



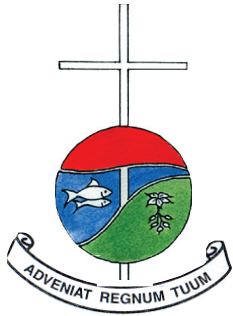
*Looking forward to the 60th
birthday of our Diocese*



Volume 41 No. 1

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2017

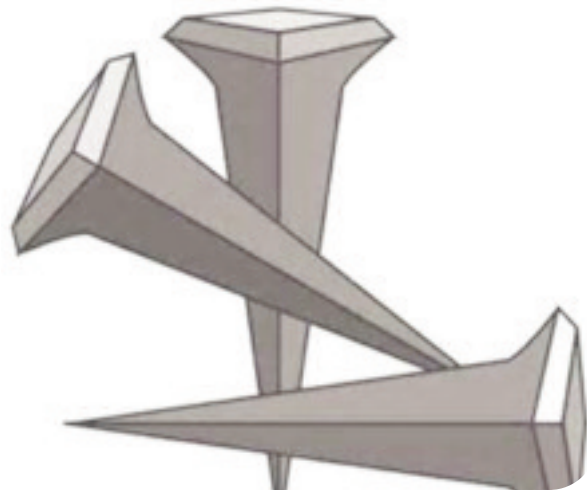
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The Diocese of Banjul NEWSLETTER

Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter

LENT
*small word,
big challenge,
great opportunity*



**Peace in our hearts
and in our world**

*Messages from Pope Francis
and our Bishop*

**Thoughts, prayers & readings
for all the Sundays
in February & March
and Ash Wednesday**





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By way of introduction

Peace on earth and goodwill to all people

WHEN Christ was born just over two thousand years ago, a message was proclaimed: 'Peace on earth and goodwill to all men.'

Surely peace on earth can apply to those seeking an end to all forms of violence?

Acts that have no other intention but to inflict pain and suffering on another person are rooted in hate, jealousy and rage.

As an old song says, 'Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.'

There have been many shameful acts in the world in just this past year, and the past week or two that show that this goal, this message, is more relevant now than it ever has been in history.

Think of the senseless destruction of Aleppo in Syria, the random killing at a Christmas market in Berlin and the shooting and killing of passengers at an Airport in America.

There is unrest in so many places, causing grief and hardship for many people.

Here in The Gambia, there isn't any conflict as such, but many people during the recent political crisis were afraid and anxious, not knowing what was to come. We felt that danger had come so close to our doorsteps.

At the moment we all feel a sense of relief. It is as though a heavy burden has been lifted from our shoulders.

Having just come out of this impasse, we should thank God the Almighty for his sustenance, peace and stability.

We need to continue to pray for national unity at a time when our politics are so divided along the lines of green and grey.

Now, as a new government takes over, we need to pray that all Gambians, in all walks of life, may live and work together for the common good.

On the first day of the year, the Universal Day of Prayer for Peace, we were invited to reflect on peace and its benefits. I hope Gambians will pause to consider that our country's greatness manifests itself in its diversity.

Jesus says to us in John 16:33:

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.'

Happy New Year to all. May you find peace and joy this year.

Fr Peter S. Lopez



The scourge of gossip and rumour

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Pardon and peace Making your Confession

page 19



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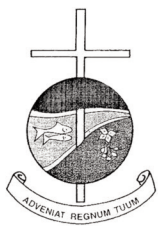
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Here & there

NEWS FROM AROUND THE DIOCESE



'Key stakeholders' to attend first diocesan AGM

THE BISHOP and the Diocesan Finance Committee have convened an Annual General Meeting (AGM) to take place at the Gambia Pastoral Institute from 4pm on Friday 3rd February, and continuing the following day.

It will be the first such meeting to be held in the Diocese of Banjul.

A statement by Bishop Robert Ellison and the Chairman of the finance committee, Bernard Mendy, says that the committee has put in place software and policies to prepare management accounts and the running of the diocese in a more professional manner, and in line with Canon Law.

An external audit firm, Keita Associates, have produced the first diocesan audit reports and accounts for the year ended 2013, which the committee approved on 15th December.

The committee has invited various 'key stakeholders' to the AGM. They are expected to participate 'actively and constructively... as we strive together to realise our diocesan vision to become a vibrant and self-sufficient local church'.

Participants at the AGM will discuss their performance, the challenges they face, and 'how the Bishop's Office could better partner' with them.

'Crowded' pilgrimage



THE ANNUAL December pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama was held on 10th December, the Saturday nearest to the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Pilgrims came from throughout the country and beyond, and it was remarked that participation was even greater than in previous years.

It was in 1986 that a group of lay people suggested to Bishop Michael Cleary that a Marian shrine should be established in The Gambia. Eventually it was decided to locate the shrine at Kunkujang. After the first pilgrimage in 1987 it was realised that more facilities were needed. Bishop Cleary provided a loan. An outdoor altar plinth was built.

The Shrine Church at Kunkujang was opened in 2006. It seats over 1,200 and cost more than D200,000 to build and furnish. It was designed by Cyril Ashby, a retired Irish civil engineer, and contains remarkable murals by Eleanor Yates, an American artist.

The more-recently-instigated Pilgrimage of Reconciliation to Kunkujang Mariama will take place on the second Saturday of Lent – 11th March.

News in brief

* EUCHARISTIC ministers held an Advent retreat at GPI on Friday 16th and Saturday 17th October.

* A STAFF dinner for Catholic offices - the Bishop's Office, GPI, CaDO and the Education Secretariat - was held at GPI on Friday 30th December.



'A word of encouragement'

ON Monday 9th January, on behalf of the Gambia Christian community, the Vicar-General of the Diocese of Banjul, Fr Emile Sambou, issued the following statement, entitled, 'A word of encouragement'.

IN the name of God the Almighty, we continue to pray for peace in our beloved country – for The Gambia, our homeland.

Beloved people of The Gambia, and all who reside therein, in the name of the Christian community of The Gambia we hereby call on all of you to remain calm and protect the peace and security of our land, while we continue to take care of our duties and businesses peacefully as Gambians as we go along our way.

In our view, the present situation does not call for any serious difficulty, and that it can be resolved without violence.

We firmly believe that through dialogue we can address our difficulties, and look at our common good, so that as Gambians we can come to an agreement to resolving the situation.

Our position as a Christian community is that democracy should lead to peace whatever the difficulties. It is time for us to reflect on what we have enjoyed over the past years (or beyond) - peace, a priceless treasure - to the envy of all in the sub-region and the world at large.

Let us work for peace, and in these difficult times we ask all and sundry to make every effort to pursue constantly, and to maintain, the peace.

We pray, therefore, for the blessing of Almighty God on our country, The Gambia, our homeland, and for all its people to remain peaceful at all times.

*Fr Emile B. Sambou
Vicar-General, Diocese of Banjul*

Catholic Calendar - first half of 2017

Ash Wednesday	1st March
Good Friday	14th April
Easter Sunday	16th April
Ascension Day	Thursday 25th May
Pentecost	Sunday 5th June
Trinity Sunday	11th June
Ordinary Time resumes	Monday 12th June



Our diocese approaches its 60th anniversary

ON Saturday 24th June 2017, our Diocese of Banjul will become 60 years old.

It was on 24th June 1957 that Pope Pius XII raised the Prefecture Apostolic to the status of a diocese, with the title 'The Diocese of Bathurst in The Gambia'. But it wasn't until 5th January 1958 that Monsignor Michael Moloney, who had been Prefect Apostolic, was named as the first Bishop.



In those days, missionary bishops were episcopally ordained in their country of origin. Mgr Moloney was ordained bishop on Sunday 4th May 1958 in the seminary chapel of the Holy Ghost (Spiritan) Fathers in Kimmage, Dublin.



The consecrating prelate was the Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, Dr Levane. Present were the President of Ireland and the Taoiseach (Prime Minister).

The Gambia Echo of 21st July 1958 reported: 'It was indeed a most memorable and impressive ceremony, printed indelibly on the mind of all who were fortunate to be present at it.'

Present from The Gambia was Fr Michael Cleary (later, Bishop Cleary), who represented the clergy of the diocese. Representatives of the laity included Martha Gomez, Vicky Blain, S.F. Njie, P.L. Halden, A.L. Blain, J.G. Wadda and J.J. Ndow.

A telegram from Banjul to the new bishop was read out: 'Greetings on the occasion of your consecration as Bishop of Bathurst. Our prayerful thoughts are with you and we send our heartiest congratulations and grateful thanks to the Holy Ghost Fathers of the Irish Province to whom your elevation to this high office is a fitting tribute.'

Bishop Michael Moloney concluded his address by saying, 'The Gambia is considered a very difficult mission. The Church has to work in a strong Islamic setting... but though we may be small in number we are encouraged by the staunch loyalty of our Catholic community.'

Bishop Moloney was enthroned in his cathedral on 26th October 1958, the feast of Christ the King. The large congregation included the Governor, Sir Percy Wyn-Harris.

Bishop Moloney was to preside over the diocese for almost 22 years. In those days, all the priests were fellow Irishmen, Holy Ghost Fathers. It was not easy to find priests for the diocese.

Expansion

The work of the diocese expanded, notably in Bakau, the Kombos and the Kartong area.

Bishop Moloney attended the various sessions of the historic Second Vatican Council held in Rome from 1962 to 1965.

On 19th February 1965 a High Mass of Thanksgiving for Gambian Independence was celebrated at the Cathedral by Archbishop Hyacinth Thiandoum of Dakar.

Bishop Moloney returned from Vatican II on 13th January 1966, thereafter implementing reforms instituting by the council in the Order of Mass.

The first junior seminary was opened at Fajara in November 1972, with Fr Anthony Gabisi and Fr Peter Gomez among the seminarians. The first Director was Fr Pierre Sagna, later Bishop of St Louis, Senegal.

Archbishop Johannes Dyba presented his credentials to President Jawara on 29th February 1980, as the first Papal Nuncio to The Gambia.

On 4th April 1980 Bishop Moloney announced his resignation on grounds of ill health and its acceptance by the Holy See.

Our second Bishop

On 15th February 1981 it was announced that the next Bishop would be Fr Michael Cleary CSSp. He was episcopally ordained at St Augustine's School on 25th March, the Feast of the Annunciation. From the start, Bishop Cleary stressed that the laity 'should take their proper rightful place in the apostolate, in the parish councils'.



On 13th April 1985, the first Gambian ordinations to the priesthood in modern times – those of Anthony Gabisi and Peter Gomez - took place at the Independence Stadium, Bakau. At the same Mass David Jimoh and Edward Gomez were made deacons.

On 5th December 1987 the first National Pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama was held.

In February 1992 Pope St John Paul II visited The Gambia.

In October 2004 President Jammeh made Bishop Cleary a Commander of the Order of the Republic of The Gambia.

Bishop Cleary retired in 2006, having served for five years beyond the usual retirement age. His successor was Bishop Robert Ellison.

Fr Ellison becomes Bishop

Fr Robert Ellison first arrived in The Gambia in October 1970. He was Administrator of the Cathedral from May 1971 to June 1972, when he left for a year to pursue Islamic Studies in Rome. On his return he served at St Michael's Njongon, North Bank Region, until he was recalled to Ireland with Fr Hugh Fagan in June 1974. Soon after he came back in 1981, Fr Ellison was appointed Vicar-General of the Diocese, taking charge of the Junior Seminary at Lamin. He later became Parish Priest of Star of the Sea Bakau, and District Superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers in The Gambia. In 1994 he succeeded Fr Donal Murray as Director of the Gambia Pastoral Institute.



In 1999 Fr Ellison was called to Rome to become General Secretary of the worldwide Congregation of the Holy Spirit - the Spiritans. He held this post until his appointment in 2006 as Bishop of Banjul.

Bishop Ellison convened the Diocesan Assembly of 2008, which had as its central theme the diocese as a dynamic, self-supporting local church. In August 2009 the Diocese of Banjul hosted a five-day meeting of about 120 West African English-speaking cardinals, archbishops, bishops and representatives of priests, religious and lay faithful. The Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA), held every three years, had last met in The Gambia in 1992. The 2009 meeting was historic, as it was the association's last before merging with its French-speaking counterpart, the Association of Episcopal Conferences of West Africa (AECOWA).

In October 2009 Bishop Ellison attended the Second African Synod of Bishops in Rome

Under his leadership, a second annual pilgrimage has been held on the first Saturday of Lent.



Bishop Ellison at State House with the Vice President and fellow West African prelates

After 109 years as a mission, it wasn't until 1957 that the Catholic faithful in The Gambia gained diocesan status. Since that momentous day, growth has continued. The diocese is now served almost entirely by Gambian priests, ordained to serve their own people. So there is much to be thankful for - and much to pray and work for - as the faithful look forward to further growth in Christ's kingdom.

