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"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."  
Martin Luther King Jr.



## *Army Roman Catholic Newsletter*



### *Welcome*

*From*

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Welcome to Issue 35 of the Army Roman Catholic Newsletter.

As we enter the Sacred season of Lent, we embark on a journey of reflection, repentance and renewal. The 40 day period invites us to draw closer to God through prayer, fasting and acts of love. It is time to remember Christ's sacrifice and prepare our hearts for the joy of Easter.

In this newsletter, we hope you will find inspiration, guidance and resources to support you in your Lenten commitments. Together, let us walk in faith, seeking transformation and the deep peace that comes with walking with Christ. May this Lent be a season of Grace for us all.



## **SPES NON CONFUNDIT**

BULL OF INDICATION  
OF THE ORDINARY JUBILEE  
OF THE YEAR 2025

FRANCIS  
BISHOP OF ROME  
SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD

TO ALL WHO READ THIS LETTER  
MAY HOPE FILL YOUR HEARTS

1. *SPES NON CONFUNDIT*. "Hope does not disappoint" (*Rom 5:5*). In the spirit of hope, the Apostle Paul addressed these words of encouragement to the Christian community of Rome. Hope is also the central message of the coming Jubilee that, in accordance with an ancient tradition, the Pope proclaims every twenty-five years. My thoughts turn to all those *pilgrims of hope* who will travel to Rome in order to experience the Holy Year and to all those others who, though unable to visit the City of the Apostles Peter and Paul, will celebrate it in their local Churches. For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the "door" (cf. *Jn 10:7.9*) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as "our hope" (*1 Tim 1:1*).

Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness. For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God's word helps us find reasons for that hope. Taking it as our guide, let us return to the message that the Apostle Paul wished to communicate to the Christians of Rome.

### *A word of hope*

2. "Since we are justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God... Hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (*Rom 5:1-2.5*). In this passage, Saint Paul gives us much to reflect upon. We know that the Letter to the Romans marked a decisive turning point in his work of evangelization. Until then, he had carried out his activity in the eastern part of the Empire, but now he turns to Rome and all that Rome meant in the eyes of the world. Before him lay a great challenge, which he took up for the sake of preaching the Gospel, which knows no barriers or confines. The Church of Rome was not founded by Paul, yet he felt impelled to hasten there in order to bring to everyone the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, a message of hope that fulfils the ancient promises, leads to glory and, grounded in love, does not disappoint.

3. Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (*Rom 5:19*). That life becomes manifest in our own life of faith, which begins with Baptism, develops in openness to God's grace and is enlivened by a hope constantly renewed and confirmed by the working of the Holy Spirit.

By his perennial presence in the life of the pilgrim Church, the Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives. Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us

from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" ( *Rom* 8:35.37-39). Here we see the reason why this hope perseveres in the midst of trials: founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life. As Saint Augustine observes: "Whatever our state of life, we cannot live without these three dispositions of the soul, namely, to believe, to hope and to love". [1]

4. Saint Paul is a realist. He knows that life has its joys and sorrows, that love is tested amid trials, and that hope can falter in the face of suffering. Even so, he can write: "We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" ( *Rom* 5:3-4). For the Apostle, trials and tribulations mark the lives of those who preach the Gospel amid incomprehension and persecution (cf. *2 Cor* 6:3-10). Yet in those very contexts, beyond the darkness we glimpse a light: we come to realize that evangelization is sustained by the power flowing from Christ's cross and resurrection. In this way, we learn to practise a virtue closely linked to hope, namely *patience*. In our fast-paced world, we are used to wanting everything now. We no longer have time simply to be with others; even families find it hard to get together and enjoy one another's company. Patience has been put to flight by frenetic haste, and this has proved detrimental, since it leads to impatience, anxiety and even gratuitous violence, resulting in more unhappiness and self-centredness.

Nor is there much place for patience in this age of the Internet, as space and time yield to an ever-present "now". Were we still able to contemplate creation with a sense of awe, we might better understand the importance of patience. We could appreciate the changes of the seasons and their harvests, observe the life of animals and their cycles of growth, and enjoy the clarity of vision of Saint Francis. In his *Canticle of the Creatures*, written exactly eight hundred years ago, Francis saw all creation as a great family and could call the sun his "brother" and the moon his "sister". [2] A renewed appreciation of the value of patience could only prove beneficial for ourselves and for others. Saint Paul often speaks of patience in the context of our need for perseverance and confident trust in God's promises. Yet, before all else, he testifies to God's own patience, as "the God of all patience and encouragement" ( *Rom* 15:5). Patience, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, sustains our hope and strengthens it as a virtue and a way of life. May we learn to pray frequently for the grace of patience, which is both the daughter of hope and at the same time its firm foundation.

#### *A journey of hope*

5. This interplay of hope and patience makes us see clearly that the Christian life is a *journey* calling for *moments of greater intensity* to encourage and sustain hope as the constant companion that guides our steps towards the goal of our encounter with the Lord Jesus. I like to think that the proclamation of the first Jubilee, in the year 1300, was preceded by a journey of grace inspired by popular spirituality. How can we fail to recall the various ways by which the grace of forgiveness had been poured out upon God's holy and faithful People? We are reminded, for example, of the great "Pardon" that Saint Celestine V granted to all those who visited the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio in Aquila on the 28th and 29th days of August 1294, six years before Pope Boniface VIII instituted the Holy Year. The Church was already experiencing the grace of the Jubilee as an outpouring of divine mercy. Even earlier, in 1216, Pope Honorius III granted the plea of Saint Francis for an indulgence for all those visiting the Porziuncola on the first two days of August. The same can be said of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: in 1222, Pope Callistus II allowed the Jubilee to be celebrated there whenever the Feast of the Apostle James fell on a Sunday. It is good that such "dispersed" celebrations of the Jubilee continue, so that the power of God's forgiveness can support and accompany communities and individuals on their pilgrim way.

*Pilgrimage* is of course a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. Setting out on a journey is traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life. A pilgrimage on foot is a great aid for rediscovering the value of silence, effort and simplicity of life. In the coming year, *pilgrims of hope* will surely travel the ancient and more modern routes in order to experience the Jubilee to the full. In Rome itself, along with the usual visits to the catacombs and the Seven Churches, other itineraries of faith will be proposed. Journeying from one country to another as if borders no longer mattered, and passing from one city to another in contemplating the beauty of creation and masterpieces of art, we learn to treasure the richness of different experiences and cultures, and are inspired to lift up that beauty, in prayer, to God, in thanksgiving for his wondrous works. The Jubilee Churches along the pilgrimage routes and in the city of Rome can serve as oases of spirituality and places of rest on the pilgrimage of faith, where we can drink from the wellsprings of hope, above all by approaching the sacrament of Reconciliation, the essential starting-point of any true journey of conversion. In the particular Churches, special care should be taken to prepare priests and the faithful to celebrate the sacrament of Confession and to make it readily available in its individual form.

In a particular way, I would like to invite the faithful of the Eastern Churches, particularly those already in full communion with the Successor of Peter, to take part in this pilgrimage. They have suffered greatly, often even unto death, for their fidelity to Christ and the Church, and so they should feel themselves especially welcome in this City of Rome that is also their Mother and cherishes so many memories of their presence. The Catholic Church, enriched by their ancient liturgies and the theology and spirituality of their Fathers, monks and theologians, wants to give symbolic expression to its embrace of them and their Orthodox brothers and sisters in these times when they endure their own Way of the Cross, often forced by violence and instability to leave their homelands, their holy lands, for safer places. For them, the hope born of the knowledge that they are loved by the Church, which does not abandon them but follows them wherever they go, will make the symbolism of the Jubilee all the more powerful.

6. The Holy Year of 2025 is itself in continuity with preceding celebrations of grace. In the last Ordinary Jubilee, we crossed the threshold of two millennia from the birth of Jesus Christ. Then, on 13 March 2015, I proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee for the sake of making known and encouraging an encounter with the “merciful face of God”, [3] the core message of the Gospel for every man and woman of every time and place. Now the time has come for a new Jubilee, when once more the Holy Door will be flung open to invite everyone to an intense experience of the love of God that awakens in hearts the sure hope of salvation in Christ. The Holy Year will also guide our steps towards yet another fundamental celebration for all Christians: 2033 will mark the two thousandth anniversary of the redemption won by the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are about to make a pilgrimage marked by great events, in which the grace of God precedes and accompanies his people as they press forward firm in faith, active in charity and steadfast in hope (cf. *1 Thess* 1:3) .

Sustained by this great tradition, and certain that the Jubilee Year will be for the entire Church a lively experience of grace and hope, I hereby decree that the Holy Door of the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican will be opened on 24 December 2024, thus inaugurating the Ordinary Jubilee. On the following Sunday, 29 December 2024, I will open the Holy Door of my cathedral, Saint John Lateran, which on 9 November this year will celebrate the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its dedication. Then, on 1 January 2025, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major will be opened. Finally, Sunday, 5 January 2025, will mark the opening of the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. These last three Holy Doors will be closed on Sunday, 28 December 2025.

