the other hand, when leaders hoard opportunities, suppress the growth of their citizens for selfish reasons and ego, or treat their position as a personal empire, the outcome is almost always tragic. The end of tenure is followed by isolation, and sometimes, very sad retributions. Once revered figures are forgotten, mocked, or pitied, not because they did not once have power, but because they did nothing meaningful with it while it lasted.

We must remember that the applause fades and the motorcades and retinue of surrounding-security operatives disappear when one is no longer in a powerful position. The titles become past tense, and when they do, all that remains is what you planted in others. The men or women who used their positions to mentor, empower, support, or create platforms for others will always have a place in the hearts of people, even when the office is no longer theirs.

So, to our leaders; “plant your citizens” while your voice still carries weight and speak for the needs of the downtrodden you govern and the voiceless, too. While your table has room, invite others to sit with you. While your hand still holds the pen, sign opportunities into others' lives because when the pen is no longer yours to hold, the people you lifted will become your greatest reference. After all, power is a loan, not a possession; use it wisely by building people.

## THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

**W**e 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. Since 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. We are still active and striving for the best. 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. 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 monthly.**

### PARISH CONTRIBUTIONS 2025

#### OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION CATHEDRAL

P.O. Box 165 BANJUL, THE GAMBIA  
Tel: 9932289 / 7269974

4<sup>th</sup> November 2025

#### HARVEST & THANKSGIVING ACCOUNT SUMMARY 2025

Details	Amount
Donation's	D194,000
Food Sales	D119,320
Food Sponsor's & Unveilers	D88,500
Drinks	D33,000
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>D434,935</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	<b>D250,912</b>
<b>Profit</b>	<b>D184,023</b>
<b>@25% For Bishop's Office</b>	<b>D46,005.75</b>

  
Rev. Fr Antoine Sambou  
Cathedral Administrator

  
Mm. Hannah Kippi Coker  
Chairperson, Cathedral  
Parish Council (778 1524)



## COVER STORY

# The Beauty In The Ashes

## *Finding Mercy for Our Families and Our Nation Sickened by Rotten Politics and a Debt-Choked Economy*

**O**ur present-day Gambian sociopolitical and economic ecosystem is structurally and ethically rotten:

- by **entrenched corruption and impunity;**
- by **tribal patronage and opportunism in our body-politic;**
- by **elite capture amid mass poverty;**
- by **the recycling of discredited actors;** and
- by **debt accumulation without accountability.**

Therefore, for us in this country, Ash Wednesday does not arrive as a mere liturgical date on the Christian calendar; it comes as a summons, quiet yet piercing, to personal and national renewal. As ashes trace a cross upon the forehead, they inscribe more than a religious symbol. They etch a covenant between heaven and homeland, reminding us that humility is the soil from which renewal grows. In The Gambia today, this ancient rite speaks with startling relevance to our families under strain, our politics burdened by mistrust, and an economy weighed down by debt and inequality.

At its heart, Ash Wednesday inaugurates the Lenten season, a forty-day pilgrimage of repentance, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that prepares the faithful for Easter. The ashes, made from the burned palms of the previous year's Palm Sunday, confront believers with a dual truth: human frailty and divine mercy. The words spoken by the priest, *"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return"* or *"Repent and believe in the Gospel"*, strip away illusions of permanence, power, and self-sufficiency. They summon the human heart back to God.

Rooted in Scripture and early Christian practice, the symbolism of ashes runs deep. In the Old Testament, ashes marked repentance, mourning, and humility: Job repented "in dust and ashes"; the king of Nineveh abandoned his throne to sit in sackcloth and ashes; Daniel fasted and prayed amid ashes as he sought God's mercy. These images converge in Lent, which mirrors Christ's forty days in the wilderness, days of temptation, self-denial, and unwavering trust in God. From the ninth century to the present day, Ash Wednesday has remained a powerful, countercultural witness in a world intoxicated by excess and pride.

Yet, Ash Wednesday is never meant to remain confined to the sanctuary. Its meaning unfolds most fully when translated into lived realities, especially within particular social, cultural, and political contexts. In The Gambia, a nation celebrated for its religious coexistence, the day assumes a distinctive resonance. Public Masses, processions, and media coverage make the ritual visible beyond church walls, quietly reinforcing shared values of discipline, restraint, and compassion. In a society where Christians and Muslims live side by side, often within the same extended families, Lenten fasting echoes the spiritual discipline of Ramadan, nurturing mutual respect and deepening interfaith harmony.

Socially, Ash Wednesday becomes a catalyst for charity and reconciliation. Lenten almsgiving finds expression in food drives, rice distributions, and parish initiatives supporting the most vulnerable. These acts resonate strongly in a country where nearly half of households

experience poverty. They also draw from indigenous traditions of communal solidarity, reminding us that care for one's neighbor is both a spiritual duty and a cultural inheritance.

Economically, the call to simplicity speaks directly to Gambian realities. Fasting curtails excess consumption and invites reflection on sustainable living in an economy strained by inflation, youth unemployment, and a heavy national debt burden. Meals during Lent often rely on local staples such as rice, millet, fish, vegetables, and herbal infusions, quietly affirming food self-reliance and prudent stewardship. In this sense, Ash Wednesday offers not only spiritual discipline but also an economic ethic: one that resists waste, tempers desire, and prioritizes the common good over indulgence.

The political implications of Ash Wednesday are perhaps the most unsettling, and the most necessary. Ashes proclaim that all power is temporary and all authority accountable. In a nation still navigating the legacy of authoritarian rule and the complexities of democratic transition, this reminder cuts deep. The ashen cross challenges our leaders and citizens alike to reject corruption, tribalism, and arrogance. It echoes the prophet Joel's urgent plea: "Rend your hearts, not your garments." Repentance, in this sense, is not sentimental regret but a decisive turning away from injustice toward integrity.

As The Gambia approaches another election cycle amid economic hardship and political fragmentation, Ash Wednesday stands as a moral compass. It calls politicians to servant leadership, fiscal discipline, and transparent governance that prioritizes the poor, the farmers, fishermen, market women, and unemployed youth. It urges voters to reject transactional politics and demand accountability rooted in conscience rather than convenience. In this way, Lent becomes not an escape from public life but a season of civic awakening. Families, too, are invited into this renewal. Within homes, Lent encourages forgiveness, honest self-examination, and the rebuilding of trust. Shared meals, prayer, and restraint from harmful habits strengthen bonds in extended households already under economic pressure. As pastoral voices have long emphasized, the renewal of society begins with the renewal of the family.

Ultimately, Ash Wednesday proclaims a paradox: that beauty can rise from ashes. From the recognition of our brokenness emerges the possibility of healing, and from humility, the promise of justice from repentance, and the hope of resurrection. Love among citizens, inclusivity in public life, and resilience in hardship are not abstract ideals; they are the fruits of hearts genuinely turned toward God and neighbor.

*This Lent, may The Gambia hear anew the quiet wisdom of the ashes. May we rise from political cynicism to ethical leadership, from economic despair to shared responsibility, from social division to interfaith solidarity. And may our journey through repentance lead us, as a people, toward a more just, compassionate, and hopeful future, where faith is not merely professed, but lived for the good of all.*

## The Pope's Prayer Intentions 2026

### **FEBRUARY: For children with incurable diseases**

Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.

### **MARCH: For disarmament and peace**

Let us pray that nations move toward effective disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, and that world leaders choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy instead of violence.

### Religious Awareness

## Taking The Internet to Heaven

The Astonishing Life of The Miracle-Working  
Teen Who Changed the Face of Sainthood, 15-year-old St. Carlo Acutis

**In every age, God raises saints who speak directly to the hopes, fears, and struggles of their time. In an era marked by smartphones, social media, digital distraction, and a restless search for meaning, that saint is Carlo Acutis. Young, joyful, technologically gifted, and radically in love with Jesus, Carlo shattered the illusion that holiness is reserved for monks, martyrs, or the elderly. His life—and the miracles attributed to him both before and after his death—proclaim a simple but revolutionary truth: sanctity is possible now, here, and even in a hoodie and sneakers. Carlo Acutis was born in London on May 3, 1991, to Italian parents and later grew up in Milan.**

From the outside, his life appeared ordinary. He loved football, video games, animals, and computers. Yet beneath this normal childhood burned an extraordinary intimacy with God. From an early age, Carlo displayed a profound spiritual awareness that astonished adults and moved hearts. At just seven years old, he received his First Holy Communion—earlier than usual—because of his unusual understanding and love for the Eucharist. From that day onward, he attended daily Mass whenever possible, prayed the Rosary faithfully, and spent long moments in Eucharistic adoration. Carlo once said words that have now become famous: *“The Eucharist is my highway to heaven.”*\* This was not a poetic slogan but the organizing principle of his life. He believed with childlike certainty that Jesus was truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, alive, listening, loving, and transforming those who approached Him with faith. His devotion was contagious. Friends, classmates, babysitters, and even skeptical adults found themselves drawn back to the sacraments through Carlo's quiet witness. Without preaching loudly, he evangelized powerfully—by joy, consistency, and authenticity. Even while he was alive, many testified that Carlo possessed a mysterious spiritual influence. People felt peace in his presence. Troubled classmates confided in him. Those who were distant from the Church found themselves questioning their indifference after encountering his faith. Carlo had an uncanny sensitivity to the suffering of others.

