



OUR LADY OF GRACE PRESTWICH

‘Stay with us, Lord, on our journey’

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3rd SUNDAY IN LENT 7 March 2021

HOLY MASS THIS WEEK

SUNDAY	First Mass of Sunday is 7pm Saturday. Sunday morning 9.00 & 11.00 am
MONDAY	12 noon Lenten Weekday/St John of God
TUESDAY	12 noon Lent Weekday/St Frances of Rome
WEDNESDAY	12 noon Lent Weekday
THURSDAY	12 noon Lent Weekday
FRIDAY	12 noon Lent Weekday
SATURDAY	12 noon Lent Weekday

The church is open every day

Monday to Saturday from 11.45 am to 1.00 pm
Sundays from 8.45 am to 10.00 am, 10.45 am to 12 noon

My dear Parishioners and Friends,

I tell you, it's a challenging time for us. We believe in God; I mean it's our faith. But if you ask me, is there a future? I would say given these circumstances, no, there's no future... But is this the end of it? No, because the final word is for God, and God, who kept the Christianity alive for 2,000 years in Iraq with all of these difficulties and persecution right from the beginning... He will find a way.

These are the heartfelt words of Archbishop Bashar Warda, Chaldean Archbishop of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. As you read this, **Pope Francis** is in Iraq. It's the first visit of any Pope to the country.

Iraq is a country close to Pope Francis' heart and he

has long planned to visit. Last Wednesday Pope Francis said: *The Iraqi people are waiting for us. They were waiting for Saint John Paul II, who was forbidden to go. One cannot disappoint a people for the second time. Let us pray that this journey will be successful.* We must say 'Amen' to that, and we must remember the Holy Father in our prayers this weekend. He will return home to the Vatican tomorrow, Monday.

We can follow the visit by using the links on the Vatican webpage that carries the Pope's itinerary for the Iraq visit: **www.vatican.va**

The Holy See's news site – Vatican News – will also be regularly updated as Pope Francis travels the country, greeting and praying with the Christian communities,

and meeting with religious and political leaders.



The part of Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, historically known as Mesopotamia, is known as 'the cradle of civilisation'. Here, mankind first began to read, write, create laws and live in cities with an organised government.

The Christian faith came early to these parts, only to be supplanted with the rise of Islam. Even so, 12% of the population was Christian in 1947. That number is now reduced to about 1% following the 2003 Iraq War. Many Christians have been displaced or have left their homeland because of ethnic and religious persecution at the hands of Islamic extremists. We in this parish have for some years now

supported the work of the international charity, **Aid to the Church in Need**. Their help is greatly appreciated by the Church in Iraq. Archbishop Warda has said: *I have always deeply appreciated the work ACN has done for us over many years, and especially after ISIS.*

ACN regularly benefit from the contents of the 'Starving World' box in this church. The contents this month (March) will go to CAFOD.



The day many have waited for comes tomorrow: **our schools re-open!** What a relief this will be, not only for parents who have tried home-schooling with varying degrees of success, but especially for the children who can now be children again amongst their peers. May their schooldays be what they should be – happy days.



This coming week sees a diocesan initiative to help parish catechists. Called *Waiting for Green – Being a Catechist on 'Pause'*, it takes the form of a **Catechists' Zoom Gathering** from 7.00 pm to 8.30 pm on **Thursday next, 11 March.**

A diocesan team will give support to parish catechists, sharing practical resources for use now and in the future. To register, email formation@dioceseofsalford.org.uk



Every week, the diocesan liturgical website offers a **reflection on the Sunday readings at Mass** for those who are keeping the Lord's Day at home. I have been sending these reflections

each week to the housebound in our parish and to others who are normally active but who are shielding at present.

The reflection for today strikes me as being very good indeed. So much so that it is reproduced here for all to see:

While the other Scripture readings in Church today make this a bit of a complicated Sunday, we will stick with the Gospel, this famous story of Jesus clearing the Temple.

*What's going on here? There are two main ideas: **first**, Jesus cleanses the holy place of everything that stops it being holy – the cheats and swindlers and crooked exchange merchants. The meaning is simple: holy places must be holy! There is also a **second** theme – a more symbolic one: when Jesus "cleanses" the Temple, he is, in a sense, declaring it unnecessary. He is the New Temple, which will be destroyed and rebuilt in "three days" when he dies on the cross and rises again.*

The Temple was the place where God dwelt with his people: after Easter Sunday, that "place" will be Jesus himself. So, we do not need to travel to Jerusalem, to visit that building, to be close to God. All we need do is "visit" Jesus, the New Temple.

*We could add a **third** understanding of this Gospel, which helps us understand our Lenten journey. We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, as the Scriptures tell us in several places. God wants to dwell within us. But as the Temple of God, do I need cleansing?*

*Do I need Jesus to help clear (at best) the indifference and (at worst) the injustice, selfishness and cruelty that clutters up my life? "Decluttering" our homes has become something of a 'thing' lately (see Marie Kondo!) – **Lent is time for the decluttering of our spiritual lives, and our relationship with God.***

A reflection is also offered 'For our Younger Friends':

Most people hate tidying their room! And yet parents always seem to be going on about it! It is good to be tidy, though sometimes that means making the effort to move the dirty clothes, or the dishes, or pack the toys and games away, and sometimes we just don't feel like it!

Today we see Jesus "tidying" the holy place – the Temple. He wants God's house to be a place of prayer and worship, not a shop! People seem to have forgotten about God: it needs tidying up!

Perhaps today have a think about tidying up – not your room, but your life! Make sure that God is welcome in your mind and thoughts and what you say and do. Be a shining bright Temple for God to live in!

If gathering as a family, perhaps now continue to discuss what this Gospel passage means to you. If alone, think about what key message you take from the Scriptures today.

If you would like to receive these notes each week, just let me know.

I wish you and all our families continuing Lenten blessings.

Fr Allen