I further decree that on Sunday, 29 December 2024, in every cathedral and co-cathedral, diocesan bishops are to celebrate Holy Mass as the solemn opening of the Jubilee Year, using the ritual indications that will be provided for that occasion. For celebrations in co-cathedrals, the bishop’s place can be taken by a suitably designated delegate. A pilgrimage that sets out from a church chosen for the *collectio* and then proceeds to the cathedral can serve to symbolize the journey of hope that, illumined by the word of God, unites all the faithful. In the course of this pilgrimage, passages from the present Document can be read, along with the announcement of the Jubilee Indulgence to be gained in accordance with the prescriptions found in the ritual indications mentioned above. The Holy Year will conclude in the particular Churches on Sunday, 28 December 2025; in the course of the year, every effort should be made to enable the People of God to participate fully in its proclamation of hope in God’s grace and in the signs that attest to its efficacy.

The Ordinary Jubilee will conclude with the closing of the Holy Door in the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican on 6 January 2026, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. During the Holy Year, may the light of Christian hope illumine every man and woman, as a message of God’s love addressed to all! And may the Church bear faithful witness to this message in every part of the world!

### *Signs of hope*

7. In addition to finding hope in God’s grace, we are also called to discover hope in the *signs of the times* that the Lord gives us. As the Second Vatican Council observed: “In every age, the Church has the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. In this way, in language adapted to every generation, she can respond to people’s persistent questions about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other”. [4] We need to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God’s saving presence, ought to become signs of hope.

8. The first sign of hope should be the desire for *peace* in our world, which once more finds itself immersed in the tragedy of *war*. Heedless of the horrors of the past, humanity is confronting yet another ordeal, as many peoples are prey to brutality and violence. What does the future hold for those peoples, who have already endured so much? How is it possible that their desperate plea for help is not motivating world leaders to resolve the numerous regional conflicts in view of their possible consequences at the global level? Is it too much to dream that arms can fall silent and cease to rain down destruction and death? May the Jubilee remind us that those who are peacemakers will be called “children of God” (*Mt* 5:9). The need for peace challenges us all, and demands that concrete steps be taken. May diplomacy be tireless in its commitment to seek, with courage and creativity, every opportunity to undertake negotiations aimed at a lasting peace.

9. Looking to the future with hope also entails having enthusiasm for life and a readiness to share it. Sadly, in many situations this is lacking. A first effect of this is the *loss of the desire to transmit life*. A number of countries are experiencing an alarming *decline in the birthrate* as a result of today’s frenetic pace, fears about the future, the lack of job security and adequate social policies, and social models whose agenda is dictated by the quest for profit rather than concern for relationships. In certain quarters, the tendency “to blame population growth, instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the [real] issues”. [5]

Openness to life and responsible parenthood is the design that the Creator has implanted in the hearts and bodies of men and women, a mission that the Lord has entrusted to spouses and to their love. It is urgent that responsible legislation on the part of



states be accompanied by the firm support of communities of believers and the entire civil community in all its components. For *the desire of young people to give birth to new sons and daughters* as a sign of the fruitfulness of their love ensures a future for every society. This is a matter of hope: it is born of hope and it generates hope.

Consequently, the Christian community should be at the forefront in pointing out the need for a *social covenant to support and foster hope*, one that is inclusive and not ideological, working for a future filled with the laughter of babies and children, in order to fill the empty cradles in so many parts of our world. All of us, however, need to recover the joy of living, since men and women, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen 1:26*), cannot rest content with getting along one day at a time, settling for the here and now and seeking fulfilment in material realities alone. This leads to a narrow individualism and the loss of hope; it gives rise to a sadness that lodges in the heart and brings forth fruits of discontent and intolerance.

10. During the Holy Year, we are called to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind. I think of *prisoners* who, deprived of their freedom, daily feel the harshness of detention and its restrictions, lack of affection and, in more than a few cases, lack of respect for their persons. I propose that in this Jubilee Year governments undertake initiatives aimed at restoring hope; forms of amnesty or pardon meant to help individuals regain confidence in themselves and in society; and programmes of reintegration in the community, including a concrete commitment to respect for law.

This is an ancient appeal, one drawn from the word of God, whose wisdom remains ever timely. It calls for acts of clemency and liberation that enable new beginnings: "You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (*Lev 25:10*). This institution of the Mosaic law was later taken up by the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (*Is 61:1-2*). Jesus made those words his own at the beginning of his ministry, presenting himself as the fulfilment of the "year of the Lord's favour" (cf. *Lk 4:18-19*). In every part of the world, believers, and their Pastors in particular, should be one in demanding dignified conditions for those in prison, respect for their human rights and above all the abolition of the death penalty, a provision at odds with Christian faith and one that eliminates all hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation. [6] In order to offer prisoners a concrete sign of closeness, I would myself like to open a Holy Door in a prison, as a sign inviting prisoners to look to the future with hope and a renewed sense of confidence.

11. Signs of hope should also be shown to the *sick*, at home or in hospital. Their sufferings can be allayed by the closeness and affection of those who visit them. Works of mercy are also works of hope that give rise to immense gratitude. Gratitude should likewise be shown to all those healthcare workers who, often in precarious conditions, carry out their mission with constant care and concern for the sick and for those who are most vulnerable.

Inclusive attention should also be given to all those in particularly difficult situations, who experience their own weaknesses and limitations, especially those affected by illnesses or disabilities that severely restrict their personal independence and freedom. Care given to them is a hymn to human dignity, a song of hope that calls for the choral participation of society as a whole.

12. Signs of hope are also needed by those who are the very embodiment of hope, namely, *the young*. Sadly, they often see their dreams and aspirations frustrated. We must not disappoint them, for the future depends on their enthusiasm. It is gratifying to see the energy they demonstrate, for example, by rolling up their sleeves and volunteering to help when disasters strike and people are in need. Yet it is sad to see young people who are without hope, who face an uncertain and unpromising future, who lack employment or job security, or realistic prospects after finishing school. Without the hope that their dreams can come true, they will inevitably grow discouraged and listless. Escaping into drugs, risk-taking and the pursuit of momentary pleasure does greater harm to them in particular, since it closes them to life's beauty and richness, and can lead to depression and even self-destructive actions. For this reason, the Jubilee should inspire the Church to make greater efforts to reach out to them. With renewed passion, let us demonstrate care and concern for adolescents, students and young couples, the rising generation. Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!

13. Signs of hope should also be present for *migrants* who leave their homelands behind in search of a better life for themselves and for their families. Their expectations must not be frustrated by prejudice and rejection. A spirit of welcome, which embraces everyone with respect for his or her dignity, should be accompanied by a sense of responsibility, lest anyone be denied the right to a dignified existence. *Exiles, displaced persons and refugees*, whom international tensions force to emigrate in order to avoid war, violence and discrimination, ought to be guaranteed security and access to employment and education, the means they need to find their place in a new social context.

May the Christian community always be prepared to defend the rights of those who are most vulnerable, opening wide its doors to welcome them, lest anyone ever be robbed of the hope of a better future. May the Lord's words in the great parable of the Last Judgement always find an echo in our hearts: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" for "just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:35.40*).

14. The *elderly*, who frequently feel lonely and abandoned, also deserve signs of hope. Esteem for the treasure that they are, their life experiences, their accumulated wisdom and the contribution that they can still make, is incumbent on the Christian community and civil society, which are called to cooperate in strengthening the covenant between generations.

Here I would also mention *grandparents*, who represent the passing on of faith and wisdom to the younger generation. May they find support in the gratitude of their children and the love of their grandchildren, who discover in them their roots and a source of understanding and encouragement.

15. I ask with all my heart that hope be granted to the billions of the *poor*, who often lack the essentials of life. Before the constant tide of new forms of impoverishment, we can easily grow inured and resigned. Yet we must not close our eyes to the dramatic situations that we now encounter all around us, not only in certain parts of the world. Each day we meet people who are poor or impoverished; they may even be our next-door neighbours. Often they are homeless or lack sufficient food for the day. They suffer from exclusion and indifference on the part of many. It is scandalous that in a world possessed of immense resources, destined largely to producing weapons, the poor continue to be "the majority of the planet's population, billions of people. These days they are mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage. Indeed, when all is said and done, they frequently remain at the bottom of the pile". [7] Let us not forget: the poor are almost always the victims, not the ones to blame.