He defended bullied classmates, befriended children with disabilities, and gave his pocket money to the homeless. He once told his mother that hurting others was the fastest way to lose God, while loving others was the surest path to Him. One of the most remarkable aspects of Carlo's sanctity was how naturally he united faith and

modern technology. A self-taught computer programmer, Carlo recognized the evangelizing power of the internet long before most adults did. He created websites for parishes, helped religious communities go online, and most famously developed a comprehensive digital exhibition cataloguing Eucharistic miracles from around the world. His goal was simple and bold: to help people rediscover belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. These Eucharistic miracles exhibition has since been displayed in thousands of parishes across every continent. It has inspired countless conversions, vocations, and returns to the sacraments. Even today, long after his death, Carlo continues to evangelize through this work fulfilling his own words: *“Our goal must be infinite, not the finite. Infinity is our homeland. Heaven has been waiting for us forever.”*

Carlo's holiness was not without suffering. In 2006, at just fifteen years old, he was suddenly diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia. The illness progressed with terrifying speed. Yet Carlo faced his suffering with a serenity that stunned doctors and nurses. He offered his pain for the Pope and for the Church, asking only to die without long suffering. He refused morphine when it dulled his clarity of mind, choosing instead to unite his pain consciously with Christ on the Cross. Even in the hospital, Carlo continued to think of others. He thanked the medical staff repeatedly, comforted his parents, and spoke calmly about heaven as if he were preparing for a long-awaited journey.

Shortly before his death on October 12, 2006, he said, *“I am happy to die because I have lived my life without wasting even a minute of it on things that do not please God.”* These words, spoken by a teenager, carry the weight of heroic virtue and spiritual maturity far beyond his years. After his death, something extraordinary began to happen. Stories of favors, healings, and conversions attributed to Carlo's intercession started spreading rapidly across the world. People who prayed to him, especially young people, reported profound spiritual experiences, renewed faith, and unexpected graces. Carlo, it seemed, had not stopped working. He had only changed his address. The first officially recognized miracle attributed to Carlo Acutis occurred in Brazil. A young boy named Matheus suffered from a rare congenital pancreatic condition that made eating impossible and threatened his life. After praying fervently through Carlo's intercession and touching a relic of the young Servant of God, Matheus was instantaneously

healed. Medical examinations confirmed the complete and unexplained disappearance of the disease. In 2020, the Vatican officially recognized the miracle, leading to Carlo's beatification. But this was only the beginning. A second miracle recognized in 2024 sealed Carlo's path to sainthood. This miracle involved the sudden healing of a young woman who suffered severe brain trauma after a bicycle accident. Doctors had lost hope. Her mother prayed desperately at Carlo's tomb in Assisi, entrusting her daughter's life to the young blessed. Against all medical expectations, the woman recovered rapidly and completely. Again, the Church confirmed the healing as scientifically inexplicable and spiritually attributed to Carlo's intercession. What makes Carlo's miracle-working life so compelling is not only the healings themselves, but what they reveal about God's priorities.

Carlo was not a priest, monk, or missionary in distant lands. He was a student. A gamer. A programmer. A son. A friend. His sanctity assures the modern world, especially the youth, that holiness is not about escaping ordinary life but transforming it.

Carlo also stands as a rebuke to a culture that glorifies fame, wealth, and self-promotion. He once observed with striking clarity: "All people are born as originals, but many die as photocopies." Carlo refused to be a photocopy. He did not chase popularity or approval. Instead, he anchored his identity in Christ, finding freedom in humility and joy in simplicity. His life reminds us that true greatness is measured not by followers or influence, but by love. Today, Carlo's incorrupt body lies in Assisi, dressed

simply, visible to pilgrims who come from every corner of the world. Many leave in tears, touched by the realization that sainthood is not a distant dream but a present calling.

Carlo's face, young, peaceful, and smiling, speaks louder than sermons. It says: God is real. Heaven is close. Do not be afraid to be holy. For families, Carlo is a model of raising children in faith without coercion. For young people, he is proof that one can love God deeply without rejecting modern life. For the Church, he is a sign that evangelization must enter the digital continent with courage and creativity. For a wounded world, he is a reminder that purity, kindness, and faith are not outdated virtues, but urgent necessities.

The miracles attributed to Carlo Acutis, both spiritual and physical are not ends in themselves. Like all true miracles, they point beyond themselves to Christ. Carlo never wanted attention for himself. He wanted Jesus to be known, loved, and adored in the Eucharist. In that mission, he continues to succeed perhaps more powerfully now than ever before. In Carlo Acutis, God has given our generation a saint who speaks our language, understands our struggles, and walks our roads. His life proclaims that holiness is not about age, status, or perfection, but about love; radical, Eucharistic, and self-giving love.

His miracles remind us that God is still active, still healing, and still calling. And perhaps the greatest miracle of all is this: that a fifteen-year-old boy, armed with faith, humility, and a laptop, is still changing lives, restoring hope, and leading souls to heaven; one prayer, one click, one heart at a time.

## **The Diocese of Banjul Newsletter wishes the Christian community a blessed Lenten Season.**



*40 Atlantic Road, Fajara.*

*Telephone: 4498000*

***Giving Hope  
to a World in  
Need.***

### **The Gambia Programme**

- Health,
- Nutrition,
- Agro-enterprise,
- Food Security.

**PARTNERING WITH THE GAMBIA PASTORAL**

**INSTITUTE ON MANY PROJECTS**

**- *THUS ENHANCING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT***

**C**atholic Relief Services began working in The Gambia in 1964 at the invitation of the then Catholic Bishop of Banjul. Since CRS has been providing emergency relief to vulnerable communities, strengthening food security, tackling malnutrition, enhancing healthcare services and providing educational opportunities for children and their families. CRS contributes to the fight against people living with HIV; malaria and emergency relief programs when disaster strikes.

# Ash Wednesday falls on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026



**Lent is one of the five seasons of the Catholic liturgical calendar.**

**The first day of Lent is always Ash Wednesday**, in which we use ashes on our forehead, in the shape of a cross, to remember our own mortality and begin our journey of penance.

The Gospels tell us that after His baptism, Jesus fasted in the desert and then was tempted by the devil. He resisted these temptations and then went to Galilee to begin His public ministry.

*“Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, “All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.” At this, Jesus said to him, “Get away, Satan! It is written: ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.’” Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him. Matthew 4: 8-11*

## Liturgical Changes

Purple (or violet) is the color of the Lenten season and this is reflected in the vestments (chasuble) that a priest wears for most of Lent, starting on Ash Wednesday.

The “Gloria in Excelsis,” normally sung in a celebratory manner, is omitted, as is the “Alleluia” normally sung before the Gospel. “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of Endless Glory” often serves as the replacement.

These are subtle reminders to us that we are in the desert with Jesus, inviting God to work in us during this

time of sacrifice.

There is no better time to reconnect with or deepen one’s faith than Lent. During this time, we can draw closer to God as we prepare for the joyous celebration of Christ’s resurrection at Easter.

Lent is a season of preparation, as we get ready for Easter—the Church’s greatest celebration.

And just like our weather seasons have unique characteristics, so too do seasons within the Church. Lent is more solemn. The sacrament of reconciliation—when we ask God for forgiveness—becomes more popular. The Stations of the Cross, a tradition often taking place on Fridays during Lent, allow us to pray with Jesus in His final hours. More solemn songs replace celebratory hymns during Mass.

