

**Prayer Intentions for the Sick**

Craig Millward, Anne Holland, David Millward, David Noble, Clare Levy, Christine Rogers, Roxine Calow, Patrick Hulinson, Barbara Murphy, Florence Ward, Peggy Sugrue, Dale Broom, Jackie Berry, Bernard Holt, Patricia Greene, Bernadette Greene, Henry Marron and Johnny Falloon.

**Prayer Intentions for the Dead**

**Recently Deceased:** Hilda Sunderland, Trevor Nolan, Jean Allen, Dennis McHugh, Mary Harris, Patricia Canny, Joe Meredith, John Doheny.

**Anniversaries:** David Hindle, Jerome Vancalsteren, George Darley, Florence Darley, Kazimierz Rybicki, Kathleen Sanchovitch, Agnes Brady, Brian Berry, Brian Lefley, Frank Regan, Mary Caffrey, Mary O’Shaughnessy, Agnes Berry, Cath Rudd, Mary Doherty, Luke Gilbert.

**WISDOM FROM THE SAINTS**

“A stable would be the last place in the world where one would have looked for Him. But the Divine is always where one least expects to find it.”

Venerable Fulton Sheen

“Love and a spirit of self-forgetfulness took possession of me and from that time on I was perfectly happy.”

St Thérèse, Christmas Day, 1886.



“This is how our tradition began: with everyone gathered in joy around the cave, with no distance between the original event and those sharing in its mystery now ... From Bethlehem and from the nativity scene of that first Christmas in 1223 everyone went home with joy. Today it can be the same.”  
Pope Francis



Last Week’s collection was: £921.26. Thank you

£££

The monthly figure for Standing Orders: £1366.00

Donations for the YCW Christmas Appeal made £1195.85 Thank you.



This week, the Sacred Heart Lamp burns for the work of our YCW.



This week, Our Lady’s Lamp burns for all those who are travelling at Christmas.



**OUR LADY OF GRACE  
PARISH, PRESTWICH**

PARISH PRIEST Fr. PHILIP CALDWELL

11, Fairfax Road, Prestwich, Manchester, M25 1AS  
Tel: 0161 773 2324

Website: ourladyofgrace.co.uk  
Email: philip.caldwell@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**Sunday 24th December**

**Christmas Eve**

**Holy Masses 9am & 11am**

**Holy Masses 7pm & 12am**

**Monday 25th December**

**Christmas Day**

**Holy Masses 9am & 11am**

**Tuesday 26th December**

**St Stephen**

**Holy Mass 12 noon**

**Wednesday 27th December**

**St John the Evangelist**

**Holy Mass 12 noon**

**Thursday 28th December**

**The Holy Innocents**

**Holy Mass 12 noon**

**Friday 29th December**

**St Thomas of Canterbury**

**Holy Mass 12 noon**

**Saturday 30th December**

Exposition 11.30am-1pm  
Confessions 11.40am-12.50pm, 4-4.40pm  
**Holy Mass 11am Vigil 5pm**

## The Gift of a Christmas Saint

You may have noticed that a statue of St Thérèse of Lisieux has appeared at the back of church—I've been saving her to be a sort of Christmas present to our parish. There's a few reasons for this.

Of course, it's good to be reminded that the saints are always with us, at prayer, in the house of God—reminding us that our place, here, is a sort of antechamber, an extension of heaven. But there are other reasons too—as to why now and why St Thérèse. The 2nd January 2023—2nd January 2024 has been a jubilee year for the Little Flower; celebrating 150 years since her birth. And to mark this anniversary, Pope Francis has written an Apostolic Letter, *C'est la Confiance—On Confidence in the Merciful Love of God*.

The Pope explains his reasons for calling the attention of the universal church to this saint: primarily, it is because her encounter with Christ summoned her to mission: Indeed, she could not see her consecration to God apart from the good she desired for her brothers and sisters. She wanted and still wants, to draw as many people as she can to Christ and through him, to the merciful love of the Father. In Saint Thérèse, the Pope says, “the grace of baptism became an impetuous torrent flowing into the ocean of Christ's love and dragging in its wake a multitude of brothers and sisters.”