#### *Appeals for hope*

16. Echoing the age-old message of the prophets, the Jubilee reminds us that *the goods of the earth* are not destined for a privileged few, but for everyone. The rich must be generous and not avert their eyes from the faces of their brothers and sisters in need. Here I think especially of those who lack water and food: hunger is a scandal, an open wound on the body of our humanity, and it summons all of us to a serious examination of conscience. I renew my appeal that "with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory situations, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life". [8]

Another heartfelt appeal that I would make in light of the coming Jubilee is directed to the more affluent nations. I ask that they acknowledge the gravity of so many of their past decisions and determine to *forgive the debts* of countries that will never be able to repay them. More than a question of generosity, this is a matter of justice. It is made all the more serious today by a new form of injustice which we increasingly recognize, namely, that "a true 'ecological debt' exists, particularly between the global North and South, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time". [9] As sacred Scripture teaches, the earth is the Lord's and all of us dwell in it as "aliens and tenants" ( *Lev* 25:23). If we really wish to prepare a path to peace in our world, let us commit ourselves to remedying the remote causes of injustice, settling unjust and unpayable debts, and feeding the hungry.

17. The coming Jubilee Year will also coincide with a significant date for all Christians, namely, *the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the celebration of the first great Ecumenical Council, that of Nicaea*. It is worth noting that, from apostolic times, bishops have gathered on various occasions in order to discuss doctrinal questions and disciplinary matters. In the first centuries of Christianity, synods frequently took place in both East and West, showing the importance of ensuring the unity of God's People and the faithful proclamation of the Gospel. The Jubilee can serve as an important occasion for giving concrete expression to this form of synodality, which the Christian community today considers increasingly necessary for responding to the urgent need for evangelization. All the baptized, with their respective charisms and ministries, are co-responsible for ensuring that manifold signs of hope bear witness to God's presence in the world.

The Council of Nicaea sought to preserve the Church's unity, which was seriously threatened by the denial of the full divinity of Jesus Christ and hence his consubstantiality with the Father. Some three hundred bishops took part, convoked at the behest of the Emperor Constantine; their first meeting took place in the Imperial Palace on 20 May 325. After various debates, by the grace of the Spirit they unanimously approved the Creed that we still recite each Sunday at the celebration of the Eucharist. The Council Fathers chose to begin that Creed by using for the first time the expression " *We believe*", [10] as a sign that all the Churches were in communion and that all Christians professed the same faith.

The Council of Nicaea was a milestone in the Church's history. The celebration of its anniversary invites Christians to join in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity and in particular to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, "consubstantial with the Father", [11] who revealed to us that mystery of love. At the same time, Nicaea represents a summons to all Churches and Ecclesial Communities to persevere on the path to visible unity and in the quest of finding ways to respond fully to the prayer of Jesus "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" ( *Jn* 17:21).

The Council of Nicaea also discussed the date of Easter. To this day, different approaches to this question prevent celebrating the fundamental event of our faith on the same day. Providentially, a common celebration will take place in the year 2025. May this serve as an appeal to all Christians, East and West, to take a decisive step forward towards unity around a common date for Easter. We do well to remind ourselves that many people, unaware of the controversies of the past, fail to understand how divisions in this regard can continue to exist.

### *Anchored in hope*

18. Hope, together with faith and charity, makes up the triptych of the "theological virtues" that express the heart of the Christian life (cf. *1 Cor* 13:13; *1 Thess* 1:3). In their inseparable unity, hope is the virtue that, so to speak, gives inward direction and purpose to the life of believers. For this reason, the Apostle Paul encourages us to "rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer" (*Rom* 12:12). Surely we need to "abound in hope" (cf. *Rom* 15:13), so that we may bear credible and attractive witness to the faith and love that dwell in our hearts; that our faith may be joyful and our charity enthusiastic; and that each of us may be able to offer a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed, in the knowledge that, in the Spirit of Jesus, these can become, for those who receive them, rich seeds of hope. Yet what is the basis of our hope? To understand this, let us stop and reflect on "the reasons for our hope" (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15).

19. "I believe in *life everlasting*". [12] So our faith professes. Christian hope finds in these words an essential foundation. For hope is "that theological virtue by which we desire... eternal life as our happiness". [13] The Second Vatican Council says of hope that, "when people are deprived of this divine support, and lack hope in eternal life, their dignity is deeply impaired, as may so often be seen today. The problems of life and death, of guilt and suffering, remain unsolved, so that people are frequently thrown into despair". [14] We, however, by virtue of the hope in which we were saved, can view the passage of time with the certainty that the history of humanity and our own individual history are not doomed to a dead end or a dark abyss, but directed to an encounter with the Lord of glory. As a result, we live our lives in expectation of his return and in the hope of living forever in him. In this spirit, we make our own the heartfelt prayer of the first Christians with which sacred Scripture ends: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (*Rev* 22:20).

20. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of our faith and the basis of our hope. Saint Paul states this succinctly by the use of four verbs: "I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve" (*1 Cor* 15:3-5). Christ *died, was buried, was raised and appeared*. For our sake, Jesus experienced the drama of death. The Father's love raised him in the power of the Spirit, and made of his humanity the first fruits of our eternal salvation. Christian hope consists precisely in this: that in facing death, which appears to be the end of everything, we have the certainty that, thanks to the grace of Christ imparted to us in Baptism, "life is changed, not ended", [15] forever. Buried with Christ in Baptism, we receive in his resurrection the gift of a new life that breaks down the walls of death, making it a passage to eternity.

The reality of *death*, as a painful separation from those dearest to us, cannot be mitigated by empty rhetoric. The Jubilee, however, offers us the opportunity to appreciate anew, and with immense gratitude, the gift of the new life that we have received in Baptism, a life capable of transfiguring death's drama. It is worth reflecting, in the context of the Jubilee, on how that mystery has been understood from the earliest centuries of the Church's life. An example would be the tradition of building baptismal fonts in the shape of an octagon, as seen in many ancient baptisteries, like that of Saint John Lateran in Rome. This was intended to symbolize that Baptism is the dawn of the "eighth day", the day of the resurrection, a day that transcends the normal, weekly passage of time, opening it to the dimension of eternity and to life everlasting: the goal to which we tend on our earthly pilgrimage (cf. *Rom* 6:22).

The most convincing testimony to this hope is provided by the *martyrs*. Steadfast in their faith in the risen Christ, they renounced life itself here below, rather than betray their Lord. Martyrs, as confessors of the life that knows no end, are present and numerous in every age, and perhaps even more so in our own day. We need to treasure their testimony, in order to confirm our hope and allow it to bear good fruit.

The martyrs, coming as they do from different Christian traditions, are also seeds of unity, expressions of the ecumenism of blood. I greatly hope that the Jubilee will also include ecumenical celebrations as a way of highlighting the richness of the testimony of these martyrs.

21. What, then, will become of us after death? With Jesus, beyond this threshold we will find eternal life, consisting in full communion with God as we forever contemplate and share in his infinite love. All that we now experience in hope, we shall then see in reality. We are reminded of the words of Saint Augustine: "When I am one with you in all my being, there will be no more pain and toil; my life shall be true life, a life wholly filled by you". [16] What will characterize this fullness of communion? Being happy. *Happiness* is our human vocation, a goal to which all aspire.

But what is happiness? What is the happiness that we await and desire? Not some fleeting pleasure, a momentary satisfaction that, once experienced, keeps us longing for more, in a desperate quest that leaves our hearts unsated and increasingly empty. We aspire to a happiness that is definitively found in the one thing that can bring us fulfilment, which is love. Thus, we will be able to say even now: I am loved, therefore I exist; and I will live forever in the love that does not disappoint, the love from which nothing can ever separate me. Let us listen once more to the words of the Apostle: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom* 8:38-39).

22. Another reality having to do with eternal life is *God's judgement*, both at the end of our individual lives and at the end of history. Artists have often attempted to portray it – here we can think of Michelangelo's *magnum opus* in the Sistine Chapel – in accordance with the theological vision of their times and with the aim of inspiring a sense of awe in the viewer. We should indeed prepare ourselves consciously and soberly for the moment when our lives will be judged, but we must always do this from the standpoint of hope, the theological virtue that sustains our lives and shields them from groundless fear. The judgement of God, who is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8.16), will surely be based on love, and in particular on all that we have done or failed to do with regard to those in need, in whose midst Christ, the Judge himself, is present (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46). Clearly, then, we are speaking of a judgement unlike any handed down by human, earthly tribunals; it should be understood as a rapport of truth with the God who is love and with oneself, within the unfathomable mystery of divine mercy. Sacred Scripture states: "You have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins, so that... when we are judged, we may expect mercy" (*Wis* 12:19.22). In the words of Benedict XVI: "At the moment of judgement we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of his love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy". [17]

Judgement, then, concerns the salvation in which we hope and which Jesus has won for us by his death and resurrection. It is meant to bring us to a definitive encounter with the Lord. The evil we have done cannot remain hidden; it needs to be *purified* in order to enable this definitive encounter with God's love. Here we begin to see the need of our prayers for all those who have ended their earthly pilgrimage, our solidarity in an intercession that is effective by virtue of the communion of the saints, and the shared bond that makes us one in Christ, the firstborn of all creation. The Jubilee indulgence, thanks to the power of prayer, is intended in a particular way for those who have gone before us, so that they may obtain full mercy.

