



Faith

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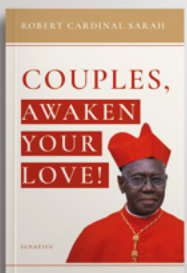
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An Anniversary and a Jubilee

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the first-ever visit of a Pope to Britain. Pope – now Saint – John Paul II summed up the historic significance of the event as he arrived: “For the first the first time in history, a Bishop of Rome sets foot on English soil.”



It was a magnificent and successful visit, with vast crowds gathering in London, Cardiff, Glasgow and elsewhere – and it was followed, of course, by the possibly even more successful, and more significant, State Visit of Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 at the invitation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Which brings us to the better-known anniversary marked this year: the Platinum Jubilee of the Queen. A deservedly beloved monarch, the Queen has served the nation and the Commonwealth with dedication and courage during decades that have seen massive social change and presented her with every sort of challenge not excluding substantial problems in her own family.

At her Silver Jubilee in 1972, Catholics in Britain, co-ordinated by Peter McDonald of the CRUX Movement, organised a Spiritual Bouquet, offering prayers, Masses, Rosaries and litanies for her, in thanksgiving for her 25 years of service.

The Queen is a practising Christian, whose faithful attendance at church has hallmarked her reign. She has been open in her annual Christmas broadcasts in speaking of the Christian faith and the centrality of Christ in her own life. The Faith Movement is glad to associate itself with the prayers and thanks that are being offered across Britain: We all owe the Queen a debt of gratitude for her service and for the witness that she gives to the human and spiritual values on which a civilised nation must be based.

When Pope John Paul II met the Queen in 1982, it was during the tense days of the Falklands War: Pope and monarch both handled the situation with grace and care. Pictures of them chatting became popular postcards. There was a message of goodwill and friendship that matched the other notable events of the Papal visit and set a seal on them: joint Anglican/Catholic prayers at the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, vast cheering crowds in the streets, warm friendly meetings with representatives of other faiths. Decades on, we still give thanks to God for all of this, especially

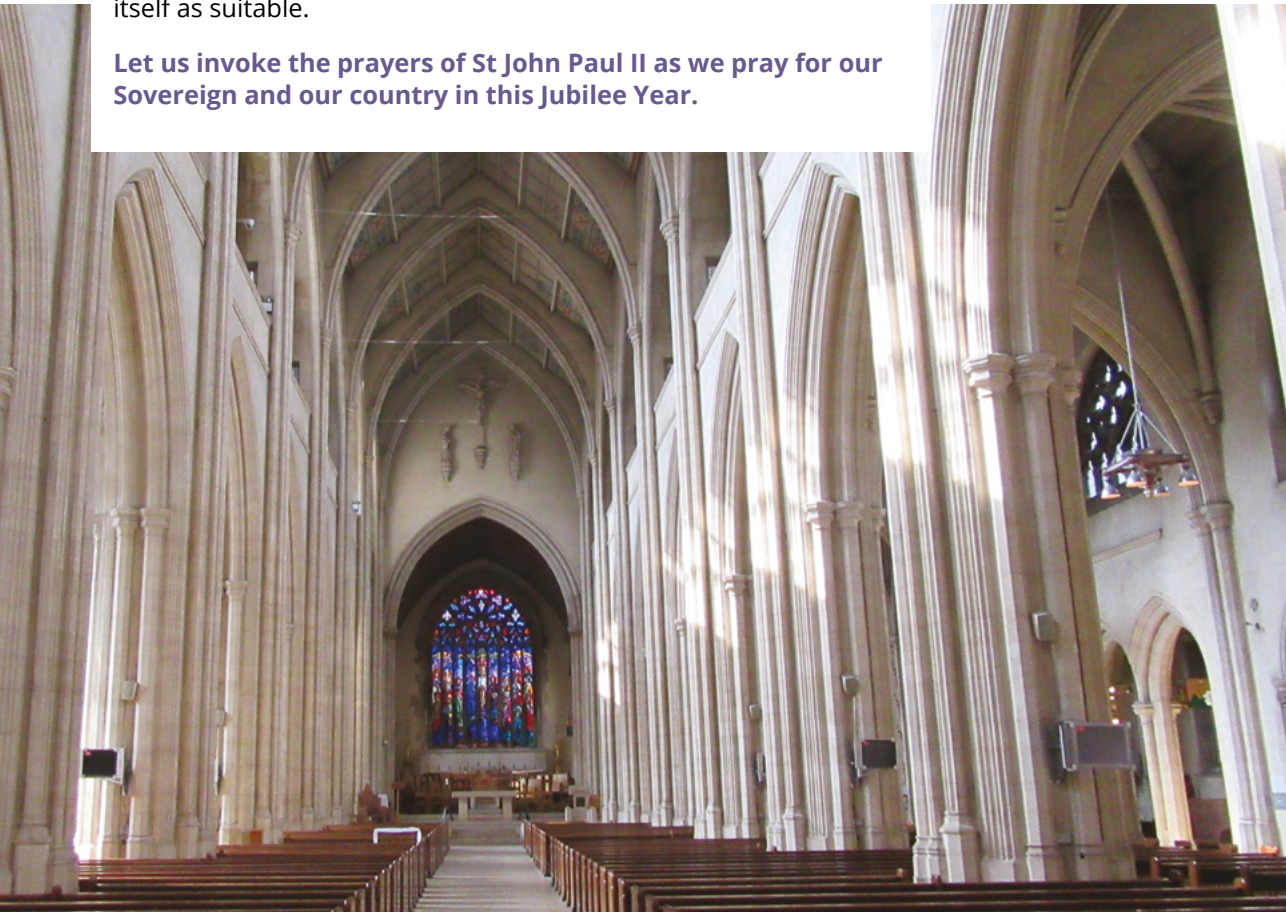
as it took place not long after Pope St John Paul had suffered two assassination attempts – in Rome and at Fatima – and the visit of necessity involved immense amounts of work and care on the part of our public and Church authorities. The visit, and the State Visit of Pope Benedict in 2010 saw Britain at its best.

There will be prayers in our churches over the 2022 Jubilee weekend, giving thanks to God for the Queen's reign and asking for his blessing on her remaining years. We do need prayer for our poor country. Britain is not a happy place in 2022: there is a good deal of violent crime – especially involving street-stabbings – a rising suicide rate among the young, and a sense of confusion about how we should view ourselves and our history. There is concern about our religious freedom: speaking out on some topics, especially those concerning sexual morality, can be something that requires courage for Christians.

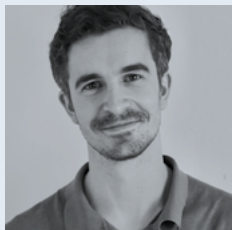
It is magnificent that the great Pope who visited us in 1982 is now a canonised saint. St George's Cathedral in Southwark is hosting a commemorative display honouring this year's anniversary: the cathedral boasts a fine stained-glass window depicting the Pope's visit. Britain really also needs a public statue of this Pope: a site near Westminster Cathedral suggests itself as suitable.

There will be prayers in our churches over the 2022 Jubilee weekend, giving thanks to God for the Queen's reign and asking for his blessing on her remaining years.

Let us invoke the prayers of St John Paul II as we pray for our Sovereign and our country in this Jubilee Year.



The Church in Pakistan: Steadfast Under Fire



Fionn Shiner describes the plight of Christians, particularly Christian women

On 4th January 2022, a woman from Pakistan called Saimi Bibi, got a phone call from her father-in-law asking if she knew the whereabouts of his grandchild – Saimi's, daughter. He said the 14-year-old Christian girl, called Mahnoor, had gone round to the house of their neighbour, Muhammad Ali Khan Ghauri – but had not returned.

Saimi said: "Mahnoor often used to go to the neighbour's house to play with their children. My husband Aslam and me both got worried and rushed to my father-in-law's house. When we reached there, we asked the neighbour if they had seen Mahnoor, but when she said she hadn't, [it] was shocking for us, as I know she never went alone anywhere before." Saimi and her family were distraught and when, after three days, there was still no word of Mahnoor, she began to fear the worst.

Three days after Mahnoor went missing, Saimi's fears were realised. She said: "Ghauri's sister Sana handed me a few documents consisting of Mahnoor's conversion to Islam and marriage certificate [to Ghauri]." She added: "I was feeling very helpless, I was crying and begging Sana, Ghauri's sister, but it was all in vain. Ghauri is already married and a father of two."

One of the biggest problems the Church in Pakistan faces is the frequent kidnapping, rape, forced conversion and forced marriage of girls.

One of the biggest problems the Church in Pakistan faces is the frequent kidnapping, rape, forced conversion and forced marriage of girls like

Mahnoor. In fact, according to research by the Movement for Solidarity and Peace in 2014, up to 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls are kidnapped, forced to convert to Islam and marry their abductors every year. Other evidence suggests the problem is even more widespread. Research by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in 2019 found that in the previous year in Sindh province alone, 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls were abducted and forced to convert.

On 25th June 2020 Christian girl Farah Shaheen was at home in Faisalabad with her grandfather, her three brothers and two sisters. There was a knock at the door and three men burst in, grabbed Farah and forced her into a van. Her family were later told that she was married to a man named Khizar Ahmad Ali (Hayat) and had converted to Islam. She was aged 12 at the time.

Farah herself, when she was eventually freed, told the BBC about her time in captivity: "I was chained most of the time...It was terrible. They put chains on my ankles and tied me with a rope. I tried to cut the rope and get the chains off, but I couldn't manage it. I prayed every night, saying: 'God please help me'."