OBITUARY

Sr Catherine passes away



THE DEATH occurred on Tuesday 24th January of a much-loved Presentation Sister, Sr Catherine Gibba.

Sr Catherine was born on 27th May 1960, and died at the age of 56.

Her Requiem Mass was held at St Therese's Church Kanifing

on Tuesday 24th January. The principal celebrant was Bishop Ellison, assisted by priests from throughout the diocese. The preacher was Fr David Jimoh Jarju.

The burial took place at the Catholic Cemetery Banjul, part of which is reserved for reverend fathers and sisters.

'Let us turn entirely to God; what is there to fear when we are really with him?' *Marie Rivier, Founder of the Presentation Sisters.*

Ya Lulu: devoted Catholic teacher

LOUISE Wadda - 'Ya Lulu' - a devoted teacher and devout Catholic - died on 22nd December at the age of 88.

Louise was born in Banjul on 2nd February 1928, last of the four daughters of Kezia Saine Gomez and Samuel Gomez.

She was a pupil at St Joseph's elementary and secondary schools. After her schooling, Louise became a teacher, and together with Sister Albert was posted to Basse by Bishop Michael Moloney.



In Basse she taught at St Edward's Boys' School and St Joseph's Convent.

Her next posting was to St Therese's Primary School. Before she left Basse, Fr Vincent Comer asked Louise to take some boys and girls and bring them up in the Kombos. Among them were Colom Baldeh, Jasinta Baldeh and Agatha Jawo.

After ten years at St Therese's, Bishop Moloney sent Louise to Yundum College to become a qualified teacher.

On her return to St Therese's she taught along with Sr Magdalene, Edward Njie, Victor Carvalho, the late Daphne Sonko, Therese Williams, Ya Adam Mendy, and Frances Lovely Tamba. The headmaster was Francis Jallow.

After decades at St Therese's, on the recommendation of Fr Comer, Louise took over Javouhey Nursery School. She served ten years as headmistress, retiring when her husband fell ill.

She had met her husband, Sheriff Wadda, in 1951. He converted to Christianity and adopted the name Francis. They were married at the Cathedral, and their union was blessed with eight children.

Louise and Frances celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary before Francis' death on 30th December 1999.

Louise loved the Church, and attended Mass every day. Whenever she was free, she recited the rosary.

In 2010 Louise went a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

As the oldest lector at Holy Spirit Banjul she was awarded a certificate by the Parish Priest, Fr Matthias Murphy. At a diocesan dinner on 9th May 2014 Bishop Ellison presented her with a 'Yester-years Living Teacher' award.

Louise was a member of the Legion of Mary, and President of St Martha's Society.

Mrs Wadda was interred at Banjul Cemetery on 22nd December, following Requiem Mass at the church she loved: Holy Spirit, Banjul.



CHILDREN'S PAGE

Here is a
picture for you
to colour



Jesus gave sight to a man blind all his life.

He also gave the man a strong faith in God.

Read the story in St John's Gospel, chapter 9. verses 1 to 41



LENT: a short word for the second-longest season in the Church's calendar (the longest being Easter Time).

And now, here in 2017, Lent lies before us once again, with all its challenges and opportunities.

The prime challenge is to take our Christian religion more seriously. The prime opportunity is to celebrate Easter with greater joy than ever.

During the roughly forty days of Lent we are asked to fast (but only on two days). We are also asked to abstain from certain pleasures or foods, or to engage in good works and works of piety. These 'Lenten obligations' are not onerous. But they should be only the beginning. We should look into our hearts and consciences - a more demanding and painful exercise.

Searching questions

We need to ask some searching questions, seeking honest answers.

- * Where do we stand in relation to our beliefs and practices?
- * How far do we understand and practise our faith in Christ?
- * How closely do we work with other members of the Church to witness to Christ?

It is in the answers to such questions that each of us can determine the best way to observe Lent - the way that will truly point us to Easter.

What are our Lenten obligations?

Throughout Lent every Catholic is obliged to perform personal penance. The obligation may be fulfilled in one or more of the following ways:

- by abstaining from meat or some other food
- by abstaining from alcoholic drink, smoking or some other form of amusement
- by offering family prayers, going to weekday Mass, visiting the Blessed Sacrament or making the Stations of the Cross.
- By going out of one's way to help someone who is poor, sick, old or lonely.

Each individual is free to choose the way of doing penance, which may be changed from day to day.

Ash Wednesday (1st March) and Good Friday (14th March) are days of fasting and abstinence.

It is recommended that the fast of Good Friday be continued the following day (Holy Saturday) until the Easter Vigil.

Fasting means that the amount of food we eat is drastically reduced. Abstinence means abstaining from meat or performing an act of charity. Those over the age of 18 are bound by the rule of fasting until they reach their 60th year. All over the age of 14 are bound by the rule of abstinence.

Every Friday, because it recalls the Crucifixion, is a day of abstinence.

Lenten traditions

The day before Lent is sometimes called Shrove Tuesday, from the practice of hearing confessions and the granting of absolution (or shriving). It is still sometimes called 'Pancake Day', because eggs were used up on this day in the making of pancakes.

In some places, days before Lent are celebrated as Carnival ('carnival' means 'farewell to meat') or *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday), when fatty foods formerly forbidden in Lent were used up.

The colour for Lent (as for Advent) is purple. On the fourth Sunday in Lent rose-coloured vestments may be worn.

The exclamation of praise, *Alleluia*, is omitted at Mass. The *Gloria in Excelsis* is not used on Sundays in Lent, but it is used on the feasts of St Joseph (Monday 20th March) and the Annunciation (Saturday 25th March), and on Holy Thursday (13th April).

By tradition, flowers are not used in church during Lent to decorate altars and shrines. The organ is played, if at all, only to sustain singing. Other musical instruments are not used.

The purpose of 'no flowers, no musical instruments' is to emphasise the penitential aspect of Lent, and to ensure that when Easter comes there is an outburst of colour and joyous music.

LORD, by our Lenten prayer and observance,
prepare our hearts to celebrate the mystery of Easter
and to proclaim the good news of salvation



'A handful of dust'

IN the West, the most common method of disposing of the dead is cremation. In the fierce flames of the oven a corpse is soon reduced to ashes. It's a sobering thought. As the poet T.S. Eliot wrote, 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust.'

The commercial value of a human body is negligible. We are just water and a few chemicals and minerals. Dead, our dust is worth even less. But as a creation of God, with an immortal soul, each of us is infinitely precious.

At the same time, our mortal life is finite. Whatever we think of this life - its joys, its sorrows, its triumphs, its disappointments, its comforts, its frustrations - it is certain that each one of us is going to die.

On Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, worshippers' foreheads are smeared with ashes. As he imposes the ashes on each penitent, the priest may say, 'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return.'

The attitude of the atheist and the agnostic may be, 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' But the Christian, too, lives each day as though it was his or her last. The Christian should make the most of every day, thanking God for his blessings and endeavouring to serve others.

Lent can usefully remind us that this life is a pilgrimage, a journey towards God.

The journey

Just as the ancient Hebrews journeyed for 40 years through the wilderness towards the Promised Land, so Christians spend 40 days preparing for Easter: the great feast of Eternal Life, the Day of Resurrection.

The whole of life - not just Lent - is a journey towards our death and resurrection. Thus, the body of a deceased person may be buried with the assertion, 'earth to earth, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.'

St Paul, even after his conversion, experienced struggle and suffering. But he was adamant: 'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things past, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.' (Romans 8:8).

We accept the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday as an intimation of our mortality. But the ashes are also a remembrance that we are sinners who do not sufficiently recognise each day as a precious gift of God, with heaven as our goal.

So we should use the Lenten season to become more faithful pilgrims.

See End-Piece, page 30



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Question Box

What is the difference between a sin and a crime?

A CRIME is an offence under the laws of the country in which you live, whereas a sin is an offence against God.

In a just and well-ordered society it is a sin to break the laws, because they have been made for the common good.

Some sins are also crimes: for example, theft, slander, assault - all against the laws of God and man.

But some sins are not crimes. For example, it is a sin to receive Holy Communion if you are not in a state of grace: this is against Church law, but not against the law of the land.

Similarly, you commit a sin if you perform sexual acts outside marriage; but this is not necessarily (in some circumstances) against the law of the land.

You commit sin by not attending Sunday Mass, and by not praying regularly; but this is not against the law of the land.

You commit sin by indulging in impure thoughts or by not doing what, as a Christian, you should do. So avoiding sin demands considerably more than simply not breaking the law of the land.

Some sins are grave, or mortal: they alienate man from God, corrode the soul, and endanger the life to come. They should be confessed in the Sacrament of Penance.

Lesser sins weaken the soul.

It is clear that all Christians should shun sin and crime. Their conscience will tell them when they have offended God or their neighbour, or acted against the law.

You should always join in the *Confiteor* at the beginning of Mass clearly understanding what you are saying, and saying every word with sincerity.

I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my own most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.



Unpleasant, burning sensation

HEARTBURN is a form of indigestion felt as a burning sensation in the chest. It's caused by acid regurgitation in the passage down which food moves between the throat and the stomach.

We all suffer heartburn from time to time. But some people suffer from it quite often.

Heartburn can be distressing, and may be mistaken for a heart attack.

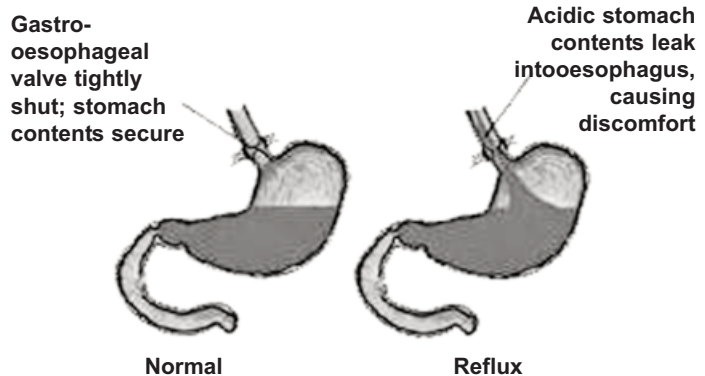
When stomach acid leaks out of the stomach into the gullet the symptoms include:

- * a burning chest pain or discomfort that occurs after eating
- * a sour taste in the mouth caused by stomach acid coming back up into the mouth
- * difficulty in swallowing

Heartburn is common. It has been estimated that around one in five people have at least one episode a week.

The condition is twice as common in men as it is in women. It can affect people of all ages, including children.

Symptoms can range from mild to severe.



The oesophagus is the medical term for the gullet or passage down which food moves between the throat and the stomach

Acid leaking from the stomach

Heartburn occurs when a muscle called the lower oesophageal sphincter is not working properly.

This sphincter acts like a valve. It opens to let food fall into the stomach, and closes to prevent acid leaking out of the stomach and into the oesophagus.

In cases of heartburn, the sphincter does not close properly. It allows acid to leak up out of the stomach.

Factors leading to heartburn include:

- * being overweight or obese
- * being pregnant
- * eating a high-fat diet

More serious cases of heartburn can trigger a range of complications, such as

- * gullet ulcers (open sores that develop in the lining of the oesophagus)

- * bleeding in the gullet
- * mouth problems such as tooth decay, gum disease and bad breath

What can you do to avoid heartburn?

You can buy antacid powder or tablets which work quickly to reduce acidity in the digestive system.

Try to eat more fibre, or 'roughage'. Most people don't get enough, and a diet rich in fibre can help digestion and prevent constipation. You need a variety of fibre, such as fruit, vegetables, wholemeal bread, brown rice, beans and oats. Some people find that cereals and grains bring on bloating. If that's the case, get your fibre from fruit and vegetables instead.

Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. It encourages the passage of waste through your digestive system and helps soften stools. Fibre acts like a sponge, absorbing water, and without fluid the fibre can't do its job, and you'll get constipation.

A good way to make sure you are getting enough fluids is to drink a glass of water with every meal. Avoid caffeine drinks such as coffee, as they can cause heartburn.

Cut back on greasy, fried food

Cutting back on greasy, fried foods eases your stomach's work-load.

Many people love spicy food, and it doesn't bother their digestive system. But others find that spicy food upsets their tummy. If spicy foods give you heartburn, stomach pain or diarrhoea, go easy on them.

Some people find that particular foods cause problems. Acidic foods such as tomatoes, citrus fruits, salad dressings and fizzy drinks can trigger heartburn.

Some people find that drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, colas, tea and some fizzy drinks, can boost acid in the stomach.

