





SUNDAY NEWSLETTER INSERTS

1st December (1st Sunday of Advent)1: AN INTRODUCTION: Preparing for Mass

Back in October the Bishop wrote to us about Stage Three of "Hope in the Future", inviting us to think and talk and pray about "Living the Sunday Eucharist". Next week there will be another short Pastoral message from the Bishop, together with a "worksheet" for us to begin our reflection. There will be three more of these in the coming Liturgical Year, so there will be plenty to think about! Every week, from today to the end of August, there will be a short reflection for the newsletter: week by week we will go through the Sunday Mass, offering thoughts and explanations which it is hoped will enhance our celebrations, and allow them to become more and more a real and vibrant encounter with God.

Since today we begin a new liturgical year, this is a good weekend to begin thinking about Sunday Mass! But where do we begin? With the Opening Hymn? The Sign of the Cross? The greeting at the church door? Sunday Mass actually begins during the week before, in our minds and hearts. We should all come to Mass **prepared**. This preparation can take different forms – for some it might be reflecting on the scriptures beforehand, for others practising music or readings or writing intercessions. But every parishioner should begin their Sunday Mass before they get to Church! An easy way is to bring an **intention**. The priest will be offering Mass for a particular intention – either the needs of the parish community or a specific intention he has been asked to offer – and everyone can do the same. Think of your intention before you come to Mass: this week it might be for yourself, or a member of your family or a friend, or for the poor or hungry of the world, or for a particular tragedy you have seen on the news, or a particular joy in your family. Think of what you will offer Mass for – remember your intention, and pray it in the quiet moments of Sunday Mass. You are coming to Mass to meet Jesus – prepare for this meeting by thinking of what you are going to offer Him!

8th December (2nd Sunday of Advent) Pastoral Message and Worksheet One "Meeting Jesus in our Welcome"

15th December (3rd Sunday of Advent) 2: INTRODUCTORY RITES: Gathering

Two weeks ago we talked about Mass beginning before we leave home, with our own preparation (especially bringing an intention of prayer). What happens when we get to Church? **We gather.**

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be there." What does "gathering" mean? It means acknowledging Jesus and each other. When we come to church we acknowledge each other by kindness, patience and simple friendliness. As Saint Paul reminded early Christian "Greet each other with a holy kiss." We should come to church ready to become "one body in the one Lord" – and we cannot do this if we ignore each other! Be prepared to smile, to say a friendly hello, to listen to each other. But be careful where you do this! Because we must also acknowledge Jesus: on entering church there are two things we do – bless ourselves with holy water and genuflect (or bow) to the Tabernacle, the place where the Body and Blood of the Lord is reserved. We acknowledge the gift of baptism, which makes us part of the Body of Christ, and we acknowledge the real presence of Jesus in our church. We should spend some time in quiet prayer before Mass – not ignoring each other, but quietly gathering as a community in faith. It is not "either/or" but "both/and" – we **both** greet each other warmly as friends **and** greet Jesus quietly in prayer.

22nd December (4th Sunday of Advent) **3: INTRODUCTORY RITES: Opening Hymns**

Last week we talked about the gathering before Mass begins. However this has been done, we still need to move into the celebration – and we normally do this in song, either with an antiphon or more commonly an **Opening Hymn**. The purpose of this singing is to bind us together more strongly as one body in worship - think of the way in which football chants unite a disparate crowd of spectators into a united (sorry!) band of supporters. Singing in church is not always easy, however. When talking about music in Mass you can seem to be tap dancing in a minefield! Questions of taste, suitability, personal likes and dislikes can abound. There are some who simply dislike music, or any singing at Mass, and will resolutely refuse to join in with anything, be it plainchant or Gospel rock! Sometimes it can feel as though music divides, rather than unites us! To overcome this demands selflessness, and a putting aside of personal tastes. Those responsible for choosing music at Mass should be aware of different styles of music, while always striving for music that is suitable for the liturgy, and which aims to bring people together into the celebration. All who attend should do their best to take part, selflessly sacrificing their own tastes and prejudices to be part of the one assembly which will very soon be told "The Lord be with you!" Since it will soon be Christmas, listen out for the ways in which familiar carols achieve this, letting people know where we are and what we are doing, and how they bind us into one body, ready to meet the Lord who comes to us!