Farah's father, Asif Masih, reported Farah's abduction to the police but it took three months before they opened the case. Eventually, in December 2020, Farah was discovered at Mr Ahmad's house in Hafizabad, nearly 70 miles from her home. Her ankles were wounded where she had been shackled. However, Farah's ordeal continued. There was a lengthy court process assessing the validity of her marriage, particularly the question of whether she was underage. The Faisalabad District and Sessions' Court ordered a medical examination of Farah's teeth, bones, and genitalia and found her to be 16 or 17. Her father dismissed this as "an outright lie".

Finally, on 16th February 2021 the court ruled the marriage unlawful on account of it having been registered incorrectly. Farah said she originally told the court she agreed to the marriage because Mr Ahmad told her if she said she'd been coerced "he'd first kill me, then murder... my whole family". An investigation into Mr Ahmad and three other men was dropped in January 2021, much to the dismay of Farah's family.

And then there's the case of Maira Shahbaz. A Catholic altar server, she was 14 when she was bundled into a car by three men at gunpoint in April 2020 during the first lockdown in Madina Town, Faisalabad. Her mother reported the case to the police and, as with Farah, a complicated court process began. In August 2020, after being forced by the courts to return to her abductor, Maira escaped his house. She renounced her forced conversion and marriage – and her abductor, Mr Mohamad Nakash, accused her of apostasy, a capital offence in religious law.

Following reports that armed men were going door-to-door looking for her, Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) called on the UK government to grant Maira asylum. ACN organised an open letter to 10 Downing Street signed by more than 30 bishops, parliamentarians and CEOs of charities supporting persecuted Christians. Alongside this letter, ACN presented a petition of more than 12,000 signatures to the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce. Mrs Bruce said she would bring it to the "urgent consideration" of Home Secretary Priti Patel. A meeting between Fiona Bruce, Sir Edward Leigh, Conservative MP for Gainsborough, and John Pontifex, head of Press and Information at ACN (UK), was held to discuss next steps.

Speaking to Crux magazine about forced conversions, Cardinal Joseph Coutts, former Archbishop of Karachi, and Pakistan's highest-ranking cleric, said: "Now where the matter has come to a head is that in court, even some lawyers have said in Islamic law, there is no minimum age



for marriage or conversion. In Islamic law, there is nothing about minimum age as long as the child is of the age of reason and is able to say yes or no.”

Arzoo Raja, 13, also Catholic, was taken on 13th October 2020 and had her marriage annulled on 11th November 2020. She is now with her parents, but her conversion to Islam still stands. There is also Huma Younus who was 14 when she was taken in October 2019 and was reportedly pregnant with her alleged abductor's baby. Additionally, there is Neelam Masih, 30, who had her home broken into by a man who raped her and tried to force her into marrying him and converting to Islam. If her neighbour hadn't intervened, she believes she would have been killed.

And the list goes on.

Blasphemy laws and mob rule

Another fear that Pakistan's nearly three million Christians – of which more than one million are Catholic – live with, is the ever-present threat of a false blasphemy allegation that can lead to imprisonment, social ruin and in some cases, lynching.

For example, on 3rd December 2021 48-year-old Sri Lankan man, Priyantha Kumara, asked the employees of his garment factory in Sialkot to remove all stickers from factory machines before a visit by a foreign delegation. According to some reports, as part of this Mr Kumara removed a poster produced by the hard-line Islamist group Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which included Quranic verses. The workers exploded in rage and accused Mr Kumara of blasphemy. He was tortured, lynched and had his body set on fire by an uncontrollable mob. Footage of the lynching proliferated across social media and some of the mob took selfies with his disfigured body. There were initial reports that Mr Kumara was a Christian but it has since emerged that he was probably Buddhist. Nevertheless, this episode gives a perfect example of the danger all minorities can face

when a false blasphemy accusation quickly escalates, with catastrophic consequences.

In 2014 a young Christian couple Shahzad Masih and Shama Bibi, parents to three children, were burned alive in a brick kiln by a mob for allegedly setting fire to pages of the Qu'ran. As recently as 4th January this year, Christian man Zafar Bhatti, 58, was sentenced to death by the Pakistan session court of Rawalpindi, after being charged with blasphemy in 2012. Mr Bhatti is accused of sending blasphemous text messages from his phone but has always denied the allegations.

Then, of course, there was the case of Asia Bibi who quickly became the international symbol of the injustice of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Her case has all the hallmarks of a typical blasphemy case – unreliable accusers likely trying to settle a personal score with pressure exerted by an extremist mob. Ms Bibi, a Catholic, was accused of blasphemy in June 2009 after an argument with co-workers and in November 2010 she was sentenced to death by hanging. She was on death row for eight years until her acquittal on 31st October 2018 due to “material contradictions and inconsistent statements of the witnesses” which sparked huge protests led by Islamist parties. After initially being barred from leaving the country, a concession by the Pakistani government to the TLP, Ms Bibi eventually left the country and landed in Canada on 8th May 2019.

Western complicity?

As with many other parts of the world, such as North Korea, China and the Middle East, Pakistani Christians are sometimes conflated with the West. Thus, any unpopular political decisions made by America and European powers, see Christians punished.

According to Cardinal Coutts: "And what is also making it bad for us is again the duplicity, the hypocrisy of the United States. For them [i.e. extremists] the United States, European Union, all the Western countries or let's say the white people, are Christians."

He added: "The first time a Church was attacked in Pakistan was a week after the U.S. marines began bombing Afghanistan with B52 bombers and tens of thousands of refugees began pouring across the border, women and children crying. Everyone was shocked. Two young men with automatic rifles burst into a church on a Sunday in Pakistan."

In the UK, much of the debate around Pakistan has centred on how much aid is sent to the country despite the litany of abuses against Christians and other religious minorities. Pakistan is the top bilateral recipient of UK aid: in 2019/20, the UK sent £302million, and in 2018/19, this number was £325million. Parliamentarians have, unsurprisingly, asked questions about the efficacy of this aid when there are institutional problems in the country. Further, it has been argued that the UK should be using this aid as leverage to enact changes in Pakistan. What sort of message does it send that the UK is happy to send hundreds of millions of pounds a year to a country where courts have adjudicated that a girl is ready for marriage once she has had her first period?

As previously mentioned, ACN campaigned to have asylum granted to Maira Shahbaz, a victim of forced conversion and marriage, who is now living in one room in an undisclosed location. She doesn't leave her room for fear of violent reprisals. Given that Boris Johnson publicly called for Asia Bibi to be granted asylum in the UK in 2019, it was thought that the same clemency could be extended to Maira who has not only been the victim of gang rape, drugging and black-mail, but who is now, for all intents and

purpose, a prisoner inside her own home. At the time of writing, Maira and her family remain in hiding.

An uncertain future

In his interview with Crux, Cardinal Coutts was keen to stress the positives for the Church in Pakistan. He said: "Pakistan is a democracy, a working democracy so far, and we have laws and as I said, we are able to have a voice, thanks be to God. Although we are a very small minority, we are not a hidden minority. I have also led protests down the street."

As Christmas approached last year, Christians celebrated in the traditional way, with churches lit up with fairy lights and church bells ringing in celebration. Prime Minister Imran Khan congratulated the Christian community on the momentous day. Nonetheless, security was beefed up, with CCTV, and security gates at entry and exit points, installed at Christmas services and celebrations.

As Cardinal Coutts said: "[Extremists] see us Christians as connected and believe that we don't belong there. But we're not migrants, mind you. We belong to the country as much as the Muslims and the Hindus and everyone else." Moreover, he added: "If you come visit Pakistan, you get off at the airport and ask the taxi driver to take you to a church, he will. And it's public, and visible, not like in Turkey."

A complex picture emerges. The Pakistani Church is clearly facing visceral challenges that mean its members could find themselves ripped from their families, or accused of blasphemy. Despite this, there is a degree of caution in the rhetoric of high-profile clerics such as Cardinal Coutts who don't want to make life even more difficult for the faithful. Yet, the message is clear: we're here to stay.

Fionn Shiner works in the Press and Information department of the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need.

The Feast of the Ascension

A sermon for Ascension Day by Fr Guy Nicholls

Last Sunday we heard St John's account of his vision of the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, and of the absence of any Temple in that heavenly city. Today we hear of the going up into heaven of that Temple who is the living place of communion with God. For the Temple in Jerusalem was the place where God had promised to meet His people, there to dwell in their midst, and there to answer their prayers.



Now that Temple has been superseded. In the reading of the Passion we heard how, after our Lord's death, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. What did this strange narrative mean? It was not simply an act of destruction, like the High Priest tearing his robes at the uttering of a blasphemy; it was rather the removal of an obstacle, of something that impeded communication from one side of the veil to the other. The death of Christ was the moment when that impenetrable veil between God and man had at last been breached for good. This is what the Letter to the Hebrews, which we heard in the second reading, has to tell us. For when Christ died, He was the Temple, He was also the sacrifice, and He was the priest. By His death He had torn apart sin.

All that remained was for Christ the priest, having torn open the veil in the Temple, to enter in Himself, that is, to enter the presence of the Father. It is this which Christ does in His Ascension. For we see it only as the Apostles saw it in the first reading from the Acts. They saw the Lord depart towards the heavens, but they did not, of course, see Him arrive there. That is what the Letter to the Hebrews is describing for us, for in the Ascension, Christ Who is the Temple, the Lamb of Sacrifice and the Priest, Himself goes up into Heaven to complete what He had already begun on the cross.

When Christ died, He was the Temple, He was also the sacrifice, and He was the priest. By His death He had torn apart sin.