Fizzy drinks in general tend to bloat the tummy. Choose drinks that aren't fizzy and don't contain caffeine, such as herbal teas, milk and plain water. If you can't do without coffee or tea, limit your intake to one or two cups a day.

'Friendly bacteria'

Pro-biotics are so-called 'friendly bacteria' that occur naturally in the gut and have been linked to all sorts of health benefits. 'Live' yoghurt, for example, is a good, natural source.

What about Valentine's Day?

SEVERAL early Christian martyrs were named Valentine. 14th February was the feast of St Valentine, imprisoned and clubbed to death around the year 270 for aiding persecuted Christians; also the feast of St Valentine, Bishop of Terni, martyred a few years later.

The commemoration was removed from the Catholic calendar in 1969 by Pope Paul VI. 'Valentine's Day', when friends exchange 'love tokens' is a relic of the old pagan Roman *Lupercalia* of 15th February, with an association dating from mediæval times of the mating season of birds.





Religion begins at home

IN his Lent message ten years ago, Bishop Emeritus MICHAEL CLEARY stressed the importance of the role of parents in the teaching of religion - a consideration that is always topical.

Here is what he wrote:

OVER and over again the Bible repeats that faith in the true God is handed on from father to son to grandson.

It stresses this point in sentences like, 'Tell your sons and your grandsons' (Exodus 10:1-2), and 'Ask of your father, let him teach you. Of your elders, let them enlighten you.' (Deuteronomy 32:7).

From the beginning of the Christian Church, the same thing has been true. Religion begins at home; and parents are its first teachers.

When parents bring their new baby to be baptised, the priest meets them on arrival at the church and says to them:

'You have asked to have your child baptised. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him or her in the practice of the faith. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?'

The parents answer, 'We do.' They accept their obligations consciously and freely.

'The domestic church'

The first Christians would speak of 'the Church at the house of Philemon' or 'the Church that meets at the house of Prisca and Aquila'. That is why Vatican II speaks of the family as 'the domestic Church'.

The Church is a community which listens to, learns from, and lives by the Gospel; and that is what the family should be.

The home should be, as it were, the first church which children get to know, and in which they are reminded of God and taught to pray.

Religion begins at home. Parents are the first and most important of all teachers of religion. If we have the precious

gift of faith to-day, this is because the parents and families of the past knew it was their primary duty as Catholics to teach the faith to their children.

Don't leave it to the school...

We must never imagine that parents do not need to teach religion because we have Catholic schools to do that.

Let parents never imagine that they have fulfilled their whole duty as Catholic parents by sending their children to Catholic schools.

No matter how good they are, Catholic schools can never replace religion in the home. Unless there is religion in the home, the most excellent school or teacher will never completely make up what is missing in the child's experience.

Parents remain and always will remain the first and most important teachers of the faith to their children.

No teacher, no religious programme, no priest or sister even, will ever replace the parents in that task, and will never compensate fully for their neglect. No priest can dispense parents from their obligation, because the obligation comes from God.

Parents are reminded that there must be religion in their homes. There must be faith in their homes.

But there is no faith without love.

St John tells us, 'God is love.' If children do not find love in their home, then something goes wrong with their belief in God.

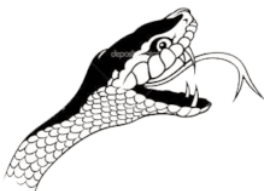
Parents may not always realise that the way husband and wife love one another is a very important part of the religious training of their children.

Marriage is a sacrament of God's love. If must, therefore, be a sign of God's love. There is no better sign that God is alive, and that God loves, than Christian homes - homes filled with love.

Your children need your love

I appeal to you parents to remember this. Your children need your love even more than they need the food you give them, and very much more than they need money.

Try to bring up your children in such a way that they will always remember their childhood days as days filled with God and filled with love. Then we can be sure that, when children grow up, they will throughout their lives, in words of the prophet Hosea 2:15, 'Respond to God, as they did when they were young.'



The scourge of gossip and rumour

WE'VE all fallen victim, at least on occasion, to whispers, gossip or even smear campaigns.

Much rumour is ill-natured. Its origin is rarely innocent.

In a small community, no-one is immune from the ill-effects of rumour. It's often spread by people who should know better.

We may go along with rumour and gossip. We all enjoy talking - and if we're not careful, some of our talk can be unkind or malicious.

When rumour and innuendo spread, they can, like fire, cause destruction. We should treat rumour with scepticism; in most cases, with disdain.

We all have a role to play in countering ill-natured gossip. We should not give it currency by passing it on. As Christians, it is our duty to shed light. In the Church and in society at large we endeavour to nurture honest, open standards of justice and fair play. This calls for openness and decency in all our dealings with each other - the very opposite of the devious, insidious voice of muck-rakers and rumour-mongers.

We believe in a society that is stable, free and harmonious. We enjoy a large measure of all three, but our freedom and harmony are hindered when we pay heed to mischief and mayhem.

Consider the advice of St James: 'Do not speak evil against one another, my brothers. (James 4:11).

And consider Psalm 34, verse 13: 'Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.'

Peace starts in the heart and the home

POPE FRANCIS' New Year message

'VIOLENCE is not the cure for our broken world,' said Pope Francis in his message for World Day of Peace on 1st January.

'Active non-violence is a way of showing that unity is truly more powerful and more fruitful than conflict,' the Pope said. While differences will sometimes lead to difficulties, 'let us face them constructively and non-violently', so that tension and opposition can turn into 'diversified and life-giving unity', preserving 'what is valid and useful on both sides'.

The Pope's message, sent to heads of state around the world, invited everyone 'to banish violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming non-violent people and to build non-violent communities that care for our common home'.

From the family, love spills out to the world

Building a new politics of non-violence starts in the human heart and the home, the Pope declared. It is in the family that people can learn how to communicate, be generous and caring, and resolve conflicts 'not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness.' From within the family, 'the joy of love spills out into the world and radiates to the whole of society.'

The Pope said: 'I plead for disarmament and for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons: nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually-assured destruction are incapable of grounding such an ethics... I plead with equal urgency for an end to domestic violence and to the abuse of women and children.'



The Pope said that an important 'manual' for peace-making is the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus presented the Beatitudes. Applying the Beatitudes, which outline how to be blessed, good and authentic, 'is also a programme and a challenge for political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions, and business and media executives'.

A kind word, smile or gesture

The politics of non-violence, the Pope said, also begins with each individual, who will never miss an opportunity to offer a kind word, smile or simple gesture that 'sows peace and friendship... I ask God to help all of us to cultivate non-violence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and non-violence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life.'

When victims of violence resist the temptation to retaliate, 'they become the most credible promoters of non-violent peace-making' in the tradition of those who struggled actively and non-violently for change - such as St Teresa of Calcutta, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and the thousands of women in Liberia who helped end their nation's civil war, Pope Francis declared.

Many religious traditions contribute by promoting compassion and non-violence and protecting victims of injustice, the Pope said. For that reason, 'I emphatically reaffirm that no religion is terrorist, and the name of God can never be used to justify violence. Peace alone is holy. Peace alone is holy, not war!' *Bishop Ellison's message, page 23*



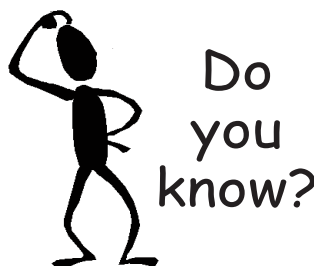
The Pope's Prayer Intentions

February

Comfort for the afflicted: That all those who are afflicted, especially the poor, refugees, and the marginalised, may find welcome and comfort in our communities.

March

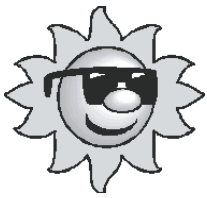
Support for persecuted Christians: That persecuted Christians may be supported by the prayers and material help of the whole Church.



- 1 One of the two Methodist churches in Banjul is named 'Bethel'. What does this name mean, and where in the Bible do we find reference to it?
- 2 'To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, is glory, majesty, power and authority, before all time and now and for ever.' To which New Testament letter do these words provide a magnificent ending?
- 3 What and where is the Dome of the Rock?
- 4 Which are our neighbouring dioceses, north and south of the Diocese of Banjul?
- 5 Name the Catholic layman shown on the right.

Answers on page 31





Fee moi Gambia

Which Augustine?

A QUERY arises from George Gomez' admirable history of St Augustine's School.

In the Church calendar, two saints are named Augustine. One is Augustine of Hippo, the great North African bishop. The other is St Augustine of Canterbury, sent by St Gregory the Great to carry the Christian faith to England.

I once asked a previous Principal which Augustine the school in Banjul is named after. He said he didn't know, but would prefer St Augustine of Hippo.

I think it may be the other Augustine, because although the missionary priests serving in The Gambia came from Ireland, they chose two other saints associated with England - St George and St Edward - as patrons of Catholic schools.

I've never heard of St Augustine's celebrating 27th May (Canterbury) as their Patron's Day, nor - although it falls in the long holiday - taking note of Hippo on 28th August.

When, by the way, may we expect histories of St Joseph's and of Gambia Senior Secondary School (still popularly known as 'Gambia High')? Both these schools, like St Augustine's, have made considerable, long-term contributions to social and economic development.

Unstinting service

IT'S 55 years since the arrival in The Gambia of Fr Vincent Peter Comer.

The young Irish Holy Ghost Father taught briefly at Blackrock College Dublin before arriving in Banjul on 11th January 1962 to teach science at St Augustine's High School, then situated in Hagan Street. In 1975 Fr Comer became Principal of the newly-founded St Peter's Technical High School in Lamin, where he soon established high standards of organisation and academic work.

In 1982, Fr Michael Cleary having become Bishop of Banjul the previous year, Fr Comer was appointed Education Secretary and Diocesan Financial Advisor.

Bishop Emeritus Cleary has paid tribute to Fr Comer's key role in ensuring that diocesan finances were kept on a sound footing.

Fr Comer was spiritual director of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association and the St Vincent de Paul Society. He was a great sportsman, being especially fond of squash, and associated with the revival of basketball in this country.

In August 1998 Fr Comer left The Gambia because of failing health. He returned on a visit in 2001, and died in Ireland on 15th October 2002.

At a Requiem Mass for Fr Comer it was said, 'Although a perfect gentleman, he would stand no nonsense, and turned the skill of saying "No" into a fine art!'

Throughout his many years of service, Fr Comer was respected within and beyond the Church for his meticulous attention to his responsibilities, his integrity, and his unstinting care for others.

Why study?

I HOPE that no child is influenced by the following jingle, passed on by a friend:

The more I study
The more I know.

*

The more I know
The more I forget.

*

The more I forget
The less I know.

*

So why study?

Speed merchants

RECENTLY, the wife of a friend of mine was climbing into a passenger van when it abruptly moved off. The door of the bus slammed into her, and she was knocked down onto the road. Although the passengers in the bus cried in alarm, the driver accelerated. The woman had to have medical treatment.

I mention this because so many drivers of taxis and other forms of public transport are in such a hurry to make money that they put themselves and their passengers at continuous risk. The sides and rears of their vehicles bear many marks of careless driving.

Passengers deserve better.

In the year 1957...

IN view of our forthcoming 60th anniversary, I've been looking at a list of events in 1957 - the year that Pius XII created the Diocese of Banjul.

In March that year, the British colonies of Gold Coast and British Togoland become the nation of Ghana - the first country in Africa to achieve independence. In August, the Federation of Malaya also gained independence from Britain.

In North Africa in 1957, Egypt re-opened the Suez Canal to all shipping, Tunisia became a republic with Habib Bourguiba as its first President, and France prohibited UN involvement in Algeria.

That same year, the Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community (predecessor of the European Union) between Italy, France, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

1957 was the year in which Dwight D. Eisenhower became US President, and Harold Macmillan replaced Sir Anthony Eden as Prime Minister of Britain.

The Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite to orbit the earth; and later in the year Sputnik 2 - with a dog on board, but no technology available to return it to Earth. The first US attempt to launch a satellite failed when the Vanguard rocket blew up on the launch pad.

The Confederation of African Football was founded in Khartoum.

Real Madrid beat Fiorentina 2-0 in Madrid to win the 1956-57 European Cup, and in England, the renowned footballer Stanley Matthews played his final international game, ending an English record international career of almost 23 years.

Nos cognovimus et credidimus caritati, quam Deus habet in nobis.

We have come to know and to believe in the love that God has for us. (1 John 4:16)

Sunday Reflections

Reflections, readings and prayers for the Sundays in February & March
and for Ash Wednesday



5th February

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The light that leads to eternity



AS followers of Jesus Christ, hoping to enter eternal life, we should live 'in the light' - which means living for others, as Christ did, rather than for ourselves.