29th December (The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph) **4: INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Sign of the Cross**

Last week we talked about the Opening hymn or chant uniting us – getting us ready to worship. The first spoken words of the Mass are what is probably the most common prayer spoken by Catholics: the Sign of the Cross. There are two things going on in this moment – words and gesture. The words "In the name of …" are a reminder of our purpose and intent. Mass is not done "in the name of money" or "in the name of convenience" or "in the name of entertainment", but "In the name of God." We should reflect on these familiar words, and make sure that we apply them to the whole of the following celebration: we sing "in the name of God." At the same time there is a gesture

– marking ourselves with the cross of Jesus. This should be generous and deliberate – not what some schoolteachers in early years refer to as the "Sign of the Squiggle" when little ones are learning! The gesture should prompt thoughts – we make the sign on the front of our bodies, could we carry it on our backs? What are we willing to bear and put up with as we carry our cross? The cross is a sign of Jesus' personal love for me, frail and sinful as I might be – do I feel this love in this sign? So often the words we use most are the easiest to slip into routine – this Sunday pause to think about the words and gesture with which we begin all our Masses, our prayers and so much else.

5th January 2020 (The Epiphany of the Lord)5: INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Greeting

Having prepared, gathered, sung and made the Sign of the Cross, we share a dialogue with the priest: "The Lord be with you. And with your spirit." This is a profoundly moving statement, and means much more than a simple "Good morning"! In effect, the priest faces the congregation with arms outstretched and says, "My dear friends, brothers and sisters in the Lord, God is here, right now, in this holy place, as we gather in His name!" We can so often rush through this part of the Mass - it might be good just to stop and realise what exactly we are saying. God is here. Here in our church or chapel this evening or morning, God is here. The God who created all that exists, is here. The God who sent Jesus to save us, is here. The God who is before and after all time, is here. Here and now, in you and me. Look round at the walls of your church and see "heaven and earth in little space" (as an old English Christmas carol puts it)! Look at the faces of parishioners young and old and see God present in our midst! Those five words, "The Lord be with you" come up several times in the Mass, and each time they should make us stop and remember Mass is not just about us, but about God-with-Us, Emmanuel! Our response is equally profound: some people still feel an awkwardness in the change from "And also with you" to "And with your spirit", but there is an important emphasis in these words – our greeting is not just to Father X, an ordinary human being just like everyone else, but to the priesthood of Father X: this will be important later, because what happens in Mass is the work of Jesus, not the priest. We begin Mass by acknowledging - or perhaps better reminding Father X - that the Mass is not his work, but that he sacrifices himself so that God's grace may flow to God's people. After all, when later he says "This is my Body," it is not his body but Christ's.

12th January (The Baptism of the Lord)6: INTRODUCTORY RITES: Sprinkling with Holy Water

At Sunday Mass there is the option of a Sprinkling with Holy Water replacing the Penitential Rite – though it has to be said that this happens very rarely! Perhaps this Sunday (The Baptism of the Lord) and Easter are the only times it is frequently used. This is a shame, because it can give a variety and interest to the Introductory Rites which can sustain our understanding and devotion week by week. Perhaps consider using it more often – especially in the Easter Season, or at celebrations where a large number of children are present, or even just once a month! John the Baptist preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins", and this is the meaning of this action at this moment of the Mass. There are many symbolisms at work in the waters of baptism, but when that water is sprinkled it is a sign of cleansing and purification – the washing away of sin and guilt and all that hinders us from the joys of life in God's Kingdom. In some ways

this action is an extension of something we have already done – dipping our fingers in the holy water stoup on the way into church: that was a reminder of baptism, which washed sin away and welcomed us as children of God and sisters and brothers of Jesus. So to, in these "Introductory Rites" whose purpose is to draw us together and prepare us for worship, the Sprinkling with Holy Water can be a powerful moment or repentance and reconciliation. A priest tells a story of a parishioner who collared him after Easter Sunday Mass, where this rite had been used, complaining that "the water never touched me!" As a "sacramental" Church we make ample use of physical symbols, and should be generous in their use: without asking people to bring raincoats, if the Sprinkling with Holy Water is used, everyone should get wet! The chant or hymn that accompanies it should be both penitential and joyful, because Jesus, the author of baptism, has made holy these waters in which we celebrate our reconciliation.