Into the presence of his Father

As a man He had already opened the veil, that which separated us from God, and now He went through to the other side, ascending as a man into the presence of His Father. This He does as our priest, our representative with the Father. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it: 'through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary by a new way which He had opened for us, a living opening through

the curtain, that is to say, His body.' Now the meaning of the Scripture about Christ's death is becoming clearer: When the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom, this was the veil that is Christ's sacred body, His human flesh and blood. This being torn apart for us in death became the way through for us to go to heaven.

Christ's Ascension into heaven is therefore the entry of redeemed humanity into heaven. Christ's entry into heaven makes possible our own future entry into heaven. The City of God, the living Temple, came down out of heaven at the Incarnation, at the moment when Mary conceived Him in her womb and He became man. Now all that the Incarnation of God as man in Mary's womb promised is at last fulfilled in Him as He ascends into heaven. He has already died and risen from the dead, now in His Ascension, He who is the living Temple of God, raised to new and indestructible life, is our trailblazer into glory.

To prepare a place for us

He goes to prepare a place for us. By 'preparing a place,' He means that by taking our human flesh into heaven, into the living presence of God, He thereby makes a place ready for us. So it is that the Letter to the Hebrews says that *'Christ has made His appearance once and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself.'* That appearance was what began at the Annunciation to our Lady and was fulfilled on the cross. Now we only await His appearance to bring all things to their conclusion. So the Letter to the Hebrews says: *'when He, Christ, appears a second time, it will...be to reward with salvation those who are waiting for Him.'*

This is why we say in every Mass that *'we await the blessed hope, and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.'* He does not merely bring us hope, He is our hope in person. So, as the Letter to the Hebrews says again, *'let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because the one who made the promise is faithful.'* To conclude, let us recall the magnificent words of the Collect Prayer for the Ascension that

we address to the Father: *'For the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.'* Even so, Amen!

Fr Guy Nicholls is an Oratorian priest. His book on Cardinal John Henry Newman and aesthetics, *Unearthly Beauty*, is published by Gracewing.



Cana, Mary and the Cross

Fr Philip Harris explores the mystery of Mary, the Cross and the Mass in a sermon based on the Wedding at Cana

Our Lord's first miracle or sign that he gave in Cana was the turning of the water into wine – in fact a super-abundance of good wine, symbolic of God's grace which is offered to us through the sacraments instituted by Christ. This first miracle happened though through the faith of one person: none other than the Lord's Mother and our Mother – the Blessed Virgin Mary. She had faith in her Son. Her simple 'Do whatever he tells you' sets into motion her Son's instruction to the servants to fill the water jars with water and then take some to the steward.



St John's account of the Wedding at Cana comes right at the beginning of Our Lord's public ministry. It has striking parallels, though, with the account of Our Lord's crucifixion. At the beginning of his ministry, Our Blessed Lady is present, referred to as the "mother of Jesus" and addressed as "Woman". As her Son hung on the Cross, St John would tell us that she was there too and again, she is again addressed by her Son as "Woman". Present too are his disciples at Cana and we are told that next to his Mother at Calvary stood the beloved disciple, St John himself. The water at Cana is turned into wine; on the Cross, water and blood would flow from Our Lord's side as the centurion pierced his heart with his spear.

Fast forward two thousand years to today, here in this parish. We are here for only one reason: because Jesus is the lynch pin of history, and indeed of eternity. His public ministry which began after his visit to Cana involved healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, opening the ears of the deaf and the mouths of the dumb, raising the dead and much, much more. But all of that would matter little if it weren't for the Cross. For it is his death on the Cross that changes the very meaning of history and the very meaning of our lives and the life of every baptised Christian who has lived or ever will live.

His death on the Cross, far from being a cruel and bitter defeat of a good man with his sad Mother and beloved disciple stand-



Paolo Veronese:
The Wedding at Cana

ing by, is instead the one true, the only acceptable Sacrifice that could change our relationship with God and with each other. For Jesus is God's love come into the world, not merely to do good and work signs and wonders but to do the ultimate good – to bridge the gap between us as fallen humanity and our Creator. That is the true miracle that his first sign in Cana is pointing to: the overthrowing of the chasm that lay between us and his Father. And it is the Cross that spans that chasm, yes with Jesus' pierced hands and feet nailed to it, his scourged back and his head bloody with thorns and finally his heart pouring out water and blood as it is pierced. Such is God's love for us that he gives himself as the saving Sacrifice that reunites us with him.

That same saving Sacrifice is present down through the ages even to today here and beyond into the future, because of God's great love for each one of us. Jesus gives himself today in this place, on this altar for you, for me, for each one of us.

It is no coincidence at Mass that as the priest prepares the chalice he says inaudibly as he adds just a drop of water to the wine: "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity." For that is what we are celebrating, the Sacrifice that raises us from the darkness of this world into eternal life and fellowship with God in heaven, making us sharers in God's life, partakers of his divinity.

Here, though we can see it only with veiled eyes, here the Cross upon which hangs the Crucified one, stretches from this altar to the very heart of God. Here, we stand

beside the beloved disciple and the Woman who gazed upon her Son as He gave his life for us. Here then, the Sacrifice of our redemption is once more made present and once more floods into our lives and, just for a moment, time and eternity stand side by side.

After the Cross would come the burial and then the joyous discovery of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. The Lord's Resurrection shows us what our future is to be: for we, too, share both in his death and resurrection. We die to ourselves and we will be raised to new and eternal life with the God who is love in heaven.

At Cana, Mary says, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Far from leaving us without a guide when Jesus ascended to his Father forty days after his Resurrection, He sent us a helper, the third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit. Mary's words tell us what we must do: 'Do whatever he tells you.' For, being loved and saved by her Son, we still have to live our lives in this world. 'There are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose,' writes St Paul.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you in your life? What gifts and talents has he given you? How is He asking you to live your life, to serve God and his Church? 'Do whatever he tells you,' Mary says. May we listen to God speaking in our hearts and lives, and, giving thanks for the wonderful promise of eternal life, live our lives as God's people, as people, we hope and pray, on their way to heaven.

Fr Phillip Pennington Harris is parish priest of English Martyrs Church, Didcot, Oxfordshire.

From Across the Pond...

Fr Peter Stravinskas reports from the USA



Ad intra

Lots of news from schools...

Last year, the Diocese of Charleston (South Carolina) brought suit against a provision of state law barring any financial assistance to faith-based schools. The current ban has its origins in an 1895 law, mimicking the so-called Blaine Amendment of New York, which was enacted to burden Catholic schools. In the nineteenth-century atmosphere of virulent anti-Catholicism (including the burning down of our schools, convents and churches), that law was replicated in numerous other states. A federal appeals court decided against the diocese, claiming that the state's ban is not rooted in religious prejudice. Undoubtedly, the diocese will appeal that decision, especially since the Supreme Court of the nation has already signaled its antipathy toward Blaine Amendments.

Regis Jesuit High School in Colorado dismissed two teachers, responsible for a student newspaper, in which an article was

printed in contradiction of Catholic teaching on the inviolability of human life in the womb. The top administrators issued an excellent statement:

"An opinion piece that presented a stance on abortion clearly in opposition to Church teaching was included that we found both deeply troubling and unacceptable. We believe that protection of life at [conception] represents the foundational requirement of respecting the dignity of human life at every stage. We are committed to ensuring that this does not happen again. The issue has been retracted in its entirety. While we believe in providing an avenue for student expression, we are taking steps now to consider the magazine's editorial process to ensure its compatibility with and responsibility in representing the mission of Regis Jesuit."

A very heart-warming story comes from St. Isaac Jogues School in the Archdiocese of Detroit. Like many Catholic schools around the country, St. Isaac Jogues experienced an enrollment boom as a result of our schools

having very reasonable approaches to the pandemic. The vast majority of parents – Catholic and non-Catholic alike – who may have used our system as an “escape hatch,” were so impressed that they have decided to stay with us. Due to the pervasive religious environment, in addition to the required participation in formal religion classes and in school liturgical events, significant numbers of conversions or “reversions” have come about. St. Isaac Jogues is a good example of this. Of the eighteen people being received into the Church at the Easter Vigil this year, twelve of them have a connection to the parish school. The principal, Sister Maria Guadalupe, says she was brought to tears watching little ones who had asked their parents to become Catholic make their first confessions and First Holy Communions (a goodly number of parents likewise are coming into the Church). One such boy, Owen Wilson in second grade, said: “I’ve been learning about the Church and how it’s a great place to have confession and learn about God. I had my first confession, and it was really good. I had to tell all my sins to the priest so I could get ready for Communion. It felt good to come out of the confessional.”

As I indicated, the evangelizing power of the school is significant. A friend of mine, pastor of another large parish, was able to accept sixteen new families into his school during the pandemic. Fourteen of those families had children needing to play sacramental “catch-up,” and four sets of parents had their marriages convalidated.

An aside: The school is blessed to have several Dominican Sisters of Nashville on the staff; as you might know, that community has a serious vocation problem: They have so many applicants that they have to keep building new wings to the motherhouse! Needless to say, the Sisters have a robust prayer and liturgical life, live a common life, wear the traditional habit, and have a common apostolate.

No matter where we are, I firmly believe that the health of a Catholic school rises and falls with the involvement and commitment of priests. To that end: our eighth annual seminar on the role of the priest in today’s Catholic school: July 11-14, Palm Beach, Florida. Priests from the UK have attended in the past and found the event very useful, despite governance differences. For further information: <https://catholiceducation.foundation/>

Varia

Louisiana Senator John Kennedy wrote a letter to the Department of Justice in 2020, expressing concern about incidents of anti-Catholic vandalism and harassment. In part, he wrote: “For example, rioters attacked a bookstore run by nuns, vandals demolished reverent statues, and arsonists set churches on fire. In one case, criminals targeted a church while worshipers were still inside. I concluded by asking that the department, which you now head, act swiftly and carefully to bring an end to these heinous crimes.” This March, he has written again; so far, no response from the Attorney General. Senator Kennedy, by the way, is a Methodist.