The second reason for the Pope's selection of this saint—is that everyone can follow her path of spiritual childhood. She wanted to offer a way to heaven that is “very straight, very short, and totally new.” And it had to be a *little* way so that people, who were not confident in themselves, could feel secure in the strong arms of the Lord. This is a way of trust—confidence in a God who helps us achieve great things by his power. This woman's boundless confidence encourages all who feel frail, limited, and sinful to let themselves be elevated and transformed, in order to reach God.

Thirdly, Saint Thérèse experienced faith most powerfully in the midst of a dark night. She said that Jesus had allowed her soul “to be invaded by the thickest darkness”: a darkness that represents the despair and emptiness of our times. In this darkness, Thérèse showed the complete trust of a little child—in that place, she held on to faith for the sake of unbelievers. At this time, when so many no longer believe, Pope Francis would have us turn to St Thérèse—that she may help draw others along her little way of confidence and trust. In a missionary church, the Holy Father says, it's necessary to concentrate on the essentials—and he feels this saint helps us to do just that.

Finally, St Thérèse describes herself as a “little winter flower.” She was born at New Year, loved snow and robins, and experienced her conversion on Christmas Eve. The right time and the right saint. At Our Lady of Grace we need to grow in confidence in the merciful love of God and to be missionary. May the prayer and example of St Thérèse help us on our own little way.

## The Last Gasp of Advent

Today we begin with an ‘O’ ... the ‘O’ of the antiphon and the ‘O’ of the opening prayer—And this ‘O’ is carried on through the penitential act and the response to the psalm. The Word of God begins with a capital ‘O,’ too. And this ‘O’ says it all.

In the beautifully illuminated manuscripts of the medieval prayer books, the capital ‘O’ of today's prayers were imaginatively illustrated. They took on the shape of the globe, the round mouths of choristers, the full womb of the Blessed Virgin, the wide eyes of the animals in the crib, and the halos of the angels. Today, it's as if everything and everyone is crying, “O”. It's the groan of the whole of creation, caught in sin: The groans of Mary in the pangs of childbirth; the gasps of the shepherds standing in wonder. It's the glorious song of the angels. And many of us are groaning, too, today—groaning with that special mixture of tiredness, expectation and excitement that marks the last gasps of Advent.

On this day, of all days, the Scriptures teach us how God takes the ‘Os’ of all our groans and sighs and gasps and shapes them into a word, his Word. Speaking through the prophet Nathan, God simply attaches two letters to the O of David's moans and the word becomes “Go!” “Do!” - “all that is in your mind.” The Holy Spirit gives direction and purpose to the groans of humanity and shapes them into the good news of the Gospel. As it says elsewhere in the Letter to the Romans, the Spirit expresses everything that we struggle to say, according to the mind of God.

And we see this shaping of the groans of humanity into the Good News most clearly in the life of the Virgin Mary. Look how the Spirit shapes the disturbed groans of this young woman. Again, the Holy Spirit shapes a small word from the ‘O’ of Mary's wonder, fear and humility. Notice how many times the evangelist, Luke, uses the word “to” - a word of direction and purpose. The angel Gabriel is sent to a town in Galilee, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph and the angel says to her: “Rejoice!” In the Virgin Mary, the sighs of our race are given direction:— “let what you have said be done to me.” And from there she sets out and goes as quickly as she can to visit her cousin, Elizabeth.

The aimless groans of men and women take shape under the influence of the Holy Spirit—Go! Do to others what God has done to you. From the chaotic mess of human relations, God shapes a message that is so clear and purposeful that it takes flesh in our world. So as we witness the last gasp of a very short Advent today—let's unite our own moans and groans with those of our brothers and sisters throughout the world, and let's bring the raw material of our lives to God, so that he might shape it according to his purpose. That way his word is made flesh again.