**Lent is far too important a season to skip over or treat like any other time of the year.**

## Prayer, Fasting and Alms giving

Three key pillars characterize the Lenten season: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (charity). Above all, Lent is a season of prayer. Deepening our relationship with God during Lent gives meaning to our fasting and strengthens our call to almsgiving.

## Preparing for Holy Week and Easter

**Lent includes Palm Sunday**, which presents its own unique liturgy, featuring a procession of the congregation into the church along with, of course, the distribution of palms. It is during this service that the entire Passion story is read aloud, as we begin Holy Week.

**Lent technically ends on Holy Thursday**, as we celebrate the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, remembering Jesus’s final meal with His disciples in which He institutes the Eucharist. Following this Mass, the altar and worship space are stripped bare, and the Blessed Sacrament is processed out from the altar to a chapel.

**The next day is Good Friday**, the only day of the year when Mass is not celebrated (though communion is distributed at some services).

**Holy Saturday, the day of waiting for the joy of the Resurrection, completes what is known as the Triduum: the three days leading up to Easter Sunday.**

# Clergy Retreat 2026

From 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2026



**T**he priests of the Diocese of Banjul had their annual retreat in GPI from 4<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2026.

Rev. Fr. Hilary Agbenosi from the Archdiocese of Accra-Ghana was the preacher at this year's retreat. His spiritual leadership enriched the priests with profound insights and moments of grace.

The Bishop of Banjul, his Excellency most Rev. Dr. Gabriel Mendy, along with over 40 priests working in the Diocese, participated in the six days of prayer, reflection

and fraternal fellowship. The retreat offered a sacred space for clergy to renew their spiritual strength and deepen their commitment to pastoral ministry.

The focus of the 6-day retreat was "The Priestly life drawn from the Eucharist healed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation-Hebrew 4: 14-16".

Let us continue to pray for our Bishop and Priests as they carry forward the fruits of the retreat into their ministry.

NEW YEAR'S  
MESSAGE  
2026

## THE POWER AND BENEFITS OF GOD'S BLESSINGS ON BELIEVERS



**A**s believers, we seek God's blessings every day of our lives and at different stages of our journey on earth. We pray for God's grace, gifts, favors, and protection because we rely on him for our human and spiritual wellbeing. For God is the source of all the blessings we need to succeed in life and give praise to him for his assistance and generosity. Each of us equally prays for God's blessings at crucial moments of our lives. But the beginning of a New Year is the time we really thank God for sustaining our lives and also request his blessings and good gifts on our families, community of faith, and nation. Simply because of the possibilities, uncertainties, and challenges we expect in the New Year. So, we seek God's assistance, guidance, and intervention and he graciously grants us his blessings and good gifts. Unfortunately, we do not always recognize and appreciate the power and benefits of God's blessings he offers us in our daily lives and in the course of the year. We easily take God's blessings for granted when he offers us his good gifts and we also lose sight of his blessings when it is not what we prayed for in life. So, my New Year's message this year is on **the Power and Benefits of God's Blessings on Believers**. This will enable us to honour, cherish, and be grateful for everything we receive from God out of his goodness and benevolence. It will also renew our faith and confidence in God, the source of all the blessings and good gifts we gained from him for his greater glory and our own benefit.

In different passages in the Scriptures, God revealed himself as the God of blessings and giver of good gifts. He freely and generously offered his grace, blessings, and sacred gifts to humanity in spite of our condition and unworthiness in life. He also rewarded his faithful people who believed in him and obeyed his commandments. When God created Adam and Eve in his own image and likeness, he blessed them (Gen. 1:28) and instructed them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. He then offered them everything he created for their own benefit. His blessings and good gifts were, consequently, what enabled Adam and Eve to survive, increase, and multiply. Otherwise, they would not have existed and sustained themselves without God's blessing. He revealed himself as a God of blessings also to Moses and Aaron (Num. 6:22-27). In this text, God assured them that if they invoke his name on his chosen people he will bless them. If they call his name saying: may the Lord bless you and keep you, may he let his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the Lord uncover his face and bring you peace, he will bless his people. This clearly indicates that God is ultimately the one who blesses when his sacred ministers pray over his people in his name. They experience the power of God's blessings when they are blessed in his name. The psalmist also acknowledged God, in Ps. 66:2-6, as the source of all blessings. He said, "O God be gracious and bless us and let your face shed its light upon us ... for you rule the world with justice ... you guide the nations on earth ... may you still give us your blessing till the ends of the earth revere you." God's people, therefore, relied on him as their source of blessings and giver of all good gifts. He was equally gracious with his blessings to them so that they too would glorify and revere him for his goodness to them.

God's divine blessings were also offered as a reward to his people who obeyed his commandments. He specifically promised long life, inheritance, and prosperity in Ex. 20:12 to those who honour their parents in obedience to the fourth commandment of the law. They will live long and be happy in the land they inherit from him. In Deut. 11:26-29, God also promised his chosen people his blessings if they obey all his commandments. He promised to reward them with his blessings if they observe his commandments in the land they will possess. But he also warned them that they will be cursed if they disobey his commandments and follow other gods of the land. Their observance and obedience to God's commandments was, therefore, for their own blessing and benefit than a legal obligation or burden on their part. This was strongly emphasized by God in Deut. 28:1-14 that "if they obey his voice ... all blessings will come upon them and overtake them ... they will be blessed wherever they live ... their enemies will be defeated before them ... the Lord will make them abound in prosperity ... he will open for them his good treasury in the heavens to give them rain for their land and bless the work of their hands." These and many more were the blessings and benefits God rewarded his chosen people for their obedience to his commandments. They equally had an advantage over other nations because of the power and benefits of God's blessings on them. But God was their main source of blessings so they had no reason, on their

part, to boast about their success and loyalty to God. They were simply required to praise, honor, and be grateful to God for his good gifts to them because it was God who enabled them to obey his commandments. They were not expected, for that reason, to commend themselves or believe they merit God's blessings on their own ability.

As a benevolent and generous God, God never revokes his blessings and good gifts even when he is not glorified and his gifts are not properly used in accordance with his will. For, his blessings are not conditional. Nor are they subject to his people's response and fidelity to him. They endure in themselves once God blesses and he never revokes his good gifts. Nobody else, according to Num. 23:20 can also withdraw God's blessings. This was strongly emphasized by St. Paul in Rom. 11:29. He said God's gifts and his special call of his chosen people were irrevocable. So, God never regrets what he freely and generously offers his people. He always offers his abundant blessings and favors for the good and benefit of his people in spite of their unworthiness. The Catholic Church, therefore, presents God's blessing in nos. 1078 of its *Catechism* as a divine and life-giving action of God that is both word and gift. God is, in that respect, the one who blesses even when his blessings are indirectly offered through the sacred actions of his ordained ministers. In both instance, God's blessings are considered by the Church as a promise of divine help, a proclamation of his favours, and a reassurance of his faithfulness to his word. We should not, for that reason, trivialize, misuse, or ignore God's blessings that he offers us to enrich our spiritual and human life on earth. Each of us should fully cherish every blessing from God and be grateful to him so that God in his goodness can bless us more with his good gifts. We can never lose God's blessings because he never revokes his good gifts to us. But we can certainly gain more of his blessings if we recognize and value his good gifts to us and express our gratitude to him.

In our various vocations and situations in life, we all desire and pray for God's blessings and good gifts at the beginning of the New Year. We seek various forms of God's blessings in the course of the year based on our needs and expectations in life. So, we pray for God's blessings of long life, good health, healing, success, protection, happy marriage, prosperous business, abundant harvest, employment, promotion, and good exam results. These may be some of the blessings we expect in the New Year but God may or may not grant them for reasons best known to him alone. He may grant us other blessings we never considered that are also for our own good and benefit. So, we should always expect God's blessings in different forms without losing faith and hope in him when we do not exactly gain what we prayed for in our lives. For God never fails to bless his people with his abundant good gifts. We, therefore, need the eyes of faith, patience, and

disposition to recognize and appreciate, not just the blessings of God, but what these blessings are meant for in our spiritual and human lives. It is important for us, in that case, to count and cherish God's blessings and make good use of them in accordance with God's purpose. This is what is required of us than boasting about God's gifts and blessings when he answers our prayers. For St. Paul clearly affirmed in 1Cor. 4:7 that there is nothing we have that is not given to us by God and if it is given to us why should we boast as if it is our own and not God's gift? None of us should, therefore, credit or commend ourselves for God's blessings and boast about it even if we benefit from God's good gifts and we are transformed by his blessings.