Bishop James Conley of Lincoln (Nebraska) spoke out against a city ordinance, which added “sexual orientation and gender identity” to its list of protected classes. In addition to causing confusion for citizens in general and children in particular, this local ordinance could have had serious consequences for Catholic institutions. He wrote: “...laws that seek to elevate sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes undermine [a] basic fact of our human biology. Rather than protect against unjust discrimination, these policies enshrine a false understanding of the human person into our legal structures.” He called for Catholics and others to sign a referendum petition to block enactment of the ordinance. The referendum petition needed 4,137 signatures by February 28. Within a day, it had garnered 18,501 signatories.

Ad extra

Varia

One of the most contentious issues during the Covid time in the U.S. was the closing down of churches. Many Catholics believed that the bishops were way too compliant, even supine. I was willing to give them some slack because I think two issues were in play. First, I suspect the bishops wanted to be “proactive” in closing down our institutions, in advance of government officials doing so, lest the bishops appear to be caving into governmental pressure. Even more pressing, I believe, was a fear of lawsuits; for example, a grandson who hadn't visited his grandmother in decades but, when Granny contracted the virus and died, he would come out of the woodwork to sue the diocese for causing her death.

At any rate, enough dust was raised during and after Covid era, that many players are now trying to ensure that this never happens again. Hence, legislation is surfacing in many venues declaring that religious institutions and what they offer their congregants must be considered “essential services,” thus guaranteeing their maintenance in crisis situations. The State of Arizona has passed such legislation, as has South Carolina.

The Media Report, produced by David Pierre, has been a constant voice of reason in the entire debacle of clergy sex abuse. He has unmasked all the dishonest dealers out to “make a buck” on the Church, throwing priests indiscriminately to the wolves.

Recently, he has been urging bishops to drop the topic because the problem has been solved and that the safest place for any child in America is in any institution run by

the Catholic Church. All too many bishops, however, keep beating their breasts – even though only seven cases surfaced last year, with over 40,000 priests in the nation.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has filed an amicus curiae brief (drafted by the most impressive Becket Fund) before the Supreme Court in support of a government school football (that's not soccer here!) coach in the State of Washington, who led his team in prayers after their games, and was subsequently terminated for violating the sacrosanct “separation of Church and State.” The USCCB brief argues: “We hope that the Supreme Court confirms what everyone with common sense knows: When a Christian coach kneels in prayer, or a Sikh schoolteacher wears a kirpan, or a Muslim principal fasts for Ramadan, they are expressing their faith, not establishing a religion.”

An elementary school in Moline, Illinois, has approved the establishment of an after-school Satanic Club. The rationale? To “help children learn benevolence and empathy, critical thinking, problem solving, creative expression and personal sovereignty. Proselytization is not our goal, and we're not interested in converting children to Satanism. After School Satan Clubs will focus on free inquiry and rationalism, the scientific basis for which we know what we know about the world around us. We prefer to give children an appreciation of the natural wonders surrounding them, not a fear of everlasting other-worldly horrors.” And public school administrators can't imagine why parents are abandoning their institutions in droves.

Pro-life Concerns

Thirteen Catholic lawmakers (all Democrats) in the U.S. Senate voted in favor of a failed attempt to pass a sweeping new abortion law that threatened to override states' pro-life laws and remove restrictions on abortion up to the point of birth, in some cases.

Reacting to the two senators from Rhode Island, Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence had this remark: "Shameful. The judgement will be God's."

Bishop George Thomas of Las Vegas, responding to one of his canonical subjects in public office advancing the abortion agenda, issued this statement: "If a politician from the Diocese of Las Vegas finds himself or herself at odds with the Church's teaching on the sacredness of human life, I ask him or her voluntarily to refrain from the reception of Holy Communion while holding public office." His stance has been praised by many, including Bishop James Conley of Lincoln.

The Alexandria City Council scrapped plans to designate March 10 as Abortion Provider Appreciation Day, following protests from Catholics in the Arlington diocese. Bishop Michael Burbidge of Arlington declared: "Proposing a celebration of abortion and an 'appreciation day' for those who destroy lives defies comprehension. The City of Alexandria should instead do the opposite. It should celebrate all those who save, protect and care for human life. It should re-direct its focus toward recognizing and supporting both mothers and their children, as so many dedicated and compassionate people in Alexandria do each day."

Ahead of a Senate vote, two U.S. bishops conference chairmen labeled a bill that would codify abortion rights into federal law as "built on a false and despairing narrative" that abortion is the "only, or best, solution to a crisis pregnancy."

"In treating abortion as the moral equivalent to the removal of an appendix, this proposal is radically out of step with the American public," Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore and Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York said in a joint letter to the Senate. "We strongly urge you to reject this bill and to put the energy and resources of our federal government behind policies that fully recognize and support both mothers and their children."

Lori and Dolan chair the bishops' conference's pro-life and religious liberty committees, respectively.

The bill failed – although it was strongly supported by devout Catholics Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden. At a St. Patrick's Day luncheon hosted by Pelosi, she lauded her partner in crime, Holy Joe, thus: "...he understands the dignity and worth of all people, because his Irish heritage in his case was accompanied by deep Catholic faith." God help us!

The Catholic Bishops of New Jersey (boasting the highest percentage of Catholics in the country) expressed their "profound disappointment and deep concern about the passage of the Freedom of



Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore and Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York

Reproductive Choice Act, which codifies into state law an individual's right to an abortion, including late-term abortions. This law departs from the fundamental Catholic teaching that all life is sacred from conception to natural death. Even more distressing is that the legal and ethical calculus that underlies this new legislation absolutely and forthrightly extinguishes the human and moral identity of the unborn child. Perhaps the legislators who rushed through this Act in the waning moments of their terms did not want citizens to understand fully its inhuman and lethal consequences." The bill was enthusiastically promoted and signed into law by another "faux Catholic," Governor Phil Murphy.

The annual March for Life in January in Washington, D.C., was another rousing success, largely populated by young people, a sizable percentage of whom are Catholic school students.

A few days after the 2010 March for Life in Washington, D. C., a journalist in favor of "abortion rights" wrote an article in the Washington Post (also strongly pro-abortion) noting that he was "expecting to write about [the March's] irrelevance," however, he indicated: "I was especially struck by the large number of young people among the tens of thousands at the march." He highlighted the fact that the vast majority came from Catholic schools who "were taught from an early age to oppose abortion." The piece ended up being remarkably fair and even positive.

This year: "As usual, the crowd at the March for Life skewed young, with many students from Catholic high schools and colleges wearing their school gear and carrying signs and banners with anti-abortion slogans."

Sometimes Europeans express surprise and even befuddlement about the tenacious opposition of American Catholics to "the culture of death," as St. John Paul II

put it. I firmly believe we have our Catholic schools – over a half decade of consistently strong catechesis on this topic – for this tenacity. And it is paying off, as pro-life pieces of legislation are enacted year after year and, most especially, with the very real possibility of the Supreme Court's overturning of the infamous Roe v. Wade decision of 1973. All of this goes to explain the rabid and nearly irrational push of the pro-abortionists these days.

On a personal note:

The following personal anecdote might be of interest:

Honesty compels me to admit that I am an Eastern European mutt: Lithuanian on my father's side, Ukrainian on my mother's, and Polish on both – thanks to shifting political borders. My four grandparents arrived in America between 1910 and 1915.

My maternal grandmother came to live with us in Newark when I was eight. Since kindergarten, I had declared my intention to be a priest. While my parents never discouraged this intention, Grandma Makara (her surname bowdlerized at Ellis Island!) took me very seriously. She shared with me that her baby brother (Michael), ordained in Ukraine in 1917, went home to his village to celebrate his first Divine Liturgy. On his way back to Lviv to assume his first priestly assignment, his train was stopped by the Bolsheviks for a "security check." Espying my grand-uncle in his cassock, they escorted him off the train and put a bullet into his head (three weeks a priest). Not content with that damage, they then went back to his family home and confiscated the farm, since having a religious in the family made one an "enemy of the state."

Fr. Peter Stravinskis is the President of the Catholic Education Foundation, Editor of *The Catholic Response* and publisher of Newman House Press.

CALLING ALL RE teachers in secondary schools!



The 2022 **Schools Bible Project** offers an opportunity for student to encounter Christ in the New Testament. With no complicated lesson-planning, this is a simple and attractive project which has been run successfully in schools across Britain for over 30 years. Pupils are invited to study an incident in the life of Christ as described in one of the Gospels and to write an account of it as if they had actually been present.

There are **cash prizes** for schools and individual **book prizes** for the students. The main prizewinners are invited to London to receive their prizes following a tour of Parliament and Tea at Westminster. A number of runner-up prizes are also awarded.

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The Schools Bible Project is organised annually by Christian Projects, an ecumenical charity bringing together representatives of the mainstream Christian denominations in Britain.

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Religious freedom

Fr Michael Nazir-Ali looks at the plight of persecuted Christians today – and our response.

The world has always had plenty of tyrants. People have had to suffer under tyrannies down the centuries. The early Church, too, suffered under the tyranny both of pagan Rome and of Persia.

And tyranny has not ceased. In modern times, we have had tyranny of power and wealth – and also of ideologies. The 20th century brought the terrible suffering wrought by Nazism and Communism. Today we have new examples of tyranny, notably Chinese Marxism – linked to nationalism – and Hindutva – linked to political Hindu revivalism in India. Much suffering has been caused to Christians, Yazidis, Baha'is and even Muslims by extreme Islamism. Viewing the latter at first hand, along with Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), I was able to see how ISIS destroyed the settled lives of Christians, Yazidis and ordinary Muslims in a country like Iraq. It is wonderful that Iraqi Christians, like Pascale Warda, are now helping those of all communities to rebuild their lives, with the help of agencies like ACN and the Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy and Dialogue (OXTRAD).