Those who took part in the Mass on

Thursday 2nd February (Candlemas, or the Feast of the Presentation) will have carried lighted candles. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us 'Your light must shine in the sight of men, so that seeing your good works they may give praise to your Father in heaven.'

Jesus is the fulfilment of all the prophecies in the Old Testament. Thus he reinforces the words of Isaiah, so long before, that if we feed the hungry, house the homeless and clothe the naked, our light 'will shine like the dawn'. So in the responsorial psalm we sing that the good man is 'a light in the darkness'.

Collect

KEEP your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection...

Readings: Isaiah 58:7-10. Psalm 111:4-9. Response: The good man is a light in the darkness for the upright. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... I am the light of the world, says the Lord; anyone who follows me will have the light of life.

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

Prayer over the Offerings

O LORD our God, who once established these created things to sustain us in our frailty, grant, we pray, that they may become for us now the Sacrament of eternal life...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for Sundays in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

O GOD, who have willed that we be partakers in the one Bread and the one Chalice, grant us, we pray, so to live that, made one in Christ, we may joyfully bear fruit for the salvation of the world...

12th February

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our choice



THERE is straight talk indeed in today's extracts from Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) and from St Matthew's Gospel.

Sirach assures us that it is within our power to be faithful.

We must make a determined choice between life and death - good and evil. Whichever choice we make, God will know, because he knows us through and through. Moreover, 'He has given no-one permission to sin.'

The long extract from the sixth chapter of St Matthew reminds us that Jesus came to complete the Law. If we want to enter God's kingdom we must seek virtue - not merely paying lip-service to the Law.

Quite simply, we cannot serve God if we have sin on our conscience, whether sin against God or against our brother or sister. It is easy for us to say the creed, the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary* and the other prayers of the Church; but to be the means of grace, these prayers must come from the heart - a heart attuned not just to the letter of God's word, but to the spirit of that word.

Collect

O GOD, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true, grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling pleasing to you...

Readings: Sirach 15:15-20. Psalm 118:1-2,4-5,17-18, 33-34. Response: They are happy, who follow God's law. 1 Corinthians 2:6-10.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... Speak, Lord, your servant is listening; you have the message of eternal life.

Gospel: Matthew 5:17-37

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY this oblation, O Lord, we pray, cleanse and renew us, and may it become for those who do your will the source of eternal reward...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for Sundays in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

HAVING fed upon these heavenly delights, we pray, O Lord, that we may always long for that food by which we truly live...

19th February

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Asking the impossible?

WE all know the story of the rich young man who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life (Matthew 10:17).

When Jesus told him he should sell all his goods and follow him, the young man turned away, shaking his head. Jesus was asking too much.

Now here is Jesus in today's Gospel demanding the seemingly all-but-impossible of his followers: he asks us to turn the other cheek to our enemies; to lend to everyone who asks; and to love not only those who love us, but even our enemies.

Is our Lord asking the impossible?

In fact, Jesus is referring clearly and unambiguously to the Law as delivered by Moses. We hear this Law in today's first reading: 'You must not exact vengeance... You must love your neighbour as yourself.'

First Moses, then Jesus: 'Be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy'; 'Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' These are counsels of perfection: but if we don't begin to move towards Christ, as Paul tells us in today's second reading, we shall stagnate in a sort of outward religion which has not yet even begun to be Christ-like.

Petty resentments in the family and at work, simmering dislike of perceived rivals, putting the needs of others a distant second to our own - all these and many other self-regarding faults are obstacles to living the kind of life that Christ wills for us.

Collect

GRANT, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you...

Readings: Leviticus 19:1-2,17-18. Psalm 102:1-4,8, 10, 12-13. Response: The Lord is compassion and love. 1 Corinthians 3:16-23.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him.

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

Prayer over the Offerings

AS we celebrate your mysteries, O Lord, with the observance that is your due, we humbly ask you, that what we offer to the honour of your majesty may profit us for salvation...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for Sundays in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

GRANT, we pray, almighty God, may we may experience the affects of the salvation which is pledged to us by these mysteries...

26th February

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First things first

WE are often needlessly anxious. Our faith in God is not strong enough to dispel our anxieties, whether small or great. And such anxiety saps confidence, weakens trust and erodes faith.

Jesus, as always, puts first things first. 'Set your hearts on God's kingdom' is his priority for us all.

In particular, we should not give so much thought to acquiring material success that we fail to look to him, our Leader and Guide in all things.

In today's responsorial psalm we sing,

*In God is my safety and glory,
the rock of my strength.*

Take refuge in God, all you people.

Trust him at all times. Pour out your hearts before him.

Today's readings and psalm provide an excellent preparation for the season of Lent, which begins in three days.

Collect

GRANT us, O Lord, we pray, that the course of our world may be directed to your peaceful rule and that your Church may rejoice, untroubled in her devotion...

Readings: Isaiah 49:14-15. Psalm 61:2-3,6,9. Response: In God alone is my soul at rest. 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... Your word is truth, O Lord; consecrate us in the truth.

Gospel: Matthew 6: 24-34

Prayer over the Offerings

O GOD, who provide gifts to be offered to your name, and count our oblations as signs of our desire to serve you with devotion, we ask of your mercy that what you grant as the source of merit may also help us to attain merit's reward...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for Sundays in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

NOURISHED by your saving gifts, we beseech your mercy, Lord, that by this same Sacrament with which you feed us in the present age, you may make us partakers of life eternal...



Would you like to say **Morning and Evening Prayer** every day, in company with priests and lay-people throughout the world?



Go to **Universalis** website and click on **Morning Prayer, or Mass, or Vespers** – as you wish – and you will find the complete Office

LENT

1st March Ash Wednesday

Ashes, prayer and supplication

OUR use of ashes on Ash Wednesday derives from ancient tradition among the Hebrews and others. Smearing oneself or one's clothing with ashes is a sign of mourning or repentance. In Jonah 42:6, for instance, the King of Nineveh seeks to avert God's anger by wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes. Job repents 'in dust and ashes'. Daniel writes (9:3), 'Then I turned to the Lord God to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.'

It is impressive in our diocese that although Ash Wednesday is not a day of obligation, many of our churches are full to overflowing.

The ashes the priest smears on our foreheads do not themselves confer forgiveness. They are the outer sign of our repentance – our wish, this Lent, to turn again to Christ and make our discipleship central to our lives. *See page 9*

Collect

GRANT, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint...

Readings: Joel 2: 12-18. Psalm 50:3-6,12-14,17. Response: Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned. 2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2.

Gospel acclamation: Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory! A new heart create for me, O God, and give me again the joy of your help.

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6,16,18

Prayer over the Offerings

AS we solemnly offer the annual sacrifice for the beginning of Lent, we entreat you, O Lord, that, through works of penance and charity, we may turn away from harmful pleasures and, cleansed from our sins, may become worthy to celebrate the Passion of your Son...

Preface III of Lent

...for as you will that our self-denial should give you thanks, humble our sinful pride, contribute to the feeding of the poor, and so help us to imitate you in your kindness...

Alternatively, the priest may use Preface IV of Lent

Prayer after Communion

MAY the Sacrament we have received sustain us, O Lord, that our Lenten fast may be pleasing to you and be for us a healing remedy...

Prayer over the People

POUR out a spirit of compunction, O Lord, on those who bow before your majesty, and by your mercy may they merit the rewards you promise to those who do penance...

5th March 1st Sunday of Lent



YEAR by year, the readings for the First Sunday in Lent concern temptation.

Today's first reading comes from Genesis, the temptation in the Garden of Eden that led to Adam and Eve's disobedience, their loss of innocence and the subsequent trials that beset the whole human race.

Whether or not we acknowledge God, we are prone to put ourselves first; and so we and those around us suffer the consequences of sin, of discord, of selfishness. Yet Paul, in today's second reading, points out the remedy: that the Second Adam - Christ our Lord - offers the whole human race salvation from sin and death.

Today's Gospel reading is the familiar narration of Christ's ordeal in the desert, where he, like us, was subjected to temptation. But - unlike us - Jesus resisted sin. As Son of God, he could do whatever he wished: he could dazzle us, lord it over us, ensure a following by displays of power and glory, shower us with material gifts. But he chose to share our common human condition to the uttermost, 'taking the form of a servant', living in poverty, forcing his teaching on no one, winning hearts by love and truth.

No-one can lead us through Lent but Jesus.

Collect

GRANT, almighty God, through the yearly observance of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ, and by worthy conduct pursue their effects...

Readings: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7. Psalm 50:3-6,12-14,17. Response: Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned. Romans 5:12-19.

Gospel acclamation: Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory! Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Prayer over the Offerings

GIVE us the right dispositions, O Lord, we pray, for by them we celebrate the beginning of this venerable and sacred time...

Preface

...by abstaining forty long days from earthly food, he consecrated through his fast the pattern of our Lenten observance, and by overcoming all the snares of the ancient serpent taught us how to cast out the leaven of malice; so that, celebrating worthily the Paschal Mystery, we might pass over at last to the eternal paschal feast...

Prayer after Communion

RENEWED now with heavenly bread, by which faith is nourished, hope increased, and charity strengthened, we pray, O Lord, that we may learn to hunger for Christ, the true and living Bread, and to strive to live by every word which proceeds from your mouth...

Prayer over the People

MAY bountiful blessing, O Lord, we pray, come down upon your people, that hope may grow in tribulation, virtue be strengthened by temptation, and eternal redemption be assured...

12th March

**2nd Sunday
of Lent**

Light and fulfilment

THE PATRIARCH Abraham, earlier known as Abram, was chosen by God to be the first of his very own people: the countless people who acknowledge and serve him as the One God. Now, in the fullness of time, comes Jesus, the prophet, priest, saviour and king who sums up in his life and teaching every word of prophecy from Abraham to John the Baptist.



This was unforgettably revealed to Peter, James and John when Jesus was transfigured before them. Moses and Elijah appeared with him. The vision showed that Jesus, the man the apostles had been following, with whom they shared their lives, was more than a wonderfully good man: he was God's Beloved, on whom God's favour rested. The command was: 'Listen to him!'

This Jesus, Son of God, was to suffer death for our sake, and to rise again for our sake. When we study the Old Testament we see that every word of prophecy is fulfilled in him. In Jesus the love of God has taken human form. Every single yearning of the human heart is known to him. Every human soul can find light and peace with him, for all eternity. That - no less - is what we Christians proclaim about Christ. This is the God and man we seek with fervour this Lent.

Collect

O GOD, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory...

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4. Psalm 32:4-5,18-20,22.
Response: May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you. Timothy 1:8-10.

Gospel acclamation: Glory and praise to you, O Christ! From the bright cloud the Father's voice was heard: 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.'

Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9.

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY this sacrifice, O Lord, we pray, cleanse us of our faults and sanctify your faithful in body and mind for the celebration of the paschal festivities...

Preface:

...for after he had told his disciples of his coming Death, on the holy mountain he manifested to them his glory, to show, even by the testimony of the law and the prophets, that the Passion leads to the glory of the Resurrection...

Prayer after Communion

AS we receive these glorious mysteries, we make thanksgiving to you, O Lord, for allowing us while still on earth to be partakers even now of the things of heaven...

Prayer over the People

BLESS your faithful, we pray, O Lord, with a blessing that endures for ever, and keep them faithful to the Gospel of your Only-Begotten Son, so that they may always desire and at last attain that glory whose beauty he showed in his own Body to the amazement of his Apostles...

19th March

3rd Sunday of Lent

Water and new life

TODAY'S theme is water, symbol of life itself, and of cleansing and refreshment.

In the desert, the Jews cried out for water. Through Moses, God granted them what they wanted, but rebuked them for their lack of faith.



Today's Gospel reading is long. But we shouldn't miss a word. It tells of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well.

It was remarkable, in an age when women were very much the 'lesser sex', that Jesus should talk at length to her. Remarkable, too, that he should talk with a Samaritan - people the Jews despised. But Jesus was open to everyone. His mission was to the whole world.

Jesus offered the woman 'living water'. Just as water is essential for human life, so the grace of God ('living water') is necessary for eternal life. The woman was fascinated by this man who offered her water that would quench her thirst once for all. Jesus used her interest to reveal his divinity to her. Little by little he showed that he knew about her life, her secrets, her conscience. Her conversion had begun. She asked about traditions of worship, which differed between Samaritans and Jews. Jesus told her that true worship comes from the heart, 'in spirit and in truth'. And he went on to tell her, explicitly, that he was the Messiah: 'I am he.'

This long Gospel reading merits careful reading, meditation and discussion. We, like the woman of Samaria, should be open to Christ's teaching, alert to respond, eager to tell others what we've learnt and what he now means to us.

