



# OUR LADY OF GRACE PRESTWICH

‘Stay with us, Lord, on our journey’

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## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY 16 AUGUST 2020

### My dear Parishioners and Friends,

So many holidays cancelled!  
So many plans scuppered!  
Greater Manchester  
continues to be in lockdown,  
and so do we.

However, as last weekend,  
so too on this, the church  
bells will ring out, reminding  
Prestwich that we are now  
open for Sunday Mass and  
inviting people to come.

Yes, we know that the  
obligation to come to Mass  
on Sunday does not apply  
during the present pandemic.  
Yes, we know that especially  
the vulnerable are  
understandably hesitant  
about going out anywhere.  
And yes, because of social  
distancing, we will not be  
able to accommodate the  
numbers who usually come.

At the same time, people are  
missing the spiritual strength  
which comes from being at  
Holy Mass. And if they are  
active during the week, they  
may well feel able, and even  
the need, to come to Sunday  
Mass. If that is *you*, you will  
be very welcome.

**Our Sunday Masses are at  
the usual times: 7.00 pm on  
Saturday, 9.00 and 11.00  
am on Sunday.**



The above date, 16 August,  
might puzzle some people.  
Surely the feast of Our  
Lady’s Assumption is kept on  
15 August? So it is. But when  
a holy day of obligation falls  
on a Saturday or a Monday,  
it is transferred to the  
Sunday, as here.

It strikes me that the  
Assumption of Our Blessed  
Lady into heaven has special  
relevance in this time of  
lockdown. How? Read on to  
the end!



In many parts of the world,  
today is a high holiday.  
Those lying on a  
Mediterranean beach, for  
example, might find  
something more interesting if  
they went into the town.  
Local conditions allowing,  
they might well find a  
colourful and noisy religious  
procession. All  
over Europe and beyond,  
there would normally be  
thousands of such  
processions for the feast of  
the Assumption, as there  
were in England before the  
change of religion in the  
sixteenth century.

This was the most important  
feast of Our Lady. It was

known as ‘Our Lady in  
Harvest’. Parliament  
abolished the feast in  
England in the year 1549. In  
that year both the House of  
Commons and the House of  
Lords approved the new  
prayer book of the Church of  
England, the first Book of  
Common Prayer. Among  
many things they abolished  
was this feast of Our Lady’s  
Assumption. It was part of a  
wholesale attack, under King  
Edward VI, on the beliefs,  
liturgy, popular institutions  
and property of the Catholic  
Church. The English  
Parliament cut our country off  
from over a thousand years  
of undivided faith and  
devotion.



Prestwich must have felt the  
pinch. The old parish church  
of Prestwich is dedicated to  
St Mary. Where it’s a simple  
dedication like that, its  
patronal feast is almost  
always the 15 August, the  
Assumption of Our Lady.

I wonder what the good  
people of Prestwich felt like  
when their patronal feast was  
abolished? We know that,  
some years later, the parish  
priest here ‘was at first  
reluctantly compliant and  
then an avowed opponent’ of

the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of 1559. There were protests all over the country when the new Book of Common Prayer came in. Bishop Bonner, the bishop of London, protested; he was deposed and put into prison. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge protested; parish priests of Oxford were hanged from their church towers. There was a popular rising in Devon and Cornwall; it was ruthlessly put down by an army of German mercenaries brought in by the government – the first time foreign troops had been used in England to put down English people.

England was a dictatorship and Prestwich, like the rest of the country, was robbed of its old faith. No longer were its people allowed to hold their parish processions. No longer could they celebrate Our Lady's entrance into heaven.



In many parts of the continent, however, as well as in many places throughout the world, celebrations will continue today – local conditions allowing. And so they should continue. Our Lady's song of thanksgiving still rings true: *My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour ... All generations will call me blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*

The Preface in today's Mass says that *the Blessed Virgin Mary was taken up into heaven to be a sign of sure hope and comfort* to God's holy people. If you have read so far, this is where I see today's festival having special relevance in this time of lockdown.

Our Lady, taken body and soul to heaven, is a *sign of sure hope and comfort* for us. How little hope and comfort there has been in the national reaction to the present pandemic! The measures put in place are there to protect us from illness and possible death. But there seems to have been an element of panic and even terror in it all. Yet all of us at some stage will become ill and all of us will die.

This reflection puts things in a better perspective:

*Today's feast is about the end of Mary's life on earth – and yet we are glad and rejoicing! Endings normally make us sad – saddest of all when someone dies. But when you believe in God, there are no endings. There are just changes on an endless journey. This is what Jesus' mother Mary shows us today – that even the end of this life is only the beginning of another life. Let's think about endings, and trust in Jesus who turns them into new beginnings.*



I'm sure we are thinking this week of our young people receiving their A-level and GCSE results. Here's wishing them all the best for their particular new beginning.



It's been good to hear how so many of you are following Mass and other services on line or via TV and radio. You can access Mass and various devotions on several websites. These include the diocesan website and that of the Catholic Bishops' Conference:  
[www.cbcew.org.uk](http://www.cbcew.org.uk)

There's also EWTN and [churchservices.tv](http://churchservices.tv) and also [shalomtv.tv](http://shalomtv.tv)

Also, if you would like to receive the newsletter weekly by email, just send me an email with that request. It's a good way to keep oneself informed. And just a reminder, that Our Lady of Grace church is open Monday to Friday 11.45 am to 4.00 pm, and on Saturday 11.45 am to 3.00 pm, with Mass each weekday Monday to Saturday at 12 noon.

Happy Sunday! Have a good week!

**Fr Allen**

**Fr Dearman's reflections on the Lord's Prayer.  
Part Six: As in heaven,  
so also on earth**

These words form a bridge between the first and second halves of the prayer. The first half focuses on the life of the Father in heaven, while the second asks for the help we need in our lives on earth.

For a follower of Jesus, heaven and earth are closely linked. When a loved one dies we pray that they will soon enjoy the supreme happiness of life in the company of the people they have loved on earth and who have gone before them, and most of all in the presence of their loving Father.

Meanwhile we battle on, striving to live our earthly life but always aware that there is another life to which we hope to pass when the time comes. St Paul said that he longed to be with Christ but that there was yet more work that he was called to do on earth.