We must be on our guard against tyranny – including the “little tyrants”, the bureaucrats, soldiers and police who enforce the rules of tyrants or sometimes act on their own, for personal financial enrichment or for personal power. These are the people who act at a local level, making the lives of Christians difficult by emphasising the things that set them apart. This can happen, for example, to Christians in a territory where a majority of people are of another



faith tradition. It takes courage – daily courage – to live the Christian life under such circumstances. And the local “little tyrants” can work with the jealousies and tensions in the community, stirring up ill-feeling and even violence. In Turkey, for instance, action against Christians can be taken at these local and lower levels, enabling those ‘higher up’ to deny any involvement.

In history

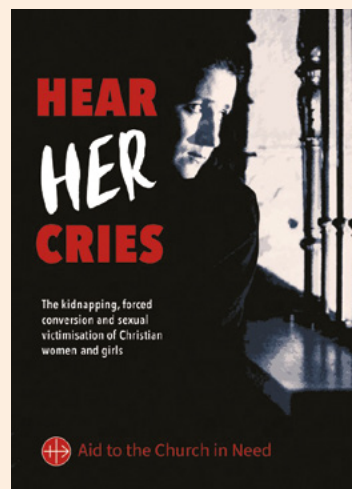
The plight of Christians under a tyrannical regime – finding themselves regarded as an “enemy within” in the land of their birth, their homeland, where they belong – is tragic. Even family members can turn against Christians when they discover their decision for Christ. We can see that this happened in history, for example, with the Vietnamese martyrs of the 19th century. Today, it can happen in countries such as Iran. Often the informers come from within families, not because they want to be informers, but because they are compelled, forced, or simply put under extreme social or economic pressure.

As an international charity, Aid to the Church in Need is able to publish and spread information about the plight of persecuted Christians in various parts of the world. Its recent report “Hear Her Cries” details the specific horror of Christian girls and young women abducted and kidnapped into forced-marriages in countries from Egypt to Pakistan. This report brings to the world the plight of the victims, and urges that these crimes are recognised as such by the countries concerned and also by the international community. Girls who have managed to escape describe what happened. They and their families also need practical support and help, which can be provided through the Church.

Informed

It is important to be informed: Aid to the Church in Need through its presence and work is able to report in detail about situations which might otherwise seem remote or remain neglected. And we should not be tempted to put uncomfortable information aside. As part of the Church, we need to be informed and to recognise realities.

The Church honours martyrs. Some have died for justice – for example, Oscar Romero. Others have died for the faith and as an act of love – for example, Maximilian Kolbe. The Pakistani Federal Minister Shahbaz Bhatti’s case for canonisation is now open. He died to protect fundamental freedoms for religious minorities. Such martyrs are not just witnesses for the Church but for the world, standing for justice, freedom and love. They are an inspiration to all, Christian and non-Christian, showing us the truth about human dignity and freedom. They can inspire us to recognise that we too should be witnesses to truth (that is really what the term ‘martyr’ means). And, yes, such witnessing can also lead to suffering and even to death.



Aid to the Church in Need
(ACN)'s report Hear Her Cries

Tempting

It really is tempting to put thoughts of martyrdom aside – it is, after all, rather uncomfortable being made to think about the idea of suffering for Christ, and having our faith challenged at a deep level. It is so much nicer just to go along with the flow of things, where our prayers and our attendance at church are part of a routine, which is, after all, not particularly inconvenient and which often makes us feel quite good about life. But Jesus calls his followers to take up their crosses and to follow Him and we must understand that martyrdom is part of the history of the Church – part of the reality of what has happened down the centuries and into our own time. Those who are suffering today for their Christian beliefs are part of the Church across the world and down the ages and in a sense of history too. We cannot just think about aspects of Christian life that make us feel comfortable – we must accept that part of our whole approach to the Faith is an acceptance of the heroism of martyrdom and the challenge that it presents to us.

A Christian martyr is above all a person who prays, who recognises him or herself before God and witnesses to the world.

A Christian martyr is above all a person who prays, who recognises him or herself before God and witnesses to the world. And the Church unites all in prayer – so we can join our prayers with the prayers of those who have gone before and those who are suffering and experiencing injustice, imprisonment, discrimination and oppression today, that the Lord of the Church will strengthen those who suffer in his name and deliver them from their torment. We pray also for ourselves that our courage will not fail us when the time comes to witness fearlessly to the truth of the Gospel and its demand on us and in the world.

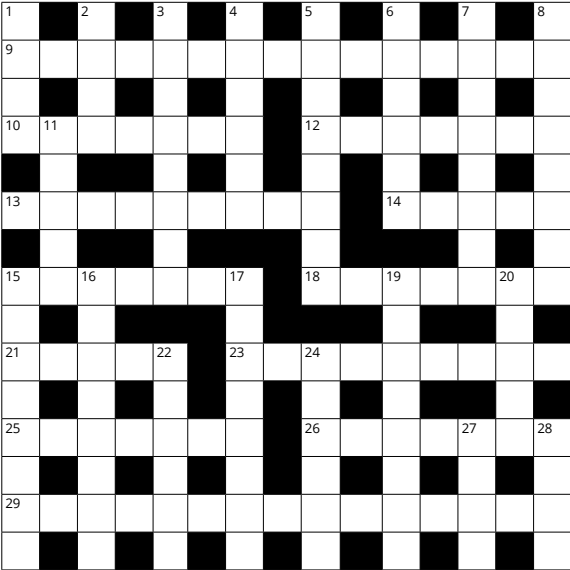
Let us pray for ACN and for all those who work with the persecuted church that God will strengthen the hands of all those who work for justice love and freedom and will provide them with the means to relieve the suffering of our brothers and sisters.

Fr Michael Nazir-Ali is a priest of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. This feature is based on a sermon preached at a Mass in Westminster Cathedral as part of an evening of information and prayer organised by Aid to the Church in Need.



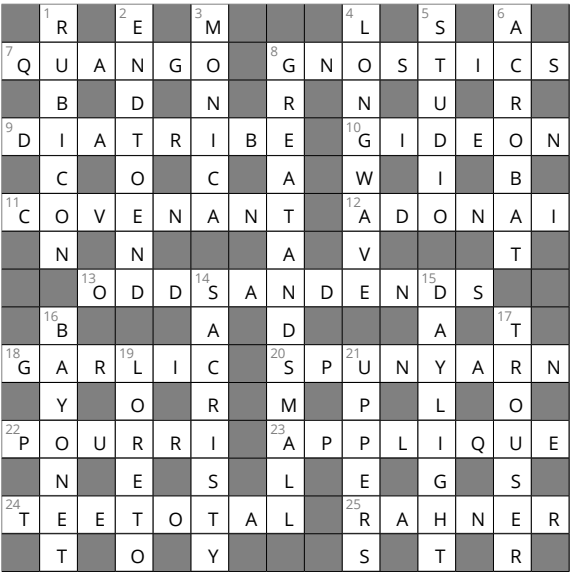
Crossword 34
by Aurora Borealis

We invite you to complete this crossword.
The clues in bold involve general religious knowledge.
The others are cryptic clues with secular answers.



A prize will go to the sender of the first correct solution opened by 1st June 2022. Entries may be the original page or a photocopy. Entries should be sent to 45 East St. Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 5EE. Please include your full postal address.

The winner of Crossword 33 was N.Alldit.



Across

- 9. Latin for "the Lord be with you" (7,8)
- 10. "Send forth your spirit and the whole face of the earth will be ____" (7)
- 12. Send them out on your behalf to get more pudding? (7)
- 13. Spiritual counsellor (9)
- 14. St. ____ Goretti died in 1902 (5)
- 15. Raincoat girl puts on to see play (7)
- 18. Hear one lump of wood is inside three works (7)
- 21. I beg you, no parking, this is a contract (5)
- 23. Throughout life – a chap and his son? (3,3,3)
- 25. Small bird eats first of insects, tiny termites – noted (7)
- 26. Go back to the underside (7)
- 29. Behind the Spanish family hides stage props for villain (15)

Down

- 1. Pronounced smell is river (4)
- 2. The last word (4)
- 3. A New York wife in this place, in all places (8)
- 4. Mutterings when middle of March arrives (6)
- 5. Spar: use weapon with spirit – not I (8)
- 6. Christmas – it comes including a TV series (6)
- 7. Plot – chaotic race is on (8)
- 8. Young lady is in early mostly as an envoy (8)
- 11. A body part sent back to find disease (5)
- 15. Silkworm loses head for tail, and gains end of giant flower (8)
- 16. God-given spiritual gifts or talents (8)
- 17. Philosophy with man not God at its centre (8)
- 19. Pub has eggs and endless tea – have new ideas! (8)
- 20. Burnish notation (5)
- 22. Biblical queen, married to Persian king Ahasuerus (6)
- 24. Imaginary land nestles above river, not in Asia to begin with (6)
- 27. Cad is in scrape (4)
- 28. Explosive phenomenon found in Somerset – nasty! (4)