19th January (2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – A) **7: INTRODUCTORY RITES: Penitential Act**

Do you remember when, as children, your mum or dad (or grandparents) would say as you came in from an afternoon or evening of play "Make sure you wipe your feet before you come in!" Perhaps this is something you still say! In a sense that is what the "penitential act" is all about. It is part of our preparation to worship God in our liturgy – the first thing we do once we are all gathered is a spiritual "wiping of the feet", asking God to cleanse us of sins and faults and failings, so that we can worship properly. As with many parts of the Mass, the most important moment here is not the words we say, but the silence we are given. This silence is for each one present to "personalise" this moment: it is not a generic acknowledgment of sinfulness, but a deeply personal and intimate confession. We should use this moment to think about the week that has gone, and own up to our great or small sins – the little lacks of patience or understanding, the moments when temper got the better of us, the indulgences we regret, the temptations we did not resist though we knew we should. We should humbly fill our minds with our own sins, things which are our fault, not looking at or blaming others: Pope Francis told a little story about this in an audience two years ago: "It costs us to admit being at fault, but it does us good to confess it sincerely. Confess your own sins. I remember an anecdote that an elderly missionary used to tell, of a woman who went to confession and started speaking about her husband's failings. Then she moved on to talk about her mother-in-law's failings and then the sins of her neighbours. At a certain point, the confessor said to her: "But, madam, tell me: have you finished? - Very well: you have finished with the sins of others. Now start telling your own". Even though this is a penitential moment, it is also joyful, because it celebrates the love of God who desires only that we turn back to him and live! It helps us to become, as Saint Paul says, "the holy people of Jesus Christ, called to take their place among all the saints."

26th January (3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time) 8: INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Gloria

Last week we talked about the Penitential Act: in Advent and Lent that is the main focus of the introductory rites (as is suitable for those seasons), but on every other Sunday of the year it is followed by an explosion of praise and joy - the hymn (and it is a hymn!) "Glory to God in the highest!" This is one of the oldest texts in the Mass, originally in Greek but (it is said) translated into Latin by Saint Hilary in the fourth century. It started life as a Christmas hymn (with the obviously reference to the song of the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem), and then a hymn reserved for Masses with bishops, but gradually spread to Easter and major feasts and Sundays: this tells us that it is meant to be joyful! The hymn is all about proclaiming how wonderful, how amazing our God is, how deserving of our praise and worship and glorification! After praise of the Father, we sing specifically of the work of Jesus, the "Lamb of God", born for us and sacrificed for us, before ending with abundant praise of the Most Holy Trinity! It is hardly surprising that this hymn should be sung, but that presents a couple of problems. It is a long irregular text, which can be challenging to sing, though many settings exist - including (and not to be overlooked) Latin plainsong settings. Some parishes use the first lines as a refrain for the congregation, with the "verses" recited by all or sung by a choir or soloist. Each parish will have to approach this according to their own abilities. But this great Sunday hymn should challenge us: how much effort are we willing to put into singing the praises or God? Do we see this as an integral part of our Sunday meeting with the Lord, or just something which "makes Mass longer"? Oh, and one final thought: how much sense does it make to **say** a joyful song? Do we recite "Happy birthday to you"? Or solemnly say "Should auld acquaintance be forgot..." on New Year's Eve?