See back page

Collect

O GOD, author of every mercy and of all goodness, who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving have shown us a remedy for sin, look graciously on this confession of our lowliness, that we, who are bowed down by our conscience, may always be lifted up by your mercy...

Readings: Exodus 17:3-7. Psalm 94:1-2,6-9. Response: O that today you would listen to his voice: 'Harden not your hearts.' Romans 3:1-2, 5-8.

Gospel acclamation: Glory to you, O Christ; you are the Word of God! Lord, you are really the saviour of the world; give me the living water, so that I may never get thirsty.

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Prayer over the Offerings

BE pleased, O Lord, with these sacrificial offerings, and grant that we who beseech pardon for our own sins may take care to forgive our neighbour...

Preface

... for when he asked the Samaritan woman for water to drink, he had already created the gift of faith within her, and so ardently did he thirst for her faith, that he kindled in her the fire of divine love...

Prayer after Communion

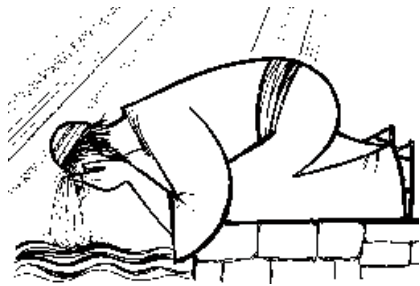
AS we receive the pledge of things yet hidden in heaven and are nourished while still on earth with the Bread that comes from on high, we humbly entreat you, O Lord, that what is being brought about in us in mystery may come to true completion...

Prayer over the People

DIRECT, O Lord, we pray, the hearts of your faithful, and in your kindness grant your servants this grace: that, abiding in the love of you and their neighbour, they may fulfil the whole of your commands...

26th March
4th Sunday of Lent
Enlightenment

TODAY'S Gospel, like last Sunday's, is longer than usual, and rich in what it teaches. Read it before you go to Mass, listen to what the priest has to say about it during Mass, and read it again after Mass.



It is about blindness - physical and spiritual - and our need of enlightenment. We pray that, like the man blind from birth, we may be enlightened.

In Jesus' day, the Jews believed that misfortune was the result of personal sin (Job 4:7-8). The cause of all mankind's ills is indeed sin: but this does not mean that every misfortune we suffer is caused by our own personal sin. The just man or woman may suffer. Think of Jesus' Mother, Mary.

Sometimes, suffering leads to cleansing, or is an exercise in virtue, or alerts us to the sufferings and needs of others, and the very sufferings of Christ.

Jesus cured the blind man in two stages: first, he put a paste on his eyes; then he told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. Jesus told the man that he was the light of the world; and as well as opening the man's eyes, he enlightened his soul.

The hitherto blind man had new faith in Jesus as prophet and Son of God. But the man's friends and neighbours had their doubts. And the Pharisees, with their cold, formal attachment to the letter of the Law but not to its spirit, did not

want to see, nor believe, despite the clear evidence before them. They repeated their old accusation that by healing on the Sabbath, Christ had broken the Law.

Christ taught that performing good works was compatible with observing the Sabbath, and that the good of others came before all the other commandments (Matthew 12:3-8).

Putting rules before justice and charity leads to fanaticism. The fanaticism of the Pharisees was shown in the dilemma they posed themselves: was Jesus a man of God, as his miracles implied? Or was he a sinner, because he did not keep the Sabbath?

By God's grace, we know the answer. Jesus was indeed a man of God; he was - and is - God incarnate. So, as St Paul exhorts us in today's second reading, let us live as children of the light - the light of Christ.

Collect

O GOD, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith, the Christian people may hasten towards the solemn celebration to come...

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-11. Psalm 22:1-6. Response: The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want. Ephesians 5:8-14.

Gospel acclamation: Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God! I am the light of the world, says the Lord: anyone who follows me will have the light of life.

Gospel: John 9:1-41

Prayer over the Offerings

WE place before you with joy these offerings which bring eternal remedy, O Lord, praying that we may both faithfully revere them, and present them to you as fitting for the salvation of all the world...

Preface

...by the mystery of the Incarnation, he has he has led the human race that walked in darkness into the radiance of the faith, and has brought those born in slavery to ancient sin through the waters of regeneration to make them your adopted children...

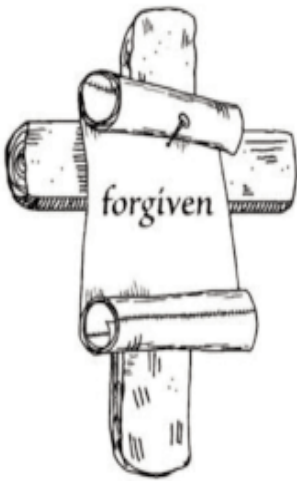
Prayer after Communion

O GOD, who enlighten everyone who comes into this world, illuminate our hearts, we pray, with the splendour of your grace, that we may always ponder what is pleasing to your majesty, and love you in all sincerity...

Prayer over the People

LOOK upon those who call to you, O Lord, and sustain the weak; give life by your unfailing light to those who walk in the shadow of death, and bring those rescued by your mercy from every evil to reach the highest good...

May the Sacrament we receive
sustain us, O Lord,
so that our Lenten fast may be
pleasing to you,
and for us, a healing remedy



Pardon and peace

A simple guide to making your Confession

LENT concentrates our thoughts on our need to love God more faithfully, and we turn for grace to the Sacrament of Reconciliation – otherwise known as Penance, or Confession.

It's a good idea to examine your conscience every day.

If it's a long time since your last confession, ask the priest to help you.

Try to go to confession regularly. Going to confession once a month is good practice. Even if you are not aware of any serious sins, you will receive God's grace and strength every time you go.

We should confess any mortal sins as soon as possible. A mortal sin is an offence against God made deliberately, knowing it to be wrong. ((See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1857)

'Each of the faithful is bound by obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.'

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1457)

'When he celebrates the Sacrament of Penance, the priest exercises the ministry of the Good Shepherd in search of the lost sheep, the Good Samaritan healing the wounds, the Father waiting to welcome back the prodigal son, the Just Judge whose judgment is just and merciful at the same time.'

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1465)

A prayer before Confession

LORD Jesus, open my mind and my heart to your Holy Spirit. Help me to remember my sins, to be sorry for them, and to try hard never to sin again.

A simple examination of conscience

Jesus says: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.'

- Have I been loyal to Jesus and his Church?
- Have I betrayed my faith, or put it at risk?
- Am I faithful in daily prayer?
- Have I put my trust in superstitions?
- Have I cursed, sworn, or broken my word?
- Have I missed Mass on any Sunday or Holyday of Obligation through my own fault?
- Have I fulfilled my Easter duties (going to Confession and Communion during the Easter period?)

Jesus says, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

- Have I respected my parents and those in authority?
- Have I been angry, hateful or proud to others?
- Have I neglected my family responsibilities?
- Have I been drunk, or been greedy or lazy?
- Have I been impure in thought, word, looks or action?
- Have I cheated, stolen, or gambled beyond my means?
- Have I told lies to excuse myself or injure others?

If it has been a long time since your last Confession, or if you are not sure what to say, ask the priest to guide you. He will be happy to help.

Making your Confession

You begin by saying:

BLESS me, Father, for I have sinned.

It is a week (or month, or however long you think it has been) since my last Confession.

Then tell the priest all the things you are sorry for.

When you have finished, you may say:

I am very sorry for these sins and all the sins of my past life.

The priest may then give you some brief words of advice. He will give you your penance (some prayers to say or some action to do, to say that you are sorry).

He will then ask you to say the Act of Contrition:

O my God, because you are so good, I am sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace I will not sin again.

The priest then gives you absolution:

GOD, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world, and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.

Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace; and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen



REMINDER

ALL Catholics should take part in the Mass every Sunday and on all Holydays of Obligation. Everybody is welcome to attend Mass - Catholics and all others.

But Holy Communion may be received only by Catholics, and they must be in a state of grace.

If you are aware of any grave sin, you must make confession before a priest and receive absolution.

Then you may receive Communion in good faith and with joy.



Gambian Christian Anniversaries

February and March

70 YEARS AGO: Ordination as the first Anglican Gambian deacon of the Revd J.C. Faye.

John Colley Faye was born at Banjul in 1907. He attended the Methodist Boys' School and became a teacher in the 1930s. After training in England he was appointed Headmaster of St Mary's School Banjul. In 1942 he became Headmaster of the new Anglican mission school at Kristikunda, Upper River Region, and In 1947 became the first Gambian Anglican deacon. After serving at Kristikunda he returned to Banjul in 1949 as Curate at St Mary's

Anglican Pro-Cathedral. For his services to education he was awarded the MBE, and in 1947 appointed to the Executive Council of The Gambia, having already served on the Banjul Advisory Council in the early 1940s.

J.C. Faye pioneered the Motor Drivers' Union, and in 1951 became leader of Gambia's first political party, the Gambia Democratic Party. He topped the poll in the 1951 Legislative Council election and was appointed a 'Member of the Government'. In 1954 he was re-elected, and pressed for constitutional reform. By the 1960 election J.C. Faye had become leader of the Democratic Congress Alliance, an amalgamation of two political parties. Under the new constitution, people in the Protectorate were for the first time given voting rights. But in 1960 and 1962 elections he was unsuccessful. J.C. Faye was ordained an Anglican priest in 1973, and thereafter concentrated on educational and church activities until his death in December 1985.

10th February 1876: Fr Lacombe left The Gambia for Sédhiou, Senegal, having spent 12 years in Banjul, ten of them as Superior.

19th March 1886: Death aged 47 of Brother Florentine Matthews, who had taught at the boys' school for 23 years.

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

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

10th February 1930: Official opening of the Catholic Boys' Secondary School in Hagan Street Banjul.

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

18th February 1947 (70 years ago): Opening of the Convent at Basse with Sr Lawrence and Sr Brigid in charge of the school.

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

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 primary school in Sambang, Upper River Region.

26th February 1959: Arrival of Fr Geoghegan and Fr Tarmey.

10th February 1960: Arrival of Fr Seán Little.

End of February 1962: Completion of the Cathedral tower.

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

During February 1975: Fr Michael Flynn became Parish Priest at Star of the Sea Bakau - the first Spiritan District Superior to live in the priests' house there.

5th February 1976: The House of Representatives registered the St Anthony of Padua Society. Its predecessor, the St Anthony of Padua Friendly Society, had been founded 110 years ago, in 1907.

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

27th March 1979: Alhaji Ousman Semega-Janneh became 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 at Wesley Church Banjul of Augusta Mahoney, former wife of President Jawara.

15th February 1981: Announcement that Fr Michael Cleary was to become Bishop of Banjul to succeed Bishop Moloney, who had resigned the previous year owing to ill health.

25th March 1981: Episcopal Ordination at St Augustine's High School of Bishop Michael Cleary.

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

28th February 1996: Death of Fr James White.

27th March 1997 (20 years ago): Opening of St Joseph's Church Jarjil.

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

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

8th March 2010: Death of Dr Samuel Palmer, founder with Dr Lenrie Peters of Westfield Clinic. His funeral at the Anglican Cathedral on 12th March was attended by his friend Bishop Emeritus Cleary, and by Bishop Ellison and other Catholic clergy.

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

1st March 2013: Fr Joseph Gough, former Principal of St Augustine's High School Banjul, left finally after a series of long visits, during which he had given substantial aid to local sports.

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

2nd March 2014: Celebration at Kunkujang Mariama of the golden jubilee as priest of Fr John Sharpe CSSp.

24th February - 2nd March 2014: Fr Peter Lopez, GPI Director, attended a meeting in Rome of *Signis*, the Catholic lay organisation for media professionals.

22 February 2015: Enthronement in Dakar of Archbishop Benjamin Ndiaye

13th March 2015: Farewell Mass at St Therese Kanifing for Bishop Emeritus Michael Cleary.





Some weekday celebrations, February & March

Thursday 2nd February: Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas)

IN the Law of Moses (Exodus 13:12) a first-born male child had to be redeemed by an offering of five shekels in the Temple at Jerusalem (Numbers 8:15-17). Mary took her infant Son Jesus with her when she went to the Temple for the rite of purification, in accordance with Jewish custom (Leviticus 12:1-6). Candlemas is a feast rich in significance. We join Anna and Simon in saluting the Child Jesus. But Simon's prophecy of a piercing sword also points to Jesus' future suffering and the suffering of Mary, his mother. Today, as at the Easter Vigil, we carry lighted candles to honour Jesus as the light of the world, and in token that we are witnesses to his light.

Monday 6th February: St Paul Miki & his companions *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.