23. Indeed, the *indulgence* is a way of discovering the unlimited nature of God's mercy. Not by chance, for the ancients, the terms "mercy" and "indulgence" were interchangeable, as expressions of the fullness of God's forgiveness, which knows no bounds.

The *sacrament of Penance* assures us that God wipes away our sins. We experience those powerful and comforting words of the Psalm: "It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion... The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy... He does not treat us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our faults. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so strong is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins" (*Ps* 103:3-4.8.10-12). The sacrament of Reconciliation is not only a magnificent spiritual gift, but also a decisive, essential and fundamental step on our journey of faith. There, we allow the Lord to erase our sins, to heal our hearts, to raise us up, to embrace us and to reveal to us his tender and compassionate countenance. There is no better way to know God than to let him reconcile us to himself (cf. *2 Cor* 5:20) and savour his forgiveness. Let us not neglect Confession, but rediscover the beauty of this sacrament of healing and joy, the beauty of God's forgiveness of our sins!

Still, as we know from personal experience, every sin "leaves its mark". Sin has consequences, not only outwardly in the effects of the wrong we do, but also inwardly, inasmuch as "every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death, in the state called Purgatory". [18] In our humanity, weak and attracted by evil, certain residual effects of sin remain. These are removed by the indulgence, always by the grace of Christ, who, as Saint Paul VI wrote, "is himself our 'indulgence'". [19] The Apostolic Penitentiary will issue norms for obtaining and rendering spiritually fruitful the practice of the Jubilee indulgence.

This experience of full forgiveness cannot fail to open our hearts and minds to the need to *forgive others* in turn. Forgiveness does not change the past; it cannot change what happened in the past, yet it can allow us to change the future and to live different lives, free of anger, animosity and vindictiveness. Forgiveness makes possible a brighter future, which enables us to look at the past with different eyes, now more serene, albeit still bearing the trace of past tears.

For the last Extraordinary Jubilee, I commissioned *Missionaries of Mercy*, and these continue to carry out an important mission. During the coming Jubilee, may they exercise their ministry by reviving hope and offering forgiveness whenever a sinner comes to them with an open heart and a penitent spirit. May they remain a source of reconciliation and an encouragement to look to the future with heartfelt hope inspired by the Father's mercy. I encourage bishops to take advantage of their precious ministry, especially by sending them wherever hope is sorely tested: to prisons, hospitals, and places where people's dignity is violated,



poverty abounds and social decay is prevalent. In this Jubilee Year, may no one be deprived of the opportunity to receive God's forgiveness and consolation.

24. Hope finds its supreme witness in *the Mother of God*. In the Blessed Virgin, we see that hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life. Like every mother, whenever Mary looked at her Son, she thought of his future. Surely she kept pondering in her heart the words spoken to her in the Temple by the elderly Simeon: "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (*Lk* 2:34-35). At the foot of the cross, she witnessed the passion and death of Jesus, her innocent son. Overwhelmed with grief, she nonetheless renewed her "fiat", never abandoning her hope and trust in God. In this way, Mary cooperated for our sake in the fulfilment of all that her Son had foretold in announcing that he would have to "undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (*Mk* 8:31). In the travail of that sorrow, offered in love, Mary became our Mother, the Mother of Hope. It is not by chance that popular piety continues to invoke the Blessed Virgin as *Stella Maris*, a title that bespeaks the sure hope that, amid the tempests of this life, the Mother of God comes to our aid, sustains us and encourages us to persevere in hope and trust.

In this regard, I would note that the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City is preparing to celebrate, in 2031, the fifth centenary of Our Lady's first apparition. Through Juan Diego, the Mother of God brought a revolutionary message of hope that she continues to bring to every pilgrim and all the faithful: "Am I not here, who am your Mother?" [20] That message continues to touch hearts in the many Marian shrines throughout the world, where countless pilgrims commend to the holy Mother of God their cares, their sorrows and their hopes. During the Jubilee Year, may these shrines be sacred places of welcome and privileged spaces for the rebirth of hope. I encourage all pilgrims to Rome to spend time in prayer in the Marian shrines of the City, in order to venerate the Blessed Mother and to implore her protection. I am confident that everyone, especially the suffering and those most in need, will come to know the closeness of Mary, the most affectionate of mothers, who never abandons her children and who, for the holy people of God, is "a sign of certain hope and comfort". [21]

25. In our journey towards the Jubilee, let us return to Scripture and realize that it speaks to us in these words: "May we who have taken refuge in him be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered" (*Heb* 6:18-20). Those words are a forceful encouragement for us never to lose the hope we have been given, to hold fast to that hope and to find in God our refuge and our strength.

The image of the anchor is eloquent; it helps us to recognize the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death. This hope, which transcends life's fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called.

The coming Jubilee will thus be a Holy Year marked by the hope that does not fade, our hope in God. May it help us to recover the confident trust that we require, in the Church and in society, in our interpersonal relationships, in international relations, and in our task of promoting the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gift of creation. May the witness of believers be for our world a leaven of authentic hope, a harbinger of new heavens and a new earth (cf. *2 Pet* 3:13), where men and women will dwell in justice and harmony, in joyful expectation of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises.

Let us even now be drawn to this hope! Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. May the way we live our lives say to them in so many words: "Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!" (*Psa* 27:14). May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and glory, now and forever.

*Given in Rome, at Saint John Lateran, on 9 May, the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the year 2024, the twelfth of my Pontificate.*

FRANCIS

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[1] *Serm.* 198 augm. 2.

[2] Cf. *Fonti Francescane*, No. 263, 6.10.

[3] Cf. Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus*, 1-3.

[4] Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

[5] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 50.

[6] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2267.

[7] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 49

[8] Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 262.

[9] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 51.

[10] Nicene Creed: H. DENZINGER-A. SCHÖNMETZER, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 125.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Apostles' Creed: H. DENZINGER-A. SCHÖNMETZER, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 30.

[13] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1817.

[14] Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 21.

[15] ROMAN MISSAL , *Preface I for the Dead*.

[16] *Confessions*, X, 28.

[17] Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 47.

[18] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1472.

[19] Apostolic Letter *Apostolorum Limina*, 23 May 1974, II.

[20] *Nican Mopohua*, No. 119.

[21] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 68.

# The Definitive Guide to Lent

Written by Fr. Gavan Jennings



## Introduction: What is Lent?

Each Spring we Catholics enter a period of purification called Lent. Lent is the period which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends strictly on Holy Thursday (not on Easter Sunday as we might expect). During this time we are encouraged to do 3 main things: **fast, give alms, and pray.**

Lent is a demanding time, especially if we take it seriously. We often look for excuses to not observe Lent, or are tempted to observe it in a watered-down manner: Lent-lite. Most of us sell Lent short and fail to appreciate its potential benefits.

Lent shouldn't be a negative experience or worse still, a mere matter of going through the motions so as not to disappoint your grandmother, society, or yourself. Lent is a lot more than the pain and sometimes pressure of 'giving something up' for 40 days.



## The link between 'God, others, self' and 'prayer, arms fasting'.

While it is common to reduce Lent to a time of special diets and refraining from social media, that is only 1/3 of the story. Traditionally, the church recommends two other practices: almsgiving and prayer. And they are at least as important as fasting.

It will help to understand this threefold practise if we look at what they aim to achieve: **repairing 3 damage relationships - the relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves.**





## **Lent: a once-a-year, 40 day spiritual bootcamp? Kind of.**

From the very beginning of the churches life comparisons have been drawn between exercise for the body and exercise for the soul. The Greco-Roman world was almost as enthusiastic about bodily exercise and physical contest as our own. The gym was a Greek invention, as were the Olympic Games. Saint Paul draws direct parallels between the physical and spiritual exercise or 'struggle'. From the Greek word for physical exercise or training we get the word 'ascetical' which is easily applied to spiritual exercise, though perhaps not with ease as is the point.

Lent can be seen as a 40-day, habit-building spiritual boot camp. However, the key is to remember that it is the internal conversion that matters (not just ticking boxes to feel good about yourself or impress others). The aim of the boot camp is to build sustainable habits that can be continued throughout the year. For example, you could build the habit of going to Mass twice a week during Lent and then, with that habit firmly established, continue it throughout the rest of the year. It is the building of the habit that is usually the toughest part; once the habit is built, simply continue it.



Especially relevant to spiritual purification during Lent is the sacrament given to us by Jesus himself: the Sacrament of Confession. If you hadn't already plan to do so, a good Confession should be central to Lent.