2nd February (The Presentation of the Lord) 9: INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Collect

Have you ever had a moment when someone was hassling you for something and you said or thought "I just need to gather my thoughts for a minute"? This is what this moment of the Mass is all about – gathering our thoughts. We have already done quite a lot – getting to Church, greeting each other and the Lord, joining together in hymns and penitence and praise – but now we **stop** for a moment. As with the Penitential Act we talked about a couple of weeks ago, as important as the words we say is the **silence** we are given. The priest says, "Let us pray," and then there should be silence – a silence long enough for us to "gather our thoughts." These might be the intentions we have brought to Mass, or things we have just heard as we greeted fellow parishioners, or even something that occurred to us during the Penitential Act or Gloria! Then the priest sums up our thoughts and prayers with some formal words: listen to them, and you will see a pattern: first, we praise God, perhaps mentioning some attribute; then there is a petition, asking for something, and then a result, keyed by the word "that". Some of the Collects in the Missal are very ancient, going back to the time of Pope Leo the Great. As well as their role in the Mass, they are a wonderful inspiration for prayer and reflection, and repay patient and careful reading.

9th February (5th Sunday in Ordinary Time) Pastoral Message and Worksheet Two "Meeting Jesus in our Listening"

This weekend you will receive the second of our "worksheets" for this year, which concerns the Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass. Both Pope Francis and the Bishops of England and Wales have called on us this year to think more and more about the importance of the Sacred Scriptures in our journey of faith: as Bishop John says in today's message: "... *it is in listening to the readings from the Scriptures that we hear God Himself speaking to us. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that "the Word of God is something alive and active" (Hebrews 4:12) which means that even the most familiar passages of the Scriptures can speak to us in different and new ways according to the circumstances of our lives, challenging and reassuring us, day by day. It is important that we continually investigate and pray with the Scriptures so that God can be made present in all our actions, choices and decisions." In weeks to come we will explore the different parts of the Liturgy of the Word one by one, but for this Sunday please spend some time thinking about, and discussing, the way in which we have a personal encounter with Jesus through the Word of God proclaimed in Sunday Mass.*

16th February (6th Sunday in Ordinary Time) 10: LITURGY OF THE WORD: Lectionary v Bible

One of the richest products of the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council was the book we call the "Lectionary." Literally this simply means "A Book of Readings", and it describes the arrangement of the bible passages that we hear at Mass on Sundays, weekdays and in the celebration of the Sacraments. There is something very special about the Lectionary: it differs from the Bible as a book because passages are not read in the order found in the Bible, nor are they read at random. There is a very careful structure to the passages we hear! This is not all a product of Vatican II: the earliest "Lectionaries" date way back into the first millennium of the Church, and consist of lists of bible passages to be read on certain days. So, for example, the different Gospels we read today for the Vigil, Midnight, Dawn and Day Masses of Christmas have been set as such for hundreds of years! What the Vatican II Lectionary does is extend this, making sure that in the course of a three-year cycle someone coming to Mass every Sunday will hear most of the four Gospels, most of the letters of Saints Paul, Peter, James and others, and a very rich selection of passages from the Old Testament. There is nothing to stop you reading the Bible at home, starting at Genesis and working your way through to the Apocalypse, but the proclamation of the Word of God at Mass we allow the Church to guide our reading, so that we may be helped in our listening to and understanding of the love of God revealed through the Word.

23rd February (7th Sunday in Ordinary Time) 11: LITURGY OF THE WORD: Structure of the Readings

Last week we talked about the Lectionary being different from the Bible – passages are chosen and arranged in a very specific way. For the Sundays of Ordinary Time (which is most of the year apart from Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter) understanding the structure of the readings can aid our listening and understanding. The first point to note is that there is a "thematic" link between the First Reading, Psalm and Gospel, but beginning with the Gospel itself, which is read more or less continuously week by week. We have a three year cycle of Sunday readings (A, B and C) and each year focusses on reading a different Gospel (Matthew, Mark and Luke*). The Gospel passage for a particular Sunday "suggests" a reading from the Old Testament – perhaps a prophecy fulfilled in the Gospel, or a prayer, story or exhortation which is echoed by the words or actions of Jesus. The Psalm is always connected to the First Reading, expanding the "theme." The Second Readings are not part of this "thematic" structure, since they follow one of the letters of Saint Paul, Saint Peter or Saint James over several Sundays: this is not to say they are disconnected to the other readings - often the second readings bring insights into the other words of scripture from the point of view of the early Church living the Gospel. The great Seasons are different, since on each Sunday all the readings combine in the same "theme" - such as the Second Coming in Advent, or the significance of the Resurrection in Easter. Lent is a little different, since sometimes there are connecting themes in the readings of one Sunday, or sometimes the "theme" stretches continuously across several Sundays.