Meditation on the Ascension

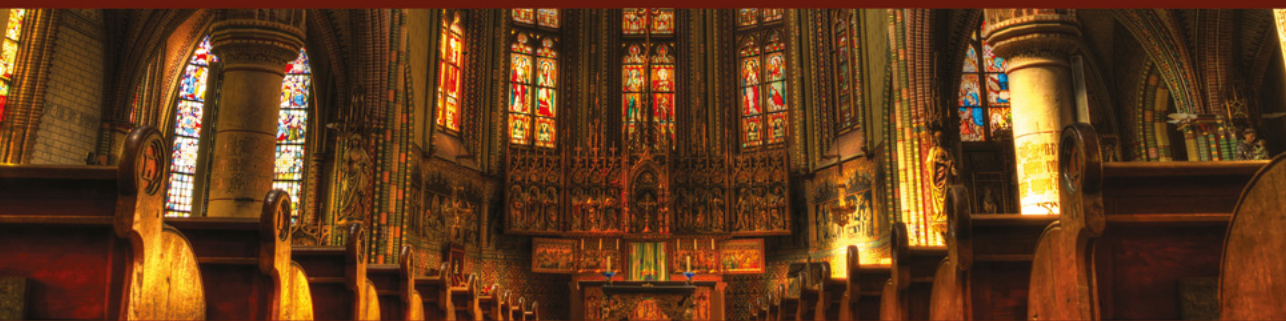
John Henry Newman

O memorable day! The Apostles feel it to be so, now that it is come, though they felt so differently before it came. When it was coming they dreaded it. They could not think but it would be a great bereavement; but now, as we read, they returned to Jerusalem "with great joy." O what a time of triumph! They understood it now. They understood how weak it had been in them to grudge their Lord and Master, the glorious Captain of their salvation, the Champion and First fruits of the human family, this crown of His great work. It was the triumph of redeemed

man. It is the completion of his redemption. It was the last act, making the whole sure, for now man is actually in heaven. He has entered into possession of his inheritance. The sinful race has now one of its own children there, its own flesh and blood, in the person of the Eternal Son. O what a wonderful marriage between heaven and earth! It began in sorrow; but now the long travail of that mysterious wedding day is over; the marriage feast is begun; marriage and birth have gone together; man is new born when Emmanuel enters heaven.

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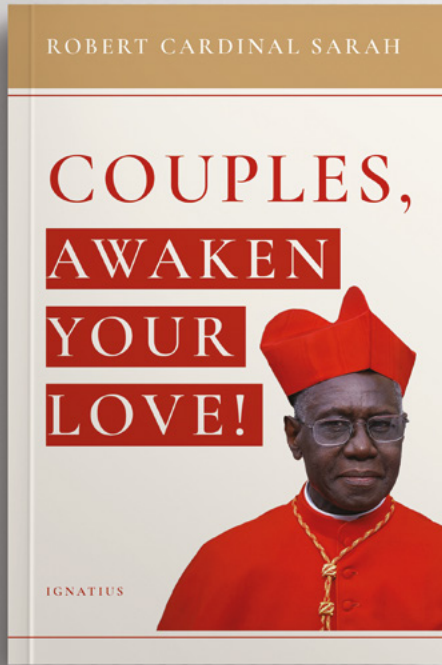
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Couples, Awaken Your Love! by Robert Cardinal Sarah



Ignatius Press
140pp
£12.99

Inspiration for spouses

Review by Emily Dytor

Cardinal Sarah's insightful and powerful book *Couples, Awaken Your Love!* is formed from the partial transcript of a talk given to married couples at a retreat in Lourdes, France, in May 2019.

The overarching theme of the writing is the centrality of the family and the vital necessity for families to be rooted in Christ. The flourishing of the world depends upon this reality: "Yes, if the final battle between God and the kingdom of Satan concerns marriage and the family, it is urgent for us to realize that we are already in the center of this spiritual battle, on which the future of our human societies depends" (p. 96). Throughout the book the Cardinal offers encouragement, wisdom and inspiration to married Christians raising families which must, in these days, like in days of old, be counter-cultural in order to retain their essence undefiled.

Powerful and thought-provoking

The book is divided into two parts and each part into short chapters. It is relatively brief, being only 140 small pages of very readably sized text, and is occasionally a little disjointed (having been based on a talk). That said, this does not take away from the intensity and fire

which are at its core. The book is an impassioned plea from the heart. In fact, if you are someone who wants to be hit with powerful and thought-provoking reflections without sitting down to read a great tome of dense theology (perhaps you have a small child!), this book certainly delivers in spades.

As a married person myself, I am left feeling the profound importance of my vocation as a married person in today's decadent society; and also the distinct privilege and beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage as a gift from God. Sarah describes the love of spouses as "the most sublime expression and the tangible sign of God's love for humanity in Jesus Christ" (p. 41).

Delight-sacrifice-resurrection

Part one focuses on the dignity of marriage and the necessity of putting Christ at the centre of the conjugal relationship. Sarah refers to the "triptych of marital love: delight-sacrifice-resurrection." A relationship is founded initially on delight in each other; it is then strengthened and built up through sacrifice and hardship, united to Christ on the cross: "the refiner's fire". This process when complete "will seal the spouses' unity definitively" and lead, through the way of the Cross, if they are faithful, to a kind of resurrection ("re-creation"). "The spouses leave the banquet hall of the wedding of Cana in order to taste already the ineffable joys of the eternal wedding feast of the lamb" (p.25-6).

Sarah speaks of the importance of Divine Mercy as a key building-block to a lasting relationship. He explains that God, who is love and loved us first, is the origin of marital love and that this fact "guarantees its fidelity and, therefore, its stability and solidity." He continues: "[Christ] commits himself in a promise to save wounded love by founding it on a faithful covenant with himself" (p.29). I love his use of the term "wounded love" to emphasize the flawed and original-sin-taint-

ed state in which couples initially find themselves in this fallen world and how he then points to the dignity and salvation God gives us through his "faithful covenant." What a glorious gift the sacrament of marriage is!

Trials

After the light of Part 1, Part two has a darker theme: the great trials Christian couples will face in our very compromised and sinful culture where the beauty and glory of God's creation is twisted and distorted into the image of man. The Cardinal repeatedly refers to the "*spiritual combat*" in which married couples must be prepared to participate. He discusses dangers present in mainstream media with its over-sexualisation of programmes, at times even those aimed at young children. He says that in the materialistic West, once children enter school many are "'re-educated,' in other words, their consciences are manipulated and polluted," citing the infamous case of a Christian couple, imprisoned for preventing their children participating in a "sexual education" experiment. His observations and analysis of culture certainly serve as a wake-up call to parents of young children. We truly are in *spiritual combat*.

'Wrestle with God'

Sarah goes on to talk about the importance of prayer. We must resist an attitude of complacent tolerance and actively fight against the evils which are working to break apart the Christian family. He quotes the letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians about putting on the armour of God, yet, to avoid fear, reminds us that we will not "be tempted beyond our strength." Our weapon in this fight is prayer. He says that in prayer we must "wrestle with God" and enter into the desert to rest with and in God. "To see God, to contemplate him, to fall on our knees at his feet to adore him brings great rest and great peace to every person" (p.68). He artfully contrasts true Christian peace with the peace a person may

seek in a yoga session. There a person is simply striving for a natural peace based on positive feelings and lack of conflict. He reminds us that as Christians “the true, imperishable food, the food of our souls, is not of this world.” We must keep our eyes fixed on heaven.

Darkness

Referring to the darkness that permeates society in way of abortion, divorce, homosexual “marriage,” and most recently, the anti-gender movement (which he describes as the “final revolution”) Sarah says, “This is the hour of combat between these shadows into which humanity sinks, held in the clutches of the demons of libertarian nihilism, and the Light that the Church alone carries like a torch...” (p.75). We are called to a type of martyrdom in this spiritual combat, abandoning our whole selves to the will of Christ. A good place to start, he says, is to pray the rosary and to foster an internal silence, in which there is a great power. Next, Sarah expresses the importance of a firm commitment to and support of life and human dignity. He concludes his talk with a sort of battle cry, reiterating the importance of the Christian family for the future of human society. Overall I found Part Two quite dark, perhaps overly pessimistic (who can say?), but at the same time profound and rousing. Whilst he can sometimes seem to focus a lot on the negative aspects of the world, the same could also be said for many of the writings of the saints and Marian apparitions.

Conjugal prayers

One of my favourite things about the book is the two appendices: one has daily prayers for couples (“Conjugal Prayers”) and the other has a workshop to promote better communication between spouses. The conjugal prayers consist of a time to seek forgiveness from God and from your spouse, a scripture reading, meditation, and ending each day with the “prayer for spouses.” The workshop clearly lays out a five-step procedure including a beautiful “prayer to Mary who restores all couples.”

In summary, the talk itself is a fairly quick read but is intense and dynamic, offering much to reflect on and reread; and the prayers in the appendices present a tangible way to facilitate positive growth in holiness within your marriage relationship. In one of the quotes in praise of the book on the back cover, it says Cardinal Sarah offers us a “pep-talk and game plan ... to fight against a culture of death,” and I think that is a great way to describe this book. I definitely recommend this book to couples young and old, struggling or thriving. If you are married, what are you waiting for? Let Cardinal Sarah remind you of the privilege and beauty of your sacred vocation and help you and your spouse “awaken your love!”

Emily Dytor is a full-time mother of three young children.

Reclaiming the Piazza III: Communicating Catholic Culture
 edited by Ronnie Convery,
 Leonardo Franchi
 Franchi & Jack Valero



Gracewing
 254pp
 £14.99

The Church and contemporary culture

Review by Richard Whinder

This is a curious book. It obviously has the best of intentions, and contains much interesting material, but in the end, it left your reviewer disappointed. I will try to explain why.

Firstly, as noted, this book is undoubtedly well-intentioned. It also has large ambitions. As its editors proclaim, it aims to be part of a new dialogue between the Church and contemporary culture, in order to bring about (in the words of Pope Francis) 'a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, inclusive and responsive society'. These are weighty goals for a slim volume of some 250 pages, and one does occasionally wonder if the editors might have bitten off more than they can chew.