Saturday 11th February: Our Lady of Lourdes

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

Wednesday 22nd February: The Chair of St Peter

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

Thursday 23rd February: St Polycarp *martyr*

POLYCARP, Bishop of Smyrna, was burnt alive about the year 155 because he refused to curse Christ and accept that the Roman Emperor was divine: 'I have served [Christ] for 86 years and he has done me no harm. How can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?'

Monday 8th February: St Josephine Bakhita *religious*

JOSEPHINE was born around 1869 in Darfur in 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 missions. She died in 1947.



Friday 17th March: St Patrick *bishop*

PATRICK was born in Wales in the 390s. He was taken as a slave to Ireland, but after six years escaped to Gaul (present-day 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.

Monday 20th 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 Bibles as a carpenter, though the original Greek calls him a *teckton* (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. (*St Joseph's Day is usually 19th March, but this year it is transferred to the following day to avoid a clash with the 3rd Sunday of Lent.*)

Saturday 25th March: The Annunciation of the Lord

ST LUKE'S account of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) and her acceptance of God's role for her, 'Be it 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 Bishop Emeritus Michael Cleary, episcopally ordained on this day in 1981. PIX?



Heaven joined to earth, and earth to heaven

The Christmas message of Bishop ROBERT ELLISON CSSp



THE CHRISTMAS message has been told in many ways. The most popular has been given to us by St Luke. It's the Gospel story we hear each year at the Midnight Mass.

Luke begins by giving us two details about Jesus' birth: he was born when the Roman Emperor, Cæsar Augustus, ruled the world; and he was born in a stable on a hillside outside the town of Bethlehem, because there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the town.

Luke therefore tells us the time and the place where Jesus was born; he wanted to let us know that the coming of the Son of God on earth was firmly rooted in our world history.

It all happened in the silence of a cold night. An angel of the Lord appeared to some shepherds to tell them: 'I bring you news of great joy; today in the town of David [Bethlehem] a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.'

With that, the shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem. There they found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in a manger.

It was exactly as they had been told by the angel.

Then they went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

God chose a few shepherds to be responsible to make known the good news about the birth of our Saviour. Wasn't there something strange how God chose a few poor shepherds to announce the birth of the long-awaited Saviour?

How did Luke come to know this story? Most probably he would have learnt it from Mary herself.

John and the 'Word of Life'

St John gives us a very different account about the Jesus of Nazareth whom he first met while fishing at the Lake of Galilee. He doesn't give us any details about when or where Jesus was born.

John opened his First Letter in this way: 'Something we have heard and seen with our eyes, which we have watched and touched with our hands, the Word of Life. And that Life was made visible; we saw it and we are giving our testimony...so that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John:1-3).

A great mystery

John was trying to introduce the first Christians to one of the greatest mysteries of our faith by using these words.

We can never understand a mystery. Remember - John was one of the twelve apostles; but he was more than that. He was also one of the three chosen by Jesus - Peter, James and John - when he witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor. John was known as the 'beloved disciple'. As such, he had a special closeness with Jesus among the twelve.

The Child born on that first Christmas night was both Son of God and Son of Mary. 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' God became man; he took on our human weaknesses - our flesh - while still remaining a divine Person.

Francis and the first crib

St Francis of Assisi was also inspired to tell us about the Christmas story. And he did so without words! He decided to create a simple 'crib' - something similar to the cave and the manger in which Jesus was born. Francis often taught his companions: 'Preach the Good News at all times; and, if necessary, only use words.' In other words, example is more powerful than preaching.

Francis assembled the first crib in the year 1223 in a cave on the side of a mountain in Italy. A crowd of local people came to take part in the ceremony with the first crib. Its only occupants were an image of the Christ Child lying in a manger of straw, and two live animals: an ox and a donkey.

The purpose of the crib was to help the people imagine the scene of Jesus' birth on that first Christmas. Francis' idea touched the hearts and minds of the farmers and shepherds who lived in the nearby village of Greccio.

One of St Francis' companions wrote a brief account of his experiences that night: Simplicity was honoured; poverty was exalted; humility was praised.'

The mystery of the Incarnation became something tangible from that first Christmas crib in a very poor rural region of Italy.

Joy and wonder

Following the example of St Francis, the making of a crib in our churches and homes at Christmas has spread all over the world. Christmas has always been a time of joy. Heaven is joined to earth, and earth to heaven. The son of Mary, a helpless child, is also the Son of God.

We must also 'taste' the real joy in our hearts as we look at that tiny figure of the Christ Child and gaze in wonder at the mystery that confronts us: 'that is why we cry out with the angels: 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth among men of good will.'

Peace. Yes, peace - so little around the world - and in our own country.

Yalla, sunyu Borom, nyungi la gerem ngir sa dom Yesu Krista, ki di fengyal sa har kanam chi nyun.

You, Yalla Borom yermande, mi nyu wotu sasu nyu sone te new dole. Sunyu reyrey, nga ut nyu be gis nyu, te fehal sunyu hol.

Nanyu Yesu Bur I jama ji dimali, ndah nyu sahal jama chi sunyu bir hol, chi bir sunyu njobot, chi sunyu reu ak chi bir aduna si sepa. Amen

Abridged

Blessed are the peacemakers

The New Year message of Bishop ROBERT ELLISON CSSp

FOR many years now, I have watched a daily international news bulletin. However, I have found that it has become more and more progressively depressing. The absence of any good news is seldom ever included.

About ten days ago as I write, a bomb was planted in the Christian Coptic Cathedral during a Sunday Mass in Cairo. Some fifteen members of the community were killed during the sacred ceremony, many others were seriously injured, and a lot of damage was done to the building. There are about 10 million Gothic Christians in Egypt out of a population of about 70 million – the largest number of Christians in any one country in the Magreb.

Christians of other countries in the Middle East have been systematically persecuted or killed in recent years. About a year ago, the President of Egypt made a point of attending a Sunday Mass in this Cathedral as a gesture of solidarity for the Christian communities in Egypt. This is a tiny sign of hope. Let us not lose it in the deluge of violence.

The nightmare of Aleppo

Many of the main cities of Syria have been badly destroyed over the last six years. Aleppo has been a nightmare for the ordinary people – Muslims as well as Christians. Women, children and elderly men over the last six months have suffered bitterly. The world has been looking on helplessly; we have been and I have been horrified by the inhuman violence of this prolonged war. A little prayer for them each day will go up to heaven on their behalf. It would also remind us of the relative comfort in which we live from day to day in spite of our worries and anxiety.

Cain and Abel

The absence of human respect for life and the dignity of every human being seems to have been lost. Cain was the first human being to kill. He killed his own brother Abel because Abel had brought the first-born of his flock as an offering for Yahweh. Cain only brought a small part of the produce of his soil. He was angry and jealous when he became aware of his own greed and how he had lost favour with Yahweh! Hardly a good reason to kill his brother? But the sin of murder was born on that day. And the disease has spread rapidly to our own day.

Some nations with a majority of citizens who are counted as Christians have an abundance of this world's goods, while others are deprived of the necessities of life and are tormented with hunger, disease and every kind of misery. This situation must not be allowed to continue to the scandal of humanity. For the spirit of poverty and of charity are the glory and the integrity of the Church of Christ' (GS88).

These words come from the last document of Vatican II in December 1965 – fifty years ago.

The distribution of wealth across the world was to be found



An Egyptian Coptic woman is comforted after the Cairo bombing

mainly in the Western world and North America. Today, very little progress has been achieved – or has it been the opposite?

The huge gap

The wars and the violence which we witness to in the present day are mainly responsible due to the huge gap between wealthy and poor, human trafficking (a form of modern slavery), and the rapid flow of migrants and refugees to Europe. It is somewhat similar to the Exodus. Yahweh spoke to Moses: 'I have seen the affliction of my people.

I have heard their cry for help. I am aware of their misery. And I am coming to deliver them...' (Exodus 3)

We have just opened a New Year 2017, a designated each year as a Day of Peace.

As a country, The Gambia has been known to have a steady reputation for peace. However, there are signs of dissatisfaction and frustration among the young in particular – so many have been ready to risk their lives by emigrating in

search of a job. May the day come when they begin to return home slowly, slowly.

Let us look forward, this year, in the hope that a new era of peace may be possible. For this to happen, we must continue to pray fervently for a peaceful induction of our President-Elect.

But then, the real game begins. We must continue to strive, work and pray together for peace and justice and mercy.

Happy the peacemakers; they shall be called the children of God.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for justice; they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful; for they shall have mercy shown them.

May the Lord let his face shine on us, and may he be gracious to us in this year 2017.

Amen

+ R. Ellison

Bishop of Banjul

'There are often
tiny signs of hope.
Let us not lose them
in the deluge
of violence'



The Way of the Cross

DURING Lent most parishes arrange for the Stations of the Cross to be performed every Friday. The Stations are well-attended on the first Friday, but numbers fall off as Lent progresses: surprisingly, because one might suppose that as Good Friday approaches, devotion to our suffering Lord would intensify.

THE STATIONS of the Cross are pictures, carvings or statues depicting Christ carrying his cross to his crucifixion. They are placed round the inside walls of a church or along a road leading to a church or shrine.

The stations may be followed by individuals or groups at any time, but especially on Fridays, and during Lent.

The stations consist of fourteen wooden crosses (pictures alone do not suffice), blessed by someone with the authority to erect stations.

The Stations as traditionally performed



- 1 Jesus is condemned to death
- 2 Jesus carries his cross
- 3 Jesus falls the first time
- 4 Jesus meets his mother
- 5 Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross
- 6 Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
- 7 Jesus falls the second time
- 8 Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
- 9 Jesus falls the third time
- 10 Jesus is stripped of his garments
- 11 Jesus is nailed to the cross
- 12 Jesus dies on the cross
- 13 Jesus is taken down from the cross
- 14 Jesus is laid in the tomb

Customary prayers

The devotion begins with an Act of Contrition:

O MY God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace I will not sin again.

Before each station:

V We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you
Adoremus te, Christe. Et benedicimus tibi

R Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world
Quia per sanctam crucem tuam redemisti mundum

After meditation at each station:

Our Father. Hail Mary. Glory be to the Father.

V Have mercy on us, O Lord
Miserere nostri, Domine

R Have mercy
Miserere nostri

May the souls of the faithful, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen

Fidelium animae, per misericordiam Dei, requiescant in pace. Amen.

On the way to the next station, a verse of a hymn, eg, the Stabat Mater, is customarily sung.

After the 14th Station:

LET us pray.

GOD, who by the Precious Blood of thine Only-Begotten Son didst sanctify the Standard of the Cross, grant, we beseech thee, that we who rejoice in the glory of the same holy Cross may at all times and places rejoice in thy protection.

Through the same Christ our Lord.

End with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be for the Pope's intentions.

The Scriptural Way of the Cross

Of the 14 traditional stations, only eight have clear scriptural foundation. Stations 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9 are not specifically attested to in the Gospels. In particular, Station 6 (Veronica) was not known before mediæval times. Station 13 (Jesus' body being taken down and laid in his mother's arms) embellishes the Gospel, which simply says that Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus down from the cross and entombed him.

On Good Friday 1991 Pope St John Paul II introduced a form of the Stations called the Scriptural Way of the Cross, more closely aligned with Biblical accounts. He celebrated this form many times. In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI approved St John Paul's alternative stations for meditation and public celebration.

- 1 Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
- 2 Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested
- 3 Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin
- 4 Jesus is denied by Peter
- 5 Jesus is judged by Pilate
- 6 Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns
- 7 Jesus takes up his cross
- 8 Jesus is helped by Simon to carry his cross
- 9 Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
- 10 Jesus is crucified
- 11 Jesus promises his kingdom to the repentant thief
- 12 Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other
- 13 Jesus dies on the cross
- 14 Jesus is laid in the tomb



The origin of the Stations

THE WAY of the Cross was fostered by the Franciscans, guardians of the Holy Places in Jerusalem, to recall the way followed by Jesus to his crucifixion.

In the 15th century the Franciscans began to build stations in Europe like those in the Holy Land. In 1686 Innocent XI granted the Franciscans the right to erect stations in their churches. In 1731 Clement XII decreed that all churches could have the stations, provided that a Franciscan erected them with the consent of the local bishop. The number of stations was fixed at fourteen.

In 1857 the bishops of England were given the right to erect the stations without the intervention of a Franciscan, and in 1862 this right was extended to bishops everywhere.

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from beyond the diocese

Priests 'should learn about climate change as part of their formation'

THE CATHOLIC Church needs holy, healthy and humble priests, the Congregation for Clergy has said.

Updating 1985 guidelines for preparing men for the priesthood and ensuring their continuing support, the Congregation for Clergy has released 'The Gift of the Priestly Vocation', a set of guidelines for priestly formation.

The document draws on St John Paul II's 1992 apostolic exhortation on priestly formation, as well as norms issued by Benedict XVI, Pope Francis and Vatican offices over the past three decades.