* The reading of Saint John's Gospel is reserved to Lent and Easter.

1st March (1st Sunday of Lent)12: LITURGY OF THE WORD: The First Reading

Last week we talked about the structure of the Sunday readings, and talked about the First reading being an "introduction" to the Gospel. We now read more of the Old Testament through the three year cycle than ever before, though sometimes the readings chosen can be challenging. The Old Testament is a story spanning many centuries, written in many different styles, but always articulating the Covenant - the special relationship God forged with the Chosen People ("Testament" is another word for "Covenant"). This Covenant is completed by Jesus in all he said and did, most especially the "Paschal Mystery" - his death and resurrection. So in our faith, Jesus "completes" the first reading from the Old Testament. We should take care never to rush into the Liturgy of the Word – sometimes First Readings are quite short, and it is possible for a congregation still to be settling down when the reader gets to "The Word of the Lord"! Whoever is proclaiming the first reading should make a point of studying the Gospel too - since this will help them emphasise those parts of their reading which "point to" the Gospel. The Old Testament can be forbidding sometimes: the Church has selected passages which have a resonance for us because of Jesus - try and be open to the fascinating story of God's people journeying through the centuries. This journey is continued in Eastertide, when the first readings tell the story of the early Church (after the resurrection) from the book of Acts. There is a fuller explanation of the way these

readings work in the Introduction to the Lectionary^{*} which is worth having a look at! Sometimes there is a deeper structure: for example in Lent Year A the first readings follow a sequence week by week – they take us through some of the most important moments of the Old Testament, meeting Adam, Abraham, Moses and David – but always with a "sacramental" emphasis – water, oil, breath and life – which is pointing to the celebration and renewal of Baptism at Easter.

* (chapters IV and V - Volume 1, pages xxx -xliii)

8th March (2nd Sunday of Lent) 13: LITURGY OF THE WORD: Responsorial Psalm

Too many words are indigestible, which is why the Church gives us a break in the Liturgy of the Word - at least in theory! The Responsorial Psalm is something different from the readings that precede and follow it - ideally it is a musical interlude, a reflective song that helps us "digest" the Word we have heard before we hear more! The Psalms have a long history, many of them dating back three thousand years: they were the prayer book of Israel, offering meditations on so many things – personal sorrow, doubt and grief, expressions of trust, hope and faith, the rejoicing and mourning of the whole people. In a sense there is a psalm for every situation in life! Each Sunday, a psalm (or portion of a psalm) is selected that flows from the first reading, chewing it over in poetry and song. Since these are (and always have been) songs, they should be sung – preferably by a cantor with a response for the people. Even if the Psalm is not sung, it must somehow mark a "change of pace" in the Liturgy of the Word, being more about prayer, reflection and contemplation than understanding, and each parish must think about how to use the Psalms effectively in Sunday worship - some parishes invite everyone to recite the psalm together, some make use of a reader whose only job is to proclaim the Psalm prayerfully, so that the change of voice allows the Psalm to work. So important is the singing of the Psalm that the Church tries to make things easier - in Volume 1 of the Lectionary (page 949 onwards) there are some "Common texts for Sung Responsorial Psalms", which provide a small number of responses (and psalms) for different seasons that can be used instead of the Psalm appointed for the day – so a congregation (and cantor!) would only need to learn, say four or five Psalm responses for the Sundays of Ordinary time.