We should, therefore, in this New Year, be more conscious of the power and benefits of God's blessings in our human and spiritual lives. It will enable us to appreciate and cherish the blessings and good gifts we receive from God and also praise and glorify him as the source of our inspiration, qualities, success, good health, progress, and prosperity in life. So, we should no longer take God's blessings for granted in our lives or assume it is by our own strength and ability we attained all our benefits. For God is the source of all the good things we experience and pray for in life. So, in the course of this year, we should always give thanks, according to St. Paul in 1Thess. 5:18, to God in all things. We should also be grateful to God when we obtain his blessings indirectly through the actions of his consecrated ministers. For the Catholic Church provides for the celebration of various blessings in its liturgy, but many do not always utilize these rites. Nor do they remember to return and give thanks. But the celebration of these blessings are intended for the pastoral benefits of the members of the Church, so they should lead the faithful to praise God and attain his grace, favours, and protection at different moments of their lives. I, therefore, encourage all believers, during this New Year, to seek blessings from God that the Church offers through its many Rites of Blessings for different needs. As we begin the New Year of 2026, I take this opportunity to wish the priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, and lay faithful of the Diocese, our brothers and sisters in Christ, our President and his Cabinet Ministers, our dear Muslim friends and believers of other faiths, Gambians at home and abroad, God's abundant blessings of peace, good health, success, and prosperity throughout this year.

*Your Servant in Christ,*

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

#### **REVISED STIPEND RATES FOR THE SACRAMENTS IN THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL 2025**

1. Mass Stipend - D100
2. Baptism - D200
3. Holy Communion - D300
4. Confirmation - D400
5. Marriage - D500

## Couples Advent Retreat 5th - 7th December, 2025

The Couples Retreat was successful and it was a weekend full of love, laughter, and joy, but above all, reflection, sharing and looking into the future with hope.

We sincerely thank Aunty Joanna Mendy for facilitating the workshop; Dr. Vivian Khumbah and Dr. Margaret for their immense support, guidance and input; Mr. and Mrs. Manneh, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Kwokori and Vincent Baba Mendy, for supporting and helping in so many ways during the period.

We are also grateful to Mrs. Madeleine Jallow for coming to share her experience with the young couples.



Finally, we thank Fr. Felix Boissey for his inspiring talk and for celebrating holy mass for us..

May god continue to bless our families with cords that can never be broken. Amen



True love is about growing as a couple, learning about each other, and never giving up on each other.



**Daily Mass Readings****February & March****1st February, 2026 – Sunday**

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Zephaniah 2](#): 3; [Zephaniah 3](#): 12-13Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 146](#): 6-7, 8-9a, 9bc-10Second Reading: [First Corinthians 1](#): 26-31Alleluia: [Matthew 5](#): 12aGospel: [Matthew 5](#): 1-12a**2nd February, 2026 – Monday**

Presentation of the Lord / Feast

First Reading: [Malachi 3](#): 1-4Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 24](#): 7, 8, 9, 10Second Reading: [Hebrews 2](#): 14-18Alleluia: [Luke 2](#): 32Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 22-40 or [Luke 2](#): 22-32**3rd February, 2026 – Tuesday**

Ordinary Weekday/ Blaise, Bishop, Martyr/ Ansgar, Bishop, Missionary

First Reading: [II Samuel 18](#): 9-10, 14, 24-25a, 30 – 19: 3Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 86](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5-6Alleluia: [Matthew 8](#): 17Gospel: [Mark 5](#): 21-43**4th February, 2026 – Wednesday**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Second Samuel 24](#): 2, 9-17Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 32](#): 1-2, 5, 6, 7Alleluia: [John 10](#): 27Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 1-6**5th February, 2026 – Thursday**

Agatha, Virgin, Martyr / Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [First Kings 2](#): 1-4, 10-12Responsorial Psalm: [First Chronicles 29](#): 10, 11ab, 11d-12a, 12bcdAlleluia: [Mark 1](#): 15Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 7-13**6th February, 2026 – Friday**Paul Miki, Priest, Martyr, and Companions, Martyrs  
Obligatory MemorialFirst Reading: [Sirach 47](#): 2-11Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 18](#): 31, 47 and 50, 51Alleluia: [Luke 8](#): 15Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 14-29**7th February, 2026 – Saturday**Ordinary Weekday/ Optional Memorial of the Blessed  
Virgin MaryFirst Reading: [First Kings 3](#): 4-13Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 119](#): 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14Alleluia: [John 10](#): 27Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 30-34**8th February, 2026 – Sunday**

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Isaiah 58](#): 7-10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 112](#): 4-5, 6-7, 8-9Second Reading: [First Corinthians 2](#): 1-5Alleluia: [John 8](#): 12Gospel: [Matthew 5](#): 13-16**9th February, 2026 – Monday**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [First Kings 8](#): 1-7, 9-13Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 132](#): 6-7, 8-10Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 53-56**10th February, 2026 – Tuesday**

Scholastica, Virgin, Religious / Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [First Kings 8](#): 22-23, 27-30Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 84](#): 3, 4, 5 and 10, 11Alleluia: [Psalms 119](#): 36, 29bGospel: [Mark 7](#): 1-13**11th February, 2026 – Wednesday**

Ordinary Weekday/ Our Lady of Lourdes

First Reading: [First Kings 10](#): 1-10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 37](#): 5-6, 30-31, 39-40Alleluia: [John 17](#): 17b, 17aGospel: [Mark 7](#): 14-23**12th February, 2026 – Thursday**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [First Kings 11](#): 4-13Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 106](#): 3-4, 35-36, 37 and 40Alleluia: [James 1](#): 21bcGospel: [Mark 7](#): 24-30**13th February, 2026 – Friday**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [First Kings 11](#): 29-32; 12: 19Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 81](#): 10-11ab, 12-13, 14-15Alleluia: [Acts 16](#): 14bGospel: [Mark 7](#): 31-37**14th February, 2026 – Saturday**

Cyril and Methodius, Bishops / Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [First Kings 12](#): 26-32; 13: 33-34Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 106](#): 6-7ab, 19-20, 21-22Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 4bGospel: [Mark 8](#): 1-10**15th February, 2026 – Sunday**

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Sirach 15](#): 15-20Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 119](#): 1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34Second Reading: [First Corinthians 2](#): 6-10Alleluia: [Matthew 11](#): 25Gospel: [Matthew 5](#): 17-37**16th February, 2026 – Monday**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [James 1](#): 1-11Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 119](#): 67, 68, 71, 72, 75, 76Alleluia: [John 14](#): 6Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 11-13**17th February, 2026 – Tuesday**Ordinary Weekday/ Seven Founders of the Order of  
Servites, ReligiousFirst Reading: [James 1](#): 12-18Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 94](#): 12-13a, 14-15, 18-19Alleluia: [John 14](#): 23Gospel: [Mark 8](#): 14-21

**18th February, 2026 – Wednesday - Ash Wednesday**  
 Begin Lenten Preparation for the Easter Triduum. Not a Holy Day of Obligation. Day of Fast (ages 18-59) and Abstinence from Meat (age 14 & up)  
 First Reading: [Joel 2](#): 12-18  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 51](#): 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 & 17  
 Second Reading: [Second Corinthians 5](#): 20 – 6:2  
 Verse Before the Gospel: [Psalms 95](#): 8  
 Gospel: [Matthew 6](#): 1-6, 16-18

**19th February, 2026 – 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

**20th February, 2026 – Friday**  
 Friday After Ash Wednesday/ 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

**21st February, 2026 – Saturday**  
 Saturday After Ash Wednesday / Peter Damian, Bishop, Doctor  
 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

**22nd February, 2026 – Sunday**  
 First Sunday of Lent  
 First Reading: [Genesis 2](#): 7-9; 3: 1-7  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 51](#): 3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 & 17  
 Second Reading: [Romans 5](#): 12-19 or 5: 12, 17-19  
 Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 4b  
 Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 1-11

**23rd February, 2026 – Monday**  
 Lenten Weekday/ Polycarp, Bishop, Martyr  
 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

**24th February, 2026 – 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

**25th February, 2026 – 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

**26th February, 2026 – 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

**27th February, 2026 – 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

**28th February, 2026 – 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

**1st March, 2026 – Sunday**  
 Second Sunday of Lent  
 First Reading: [Genesis 12](#): 1-4a  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 33](#): 4-5, 18-19, 20, 22  
 Second Reading: [Second Timothy 1](#): 8b-10  
 Verse Before the Gospel: [Matthew 17](#): 5  
 Gospel: [Matthew 17](#): 1-9