The document says that the training of priests must include a study of climate change and other environmental issues. Priests must be 'promoters of an appropriate care for everything connected to the protection of creation.'

The guidelines are to be adopted by local bishops' conferences. They include an outline of the stages, prayer life and subjects to be studied during the six or more years of preparation for priestly ordination.

The guidelines point out that many skills needed by a good priest cannot be learnt in a classroom. They are the result of prayer, self-discipline and seeking to model one's behaviour on that of Christ.

'The call to be pastors of the people of God requires a formation that makes future priests experts in the art of pastoral discernment... able to listen deeply to real situations and capable of good judgment in making choices and decisions... To make pastoral discernment effective, the evangelical style of listening must take central place.'

Urbi et Orbi

ON CHRISTMAS Day, in his message *Urbi et Orbi* ('to the city and the world') Pope Francis wished peace for people scarred by wars and for those who had lost loved ones to terrorism - which he said was sowing 'fear and death into the hearts of so many countries and cities'.

An estimated 40,000 tourists and Romans endured long queues for security checks to enter St Peter's Square. There they had a glimpse of the Pope on the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica, where he delivered the traditional Christmas message.

Francis cited those suffering through the Syrian war, especially during the 'most awful battles' in Aleppo. He pressed the international community to find a negotiated solution.

The Pope urged Israelis and Palestinians to abandon hate and revenge.

He also lamented that in Nigeria 'fundamentalist terrorism exploits even children', a reference to child suicide bombers, and he decried conflicts and tensions in Africa, eastern Ukraine, Burma, the Korean peninsula, Colombia and Venezuela.

Francis to visit Fatima for 100th anniversary



POPE Francis is to visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima on 12th May, the one-hundredth anniversary of the appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary to three children (pictured above) from May to October 1917. She identified herself as the Lady of the Rosary.

Pope Paul VI visited Fatima on 13th May 1967, fifty years after the first apparition.

Pope St John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have also visited the shrine.

A third of the US Congress is Catholic

THE RELIGIOUS make-up of the 115th US Congress is significantly Christian - 91 per cent - with Catholics comprising one third of the House of Representatives and about a quarter of the Senate.



The House Speaker, Paul Ryan, is a Catholic

Overall, there are six fewer Christians in Congress, at 485 members. But there are four more Catholics, who total 168.

In 1961, Protestants made up 87 per cent of Congress, compared with 56 per cent today. Catholics, conversely, made up 19 per cent of the 87th Congress, and now are 31 per cent.

Two thirds, or 67 per cent, of Republicans in the new Congress are Protestant and 27 per cent are Catholic.

Among the Democrats, 42 per cent are Protestant and 37 per cent are Catholic.

Among non-Christian religious groups, Jews and Hindus had an increase of two seats each. Jews now hold 30 seats in Congress.

The number of Hindus rose from one to three, and the number of Buddhists increased from two to three. The number of Muslims in Congress - two - remained unchanged.

Some religious groups, including Protestants, Catholics and Jews, have greater representation in Congress than in the general population. Jews, for example, make up two per cent of the US adult population, but account for six per cent of Congress. Other groups - including Buddhists, Mormons, Muslims and Orthodox Christians - are represented in Congress in roughly equal proportion to their numbers in the US public.

The most under-represented group consists of those who have no religion. This group accounts for 23 per cent of the public, but makes up only 0.2 per cent of Congress.

Bishops urge Syrians: 'Put aside ideology and work to rebuild Aleppo'

CATHOLIC leaders in the Middle East are urging people to put aside ideology and work to rebuild the Syrian city of Aleppo.

'The world is divided. Each one is accusing the other,' said the Syrian-born Catholic Patriarch, Gregoire III Laham. 'Between the super-powers bickering, a whole country has been destroyed. Hospitals, schools, churches, mosques and so many people have been killed or displaced. Accusing each other is not going to help the situation. This is the time to work with each other so we can end the war and rebuild Syria.'



'It's not the time to accuse each other. It's the time for world-wide powers to be united and to work together for peace. Now is the time for reconciliation,' he told Catholic News Service. 'As Christians, we cannot have hatred in our hearts. Even the ones who attacked us, we have to pray for them that they may have a new life and not to continue with war, violence, hatred and terrorism. We must pray for them to go toward the path of peace.'

The Syrian army has regained control of almost the entire city of Aleppo, which had been split between government and rebel control since 2012.

Reconciliation through honest dialogue

Bishop Antoine Audo of Aleppo declared, 'Let's put aside the weapons and ideology. Let's look at the bruised faces... Let's look at the truth, and let God grant us objectivity. We need reconciliation through honest dialogue.'

The Maronite Archbishop of Aleppo, Joseph Tobji, said that the citizens of Aleppo were 'very sad for all the people that died and for the destruction of our cities, not only Aleppo. And we're looking forward to rebuild our churches, our cities and our country.'

Cardinal Antonio Luis Tagle, President of Caritas Internationalis, said, 'For half a decade the people have suffered from the cruel winds of war. Millions are without homes. Even those with shelter have no heating or electricity. Our own Caritas staff burn their furniture to stay warm. Those schools still open can't afford fuel: the children are wrapped up in heavy blankets as they sit at their desks.'

A Vatican delegation visited Aleppo following the end of the hostilities that left thousands dead and the city in ruins.

Mgr Giampietro Dal Toso, Secretary-Delegate of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, visited the city from 18th to 23rd January, accompanied by Cardinal Mario Zenari, Apostolic Nuncio to Syria, and Mgr Thomas Habib, an official at the Nunciature.

The delegation met Christian communities and their pastors,

who 'expressed gratitude to the Pope for his constant concern for beloved Syria'. They also visited refugee camps and Catholic institutions assisting in relief efforts, including a humanitarian assistance centre run by Caritas Aleppo.

During a meeting with the Church charitable institutions, Mgr Dal Toso and the delegation emphasised the importance of providing relief assistance to the Syrian people. 'With the support of the universal Church and thanks to the generous contribution of the international community, such help may be intensified in the future to meet the growing needs of the people.'

The delegation took part in an ecumenical service that coincided with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, as well as having several meetings with Muslim representatives.

Congo bishops issue warning

CATHOLIC bishops in the Democratic Republic of Congo have warned that an accord signed in December requiring President Joseph Kabila to step down after elections this year risks unravelling if politicians do not quickly reach compromises on implementing it.

The deal was greeted as a critical step towards averting a slide into anarchy in the Democratic Republic of Congo over Mr Kabila's decision to remain in power when his mandate expired in December.

Initially, after the deal was signed, Mgr Leonard Santedi Kinkupu, Rector of Kinshasa's Catholic University and former Secretary-General of the Bishops' Conference, declared: 'We're all saluting this great step, the fruit of a dialogue arranged by the Church... Being a Catholic country has given us an advantage over other African states when it comes to seeking peace, and it's good the Church and its bishops have been instrumental in bringing this about.'

The accord, signed by representatives of Mr Kabila's ruling coalition and the main opposition bloc, bars Mr Kabila from trying to change the constitution to stand for a third term in an election to be held by the end of this year.

But talks on implementing the deal's components have stalled. The Catholic Bishops' Conference has launched an appeal to the negotiators 'not to lose sight of the main objective of these negotiations, which is organising the elections in less than a year. CENCO [the Bishops' Conference] is not prepared to mediate indefinitely without results.'

Main obstacles include a disagreement over the composition of a council to monitor progress towards elections and whether the main opposition bloc must allow Mr Kabila to choose from multiple prime ministerial candidates.

Mr Kabila has ruled since his father's assassination in 2001, and the extension of his mandate saw violent protests in which security forces killed at least 40 people.

Catholics make up about half the 67.5 million inhabitants of the country.

New Vatican website

THE Vatican Museums have established a YouTube channel and revamped their website to offer high-resolution images and mobile-friendly information.

The *Musei Vaticani* YouTube channel lists short visual tours of some of its collections along with videos highlighting tours and services offered on-site, including guides for the deaf or

Readings at Mass during Lent

THE SUNDAY and weekday readings at Mass during Lent have been carefully chosen by the Church to help us to prepare for Easter.

Sundays in Lent

- 1 The key reading is the passage from the Gospel.
- 2 The Old Testament readings have been chosen to harmonise with the Gospel.
- 3 The psalms provide a response to the Old Testament readings.
- 4 The Epistle readings have been chosen to fit the Gospel and Old Testament readings and provide a connection between them.



The **First Sunday** Gospel reading concerns Christ's temptation in the wilderness, and the **Second Sunday** his transfiguration. Both these readings come from St Matthew.

The Gospel readings for the **Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays** are the passages from St John's Gospel anciently used in the preparation of candidates for baptism and confirmation.

The theme for Lent 3 is 'Living Water' (the Samaritan woman). On Lent 4 it is 'Enlightenment' (the man blind from birth). On Lent 5 it is 'New life' (the raising of Lazarus).

Each of these three Sundays has its own Preface.

Weekdays in Lent

The Gospel readings on the weekdays of Lent relate to the themes of this holy season, and the Old Testament readings have been chosen to relate to the Gospel.

It is an excellent Lenten practice to take part in the weekday Mass as often as you can. If for good reason you cannot attend, you should read the readings for each day for yourself. ***They are printed on the opposite page.***



Pious practices

MANY devotional practices in the Church are so habitual that we don't think about them. But whenever we make the sign of the Cross, for instance, or dip our fingers into holy water, we should do so in awareness of what the action means. We shouldn't perform such actions to impress others or to tell ourselves how holy and good we are. We perform them to honour God and our membership of his Church.

Praying in church

CATHOLIC churches are built for the celebration of Mass. In urban churches the Mass may be celebrated every day; but it is on Sunday, in particular, that Catholics gather to celebrate our Lord's resurrection.

In many churches and parishes there is renewed devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, not just at Mass but at services of Adoration and Benediction.

What goes on in the church building for the rest of the week? There may be other services, such as the Holy Hour; there may be meetings, catechism or choir practice.

When not in use by groups of people, some churches are locked for security reasons. Others may be left open as places for quiet, private prayer.

We can, of course, pray almost everywhere and at any time - even in bed. Christ is always with us when we pray to him.

For regular daily prayer it's good to use a quiet corner of the home. Better still, to pray in church, whether on a regular basis or when we happen to be passing.

A church is hallowed by the prayers of all who have used it. It has an atmosphere conducive to prayer.

In church may be the shrines or statues of the saints - particularly of our Lady - where prayer seems particularly valid, and we may light a votive candle. We may feel companionship, not only with the saints but with our fellow Christians, if others are quietly and privately praying in church at the same time as us.

Above all, in church is the Lord's tabernacle, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. There is nowhere better to pray than before the tabernacle, where Christ himself is present in a particular and unique way.

Conscious of all that Christ does for us, particularly in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we feel particularly close to him when we pray before the tabernacle, and our prayers are enriched. Those who make their own prayers before the tabernacle at any hour when the church is open are helping not just themselves but the prayer life of the whole parish.

Visit church as often as you can. It is your home.