15th March (3rd Sunday of Lent) 14: LITURGY OF THE WORD: Second Reading

After the prayerful meditation of the Psalm, we have more words – normally from Saint Paul, but sometimes Saint Peter, Saint James or Saint John. The pre-1970 Mass did not have a "Second Reading", but if you go back in time this was an integral part of the Liturgy – a fourth century document instructs: *"after [singing the hymns of David] let our Acts be read and the Epistles of Paul our fellow-worker…" (Apostolic Constitutions)* These readings are separate from what has gone before, so the one thing you mustn't do is rush into them! They are all about the application of the Gospel, how to live discipleship, how to be missionaries – they are essentially practical. Saint Paul

especially wrote letters to communities to help them live out the Gospel – and those letters have such value that they have found their way into the Bible and been passed on through the centuries to our Sunday worship! A problem is that they are not always easy to understand: Saint Paul's sentences can be very long and complex – a real challenge to our readers and also to us who listen! The responsibility of readers to prepare their readings is particularly important with these second readings. There will always be a message, or a point that you can grasp, if you are listening out for it: realise that these words have been part of the life of the Church since the first communities in Corinth or Rome or Ephesus eagerly "opened the envelope" to see what Paul the preacher had to say to them!

22nd March (4th Sunday of Lent) 15: LITURGY OF THE WORD: Gospel Acclamation

The worst thing as parish can do with the Liturgy of the Word is make it flat and boring – one voice, nothing sung, no variety! The Church has designed the Liturgy of the Word to have a rhythm and a dynamism (which it inherits from the earlier worship and prayer of Israel) in order to allow the Word to be "alive and active". Nowhere is this more true than the acclamation before the Gospel and its accompanying actions: the Introduction to the Lectionary is uncharacteristically dogmatic about this saying "it MUST be sung ... by the whole congregation together" (GIL 23) – the Missal goes even further, saying that if it is not sung, it may be omitted completely! Accompanying this song is a communal gesture - standing. Standing is a mark of respect, acknowledging that someone important is going to speak to us - remember at Primary School solemnly getting to your feet when the Headteacher walked in? Who is more important than Jesus, about to address us in the Gospel? Also accompanying the song is an **action** – the Gospel procession, which may involve a Gospel Book, candles or torches and incense – all of which should speak to us (without words) about the solemnity of what is about to happen. The normal acclamation is the word "Alleluia!", a Hebrew word simply meaning "Praise God!", which has been sung for thousands of years. In Lent, however, we "fast from" that word, saving it for the joyous moment of the Easter Vigil: even though we do not sing "Alleluia", we still sing, praising the God who speak to us.

29th March (5th Sunday of Lent) 16: LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Gospel

5th April (Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord) **17: LITURGY OF THE WORD: Silence**

12th April (no insert this week)

19th April (2nd Sunday of Easter or of Divine Mercy) 18: LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Homily

26th April (3rd Sunday of Easter) 19: LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Profession of Faith

9th August (19th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

2nd August (18th Sunday in Ordinary Time) **31: COMMUNION RITE: "Lord, I am not worthy..."**

26th July (17th Sunday in Ordinary Time) **30: COMMUNION RITE: The Breaking of Bread**

19th July (16th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
29: COMMUNION RITE: The Sign of Peace

12th July (15th Sunday in Ordinary Time) Pastoral Message and Worksheet Four "Meeting Jesus in our Mission"

5th July (14th Sunday in Ordinary Time)28: COMMUNION RITE: The Lord's Prayer

28th June (Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Apostles) 27: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Eucharistic Prayers

21st June (12th Sunday in Ordinary Time) 26: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Preface and Sanctus

14th June (The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ) Pastoral Message and Worksheet Three "Meeting Jesus in our Offering"

7th June (The Most Holy Trinity) 25: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: Prayer over the Gifts

24th May (7th Sunday or Easter)
23: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: Washing of Hands
31st May (Pentecost Sunday)
24: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: Incense

17th May (6th Sunday of Easter) 22: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: Blessing of Bread and Wine

10th May (5th Sunday of Easter) 21: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: Presentation of Gifts

3rd May (4th Sunday of Easter) 20: LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Prayer of the Faithful

32: COMMUNION RITE: Holy Communion

16th August (The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary) 33: COMMUNION RITE: Silence (again!)

23rd August (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time) **34: THE CONCLUDING RITE: Blessing**

30th August (22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time) **35: THE CONCLUDING RITE: Dismissal**