

Monday 3 April 2023

## Monday of Holy Week

### Gratitude and joy

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11



*"The house was full of the scent of the ointment."* (John 12:3)

Kenneth Grahame's book *The Wind in the Willows* tells the story of the Mole, the Water Rat and the famous Mr Toad. At one point, the author tells us: "The Mole waggled his toes from sheer happiness, spread his chest with a sigh of full contentment, and leaned back blissfully into the soft cushions. 'What a day I'm having!' he said." Then, on another occasion, "Glorious, stirring sight!" murmured Mr Toad. 'The poetry of motion! The real way to travel! The only way to travel!'" Both these characters, Mole and Mr Toad, are expressing, in their own ways, their happiness and their excitement.

In today's Gospel, we hear how Mary takes an expensive perfume and anoints the feet of Jesus. The house is filled with the fragrance of the perfume. She feels an intense joy at the presence of Jesus and wants to honour him. The smell of the perfume lingers, despite the criticism levelled at Mary for what she does.

It might sometimes feel difficult to find joy in our lives, especially if we are busy and have to work hard, or if we are short of money and wondering how to pay our bills. But we can look for small things to be grateful for – a baby's smile, the beauty of the clouds in the sky, a hug from a friend. And we can always be alert for the smell of the perfume, the constant presence of Jesus in our lives. Like Mary, we can express our joy at knowing his love.

### Prayer

*Lord, in times of hardship and difficulty you are always with us. May we experience the joy of your presence in our lives and seek to serve you with gratitude in our hearts. Amen.*

**Tuesday 4 April 2023**  
**Tuesday of Holy Week**  
**Reality and longing**

**Readings:** Isaiah 49:1-6; John 13:21-33. 36-38



*“Night had fallen.” (John 13:30)*

“Christ be our Light” is one of Bernadette Farrell’s most beautiful songs. The chorus rings out, “Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness... Shine in your church gathered today.” And the verses juxtapose our longing with our reality, contrasting the two: “Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair.” The composer chooses words that portray the difference between what we know to be good, and what we know to be a failure on the part of humanity.

In today’s Gospel, we hear how Judas Iscariot chooses darkness over light. As he leaves the table and walks away from Jesus, we hear that, “Night had fallen.” The Gospel writer chooses this detail carefully – it is not a casual remark about the time of day. Jesus knows that he will be betrayed, not just by Judas, but also by Peter. His heart must be very heavy.

Our hearts are full of longing for the good. We want peace. We want people who are homeless to find shelter, and wish that those who are hungry would be fed. We want those in despair to find hope. But these good things do not come about by chance. We are called to choose the light and to work towards the good. Sometimes, even though we say we want something, and think we mean it – just like Peter – we still make mistakes and choose our own interests over the common good. Peter learned from his failings and started again. Can we?

### **Prayer**

*Loving Father, you know us through and through, right to the depths of our heart. You know our shortcomings and our fears. Grant us the courage to take responsibility for our failings and to grow in love every day. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Wednesday 5 April 2023

## Wednesday of Holy Week

### The pain of betrayal

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9; Matthew 26:14-25



*“They paid him thirty silver pieces.” (Matthew 26:16)*

*The Railway Man* is a film starring Colin Firth. It’s based on the story of Eric Lomax, who was a prisoner of war working on the Burma Railway during the Second World War. He built a secret radio in the camp, to try to bring news to others and to find hope. But the radio is discovered, and Eric is beaten and tortured. His experience stays with him for the rest of his life, as he has symptoms of PTSD, including flashbacks. Finally, he arranges to meet one of the guards responsible for his treatment – Takashi Nagase – and finds that he has since tried to atone for his wartime actions.

Jesus confronts head-on the experience of betrayal by his friends. Being betrayed by family or friends is one of the most painful things we can go through. Here we read that Jesus sees into the heart of Judas, making him reflect on his own words and confront what he is about to do. Pope Benedict XVI wrote about Judas Iscariot, “It is not up to us to judge his gesture, substituting ourselves for the infinitely merciful and just God.”

In the film, the story of Eric Lomax and his former tormentor ends with scenes of forgiveness as each man tries to come to terms with his experience. If there are occasions in our lives when we have been badly hurt by others, can we find it in our hearts to forgive, so that we can live on without being overwhelmed by hatred?