### **Where does Lent come from?**

The ultimate origin of Lent lies in a man's deep seated awareness of personal sin and the need for purification. We see periods of fasting and penance in many non-Christian cultures also, think of the Muslims period of Ramadan. For the Jews especially there was a very strong sense of need for purification, often expressed in the external practises of purifying and washing the body.



Of course most Catholics are aware that the 'first Lent' was the 40 days spent by Jesus in the wilderness in preparation for his public life. In Matthew 4:1-11 it tells us how Christ was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit for a gruelling period of prayer, fasting, and combat with the devil and his temptations. Still today in Israel you can visit the Mount of the Temptations in the desert area near Jericho where tradition holds that Jesus was subject to the three infamous and unsuccessful temptations by the devil.

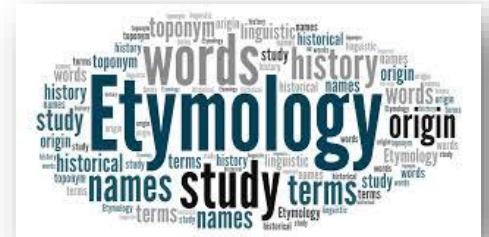
Further still, there is a biblical basis for Lent. That number 40 immediately calls to mind some Old Testament penitential predecessors to Jesus, most obviously the 40 years spent by the Israelites in their journey from slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Israel. To some degree we can see this as a period of purification before the chosen people are fit to enter the land set aside for them by God (in much the same way as we can look on our whole life as a preparation for entering Heaven).

Of course these Old Testament events were well known to Jesus, and would have been the inspiration for his own decision to spend precisely 40 days in the desert.

The early church adopted Lent in imitation of Christ's own penitential period. From earliest times Catholics have imitated Jesus in observing a period of around 40 days, though its length has varied in different regions and at different times. At several stages, there have even been traditions of having several Lents during the year.

### **Etymology of Lent.**

Etymologies can be very useful for giving us a special insight into a concept, and this is especially true of the word Lent. The word has its origin in old English lencten 'spring Lent' and perhaps refers to the lengthening of the days in springtime.



The link between the word 'Lent' and springtime is very striking. It suggests that what is taking place in the natural world around us, buds appearing on the trees, first shoots coming up through the soil, and animals that have been hibernating for the winter all stirring back to life and action, must also take place on a spiritual plane in the soul of each one of us.

Lent then is about the soul shaking off the sluggishness of the winter months and coming more fully alive. The fact that this awakening might be a painful experience is not surprising. It is gestured to us by the famous poet T.S. Eliot in the opening words of his poem *The Wasteland*:

*April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, staring  
Dull roots with spring rain,  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.*

### **Timeline through Lent.**

Now let's look at the structure of Lent. We know that it begins with one of the Church's 2 days of fasting and abstinence, Ash Wednesday. However, Ash Wednesday does not occur in a particular date each year. How then does the church decide on which date it will fall? Well, to know that we have to begin at the other end of Lent, in fact, at Easter itself.



The date on which Easter will fall each year is a fascinating and complex topic, but suffice to say that it is decided by a combination of the lunar and solar calendars. Easter falls on the 1st Sunday following

the first full moon following the spring equinox, that day in spring when day and night are of equal length, hence equi (equal) and nox (night). Generally this falls around the 21st of March.



Why does the church use this date? Because the Jewish Passover, the day on which Christ was crucified, also coincided with the first full moon after the spring equinox, and so his resurrection must take place on Sunday following this date. We then count back 46 days from Easter to Ash Wednesday (not 40, as might be guessed) because the 6 Sundays between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday don't strictly count as days of Lent!

Each of the weeks of Lent are essentially the same until we get to the final one: Holy Week. This week begins with Palm Sunday, commemorating the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the Sunday preceding the Passover feast.

Holy Week is, as its name suggests, of very special significance in the Church's annual calendar. It might be useful to consider it a 'real time' accompaniment with Jesus through the events of that week, of which we know a great deal. In fact, it is possible to reconstruct the movements of Jesus hour-by-hour during the days leading up to his crucifixion, and of course that makes it easier for us to relive those hours with him in the liturgy and in our own personal prayer.

### **How has Lent evolved in our time as Christians?**

One thing is clear: Lent has become less demanding over the centuries! Perhaps one reason for this is that the focus in the past may have been excessively on bodily fasting and now the almsgiving and prayer dimensions of getting more attention.

In the early church there was even a special Lenten ritual reserved to those who had fallen into very serious sin, were doing public penance, and would be joyfully reunited with God and the Church on Good Friday.

Until Lent was reformed with the second Vatican council in 1962, adult Catholics (but not the elderly) were required to fast every day of Lent, to have only one large meal and two snacks, and nothing else. Now the norm of fasting and abstaining from meat is obligatory only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.



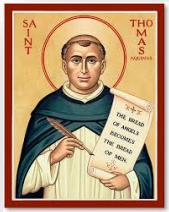
The second Vatican council also revived an ancient custom which linked Lent and the final stages in preparation for baptism. With the expansion of the missionary activity of the Church in the 19th and 20th centuries, there was a growing realisation that greater importance had to be given to the preparation of adults with baptism: the period of time traditionally known as the 'catechumenate' (that is, the period of receiving catechesis). On the other hand, infant baptism has been a tradition in the Church from the earliest times, but their catechesis has to wait until after their baptism, when they're a little older.

## What Saints have said about Lent.

All else being said, an ideal guide to living Lent is the example of the saints. Generally, we see that they took Lent very seriously, and in some cases engaged in extremely rigorous fasts. For example, as a result of the prayer and fasting, St. John Paul II was known to drop many kilos in the course of one Lent.

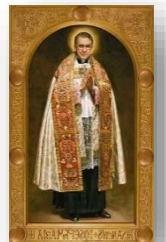
So, what did the Saints actually say about Lent? Here a few reflections:

"As lent is the time for greater love, listen to Jesus' thirst... He knows your weakness. He wants only your love, once only the chance to love you." - St. Teresa of Calcutta.

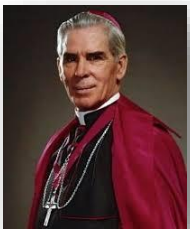


"Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind, subjects one's flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, kindles the true light of chastity." - St. Thomas Aquinas.

"Lent is not only an opportunity for increasing our external practises of self-denial. If we thought it were only that, we would miss the deep meaning it has in Christian living, for those external practises are, as I have said, the result of faith, hope, and charity." - St. Josemaria Escriva.



"Unless there is a Good Friday in your life, there can be no Easter Sunday." - Ven. Fulton Sheen.



## What can I do or not do for Lent?

So, to finish, here are some practical suggestions for your Lent. Of course, these are only suggestions: you are not obliged to do all, or even any, of these things! But you could, in your personal prayer and perhaps with the help of a confessor or spiritual guide, identify some suitable Lenten practises to work on each of your three relationships.



## Your relationship with yourself

Abstain from non-essential mobile use  
Abstaining from social media  
Abstaining from alcohol/dessert/sweets  
Abstain from YouTube/Netflix/TV  
Abstain from video/computer games  
Abstain from eating between meals  
Abstain from online shopping/non-essential purchases

Abstain from fizzy/sweet drinks  
Have someone put a screen limit on your iPhone  
Only listen to music that lifts your soul to God  
Exercise three or more times a week  
Take cold or lukewarm showers

## Your relationship with others

Volunteer at a homeless shelter/church/community centre  
Offer lunch to a person who is homeless once a week  
Carry snacks/gift cards/money to give to people in need  
Ask your housemates how could you make their life more pleasant  
Take on someone else's chore  
Talk to someone about the Catholic faith  
Teach a skill to or engage in conversation with a younger or older person  
Regularly visit a sick or poor person you know  
Actively forgive someone  
Perform a daily or weekly act of charity  
Compliment someone every day  
Give up complaining  
Refrain from gossip

## Your relationship with God

Pray 20 minutes every day  
Pray a Holy Hour once a week  
Visit Jesus in a church every day (even if just a few minutes)  
Attend daily Mass  
Frequent the Sacrament of Confession  
Say a daily rosary/divine mercy chaplet  
Read a book on the Catholic faith for 15 minutes every night  
Go on a silent retreat (either self-led or with a group)  
Meet every few weeks with a spiritual director (if you don't already)

## Departing message.

And one last thing: if we mess up our Lent it is not all over! Don't think that just because we succumbed to a Netflix binge or a fight with a parent or seriously offended God it is time to pack it in. That would be pride at work. Be humble: tell God you are sorry. Go to confession if needs be. And simply start again.

# *Ministry in Motion*

Written by Fr. David Burke - RC Chaplain at AFC Harrogate

## *Christmas Cheer at AFC Harrogate!*



In preparation for Christmas - and after a long term at the AFC - each junior soldier came to the Chaplaincy centre to participate in their respective company carol service. And participate they surely did! I hadn't realised how many of our junior soldiers were so keen to sing (at great volume!) such tender christmas classics as 'Silent Night,' and 'Oh, little town of Bethlehem'.