**2nd March, 2026 – Monday**  
 Lenten Weekday  
 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

**3rd March, 2026 – Tuesday**  
 Lenten Weekday/ Katharine Drexel, Virgin, Religious Founder  
 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

**4th March, 2026 – Wednesday**  
 Lenten Weekday/ Casimir  
 First Reading: [Jeremiah 18](#): 18-20  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 31](#): 5-6, 14, 15-16  
 Verse Before the Gospel: [John 8](#): 12  
 Gospel: [Matthew 20](#): 17-28

**5th March, 2026 – 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

**6th March, 2026 – 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

**7th March, 2026 – Saturday**  
 Lenten Weekday/ Perpetua and Felicity, Martyrs  
 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

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### 8th March, 2026 – 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

### 9th March, 2026 – Monday

Lenten Weekday/ Frances of Rome, Married Woman, Religious Founder

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

### 10th March, 2026 – Tuesday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Daniel 3](#): 25, 34-43

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 25](#): 4-5ab, 6 and 7bc, 8-9

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

Gospel: [Matthew 18](#): 21-35

### 11th March, 2026 – 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

### 12th March, 2026 – 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

### 13th March, 2026 – Friday

Lenten Weekday/ Day of Abstinence from Meat (age 14 & up)

First Reading: [Hosea 14](#): 2-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 81](#): 6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14 & 17

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

Gospel: [Mark 12](#): 28-34

### 14th March, 2026 – 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

### 15th March, 2026 – 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

### 16th March, 2026 – Monday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 65](#): 17-21

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 30](#): 2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a & 13b

Verse Before the Gospel: [Amos 5](#): 14

Gospel: [John 4](#): 43-54

### 17th March, 2026 – Tuesday

Lenten Weekday/ Patrick, Bishop, Missionary

First Reading: [Ezekiel 47](#): 1-9, 12

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 46](#): 2-3, 5-6, 8-9

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

Gospel: [John 5](#): 1-16

### 18th March, 2026 – Wednesday

Lenten Weekday/ Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop, Doctor

First Reading: [Isaiah 49](#): 8-15

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 145](#): 8-9, 13cd-14, 17-18

Verse Before the Gospel: [John 11](#): 25a, 26

Gospel: [John 5](#): 17-30

### 19th March, 2026 – Thursday

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

### 20th March, 2026 – Friday

Lenten Weekday / Day of Abstinence from Meat (age 14 and up)

First Reading: [Wisdom 2](#): 1a, 12-22

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 34](#): 17-18, 19-20, 21 and 23

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

Gospel: [John 7](#): 1-2, 10, 25-30

### 21st March, 2026 – Saturday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Jeremiah 11](#): 18-20

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 7](#): 2-3, 9bc-10, 11-12

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

Gospel: [John 7](#): 40-53

### 22nd March, 2026 – Sunday

Fifth Sunday of Lent. Third Scrutiny of the Elect

First Reading: [Ezekiel 37](#): 12-14

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

Second Reading: [Romans 8](#): 8-11

Verse Before the Gospel: [John 11](#): 25a, 26

Gospel: [John 11](#): 1-45

### 23rd March, 2026 – Monday

Lenten Weekday/ Toribio De Mogrovejo, Bishop

First Reading: [Daniel 13](#): 1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 or

[Daniel 13](#): 41c-62

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

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

Gospel: [John 8](#): 1-11

### 24th March, 2026 – Tuesday

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Numbers 21](#): 4-9

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 102](#): 2-3, 16-18, 19-21

Gospel: [John 8](#): 21-30

### 25th March, 2026 – Wednesday

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

**26th March, 2026 – Thursday**

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Genesis 17](#): 3-9

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 105](#): 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Verse Before the Gospel: [Psalms 95](#): 8

Gospel: [John 8](#): 51-59

**27th March, 2026 – Friday**

Lenten Weekday. Day of Abstinence from Meat (age 14 and up)

First Reading: [Jeremiah 20](#): 10-13

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 18](#): 2-3a, 3bc-4, 5-6, 7

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

Gospel: [John 10](#): 31-42

**28th March, 2026 – Saturday**

Lenten Weekday

First Reading: [Ezekiel 37](#): 21-28

Responsorial Psalm: [Jeremiah 31](#): 10, 11-12, 13

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

Gospel: [John 11](#): 45-56

**29th March, 2026 – Sunday**

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Procession: [Matthew 21](#): 1-11

First Reading: [Isaiah 50](#): 4-7

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 22](#): 8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

Second Reading: [Philippians 2](#): 6-11

Verse Before the Gospel: [Philippians 2](#): 8-9

Gospel: [Matthew 26](#): 14 – 27: 66 or [Matthew 27](#): 11-54

**30th March, 2026 – Monday**

Monday of Holy Week

First Reading: [Isaiah 42](#): 1-7

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 27](#): 1, 2, 3, 13-14

Gospel: [John 12](#): 1-11

**31st March, 2026 – Tuesday**

Tuesday of Holy Week

First Reading: [Isaiah 49](#): 1-6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 71](#): 1-2, 3-4a, 5ab-6ab, 15 & 17

Gospel: [John 13](#): 21-33, 36-38

**Gambian Christian**

**February & March**



**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 on 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, at 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 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 Udogbo was the moderator 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.

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**Weekday  
Celebrations**

# SAINTS

**February  
&  
March**

**6<sup>TH</sup> 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.*)

**8<sup>TH</sup> 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.

**11<sup>TH</sup> 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.

**22<sup>ND</sup> 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.

**17<sup>TH</sup> 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.

**19<sup>TH</sup> 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.

**25<sup>TH</sup> 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).

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February &amp; March

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

# Our Sunday Readings

## 1st February, 2026 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

**1st Reading:** Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10  
**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
**Alleluia:** Matthew 5:12A  
**Gospel:** Matthew 5:1-12A

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

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** When one reads these Beatitudes literally, he/she might get very confused because they seem not to auger well with our earthly beliefs and expectations. The most confusing thing about the Beatitudes is that if you try to live them, you will face very many challenges in real earthly life. You may even start doubting if God is really there for you. One may ask oneself, how should I be blessed when I am poor and hungry? Well, let us find out how! Jesus frames these Beatitudes such that they promise a glorious outcome at the end. He says that if you persevere through those hardships while Loving, Serving, Praising, and Glorifying God, then you will be blessed with the promise at the end of each Beatitude. So, being poor means that you are not interested in amassing earthly wealth. This earthly wealth blinds one from doing the will of God. So if you are contented with what God has given you and remain poor in earthly terms, then the Kingdom of God is yours. Being hungry may mean normal hunger or the constant hunger for knowing God more. Jesus assures us that we will be satisfied. For those of us who are weeping, struggling, and toiling, because of earthly troubles, as they do the will of God, Jesus tells us we will definitely laugh when God rewards us. Therefore, let us do what we were created to do by God. Let's allow ourselves to suffer as we serve and praise God with our work. Let's ask for God's fortitude to persevere the hatred and ridicule from others as we continue serving God. For all our suffering will be rewarded abundantly when we finally reach our destination. Heaven.

**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.

## 8th February, 2026 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 58:7-10  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 2:1-5  
**Alleluia:** John 8:12  
**Gospel:** Matthew 5:13-16

**Homily Theme:** You are the Light of the World – Matthew 5:13-16

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** Indeed, we are the Light of the World and also the Salt of the World. Jesus tells us that we should become the light of the world. What does He mean? The light illuminates a space or a place so that we can see, judge and act. In the absence of light, we can't do anything tangible. For us to become the Light of the World as Jesus commands, we are supposed to first, possess the virtues of Christ, hear His teachings and follow Him and secondly, become good examples to others in an open manner by exhibiting all good things that Christ taught us.