### Prayer

*Lord God of forgiveness and peace, grant that I may find ways in my heart to repair my relationships with others even if they have hurt me. May I work for reconciliation and peace and seek to overcome injustice and the pain of war, through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Thursday 6 April 2023  
Maundy Thursday  
A life of love and service

Readings: Exodus 12:1-8. 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15



*“Now he showed how perfect his love was.” (John 13:1)*

The artist Jacopo Tintoretto was fascinated by the story of Christ washing the feet of his disciples and created at least five paintings of the story. The first originally hung in the church of San Trovaso in Venice. You can see different versions online in the National Gallery in London or the Prado in Madrid. Each has different details, including this one with a dog and a cat in the midst of it all.

In John’s Gospel, we read how Jesus offers to wash the disciples’ feet and tells them that he is setting them an example. They too ought to wash each other’s feet. He is showing them how he wants them to live a life of humble and loving service after his approaching death.

In Tintoretto’s paintings, Jesus and the disciples are dressed rather grandly. But their feet would probably have been covered in dust or mud. Jesus loves humbly and tenderly to the very end. He wraps a towel round his waist, ready to dry their feet. The disciples have been fretting about their status, and who is the greatest among them. But he shows them what is truly important – to walk humbly and to love tenderly. This is the example that he sets for us all.

As Pope Francis wrote, “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets.” Are we able to overcome our daily concerns, our fears about status and security, and step out into the world, ready to serve?

## Prayer

*God of love, we are called to walk humbly and to act tenderly. We are asked to live a life of love and service. Grant that we may be able to put aside our fears and find the courage to follow the example of Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Friday 7 April 2023

## Friday of the Passion of the Lord + Good Friday

### Truth and meaning

**Readings:** Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1 – 19:42



*“‘Truth?’ said Pilate, ‘What is that?’” (John 18:38)*

The poet Maya Angelou wrote these lines in her work “When Great Trees Fall”: “Great souls die and / our reality, bound to / them, takes leave of us. / Our souls, / dependent upon their / nurture, / now shrink, wizened.” She speaks of the way our own lives change when someone we love dies. Our reality is different because they are gone. Life is no longer the same, and neither are we.

The conversation we hear today between Jesus and Pontius Pilate shows us how differently they each see the world. Pilate has a view of what a king and a kingdom should look like. But Jesus tells him that his own view of kingship is totally different from the way the world sees things. Jesus, unlike other kings, lovingly washes the feet of others. He is not concerned with worldly status, but with witnessing to the truth. Pilate finds it very hard to understand. “Truth? What is that?” he asks.

When we come face to face with death, there isn’t anywhere to hide. It’s very raw, and it’s too late to pretend. Jesus is love, right to the end. Jesus is the truth, right to the end. On this Good Friday, we hear how Jesus held fast to the truth, even as he faced death. In a world where the truth is manipulated and image is everything, can we look beneath the surface and the lies to find the everlasting love of Christ?

### Prayer

*God our Father, we are often afraid, and we can be confused. Help us to seek the truth. Guide us towards the light. May we always be people of love and forgiveness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Saturday 8 April 2023

## Holy Saturday: The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night

### Fear, joy and hope

Readings: Exodus 14:15 – 15:1; Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 28:1-10



*“Do not be afraid.” (Matthew 28:10)*

In the Royal Collection in the UK, there is a drawing entitled *The Risen Christ*, by Michelangelo. It's drawn in black chalk, and shows Christ rising from a tomb. His shroud swirls around him as he casts it aside. He is filled with energy and light and there is an intense sense of joy and freedom.

We hear tonight how two women go to the tomb. It's not made clear why they go. In some accounts it is to anoint Jesus' body, but it could be just to have the sense that they are near him, even after his death. When they arrive, things are not as they expected. The women are filled with awe. The angel and Jesus both tell them not to be afraid. They go from devastation to joy in just a few moments. Their love for Jesus means that they have stayed with him throughout, even at his crucifixion. And now these women are the first messengers who take this incredible news out to everyone. They are trusted by Jesus. They are not to remain silent, but to speak out and be heard.

Amidst the joy we feel at the resurrection, can we take a quiet moment to listen to the voice telling us, “Do not be afraid”? Are we ready to speak – and to be heard as we share the good news? And are we ready to hear unexpected voices, especially those who have previously been silenced, that may be bringing us wonder and joy?

### Prayer

*God of joy, as we celebrate this Easter, grant that we may have the strength to overcome our fears and anxieties. May our love grow and become a light for the world to see. May we always be ready to share the good news, through Christ our risen Lord. Amen.*