For many, this was their first experience of being at a carol service and judging from their reactions, I suspect not their last! Having given their all - with some being particularly fatigued in their very robust 'singing and actions' during the '12 days of Christmas' - our junior soldiers left the chaplaincy to go to the cookhouse where they enjoyed a delicious Christmas lunch, catered by our phenomenal kitchen staff and served by their military instructors and training staff! The festive spirit was very evident in the cookhouse, with smiles and full stomachs all around.



On behalf of AFC, I hope you had a good Christmas, and I wish you all every blessing in this new year!





**Christmas Dinner in the Cookhouse, AFC Harrogate**

## *Carol Service in St. Columb's Garrison Church, NI.*

Fr. Kevin Dow leads 2 Rifles Battalion at the their Regimental Carol Service.



Fr. PJ O'Driscoll, who is currently the RC Chaplain with 1RHA in Larkhill, shared a poem with us that one of his soldiers wrote.



## **Padre O'Driscoll**

Written by Cpl Redfern - OHQBTY Medic

In the midst of Salisbury's vast expanse,  
Where troops on exercise advance,  
A padre walks with a steady gait,  
His presence always brings a calming state.

With small bags of Haribo sweets in his hand,  
He spreads morale across the land,  
Amidst the drills and rigorous strain,  
His treats provide a sweet refrain.

Through muddy fields and chilly air,  
His words of wisdom, his tender care,  
He lifts spirits high, in soldiers' hearts,  
As they train and play their parts.

Underneath the vast expanse of sky,  
He stands, a beacon, ever nigh,  
Bringing comfort, bringing light,  
In the midst of their valiant fight.

So let us praise this padre bold,  
Whose actions speak a story told,  
Of love and courage, amidst the fray,  
On Salisbury Plain, where troops hold sway.



# *1 Mercian Regiment - Bulford Camp*

Article written by Fr. Terkura Igbe

## *A BAPTISM OF FIRE?*



The ups and downs of life at Sandhurst were over. The movement out of Victory Building was so swift. It was as though the Commanding Officer (CO) of Dettingen Coy no longer needed the presence of OCdts. This perhaps was confirmed by the RSM who was even more emphatic that Victory Building needed to be vacated on 23 November, 2024 - the day of my commissioning. 'Concurrent activity' was the expression in vogue, hence the need to pack my stuff out of Room 180, tidy up the room, change the beddings, go to the Company Quarter Master (CQM) for clearance and then to the finance office to pay my mess bill before leaving RMAS. I finally left my beloved Sandhurst once I had got approval from the CQM. I thought I would see both the Old College and the New College buildings as I drove out of the RMAS but apart from the nasty weather, the whole place was dark. Perhaps a good feeling not to see the famous colleges?

I had one week of cooling down time after which I officially reported at my place of work - 1 Mercian Regiment in Bulford on Salisbury Plain on Sunday 1 December 2024 to be ready for work on Monday 2 December 2024. My Brigade Chaplain - Catherine Gillham was so kind to welcome, accompany me, and arrange for my lodging at the 1 Mercian Officers Mess.

Monday 2 December 2024 was quite a busy day for my handover takeover (HOTO). The outgoing chaplain, Padre Daniel Njuguna spent the whole day with me. He took me round the key areas of the camp. This was a good opportunity for me to meet a few people and formally introduce myself. Then I felt as though a huge weight was laid on my shoulders. "My brother, I am done! All the best" were his words. I however asked Padre Njuguna if we could say a prayer before he left which he kindly accepted. The prayer might have sparked a change in him as he then took his time to unveil certain key important pieces of information to me. This day felt like a baptism of fire!





My time at the Officers Mess was quiet. Most of the young officers were out on exercise but later that week commencing 1 December, some of the officers returned from their field exercise. I introduced myself as the new Padre. 'Oh welcome Padre,' they said. Thank you, I replied.

I met the CO of the Regiment, Lt. Col Grant Brown on 9 December. He was grateful for my letter to him and welcomed me with great warmth. Sometimes it is not obvious how things will turn out. "Hope is not deceptive" (Rom 5:5) is all I can say.

I never really understood the concept of a 'Drumhead Service' but the RSM was so keen on it. With the Christmas Carols scheduled for 16 December, the RSM requested for a combined Drumhead/Christmas Carol service. I accepted the challenge of preparing this service. The RSM was to take care of the military aspect while the spiritual aspect was totally up to me. We had a very brief practice session with the RSM like 'rapid fire,' but I was not sure I understood it. "Padre, you will stay here, the colour party will march from there and then the CO will come to the parade ground, from the other side. He will address the parade and then say over to you Padre and then you will begin" said the RSM.

I believe Monday 16 December 2025 was my baptism of fire with the combined drumhead/carol service. "Colour party, prepare to march!" Shouted the CO. Then I heard the CSgt shout aloud, "Colour party by the right quick march, elf ait, elf ait left" I enjoyed the pageantry of the colour party after which I led the carol service. I chose a reading from the Prophet Baruch 5:1-9, which was the first reading of the second Sunday of Advent. I tried to relate it to the history of 1 Mercian which was only formed in 2007 as a result of regiments from five different counties from the ancient Kingdom of Mercia coming together. On the whole, it was a good service. It was also important for the soldiers to see their new padre. As I moved round the camp on Tuesday 17 December, the soldiers were excited to greet me - "Morning Padre! Thank you for yesterday's service!"



# *INTERNATIONALER SOLDATENGOTTESDIENST (INTERNATIONAL MILITARY MASS) IN COLOGNE CATHEDRAL*



Written by Colonel Paolo Capanni, Regional Clinical Director, Wolverhampton & Deputy Secretary of the Apostolat Militaire International.

As Deputy Secretary General of the Apostolat Militaire International (International Military Apostolate), I was privileged to attend the Internationaler Soldatengottendienst (International Military Mass) to mark the World Day of Peace, which was held in Cologne Cathedral on 23 January 2025.

Beginning on 1 January 1968, the Catholic Church has observed 1 January (the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God) as World Day of Peace, and the International Military Mass has been celebrated annually in Cologne since 1977.







Cologne Cathedral, the largest church in Germany, was packed with hundreds of military personnel from Germany and around the world. In his homily, the Archbishop of Cologne, Rainer Cardinal Woelki emphasised that peace is our great hope, both for the world with its many conflicts and for our personal lives. Reflecting on the recent Christmas season, he explained that the Son of God does not come into the world armed to the teeth. Rather, he comes as a small, defenceless child to disarm us and move us to peace. The transition to global peace always begins on a small scale, at our own door, in our personal lives.

With music from the Musikkorps der Bundeswehr (Band of the German Armed Forces) and cathedral organ resounding throughout the cathedral, the Mass ended with the hymn 'Grosser Gott, wir loben dich' ('Holy God, We Praise Thy Name'), its tune familiar to Christians from all nations throughout the world.

Colonel Paolo Capanni, pictured on the right, with fellow AMI colleagues.



Just in case you were wondering what the AMI (Apostolat Militaire International) is, the following will provide you with that information and there are links for further details.



***Strengthening Christian values within the Armed Forces worldwide***

<https://www.apostolatmilitaire.com>



AMI is a lay organisation, governed by the General Assembly of delegates ([AMI Statute](#)) made up of the Executive Committee (EC) and the delegates of 18 full members, 2 open memberships and 19 friends associated from 4 different continents.

The purposes of AMI, based also on its NGO (Non-governmental organisation) status, are: to promote at the national and international level the affirmation of a Christian vision of military life and of the values that characterise this vision; to promote and support international understanding and cooperation, as a contribution to strengthening peace; to study together, in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church, the spiritual, moral and social problems peculiar to the military sphere.



Pictured on the left, AMI President with Pope Francis.

Pictured on the right, AMI Secretary General with Pope Francis.



For these reasons, for the four-year period 2018-2021, AMI has adopted the so-called [AMI Vision Paper](#) which defines the vision of AMI on different layers of advice:

- reaching the individual soldier through social media according to his/her age (AMI website in 6 different languages, Newsletter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp), keep working with associations of lay catholic soldiers and Military Ordinariates. In this regard, recently AMI signed a contract to build an AMI Application for smartphones to communicate with the individual soldier, with daily encouragement as well as questions and answers about the contemporary world challenges facing our military members and their families;
- providing AMI expertise and its military support to the Vatican and Catholic-inspired NGOs, as the interlocutor to advise on generic issues of military life such as about war and peace, living the social teaching of the church or the legitimate use of violence for a greater cause;
- Involvement World Youth day; best practice Lay organization; use of sports as a means; ethics of military capabilities; the impact of military life on families.