Jesus tells us that we will be of no use to the Kingdom of God if our good deeds do not make others glorify **God**. Just like salt which cannot make food taste good, is useless, those whose good deeds do not attract people to God, will be thrown out and people will trample on them. So, today let our good deeds become visible to everyone so that God can be glorified in our work and love for others. Let us become good role models to others and glory and honour will be to the Almighty God.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, You have commanded us to become the Light of the World and Salt of the Earth. Give us strength, courage and humility so that we can become perfect examples to others and bring them closer to You. Jesus, I love You. **Amen.**

## 15th February, 2026 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

**1st Reading:** Sirach 15:15-20  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34  
**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 2:6-10  
**Alleluia:** Matthew 11:25  
**Gospel:** Matthew 5:17-37

OR Matthew 5:20-22A, 27-28, 33-34A, 37

**Homily Theme:** I have Come not to Abolish but to Fulfil the Law – Matthew 5:17-19

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** This statement above underscores the continuity between the Old Testament (Law and Prophets) and the New Testament (Jesus). Jesus, as the fulfilment of the divine plan, embodies the essence and purpose of the Law. The Law served as a guide for God's people, providing them with moral and ethical principles to live by. Jesus, in His teachings and actions, doesn't negate the importance of the Law but reveals its true depth and meaning. He is the embodiment of

righteousness, and through Him, the true spirit of the Law is unveiled. As followers of Christ, we are called to a higher standard of righteousness. The righteousness Jesus speaks of surpasses mere adherence to external regulations; it delves into the intentions of the heart. Our actions should not merely be a result of legalistic observance but a reflection of a transformed and renewed heart. Jesus warns against breaking even the least of the commandments and teaching others to do the same. This emphasis on the smallest details signifies the importance of integrity in our walk with God. It's a call to genuine obedience, not just outward conformity. This was a revelation that the God-sent prophets who had prophesied about Jesus were actually right, and all that they had proclaimed would come to pass.

Now, Jesus simplifies all these commandments and prophecies into two commandments namely;

1. *You shall Love the Lord Your God with all Your Heart, Soul, and Mind and*

2. *You shall Love your Neighbour as Yourself.*

After these commandments have been condensed into two, we can now confidently understand what Jesus means. You should obey, follow, and teach these commandments to others, you will see the Kingdom of God and more so be regarded very highly. Let's heed Jesus' call to be obedient to the first and foremost the two greatest commandments and also the teachings of Christ so that we can have a high place reserved for us in Heaven.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, give us the passion to obey Your commandments and teach them to others. Help us to continually become the salt and the Light of the World so that our actions and deeds may become good examples that glorify the Name of our Lord. Jesus, I love you. **Amen.**

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## 22nd February, 2026 First Sunday of Lent, Year A

**1st Reading:** Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17  
**2nd Reading/Romans:** 5:12-19 Or Romans 5:12, 17-19  
**Verse Before the Gospel:** Matthew 4:4B  
**Gospel:** Matthew 4:1-11

**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 Reflections:** 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.

Overcoming temptation is like acing an exam, winning a contest, completing a difficult project or accomplishing some challenging feat. We should take great joy in overcoming temptation in our lives, realizing that this strengthens us to the core of our being. As we do so, we must also do so in humility, realizing that we have not accomplished this on our own but only by the grace of God in our lives. The opposite is true also. When we fail a particular temptation over and over again, we get discouraged and tend to lose the little virtue we have.

Know that any and every temptation from the evil one can be overcome. Nothing is too great. Nothing is too difficult. Humble yourself in confession, seek the help of a confidant, fall on your knees in prayer, trust in the almighty power of God. Overcoming temptation is not only possible, it is a glorious and transforming experience of grace in your life. 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 love You. **Amen.**

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## 1st March, 2026, Second Sunday of Lent, Year A

**1st Reading:** Genesis 12:1-4A  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22  
**2nd Reading:** 2 Timothy 1:8B-10  
**Verse Before the Gospel:** Matthew 17:5  
**Gospel:** Matthew 17:1-9

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

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** 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. Listen to him.” God Himself reassured the apostles that Jesus was indeed His beloved Son whom He had sent down to earth and that they should listen to Him. God told them to stop losing faith and hope in Jesus just because He had told them that He would die. The statement by Jesus that He will die made the disciples start wondering if He really was the Messiah. But because the word of the prophets had to be fulfilled, He had to die but still, He have to prove that He was God.

After this powerful transfiguration they all descended to the bottom of the mountain and found the rest trying, but in vain, to drive out a demon out of a man. Jesus confirms their wavering faith in Him by telling them that their dwindling faith is the cause of their inability to drive out demons. 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.

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**8th March , 2026  
Third Sunday of Lent, Year A**

**1st Reading:** Exodus 17:3-7  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9  
**2nd Reading:** Romans 5:1-2, 5-8  
**Verse Before the Gospel:** John 4:42, 15  
**Gospel:** John 4:5-42 or John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42

**Homily Theme:** Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well – John 4:5-42

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** This is the story of a woman who encountered Jesus at the well. She comes to the well in the middle of the noon-day heat so as to avoid the other women of her town for fear of encountering their judgment upon her, for she was a sinful woman. At the well she encounters Jesus. Jesus speaks with her for a while and she is deeply touched by this casual but transforming conversation. The first thing to note is that the very fact of Jesus speaking to her touched her. She was a Samaritan woman and Jesus was a Jewish man. Jewish men did not speak to Samaritan women. But there was something more that Jesus said that deeply affected her. As the woman

herself tells us, He “told me everything I have done.” She wasn’t only impressed that Jesus knew all about her past as if He were a mind reader or magician. There is more to this encounter than the simple fact that Jesus told her all about her past sins. What truly seemed to touch her was that within the context of Jesus knowing all about her, all the sins of her past life and her broken relationships, He still treated her with the greatest respect and dignity. This was a new experience for her! We can be certain that she would have daily experienced a sort of community shame. The way she lived in the past and the way she was living at the present was not an acceptable lifestyle. And she felt the shame of it which, as mentioned above, was the reason she came to the well in the middle of the day. She was avoiding others. But here was Jesus. He knew all about her but wanted to give her Living Water nonetheless. He wanted to satiate the thirst that she was feeling in her soul. As He spoke to her, and as she experienced His gentleness and acceptance, that thirst began to be quenched. It began to be quenched because what she really needed, what we all need, is this perfect love and acceptance that Jesus offers. He offered it to her, and He offers it to us. Interestingly, the woman went away and “left her water jar” by the well. She never actually got the water she came for. Or did she? Symbolically, this act of leaving the water jar at the well is a sign that her thirst was quenched by this encounter with Jesus. She was no longer thirsty, at least spiritually speaking. Jesus, the Living Water, satiated.

Reflect, today, upon the undeniable thirst that is within you. Once you are aware of it, make the conscious choice to let Jesus satiate it with Living Water. If you do this, you too will leave the many “jars” behind that never satisfy for very long.

**Prayer:** Lord, You are the Living Water that my soul needs. May I meet You in the heat of my day, in the trials of life, and in my shame and guilt. May I encounter Your love, gentleness and acceptance in these moments, and may that Love become the source of my new life in You. Jesus, I love You. Amen.

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**15th March , 2026  
Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year A**

**1st Reading:** 1 Samuel 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6  
**2nd Reading:** Ephesians 5:8-14  
**Verse Before the Gospel:** John 8:12  
**Gospel:** John 9:1-41 or John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

**Homily Theme:** Jesus Heals a Man Blind From Birth – John 9:1-41

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** Who was this man? Interestingly, he does not have a name. He is only referred to as the “man blind from birth.” This is significant in the Gospel of John because the lack of a name is also seen, for example, in the story of “the woman at the well.” The fact that there is no name indicates that we should see ourselves in this story. “Blindness” is our inability to see the hand of God at work all around us. We struggle to see the daily miracles of God’s grace alive in our lives and alive in the lives of others. So the first thing we should do with this Scripture is strive to see our lack of sight.

We should strive to realize that we so often do not see God at work. This realization will inspire us to desire a spiritual

healing. It will invite us to want to see God at work. The good news is obviously that Jesus cured this man, as He willingly cures us. To restore sight is easy for Jesus. So the first prayer we should pray as a result of this story is simply, “Lord, I want to see!” The humble realization of our blindness will invite God’s grace to work. And if we do not humbly acknowledge our blindness, we will not be in a position to seek healing. How He heals this man is also significant. He uses His own spit to make mud and smear it on this man’s eyes, which is not immediately that appealing. But it does reveal something quite significant to us. Namely, it reveals the fact that Jesus can use something exceptionally ordinary as a source of His divine grace!

If we look at this in a symbolic way we can come to some profound conclusions. Too often we look for God’s action in the extraordinary. But He so often is present to us in that which is ordinary. Perhaps we will be tempted to think that God only works His grace through heroic acts of love or sacrifice.