Literature, Art, Economics, Architecture, History, Science

The book is divided into two parts: 'Beauty and Goodness' and 'Truth and Goodness'. Again, these are considerable fields of enquiry, and necessarily the contributors have only a limited space in which to deal with some very demanding topics. Thus,

we have chapters such as 'A Catholic understanding of Literature', 'A Catholic understanding of Art' and 'A Catholic understanding of Economics' – all subjects which would surely justify whole volumes (if not libraries) rather than the few pages accorded to them here. This is not to say that these essays are not worth reading – far from it. I was particularly drawn to Dr Timothy O'Malley's chapter on 'A Catholic understanding of Architecture' (which, pleasingly, draws on the work of the late Sir Roger Scruton), and (as a trained historian), to John Charmley's essay on 'A Catholic understanding of History', which gives a proper place to St John Henry Newman's insights in this field. Also, since readers of *Faith* magazine often have a special interest in the relationship between religion and the natural sciences, it is only right to draw attention to the Rev. Dr Andrew Pinsent's chapter on 'A Catholic understanding of Science.' Those familiar with Fr. Pinsent's work will not be surprised to learn that he demolishes the hoary old myths concerning the alleged 'conflict' between faith and science with his customary incision and panache. Nevertheless, I suspect that he, too, would acknowledge that to deal seriously with this subject would require a great deal more space than the present volume is able to give it.

Methodology

Nevertheless, one should not fault Catholic writers for showing ambition, and even if the topics covered cannot be dealt with in their fullness, it is good that these issues are being addressed. Ultimately, however, my reservations about this book go beyond a desire that some of the topics could have been covered in more depth. In the end, I was more concerned about the essential methodology being employed.

Perhaps I can best explain this by quoting the editors themselves. In their introduction they express a desire to avoid 'slogans, anathemas or culture wars' in favour of 'patience, respect, and a humble search for understanding'. In one sense, wholly admirable, but reading that sentence I was reminded of a saying attributed to Leon Trotsky: 'You may not be interested in war, but war may be interested in you.' Catholics may indeed desire to eschew the culture wars of contemporary society, but is that actually realistic? Again, when the editors write that (speaking of those currently outside the Church), 'ultimately we all want the same thing', I found myself asking, are you sure that is the case? Does that statement do justice to the reality of sin, the existence of evil, and the pervasive influence of these phenomena in the world around us? Do the authors acknowledge the existence of the 'culture of death' which Pope St John Paul II believed to be at work in much of modern society?

A notable absence

It was then that I realised that the name and teaching of Pope St John Paul II is noticeably absent from most of this book (and I checked the footnotes, to be sure). True, he is cited a handful of times (principally his 'Letter to Artists' of 1999), but it does seem odd that the longest reigning Pope of the twentieth century, himself a poet and playwright, who was so deeply interested in the interplay between divine faith and human culture, should have been thus neglected. Certainly, this work would have benefitted from giving more space to his insights, and in particular to the robust challenge he was prepared to offer the contemporary world when it turned against Christ and the laws of God.

Ultimately, however, this volume is a very 'establishment' project – after all, it comes

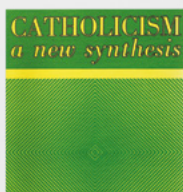
garlanded with a preface from no less a figure than His Excellency Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation. And, as we know, the magisterium of Pope St John Paul II no longer appears to be held in high regard, nor is it frequently cited, in the documents that come from the Vatican today. It is understandable that the editors should have wanted their book to chime with the thinking of the current regime in Rome, but it does bring with it some notable limitations.

To conclude, as I began: this is a well-intentioned book which contains some interesting essays. But the reader may go away regretting a missed opportunity.

Fr Richard Whinder is a history graduate and Parish Priest of Holy Ghost Catholic Church, Balham, London.

CATHOLICISM: A NEW SYNTHESIS

Edward Holloway's major work in which he shows in detail how orthodox Catholic theology can be synthesised with the philosophy of evolution to produce a coherent understanding of Catholic Christianity for the modern age. The thinking behind the Faith movement, this theological vision has been inspiring Catholics, especially the young, for over 50 years. It provides a way forward for the Church to meet the intellectual challenge of the modern secular worldview.

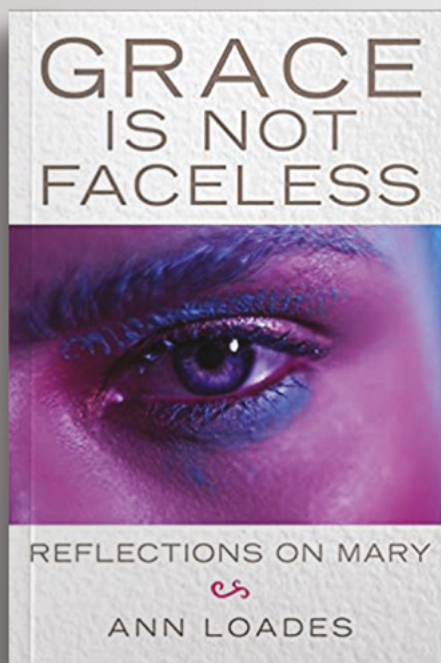


SEXUAL ORDER AND HOLY ORDER

The Church through the ages has always taught that priests should be male. But in an age when woman has, through the cultural and intellectual development of society, been able to vindicate that status of equality with the male which was always hers by right of nature and grace, we have to look for the intrinsic reasons behind the works and words of God in Christ about the priesthood. Fr. Holloway explores why human beings are created male and female and the role of sexuality in God's self-giving to us which climaxes in the Incarnation and the Eucharist.



Grace Is Not Faceless,
Reflections on Mary
by Ann Loades



Darton, Longman
and Todd
176pp
£16.99

An Anglican feminist on Mary

Review by Pia Matthews

***Grace Is Not Faceless, Reflections on Mary* is a collection of the writings of Ann Loades, an influential feminist thinker from the Anglican tradition. The collection includes essays on Mary as she is treated in ecumenical dialogue, notably the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) discussions and the debate over the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, reflection on poetry and the Nativity, a short meditation on the Royal Mail's Christmas stamps of 2019, and two sermons one on the Annunciation the other on the Assumption.**

The overall theme of the collection follows Loades's own stated project: that her general aim is to give an account of the enterprise of feminist theology and then reflect on how Mary is viewed by a variety of feminist theologians from different faith traditions. The main thrust of this collection is to present a feminist critique of these different traditions. After all, according to Loades, Mary seen through a feminist lens can be helpful for ecumenism. Nevertheless, her principal complaint is that in Marian theology in general, and specifically in the ARCIC enterprise, feminism is not taken into account.

The female face of grace

Loades does offer the main aspects of Roman Catholic and Anglican thinking on Mary. However, the reader will not find a detailed account of Marian theology from either of these two traditions in this book nor how there is or could be dialogue on Mary between the traditions. Indeed, the editor Stephen Burns takes it upon himself to at least outline themes from Scripture, Catholicism, Anglicanism, and theological 'other voices' in his introduction in order to give the reader some orientation. The title of the book is taken from a phrase coined by the Dominican Cornelius Ernst to describe the significant presence of Mary in the Catholic experience. For Loades the phrase 'grace is not faceless' means that the face can be female as well as male.

Oppressive, idealized or sentimentalized?

Loades claims that traditional doctrines about Mary are constantly assessed by women as suggesting the denigration of all other women, be they doctrines about Mary in contrast to Eve, Mary as the most blessed among women or that in the Incarnation God 'did not abhor a virgin's womb.' According to Loades, in these doctrines it is women's bodies not men's bodies that are treated as in some way sinful, problematic, 'indecent'. Loades also thinks that Vatican II documents referring to Mary are not 'untypical of Christian attitudes to women': they 'cut Mary down to size'. It seems that male theologians, especially Catholic theologians, cannot put a foot right, even when they seek, like Pope St Paul VI and Pope St John Paul II, to emphasize the equal dignity of women. Loades continuously sees in most pronouncements gender stereotyping and a pervasive gap between the 'proclamation' of 'full personhood' for women, represented by the 'new Eve-Mary,' and the 'practice' of associating women with the 'old Eve.' Instead of what she regards as these oppressive or idealized or sentimentalized images of Mary, Loades engages with other feminist thinkers who believe that Mary can mobilize us for change and alert us to oppressions.

Sticking points

The collection as a whole may seem rather repetitive, and this is understandable given that it is made up of some of Loades's important contributions to feminist Marian approaches. Loades highlights some of the sticking points for Mary in ecumenism such as the concerns over the way in which a focus on Mary may detract from the work of Christ, the nagging worry of reformers of potential idolatry or superstition, and she notes that the Anglican tradition is more nuanced when it comes to, for instance, liturgies. Her sermon on the Assumption roots the feast in early Christianity and she points

out that Mary, 'no door-mat,' is the only person in Scripture 'twice Spirit-graced,' in the Annunciation and at Pentecost. However, these sticking points are essentially observations on which she layers her conviction that 'Christian theological feminism simply has not been taken into the theological bloodstream of those likely to produce an acceptably ecumenical statement'.

Mary and 'co-inherence'

Loades does remind the reader of the need to pay attention to historical realities whether it is the recollection of Mary as an historical person or the actual experiences of women and men. Loades also expresses the hope of feminist theologians that they can 'verbalise God' in an inclusively human manner, taking account of female human beings. Along with other feminists, she thinks that a new inclusive vision should apply to biblical texts, exegesis habits, ecclesiastical practice and tradition. Moreover, she claims that the 'symbol of Mary' can help us to achieve in both Church and society a new sense of 'co-inherence' between men and women so that 'each actualizes the dignity and worth of the other'.