Daily Mass Readings



February & March

Sunday readings Year A Weekday readings Year 1

Celebrations in brackets () are optional

Wed 1st Feb	Hebrews 12:4-7,11-15. Psalm 102:1-2,13-14,17-18. Mark 6:1-6	
Thu 2nd	Malachi 3:1-4 or Hebrews 2:14-18. Psalm 23:7-10. Luke 2:22-40	TRANSFIGURATION of THE LORD
Fri 3rd	Hebrews 13:1-8. Psalm 26:1,3,5,8-9. Mark 6:14-29	(St Blaise <i>or</i> St Ansgar) <i>abstinence</i>
Sat 4th	Hebrews 13:15-17,20-21. Psalm 22:1,3-6. Mark 6:30-34	(of the BVM)
Sun 5th	Isaiah 58:7-10. Psalm 111:4-9. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. Matthew 5:13-16	5th SUNDAY of YEAR
Mon 6th	Genesis 1:1-19. Psalm 103:1-2,5-6,10,12,24,35. Mark 6:53-56	St Paul Miki
Tue 7th	Genesis 1:20 - 2:4. Psalm 8:4-9. Mark 7:1-13.	
Wed 8th	Genesis 2:4-9,15-17. Psalm 103:1-2,27-30. Mark 7:14-23.	(St Jerome Emiliani <i>or</i> St Josephine Bakhita)
Thu 9th	Genesis 2:18-25. Psalm 127:1-5. Mark 7:24-30	
Fri 10th	Genesis 3:1-8. Psalm 31:1-2,5-7. Mark 7:31-37 St Scholastica	
Sat 11th	Genesis 3:9-24. Psalm 89:2-6,12-13. Mark 8:1-10. <i>or for Lourdes:</i> Isaiah 66:10-44. Psalm Judith 13:18-19. John 2:1-11	(Our Lady of Lourdes)
Sun 12th	Sirach 15:16-21. Psalm 118:1-2,4-5,17-18,33-34. 1 Corinthians 2:6-10. Matthew 5:17-37	6th SUNDAY of YEAR
Mon 13th	Genesis 4:1-15,25. Psalm 49:1,8,16-17,20-21, Mark 8:11-13	
Tue 14th	Genesis 6:5-8;7:1-5,10. Psalm 28:1-4,9-10. Mark 8:14-21.	St Cyril & St Methodius
Wed 15th	Genesis 8:6-13,20-22. Psalm 115:12-15,18-19. Mark 8:22-26	
Thu 16th	Genesis 9:1-13. Psalm 101:16-21,29,22-13. Mark 8:27-33	
Fri 17th	Genesis 11:1-9. Psalm 32:10-14. Mark 8:34 - 9:1	(Seven Founders of the Servites) <i>abstinence</i>
Sat 18th	Hebrews 11:1-7. Psalm 144:2-5,10-11. Mark 9:2-13	(of the BVM)
Sun 19th	Leviticus 19:1-2,17-18. Psalm 102:1-4,8,10,12-13. 1 Corinthians 3:16-23. Matthew 5:38-48.	7th SUNDAY of YEAR
Mon 20th	Sirach 1:1-10. Psalm 92:1-2,5. Mark 9:14-29	
Tue 21st	Sirach 2:1-13. Psalm 36:3-4,18-19,27-28,39-40. Mark 9:30-37	(St Peter Damien)
Wed 22nd	1 Peter 5:1-4. Psalm 22:1-6. Matthew 16:13-19	CHAIR of St PETER
Thu 23rd	Sirach 5:1-10. Psalm 1:1-4,6. Mark 9:41-50	St Polycarp
Fri 24th	Sirach 6:5-17. Psalm 118:12,16,18,27,34-35. Mark 10:1-12	<i>abstinence</i>
Sat 25th	Sirach 17:1-13. Psalm 102:13-18. Mark 10:13-16	(of the BVM)
Sun 26th	Isaiah 49:14-15. Psalm 61:2-3,6-9. 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. Matthew 6:24-34	8th SUNDAY of YEAR
Mon 27th	Sirach 17:1-13. Psalm 31:1-2,5-7. Mark 10:17-27	
Tue 28th	Sirach 35:1-15. Psalm 49:5-8,14,23. Mark 10:28-31	(Shrove Tuesday)
LENT BEGINS All the weekdays of Lent are days of abstinence or penance		
Wed 1st Mar	Joel 2:12-18. Psalm 50:3-6,12-14,17. 2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2. Matthew 6:1-6,16-18	ASH WEDNESDAY
Thu 2nd	Deuteronomy 30:15-20. Psalm 1:1-4,6. Luke 9:22-25	
Fri 3rd	Isaiah 58:1-9. Psalm 50:3-6,18-19. Matthew 9:14-15	
Sat 4th	Isaiah 58:9-14. Psalm 85:1-6. Luke 5:27-32	[St Casimir]
Sun 5th	Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7. Psalm 50:3-6,12-14,17. Romans 5:12-19. Matthew 4:1-11	1st SUNDAY of Lent
Mon 6th	Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18. Psalm 18:8-10,15. Matthew 15:31-46	
Tue 7th	Isaiah 55:10-11. Psalm 33:4-7,16-19. Matthew 6:7-15	[St Perpetua & St Felicity]
Wed 8th	Jonah 3:1-10. Psalm 50:3-4,12-13,18-19. Luke 11:29-32 [St John of God]	
Thu 9th	Esther (Vulgate) 14:1,3-5,12-14. Psalm 137:1-3,7-8. Matthew 7:7-12	[St Frances of Rome]
Fri 10th	Ezekiel 18:21-28. Psalm 129:1-8. Matthew 5:20-26	
Sat 11th	Deuteronomy 26:16-19. Psalm 118:1-2,4-5,7-8. Matthew 5:43-48	
Sun 12th	Genesis 12:1-4. Psalm 32:4-5,18-20,22. 2 Timothy 1:8-10. Matthew 17:1-9.	2nd SUNDAY of LENT
Mon 13th	Daniel 9:4-10. Psalm 78:8-9,11,13. Luke 6:36-38	
Tue 14th	Isaiah 1:10,16-20. Psalm 49:8-9,16-17,21,23. Matthew 23:1-12.	
Wed 15th	Jeremiah 18:18-20. Psalm 30:5-6,14-16. Matthew 20:17-28	
Thu 16th	Jeremiah 17:5-10. Psalm 1:1-4,6. Luke 16:19-31	
Fri 17th	Genesis 37:3-14,12-13,17-28. Psalm 104:16-21. Matthew 21:33-43,45-46	[St Patrick]
Sat 18th	Micah 7:14-15,18-20. Psalm 102:1-4,9-12. Luke 15:1-3,11-32	[St Cyril of Jerusalem]
Sun 19th	Exodus 17:3-7. Psalm 94:1-2,6-9. Romans 1-2,5-8. John 4:5-42.	3rd SUNDAY of LENT
Mon 20th	2 Samuel 7:4-5,12-14,16. Psalm 88:2-5,27,29. Romans 4:13,16-18,22. Matthew 1:16,18-21,24 <i>or</i> Luke 1:41-51 St JOSEPH	
Tue 21st	Daniel 3:25,34-43. Psalm 24:4-9. Matthew 18:21-35	
Wed 22nd	Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9. Psalm 147:12-13,15-16,19-20. Matthew 5:17-19	
Thu 23rd	Jeremiah 7:23-28. Psalm 94:1-2,6-9. Luke 11:14-23	[St Turibius de Mogrovego]
Fri 24th	Hosea 14:2-10. Psalm 80:6-11,14,17. Mark 12:28-34	
Sat 25th	Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10. Psalm 39:7-11. Hebrews 10:4-10. Luke 1:26-38	ANNUNCIATION of THE LORD
Sun 26th	1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13. Psalm 22:1-6. Ephesians 5:8-14. John 9:1-41	4th SUNDAY of LENT
Mon 27th	Isaiah 65:17-21. Psalm 29:2,4-6,11-13. John 4:43-54	
Tue 28th	Ezekiel 47:1-9,12. Psalm 45:2-3,5-6,8-9. John 5:1-26	
Wed 29th	Isaiah 49:8-15. Psalm 144:8-9,13-14,17-18. John 5:17-30	
Thu 30th	Exodus 32:7-14. Psalm 105:19-23. John 5:31-47	
Fri 31st	Wisdom 2:1,12-27. Psalm 33:17-21,23. John 7:1-2,10,25-30	



What is fasting?



IN the Old Testament we learn that God commanded Israel to observe several designated times of fasting. For New Testament believers, fasting was neither commanded nor forbidden in the Bible. But many early Christians regularly practised prayer and fasting.

Jesus affirmed that after his death, fasting would be appropriate for his followers: 'The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.' (Luke 5:35)

Focusing on prayer

A spiritual fast involves abstaining from food while focusing on prayer. This can mean refraining from snacks between meals, omitting one or two meals a day, abstaining from certain foods, or a total fast from all food for an entire day or longer.

For medical reasons, some people may not be able to fast from food altogether. They may choose to abstain only from certain self-indulgent foods, such as sugar or chocolate, or from something other than food.



The purpose of spiritual fasting

Fasting provides spiritual benefits in the life of the believer. It requires self-control and discipline. During spiritual fasting, the believer's focus is removed from the physical things of this world and concentrated on God. Fasting directs our hunger towards God. It clears the mind and body of earthly attentions and draws us closer to God. So as we gain spiritual clarity of thought while fasting, it allows us to hear God's voice more clearly. Fasting also demonstrates a profound need of God's help and guidance through complete dependence on him.

What fasting is not

Spiritual fasting is not a way to earn God's favour by getting him to do something for us. Instead, the purpose is to produce a transformation in us - a clearer, more focused attention and dependence upon God. Fasting is never to be a public display of spirituality: it is between you and God alone.

In fact, Jesus specifically instructed us to let our fasting be done privately and in humility, or we forfeit the benefits. And while Old Testament fasting was a sign of mourning, New Testament believers were taught to practise fasting with a cheerful attitude:

Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting.. Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

Spiritual fasting is never for the purpose of punishing or harming the body.

How long should we fast?

Fasting, especially from food, should be limited to a determined length of time. While Jesus and Moses both fasted for 40 days without food and water, this was clearly an impossible human achievement, only accomplished through the Holy Spirit's empowerment. So your decision to fast should be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Lent and fasting

In Old Testament times, fasting was observed to express grief and to avoid God's anger. In the New Testament, fasting is thought of as a way to focus on God and prayer.

Such a focus was Christ's intent during his 40-day fast in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2). In preparation for his public ministry, Jesus intensified his prayer with fasting.

Today, many Christians associate Lent with Moses' 40 days on the mountain with God, the 40-year journey of the Israelites in the desert, and Christ's 40-day period of fasting and temptation. Lent is a period of sombre self-examination and penitence in preparation for Easter.

The Catholic Church has a long tradition of fasting and Lent. Not only do Catholics fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, but they abstain from meat on those days.

Fasting does not mean complete denial of food. On fast days, Catholics are allowed to eat one full meal and two smaller meals which, together, do not constitute a full meal. Young children, the elderly, and persons whose health would be affected are exempt from fasting.

Fasting, prayer and alms-giving are spiritual disciplines to take a person's attachment away from the world and focus it on God and Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

PROMPT our actions with your inspiration, O Lord,
and further them with your continual help,
that all we do may always begin from you
and by you be brought to completion.
Through Christ our Lord.

Examples of fasting in the Old Testament

- Moses fasted 40 days on behalf of Israel's sin: *Deuteronomy 9:9,18,25-29; 10:10*
- David fasted and mourned the death of Saul: *2 Samuel 1:12*
- David fasted and mourned the death of Abner: *2 Samuel 3:35*
- David fasted and mourned the death of his child: *2 Samuel 12:16.*
- Elijah fasted 40 days after fleeing from Jezebel: *1 Kings 19:7-18.*
- Ahab fasted and humbled himself before God: *1 Kings 21:27-29*
- Darius fasted in concern for Daniel: *Daniel 6:18-24*
- Daniel fasted on behalf of Judah's sin while reading Jeremiah's prophecy: *Daniel 9:1-19*
- Daniel fasted regarding a mysterious vision from God: *Daniel 10:3-13*
- Esther fasted on behalf of her people: *Esther 4:13-16*
- Ezra fasted and wept for the sins of the returning remnant: *Ezra 10:6-17*

- Nehemiah fasted and mourned over the broken walls of Jerusalem: *Nehemiah 1:4-2:10*
- The people of Nineveh fasted after hearing the message of Jonah: *Jonah 3*

Examples of fasting in the New Testament

- Anna fasted for the redemption of Jerusalem through the coming Messiah: *Luke 2:37*
- Jesus fasted 40 days before his temptation and the beginning of his ministry: *Matthew 4:1-11*
- The disciples of John the Baptist fasted: *Matthew 9:14-15*
- The elders in Antioch fasted before sending off Paul and Barnabas: *Acts 13:1-5*
- Cornelius fasted and sought God's plan of salvation: *Acts 10:30*
- Paul fasted three days after his encounter on the Damascus road: *Acts 9:9*
- Paul fasted 14 days while at sea on a sinking ship: *Acts 27:33-34*

Answers to 'Do you know?' page 12

1. 'Bethel' or 'Beth-El' means 'house of God'. There are many references in the Old Testament. The first is in Genesis 12, but the best known is in Genesis 28:10-18, where Jacob, fleeing from his brother Esau, sees in a dream a ladder reaching to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. He names the place where he's been sleeping 'Bethel' - 'house of God'.
2. The short letter of Jude, verse 25.
3. The Dome of the Rock is an Islamic shrine and landmark in Jerusalem, located on the Temple Mount, site of the Second Jewish Temple. The Temple was destroyed during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. The Dome was built between AD 689 and 691, following the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in AD 637. In Muslim Sunni tradition, the rock is the place from which Muhammad ascended.
4. Our northern neighbour: the Diocese of Kaolack. Our southern neighbour: the Diocese of Ziguinchor.
5. George Gomez: former Director of the National Olympic Committee and a founder member of the Knights of St Peter & St Paul. He has recently published a history of St Augustine's School.

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The woman at the well

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water...

'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

...The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.'

Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

John 4:5-10,13-14,25-26

Extracts from the Gospel for the 3rd Sunday of Lent, 19th March

Our illustration is a painting (about 1640) by Giovanni Francesco Guercino, Italian artist, in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