Perhaps we are tempted to think that God is not able to use our daily ordinary activities to perform His miracles. But this is not true. It is precisely those ordinary actions of life where God is present. He is present while washing the dishes, doing chores, driving a child to school, playing a game with a family member, carrying on a casual conversation or offering a helping hand. In fact, the more ordinary the activity, the more we should strive to see God at work. And when we do “see” Him at work in the ordinary activities of life, we will be healed of our spiritual blindness. Reflect, today, upon this act of Jesus and allow our Lord to smear His spit and dirt on your eyes. Allow Him to give you the gift of spiritual sight. And as you begin to see His presence in your life, you will be amazed at the beauty you behold.

**Prayer:** Lord, I want to see. Help me to be healed of my blindness. Help me to see You at work in every ordinary activity of my life. Help me to see Your divine grace in the smallest events of my day. And as I see You alive and active, fill my heart with gratitude for this vision. Jesus, I love You. Amen

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**22nd March, 2026**  
**Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A**

**1st Reading:** Ezekiel 37:12-14  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8  
**2nd Reading:** Romans 8:8-11  
**Verse Before the Gospel:** John 11:25A, 26  
**Gospel:** John 11:1-45 Or John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

**Homily Theme:** I Am the Resurrection and the Life; Whoever Believes in Me will Live – John 11:25-27

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** This statement above by Jesus is very perplexing. A person of this world who does not know God or Jesus will find it difficult to fathom the meaning of this statement. But a person who knows God and Christ will understand perfectly what this is all about. In the heavenly context, people of this world are intrinsically dead until they begin to know God, love Him, serve Him, praise and glorify Him. This is why when Jesus says He is the resurrection and life, He means that when you believe in Him and then die the physical death, you will continue living. This is because He will raise you spiritually and give you new life since He is the resurrection and life. This is reinforced by the fact that our

spiritual life after physical death is more important than the physical life we have right now. It still means if you believe in Jesus Christ while you are still physically alive, then your soul is alive and it will never die after the body dies. Martha knew too well about the resurrection of the dead, that is why she told Jesus, “I know he [Lazarus] will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” But Jesus then taught us about the different resurrection and life that He is. Jesus is not interested so much in our short-lived physical life but in the everlasting life that our souls will enjoy after our physical death. Let us, therefore, realize today that Jesus Christ came to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven so that He can raise us from the death we are in. Let us put into practice the teachings of Christ so that we can continue knowing God, loving him, serving, and praising Him. By doing so, Jesus guarantees us everlasting life after our physical death.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, we believe that You are the resurrection and life. We ask You to grant us the strength to push through the challenges of this world without giving in to the temptations of the evil one. May You, during the last day, raise us to the new heavenly life where we will praise You, The Holy Spirit, and our Heavenly Father, in communion with the Angels and Saints. Jesus, I love you. Amen.

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**29th March, 2026**  
**Palm Sunday, Year A**

**At The Procession With Palms – Gospel:** Matthew 21:1-11  
**At The Mass – 1st Reading:** Isaiah 50:4-7  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalms 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24  
**2nd Reading:** Philippians 2:6-11  
**Verse Before the Gospel:** Philippians 2:8-9  
**Gospel:** Matthew 26:14-27:66 or Matthew 27:11-54

**Homily Theme:** Palm Sunday: Jesus Enters Jerusalem in Jubilation for His Passion and Cross.

**Verse of the Day Reflections:** Celebrating Palm Sunday, is a special day in the story of Jesus. In the Gospel, we read about Jesus entering Jerusalem, a big city, on a little donkey. The people were very happy and shouted “Hosanna!” They put their coats and palm branches on the road for Jesus. This event fulfils an old promise from the Bible that said the King would come riding on a donkey. Jesus chose a donkey instead of a big, strong horse to show that he is a different kind of King – one of humility and peace, not someone who conquers with force. In this Liturgy, we face quite a contrast of experiences and emotions. We the celebration by listening to the story of Jesus being welcomed into Jerusalem with great joy and exultation!

“Hosanna!” they cried out. “Hosanna in the Highest!” Jesus was treated as He should have been treated. People were excited to see Him and there was much excitement. When the crowd shouted “Hosanna,” they were asking Jesus to save them. But sometimes, like those people, we might expect God to fix our immediate problems, not realizing that Jesus brings a deeper and everlasting kind of help.

But this excitement quickly turned to shock and horror as we enter more deeply into today’s readings. The Gospel culminates with Jesus hanging on the Cross crying out “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And with that, “Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.” At that moment the entire

congregation kneels in silence as we ponder the reality of Christ's death. How things can change in one short week. What happened to all the people who were shouting and praising Him as He entered Jerusalem? How could they allow Him to enter into this Crucifixion and death?

The deepest answer to this question is one that we may not expect. The answer is that the Father willed it. The Father willed, by His permissive will, that so many would turn on Him, abandon Him, and allow Him to be crucified. This is so very important to understand. At any time during that first Holy Week, Jesus could have exercised His divine power and refused to embrace His Cross. But He didn't. Instead, He willingly walked through this week anticipating and embracing the suffering and rejection He received. And He didn't do so begrudgingly or even with regret. He embraced this week willingly, choosing it as His own will. Why would He do such a thing? Why would He choose suffering and death? Because in the Father's perfect wisdom, this suffering and death was for a greater purpose. God chose to confound the wisdom of the world by using His own suffering and Crucifixion as the perfect means of our holiness. In this act, He transformed the greatest evil into the greatest good. Now, as a result of our faith in this act, the crucifix hangs centrally in our churches and in our homes as a constant reminder that not even the greatest of evils can overcome the power, wisdom, and love of God.

God is more powerful than death itself and God has the final victory even when all seems lost. As we go through this week, from the joy of Palm Sunday to the sadness of Good Friday, let's think about our own hopes and what we expect from God. Let's remember that true salvation comes from Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, not just from

quick solutions to our everyday challenges. Let this week give you divine hope. So often we can be tempted toward discouragement and, even worse, we can be tempted toward despair. But all is not lost for us either. Nothing can ultimately steal away our joy unless we let it. No hardship, no burden, and no cross can conquer us if we remain steadfast in Christ Jesus letting Him transform all we endure in life by His glorious embrace of His own Cross.

The people who cheered for Jesus on Palm Sunday turned against him later in the week. It makes us think about how our own faith can sometimes be unsure. Let's use this Holy Week to reflect on our lives, say sorry for our mistakes, and renew our commitment to follow Jesus, the humble King, who loves us without limits. Reflect, upon the contrast of emotions from Palm Sunday through Good Friday. Ponder the fear, confusion, and despair that many would have had as they saw Jesus murdered. Reflect, also, upon this being a divine act by which the Father permitted this grave suffering so as to use it for the greatest good ever known. The Lord gave His life freely and calls you to do the same. Reflect upon the cross in your life. Know that the Lord can use this for good, bringing forth an abundance of mercy through your free embrace as you offer it to Him as a willing sacrifice. Blessed Holy Week! Put your eyes upon the Lord's Cross as well as your own.

**Prayer:** Lord, when I am tempted to despair, give me hope. Help me to see your presence in all things, even in those things that are most troubling to me. May this Holy Week transform my darkest moments and weakness as I surrender all to You, my God. Jesus, I love You. Amen.

## PERSPECTIVE

By Andrew Sylva - [andrewsylva1982@gmail.com](mailto:andrewsylva1982@gmail.com)



The author

# Containing the 'Back Way' Phenomenon: *Irregular Migration and National Development in The Gambia in 2026*

**A**s The Gambia steps cautiously but resolutely into the year 2026, one haunting reality continues to cast a long shadow over its national psyche: the persistent phenomenon of irregular migration, popularly known as the "Back Way." It is not merely a migration route; it is a loud, painful cry of despair, a verdict on unmet aspirations, and a mirror reflecting deep structural weaknesses within the state. For too long, young Gambians have chosen uncertainty, deserts, and treacherous seas over the familiarity of home—not because they hate their country, but because hope has grown thin.

Irregular migration is not an accident of fate. It is the outcome of deprivation, chronic unemployment, limited opportunities, low income, poor social mobility, and crushing family responsibilities. When a young person boards a rickety boat or crosses the Sahara, it is often after exhausting every available option at home. As the philosopher Frantz Fanon once observed, "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it." For many Gambian youths, the "Back Way" has become a tragic attempt to fulfill that mission by any means necessary.