Such advice can be helpful in three categories: delivering the military context from a Catholic perspective, anticipating in the development of contemporary Catholic teaching on (just) war and peace or compliance with and enforcement of human rights by military personnel, inserting real-life topics from soldiers to the strategic level.

**AMI VISION: EXPANDING CIRCLES** – focus is Information Exchange and Encouragement in the faith. To achieve that, we can use a multi-faceted approach of concentric circles of activity.

**First circle:** the individual soldier, with his/her own values, own thoughts, and own experiences.

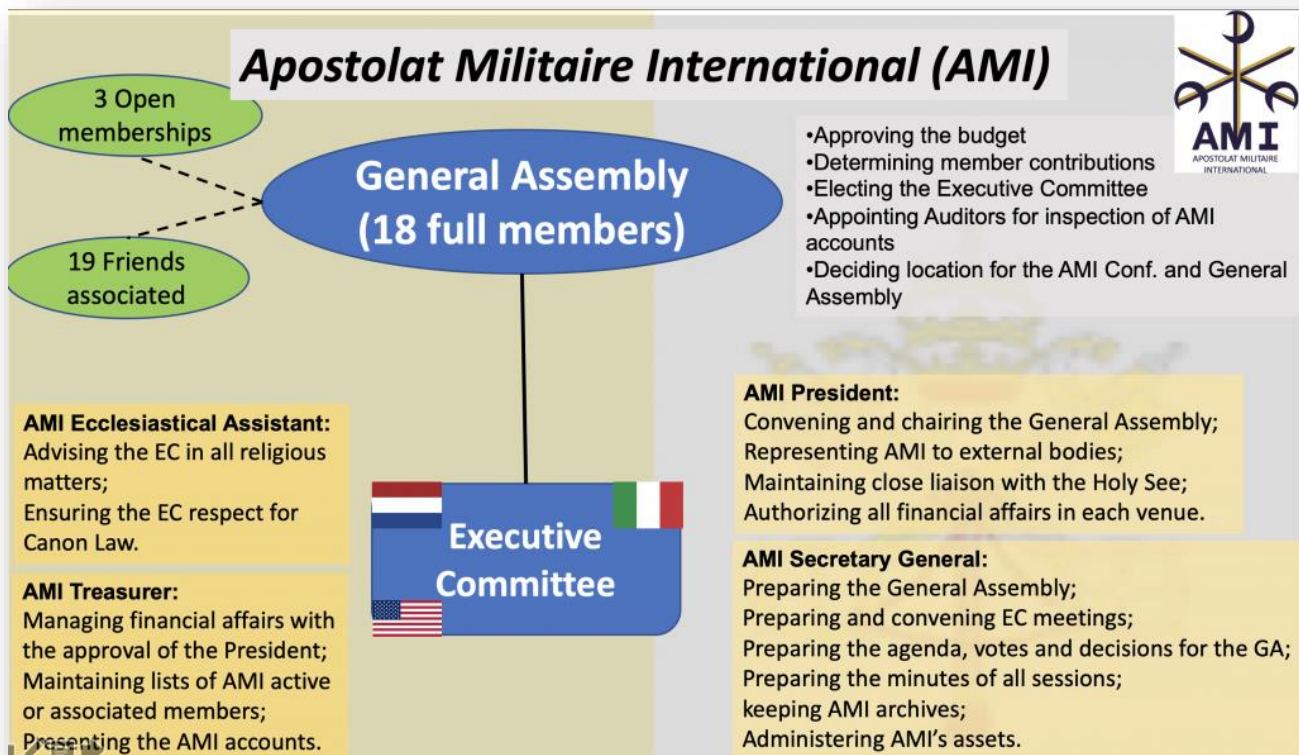
**Second circle:** network of family and friends where soldiers live dealing with many relevant issues.

**Third circle:** working environment. The military organizations and their lay military catholic associations, including the Military Ordinariates. In all three of these circles, Military Chaplains are often the first ones to listen to and support the individual soldier in his/her worries and questions.

**Fourth circle:** Nations are important for soldiers for pride, culture, and governance. Within that, they can operate together to deliver peace.

**Fifth circle:** Multinational organizations provide the resolutions to act upon and the Vatican provides a framework for questions on war and peace.

Through the **AMI Action Plan** and in order to support the Vatican and Catholic-inspired NGOs, AMI has been equipped with a pool of advisors out of the AMI participants, whose key competencies include all the following: military experience, Catholic/Christian background, fluency in English and communicative, diplomatic and analytical. Besides, AMI can rely on a Strategic Communication board and Quarterly discussion group within the community to face and deepen constantly new and old issues in preparation to support both AMI annual meetings and the Catholic community.





# Military Jubilee Event - 'Pilgrims of Hope'

## Rome 6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2025

More than 30,000 people travelled to Rome to participate in a major Jubilee event during this Holy Year of 2025. Two days were specifically dedicated to the Armed Forces, Police, Security Operators, Veterans, Military Associations, Military Academies, Chaplaincies and Military Ordinariates.

Delegations from over 100 countries, including Colombia, Australia, Ukraine, USA, UK and Indonesia started the event with a pilgrimage to the Holy Door. A welcome ceremony with a brass band concert was held in the afternoon at Piazza Del Popolo and the Holy Father presided over Mass in St Peter's Square on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February. You may follow the Mass by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7SxOpsnH28>

From the Bishopric of the Forces, Bishop Paul Mason attended accompanied by the Vicar General and Bishopric representatives; Chaplains and Serving Personnel from the RN, Army and RAF.



Cpl Jone Cagiogo shares his thoughts about the trip: I felt a sense of the depth of the faith, how the Saints died for what they truly believed in. To be witnessing this during the jubilee year was just amazing.

The highlight was the preparation to walk through the Holy door, that God forgives again and again.. and we are restored anew and afresh despite our failures.





Sgt Jason Townson reported: As I arrived in Rome on the evening of the 06<sup>th</sup> Feb. It was a short taxi from the airport to our accommodation. This gave me the chance to gather my thoughts on what I was going to archive on this pilgrimage, Whilst the social and military elements are vital components of our time together the opportunity presented to engage in matters of faith are also critical as Rome is a holy place of religious significance where it can represent an individual journey of faith.

After 4 days of visiting Churches, Basilicas and remains of ancient buildings with the help from a vast amount of experience from the Priests who were on the group, especially Fr Paul McCourt, who gave a detailed introduction of Sacred places of worship and architecture. Covering over 33000 steps on the first day, I reached a point where I was actually was feeling my age.

Overall, I find it difficult to pinpoint which was the best experience whilst on the Pilgrimage, but an invitation celebrating Mass with the Holy Father held at St Peter's Basilica within St Peters Square visiting the Sistine Chapel, this led to me feel a sense of a spiritual connection. Memories I will forever cherish.

Once again thank you for giving me the opportunity for personal reflection, a sense of community with fellow pilgrims.







Photo: RSM 40 Cdo & Musn Dean Welsh praying at the tomb of Pope Benedict XVI.

Musician Dean Welsh wrote: The recent opportunity to travel to Rome for the Jubilee weekend of the Armed and Security Forces as part of the Vatican's Jubilee Year presented not only the opportunity to undertake a physical journey but, also to reflect on my personal journey with my faith. In 2010 when Pope Benedict visited the UK I was invited to represent my secondary school at the Big Assembly held in Twickenham, making the Pilgrimage down from Scotland to have Mass with the Holy Father near to the location where I would later undertake my phase 2 training. To be asked to represent the Army and UK Armed Forces at the Vatican felt very similar and a great privilege.

Having attended the Jubilee Year Opening Mass with Cardinal Vincent Nichols at Westminster Cathedral there was opportunity to prepare for the journey to Rome during January and February. Personally, reflecting on the theme of hope set by Pope Francis and echoed in Cardinal Nichols' Homily. As a Musician, I am aware of the power of music to bridge many gaps and boundaries however, what was clear in Rome was the power of shared faith and prayer to bridge these similar gaps and boundaries. Aside from large crowds gathering from across continents more subtle moments such as morning prayer with the Seminarians studying at the Irish College, ascending the Scala Santa with members of other services and public to carrying our groups Jubilee Cross towards St Peters while joined by others from across Europe. It was clear to see how both the purpose of the Pilgrimage for the Jubilee Year and our shared faith unites us.

Something that was very notable was the comradery and trust that quickly grew within the group pilgrims and members of the clergy which led to many open and deep conversation which probably would not happen in the normal workplace.

For many of us who attended this Pilgrimage this will be a once in a career opportunity and I am extremely grateful to have been given the opportunity to attend it.



# *Freda Mary Sheppard RIP*

## *Administrator at the Bishopric Office*



Freda Sheppard worked for the Bishopric doing many different administrative roles for many years. She was known by many of our priests. Sadly, she passed away on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024, her funeral service was held at St Michael & St George, Aldershot, The Cathedral Church of the Bishop of the Forces on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January.