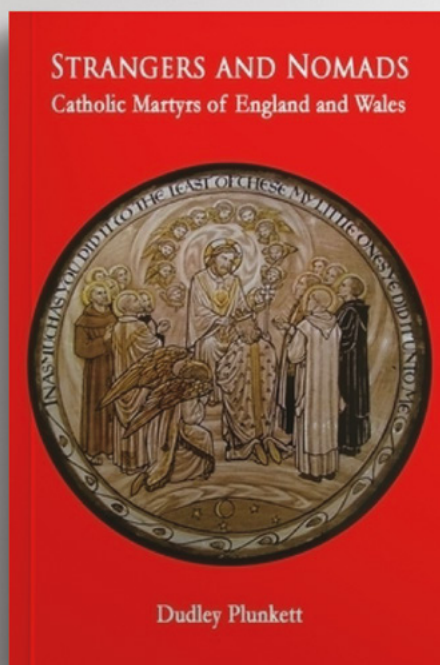
'A horizon of hope'

Loades's previously unpublished essay 'Mary for Now' is perhaps the most significant contribution in the collection. To begin with Loades once again reminds the reader that, in spite of 'ambivalence' in the complex Christian tradition, this tradition can still offer 'a horizon of hope' for all, both 'within and beyond Christian institutions'. Then using insights from, among others, Evelyn Underhill and Dorothy L. Sayers, Loades highlights the way in which Mary can stand for the 'unbelongers' who bring about change notably through prayer and pacifism, and Mary's role in the tradition as protector, defender and lady wisdom.

However, in a significant addition, Loades introduces the offering of Karen O'Donnell on how Mary's experiences of flight into exile to avoid massacre all the way up to the images of the Stabat Mater and the Pieta can inform the new field of trauma theology. Given the real problem of violence against women, as well as the often understated tragedy of miscarriage, the significance of Mary in trauma theology based on the reality of embodied experience can be a new and fruitful area where feminist theology can bring real insights.

Dr Pia Matthews lectures at St Mary's University, Twickenham. Her most recent publication is *Marriage, Family and the Church: A Boat with New Nets* (Gracewing).

Strangers and Nomads
by Dudley Plunkett



Gracewing
138pp
£9.99

Our neglected martyrs

Review by Richard Marsden

Upon seeing the front cover of *Strangers and Nomads*, those familiar with literature on penal times might first think: 'Yet another short pamphlet-style book of summaries of the English and Welsh martyrs?' As the author himself acknowledges in his first paragraph, there is no shortage of such publications. To answer this critique, Plunkett argues that his book's distinguishing feature is the "deliberate intention" of spreading devotion to these martyrs, and also to encourage the seeking of their intercession "for the spiritual needs of contemporary society." Any reader would find it difficult to deny that he fulfils his aim.

Neglected

The introductory pages point out the "apparent neglect" of most of the martyrs by the Church today, a Church "so much in need of their help at a time of spiritual crisis." It is a critique that many priests and lay people alike will recognise. Evidence presented in support of this argument is the apparent absence of any "fanfare" with which the 50th anniversary of the Canonisation of the Forty Martyrs in 2020 was marked, coupled with the fact that very few of their individual

feast days are included in the national liturgical calendar. The author's observation justifies the importance he therefore places on spreading the cult of these saintly priests, religious and lay people, something he does with great passion. It is a devotion which is grounded in three key foundations of the Catholic faith the martyrs witnessed to: "fidelity to the Pope and to the Apostolic Succession; the centrality of the Mass and importance of the Holy Eucharist at the heart of the Church; and the communion with the saints in heaven, especially with Mary, the Mother of God" (p. 17).

Acts and plots

The title 'Strangers and Nomads' is a quotation from Hebrews 11:13 and refers to the descendants of Abraham, who 'recognised that the earth was not their true home and so longed for a dwelling more glorious and lasting.' It is a fitting way to describe how the English and Welsh martyrs were treated in their own land, and too, expresses their own longing to be numbered among the saints of heaven.

This slender book is particularly appropriate for those with little prior knowledge of the penal times or the inspiring stories of the martyrs. The first section, 'Remembering the Martyrs,' outlines the historical context succinctly and explains the various Acts of Parliament which these saints refused to swear to, as well as the numerous fictitious 'plots,' such as one devised by Titus Oates (1678), that led to the death penalty for many of them. Neither does the author assume any previous knowledge of the several brutal ways of torture the martyrs suffered, such as the Scavenger's Daughter, and the various sites of execution, such as Tyburn, which are explained in detailed footnotes.

Profiles

The bulk of the text, 85 pages, contains profiles of each of the Forty Canonised Martyrs of England and Wales. Additionally, there are short entries on Saint John Fisher, Saint Thomas More, Saint Oliver Plunkett (who was Irish but who was the last Catholic martyr to be executed at Tyburn). To say the profiles are brief would be an understatement. One or two are barely over half a page long, some are two to three pages in length, another indicator that this is very much an introductory book on the martyrs. Despite their brevity, however, the profiles do characterise well the saints' mission, faithfulness and glorious witness to Christ. Furthermore, they are arranged according to Feastsdays, which makes 'Strangers and Nomads' a good book to have on hand to accompany one's prayers throughout the year. Those featured, who are among the forty canonised by Pope Paul VI in 1970, include:

- **Jesuit priests**, such as St Henry Morse, who ministered faithfully in London to victims of the plague and also worked as a military chaplain in Flanders, before being eventually hanged drawn and quartered at Tyburn in 1645.
- **Secular priests**, such as Yorkshireman St Luke Kirby, who travelled to England with St Edmund Campion, but was arrested as soon as he landed. Despite not getting to bring the Mass to the Catholics of England at all, he did manage to celebrate the sacred mysteries in the Gatehouse prison in London, thanks to materials being smuggled in.
- **Male Religious**, Ss John Houghton, Robert Lawrence, Augustine Webster (Carthusians) and Richard Reynolds (Bridgettine), who were all executed on May 4, 1535, for refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy. They were the first of the Forty, which is why the Feast of the English Martyrs is on this date.
- **Laymen**, such as St Richard Gwyn, a Welsh schoolmaster, and married father of six, who was forced to attend a Protestant church in chains and rattled them so loudly the preacher could not be heard.
- **Laywomen**, Ss Anne Line, Margaret Clitherow, and Margaret Ward, who harboured priests, assisted them in their ministry, and provided places for Mass to be said.

Last words

Each profile ends with the collects (opening prayers at Mass) relating to each feastday. But perhaps the most intriguing feature of the accounts are quotes of the martyrs' last words on the gallows. Many of them are at pains to point out that they have no animosity towards the monarch. In fact, what is clear, is that the martyrs love their country. However, each in their own way, pledge their loyalty above all to Christ and the Catholic Faith.

Among the most beautiful closing words, are those of St Edmund Arrowsmith:

"The mercy I look for is heaven... I freely and willingly offer to thee Sweet Jesus, this my death in satisfaction for my sins... I die for the love of thee, for our holy faith, for the support of the authority of thy vicar on earth, the successor of Saint Peter, the true head of the Catholic Church, which thou hast founded and established." (p. 66)

Fr Richard Marsden is a priest of the Diocese of Middlesbrough, serving as assistant priest for the parishes of Richmond (& Wycliffe), Leyburn, and Ulshaw Bridge in the Yorkshire Dales.

FEED THE HUNGRY

(Cf. Isaiah 58:10)

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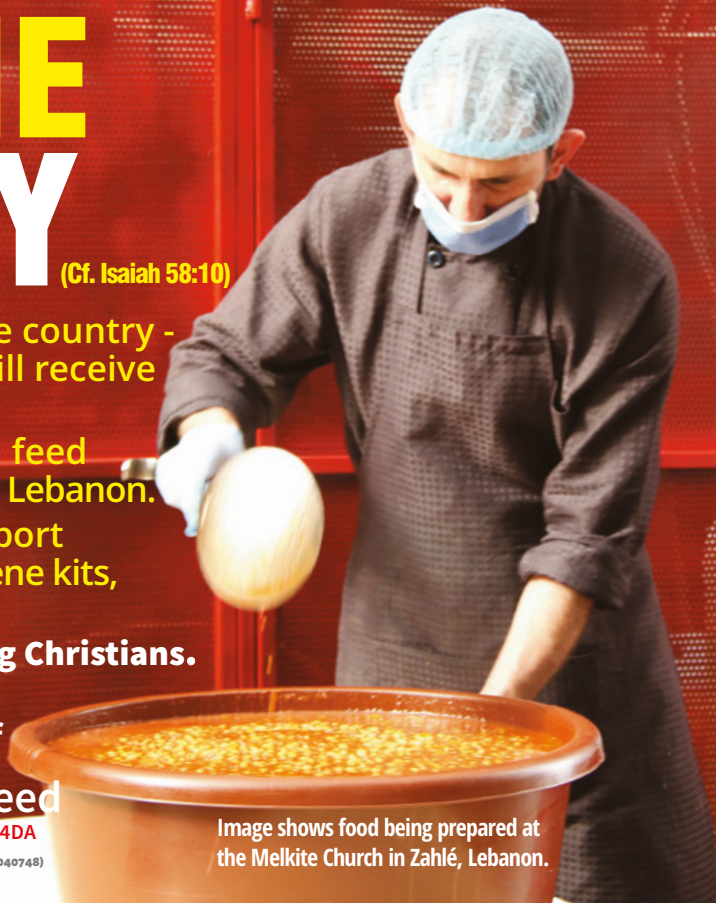


Image shows food being prepared at the Melkite Church in Zahlé, Lebanon.

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