The recent migration disaster at Jinack, where several Gambians lost their lives, remains a chilling reminder of the human cost of policy inertia. These were not statistics; they were sons, daughters, breadwinners, and dreams

extinguished mid-journey. It is, therefore, no longer acceptable to recycle the same responses year after year and expect different outcomes. As Albert Einstein famously warned, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." The Gambia must, in 2026, chart a fundamentally new and pragmatic path.

### Understanding the Roots: Beyond Condemnation to Comprehension

Containing irregular migration begins with understanding its roots. The "Back Way" is not driven by ignorance alone; many migrants are fully aware of the dangers. What propels them is desperation mixed with rational calculation—when staying appears more dangerous than leaving. Weak industrial base, limited private sector absorption, urban congestion, rural neglect, and a mismatch between education and labor market needs all converge to create a fertile ground for migration.

Family pressure also plays a critical role. In many Gambian households, migration is perceived as a collective survival strategy. Remittances from abroad have become informal social protection systems, replacing what the state has failed to provide. Any strategy to curb irregular migration must, therefore, address both individual aspirations and household survival economics.

### A Strategic Shift: From Reaction to Prevention

If 2026 is to be different, the Gambian government must adopt a strategic, preventive, and development-driven approach. Border patrols, public warnings, and migration sensitization campaigns—while necessary—are insufficient on their own. You cannot preach patience to a hungry stomach. Sustainable solutions lie in job creation, inclusive growth, and visible opportunities that restore faith in the national project.

“Development is about transforming the lives of people, not just transforming economies,” reminds economist Joseph Stiglitz. For The Gambia, development must be youth-centered, spatially balanced, and future-oriented.

### Investing in Job-Creating Sectors: The Only Durable Solution

At the heart of irregular migration is unemployment and underemployment. Investing deliberately in sectors that generate decent, sustainable jobs for young Gambians is the single most effective antidote to the “Back Way.”

One such underutilized goldmine is the River Gambia—a natural artery that has historically shaped settlement, trade, and livelihoods. Its strategic potential remains largely untapped.

### Commercializing the River Gambia: Tourism, Transport, and Transformation

The commercialization of the River Gambia as a high-end tourism corridor could be a game-changing intervention. River-based tourism—luxury cruises, eco-tourism lodges, cultural heritage tours, and water sports—can create thousands of direct and indirect jobs. From tour guides and hospitality workers to artisans, boat engineers, and food suppliers, the multiplier effects are immense.

More significantly, investing in river transportation from Banjul to Basse can revolutionize national mobility. A modern, safe, and efficient river transport system would reduce travel costs, ease pressure on road networks, stimulate local economies along the riverbanks, and open new markets for rural producers. High-end river cruises could simultaneously serve transport and tourism purposes, positioning The Gambia as a unique destination in West Africa.

Such initiatives require favourable investment terms—tax holidays, tax rebates, public-private partnerships, and clear regulatory frameworks—to attract both domestic and foreign investors. When investors see policy consistency and long-term vision, capital follows.

### Revitalizing Agriculture Through the River Gambia

Beyond tourism and transport, the River Gambia holds transformative potential for agricultural development. Strategic investment in irrigation systems can ensure all-year-round farming, breaking the cycle of seasonal unemployment that pushes rural youths toward migration.

Irrigated agriculture enhances food security, increases farmer incomes, and creates agro-processing opportunities. Rice, vegetables, fruits, and cash crops can thrive along the riverbanks, feeding local markets and reducing import dependence. As the African proverb goes, “When the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind.” Strengthening agriculture strengthens the roots of the Gambian economy.

Agro-industrial clusters—linked to storage, processing, packaging, and export—can absorb thousands of employable youths. When rural economies thrive, migration pressures decline organically.

### A Dedicated Fishing Port: Unlocking the Blue Economy

Equally critical is the establishment of a dedicated fishing port or hub for The Gambia. The country’s marine and riverine resources are vast, yet value capture remains minimal. A modern fishing port equipped with cold storage, processing facilities, quality control labs, and export infrastructure would professionalize the sector.

This would create jobs not only for fishermen, but also for processors, logistics operators, marketers, and technicians. The blue economy, if properly harnessed, can become a pillar of youth employment and export earnings, offering dignified livelihoods that rival the lure of migration.

### Education, Skills, and the Future of Work

Economic investments must be complemented by skills development. Technical and vocational education aligned with market needs—marine engineering, tourism management, agribusiness, logistics, and renewable energy—will ensure that Gambians are not spectators but participants in national development.

Youth entrepreneurship funds, incubation hubs, and access to affordable credit can further empower young people to create jobs rather than chase them abroad. As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan wisely stated, “Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress.”

### Governance, Trust, and National Ownership

Ultimately, containing the “Back Way” is also about restoring trust between the state and its citizens. Young people must see leaders who listen, consult, and act. Development strategies should be inclusive, data-driven, and continuously evaluated. National dialogue on migration—bringing together government, academics, civil society, traditional leaders, and the youth themselves—can generate homegrown solutions.

The Gambian government must move beyond symbolism to substance. Pragmatic, precautionary, and proactive steps taken today will save lives tomorrow. If these measures are implemented with sincerity and strategic clarity, irregular migration can gradually become a painful memory rather than a recurring nightmare.

### Conclusion: Choosing Hope Over Despair

As 2026 unfolds, The Gambia stands at a crossroads. One path leads to continued loss of lives, talents, and dreams to the “Back Way.” The other leads to national renewal anchored on opportunity, dignity, and shared prosperity. The choice should not be difficult.

“The future belongs to those who prepare for it today,” said Malcolm X. By investing boldly in job creation, river-based development, agriculture, fishing, and youth empowerment, The Gambia can transform migration from an act of desperation into a matter of choice.

Containing irregular migration is not just about stopping people from leaving—it is about giving them compelling reasons to stay. When hope is domesticated, the “Back Way” loses its grip. And when that happens, national development ceases to be a slogan and becomes a lived reality for every Gambian.



# LENT A TIME OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AND NURTURING



BY FR. GABOU SECKA



**W**hat does “entering Lent” mean? It means we enter a season of special commitment in the spiritual battle to oppose the evil present in the world, in each one of us and around us. It means not off-loading the problem of evil onto others, onto society or onto God but rather recognizing one’s own responsibility and assuming it with awareness. In this regard, Jesus’s invitation to each one of us Christians to take up our “cross” and follow him with humility and trust is particularly pressing. Although the “cross” may be heavy, it is not synonymous with misfortune, with disgrace, to be avoided on all accounts; rather it is an opportunity to follow Jesus and, thereby, to acquire strength in the fight against sin and evil.

We are invited to total trust in divine faith in God; called to fervent prayer and self-sacrifice, imitating our Lord Jesus Christ. We should completely surrender ourselves without reserve to the Lord, prepared to undergo pain and suffering of the body through fasting and abstinence, for the healing of our sinful souls that should be precious gifts to God. We should strive to let go earthly pleasures, luxury and things or rather transcend the earthly or worldly comfort and our desires. Christ was obedient to the Father’s will to enter into the desert field to an encounter with the devil and the world. What did the devil offer apart from just the material world and things that do not last? As Christ overcame the devil and all his

temptations, so are we to be obedient to the Father’s will to overcome all temptations, all adversity. We should seek the things that are eternal, that which is from God. We should bear the “cross” and grow into spiritual maturity in God, and living in the spirit of God. This season calls us to experience some inner silence. Silence is the space where God speaks and man listens; constant and consistent in our encounter with God in prayer. Listen to Him as He speaks to you during this special season of Lent. The inner silence is essential for hearing God’s voice. During this season, we should be very aware of silence deep within us, devoted to prayer and simplicity of heart. Let us be willing and ready to make sacrifices with unwavering faith; deepen our spiritual life and service to our fellow brothers and sisters who need us most. Let’s live in patience with one another. We can only have a great encounter with God in silence. It is in this silence that we can build up an intimate relationship with God, and to be in total union and communion with God. Seek holiness in the little good things you do with total-selflessness. We should endeavor in living the Gospel for our spiritual treasure. The word of God is food for the soul and the spirit. Let us then be filled with the wisdom of God. Listen to Him each day, every moment. He is speaking to you. That moment of silence.

Remember during this season of Lent, that the very little good things you do perfectly well to the best of your ability, make you great in the sight of God.