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.





1. Where did the first Passover take place?
2. What does "Mardi Gras" mean?
3. Lent is the 40-day period prior to Easter. What do the 40 days represent?
4. For Catholics Lent is a time to focus on three main practices. What are they?
5. The Easter Triduum refers to what?
6. Pretzels were a common food eaten during Lent. What does the shape in the middle portion of the pretzel represent?
7. Who provided the tomb for Jesus' burial?
8. How many Stations of the Cross are there?
9. What does the term "Paschal Mystery" refer to?
10. The candle that burns 24 hours a day by the tabernacle, to remind us of Jesus' True Presence in the Eucharist, is known as what?

Answers to Newsletter Issue 35 will be published in Issue 36 or email Karen at: [ArmyRCPAA21@gmail.com](mailto:ArmyRCPAA21@gmail.com) Answers to Newsletter Issue 34: 1. The arrival of a notable person or thing/Coming, 2. First Vespers of the Sunday closest to 30 Nov, 3. Hope, Peace, Love & Joy, 4. A time of prayer, penance, sacrifice & spiritual reflection, 5. Gloria, 6. Pickle, 7. Caterpillars 8. Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar, 9. 6<sup>th</sup> January, 10. Reveal, 11. Queen Victoria & Prince Albert, 12. Jingle Bells, 13. Silent Night, 14. 2 - Christmas, Michigan & Christmas, Florida, 15. True. The legend of Santa Claus can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk named St. Nicholas.

# *New for 2025 - Army RC Newsletter Letters to the Editor*



Dear Readers,

We are excited to introduce a new section in future issues of the newsletter: '**Letters to the Editor.**'

This is your space to share thoughts, reflections, questions, and experiences related to your faith journey and our shared spiritual community.

Do you have a testimony of how God has worked in your life recently? A response to something you've read in the newsletter? Or perhaps a question or idea you'd like us to explore together? We sincerely invite you to participate by writing to us.

Your voices matter. Together, we can grow deeper in faith, encourage one another, and foster meaningful conversations within our community. Let's make this a place where hearts are uplifted and God's love is shared.

If you feel you would like to submit an article for publication in the newsletter, then please send your articles and/or letters to: [armyrcpaa21@gmail.com](mailto:armyrcpaa21@gmail.com) and we may include them in upcoming publications.

We look forward to hearing from you!





## *Chrism Mass*

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at 1200 hrs**

The annual Chrism Mass brings together the Bishop, Priests and Deacons and Lay People of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force to celebrate the blessing of the oils of Catechumens, Chrism and the Sick. The Chaplains will renew their priestly vows and commitment in front of the people.

Further details can be obtained from:

**Mrs Diane Restall, Tel: 01252 348234 or Email: [Dianerestall654@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Dianerestall654@mod.gov.uk)**

Event >>>

# 65<sup>th</sup> International Military Pilgrimage Lourdes 2025



The UK Contingent will depart for the International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2025, returning Monday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

Serving personnel may obtain details from their Military Chaplain or from the Pilgrimage Organiser:  
**Father Nick Gosnell**, Cathedral of St. Michael and St. George, Queens Avenue, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2BY. Tel: **01252 315042**

The Travel agents are Tangney Tours, Pilgrim House, Station Road, Borough Green, Kent TN15 8AF.  
Tel: 01732 886666

## *Bishopric of The Forces Retreats*

Are you in need of stillness and sanctuary? The Bishopric of the Forces is offering 3 opportunities to go on a retreat in 2025. The retreats are open to all MOD personnel (Regular, Reserve and Civil Servant); immediate dependants will be considered dependent upon the availability of places. Applications from junior ranks are particularly encouraged.

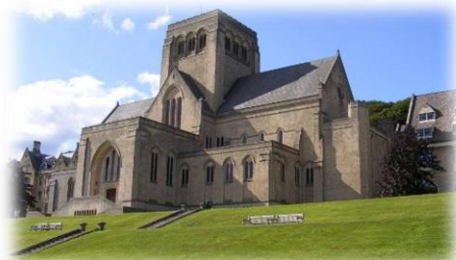
For 2025, Douai Abbey in Berkshire, St Beuno's Centre in North Wales, and Ampleforth Abbey in North Yorkshire.



DOUAI ABBEY 10 - 13 JUN 25



ST BEUNO'S CENTRE 13 - 16 OCT 25

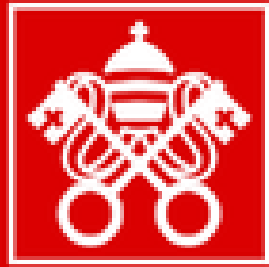


AMPLEFORTH ABBEY 10 - 13 Nov 25

The retreats are aimed at all levels of faith and knowledge, age groups, backgrounds, ranks and experiences. They will allow participants to challenge their preconceptions in a relaxed and non-judgmental environment. All venues offer a unique opportunity to take a fresh look at faith away from the pressures of everyday service life. The retreats aim to promote and foster spiritual and moral values from a faith perspective thus contributing to professional and personal development as well as serving to strengthen the moral component of the application of military force.

Further details can be found on the Defence Instructions and Notices: DIN 2025DIN01-011  
Alternatively, please contact to register your interest or to receive further information:

Wg Cdr (Retd) Jem Wynne, Pastoral Administrative Assistant to the RAF Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain. Tel: 07834609153 Email: [Jeremy.Wynne109@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Jeremy.Wynne109@mod.gov.uk)



VATICAN  
NEWS

*Vatican News is the portal for Vatican information where you can find the latest news on Pope Francis, the Holy See, the Church in the world, and international news.*

*Please follow the link to access the site: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en.html>*





# Online with Saints App



Online with Saints offers a virtual encounter with 100+ saints from all around the world. Women and Men, carpenters and scholars, mothers and popes, princes and paupers: their inspiring life stories are linked to real life modern questions. Be sure to check the social media profiles of the saints in the app.

Anyone can become a saint. Each saint is different, with their own unique personality and destiny. Each of them found their vocation in a different way - demonstrating that God has a special plan and vocation for each individual.

**# Download the FREE online with saints app on either [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play](#)**

Discover much more information about the saints:

- Social media profiles of the saints
- Animated videos about their lives
- Information on their history
- Pray with the saints and find patron saints

**# Access videos**

Turn on the subtitles in YouTube

- Via the app: scan a saint in the book
- Via the app: click on a saint's profile, play the video
- Via the website [onlinewithsaints.com](#)
- Via the YouTube channel of *Online with Saints*

## Catholic Military App is Live!



The [Apostolat Militaire International](#) and [Tweeting with GOD](#) have launched the FREE Catholic Military Connect App. See the launch video [here!](#) It's designed explicitly for military Catholics.

- ❖ It offers:
- ❖ Strong Catholic prayers, all downloaded so they can be accessed easily whilst on ship/ops/ex etc.
- ❖ Answers to 200+ questions about faith and the military.
- ❖ Prayers specifically for the military.
- ❖ Testimonies from serving Catholics.
- ❖ Inspiring military Saints and quotes.
- ❖ Guidance for preparing for Mass and Confession.
- ❖ Spiritual first aid.
- ❖ Contact details for the Military Chaplain and Association of whichever country the user is in.
- ❖ The facility to upload spiritual reading.

The CMC app is currently available in both the [Google Play](#) and [App stores](#), for smartphones and tablets, in 8 languages (English, Italian, French, Spanish, Croatian, German, Portuguese and Dutch). This is an excellent resource for your spiritual armoury.



### The Holy See endorses CMC App

The Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, sent a message for the launch of the CMC App to the International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes. In his words: "I believe that the app will be immensely helpful to all military personnel, and in a particular way to young men and women who, in this important sector of civil service, seek to grow in personal friendship with Jesus Christ." See the video.



## Key Dates in March & April

Shrove Tuesday – *4<sup>th</sup> March*

Ash Wednesday – *5<sup>th</sup> March*

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent – *9<sup>th</sup> March*

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent – *16<sup>th</sup> March*

St Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
(Solemnity) – *19<sup>th</sup> March*

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent – *23<sup>rd</sup> March*

The Annunciation of the Lord  
(Solemnity) – *25<sup>th</sup> March*

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent – *30<sup>th</sup> March*

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent – *6<sup>th</sup> April*

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord – *13<sup>th</sup> April*

Maundy Thursday – *17<sup>th</sup> April*

Good Friday – *18<sup>th</sup> April*

Holy Saturday – *19<sup>th</sup> April*

Easter Sunday, Vigil – *20<sup>th</sup> April*

## **Information.....**

If you wish to know more about Roman Catholic matters within the Army Faith Community, please contact: **Mrs Karen Horn MBE** Pastoral Assistant (PA) to PRCC(A) at: [ArmyRCPAA21@gmail.com](mailto:ArmyRCPAA21@gmail.com)