

18th February 2024

First Sunday of Lent (Year B)

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH OF MERTHYR TYDFIL

Worshipping together

Website – www.merthyrcc.co.uk

St Aloysius, Chestnut Way, Gurnos, Merthyr Tydfil CF47 9SB
St Illtyd's, Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil CF48 3BT

St Benedict's, Merthyr Vale CF48 4RF
St Mary's Pontmorlais West, Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8RG

Parish Priest: CANON BARRY ENGLISH 01685 723336 Email – merthyr@rcadc.org

Deacons: Rev. DAVID O'KEEFE 01685 375761

Rev. GARTH TASKER 07939 310176

Psalm Response: You are my refuge, O Lord;
You fill me with the joy of salvation.

Gospel Acclamation : Alleluia; Alleluia;
May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten
the eyes of our mind, so that we can see what hope his
call holds for us.
Alleluia!

MASS TIMES

Saturday 17th February

4.30 pm St Benedict's

6.30 pm St Aloysius

Sunday 18th February

9.30 am St Illtyd's

11.30 am St Mary's

Monday 19th February

10.00 am St Illtyd's

Tuesday 20th February

9.30 am St Mary's

Wednesday 21st February

10.00 am St Mary's

10.30 am St Mary's

Thursday 22nd February

10.00 am St Mary's

Friday 23rd February

10.00 am St Illtyd's

10.30 am St Illtyd's

12.00 St Illtyd's

Saturday 24th February

4.30 pm St Benedict's

6.30 pm St Aloysius

Edward Kaler (Anniv); Lorraine Keohane;

Sunday 25th February

9.30 am St Illtyd's

11.30 am St Mary's

Please remember in your prayers: Peggy Vaughan, Tony Crawford, Oliver McAleer, Pat O'Brien, Nicholas Santos, Beryl & David Keefe, Ed Rees, Margaret Banfield, Steven Denton Thomas, Teresa Jones, Lisa Morgan Jones, Thomas Fitton, Mark Esposito,

Requiescat in pace:

Teresa Collins, Karl Baynham, Anne O'Brien; Anthony Hughes; Ken Hodgson; Danny Griffiths; Peter Love, Dennis Dowling; Audrey Morgan; Denis Evans; Sister Anna (Sister of St Joseph);

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they Rest in peace.

CAFOD FAMILY FAST DAY – FRIDAY 23RD FEBRUARY

2ND COLLECTION WEEKEND 24/25 FEBRUARY - CAFOD FAMILY FAST DAY

St Illtyd's Lottery 11th February

Numbers:

No Winner

Next Draw :18th February £1525

St Mary's Lottery 11th February

Numbers :6, 13, 17, 19

No Winner: Lucky Dip

Next Draw 18th February £5150

Vigil –First Sunday of Lent

Bill Hughes; Claire Price; Dennis Dowling RIP;

Bernard and Mary Corcoran, Mrs Sybil Joseph RIP;

First Sunday of Lent

Ronnie O'Donnell (B'Day); Christopher O'Donnell;

Ron Morgan; Christine O'Malley Dooagh, Bryan James;

Mayo, Ron and Stephen Fealey; Mary and Ernest Galeozzie;

Stephen Fryzer;

St Peter Damian, Bishop, Doctor

The Repeal of the Abortion Act and the Lives of the Innocent Victims of the Act

St Mary's School – First Reconciliation

Chair of St Peter Apostle

People of the Parish

St Polycarp, Bishop, Martyr; CAFOD Family Fast Day

People of the Parish

St Illtyd's School – First Reconciliation

REQUIEM MASS – DANIEL GRIFFITHS

Vigil – Second Sunday of Lent

Bill Hughes; Claire Price;

Bernard & Mary Corcoran, Joan and Dinny O'Leary (Anniv); Eileen Jones (Anniv);

Second Sunday of Lent

Kitty Walsh;

Ron Morgan; Griff Quinn; Connie Green; Roy Price;

Station Mass

A Station Mass will take place at All Hallows, Miskin on Monday 19th February at 7.00pm. All are welcome to attend. Confession will be heard before Mass.

Syro Maralbar Mass

The Syro Maralbar Mass will be held at St Mary's on Thursday 22nd February at 5.00 pm.

Wintry weather at St Aloysius

We are looking for volunteers to assist with spreading salt and grit prior to Mass at St Aloysius Church during periods of wintry weather. Also to tidy up the grounds around the Church.

If you wish to help please get in touch by email. Merthyr@rcadc.org

Catholic Youth Retreat

The Catholic Youth Retreat will take place next Saturday 24th February at Archbishop McGrath School in Bridgend. Our last retreat was very well attended, with upwards of 150 young people participating. We would love for this one to be equally successful. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact either Deacon Christian Mahoney at youth@rcadc.org.

Pro –Life Amendment

Support an amendment to reduce our abortion time limit from 24 weeks to 22 weeks. Research indicates that a significant number of babies born at 22 or 23 weeks can now survive outside the womb, leaving a contradiction in our abortion law. **Take action:** Collect a postcard today from the back of the church and post it to your MP urgently in support of this amendment! If you have any questions about the amendment or would like help with supporting and promoting the campaign, please do not hesitate to get in touch. On behalf of the team at Right To Life UK, we hope you and your parish have a blessed Lent.

Retrouvaille – A life line for Married Couples

Retrouvaille is a programme to support couples who have difficulties in their marriage. It brings a positive focus, new hope and helps nourish and grow your marriage. For confidential information about Retrouvaille or to register for the next programme which commences with a weekend in Welyn Garden City on 14-16 June call or text 07887296983 or 07973380443 or email retrouvailleukinfo@gmail.com or visit www.retrouvaille.org.uk

Come and See Weekends- Holy Cross Abbey

We are Cistercian Nuns at Holy Cross Abbey, Whitland, Pembrokeshire, We are inviting single Catholic Women aged 25 – 45 who are discerning a vocation, to experience our monastic life during one of the following weekends:- Friday 24th May – Monday 27th May or Friday 16th August to Monday 19th August 2024. For enquiries and/ or registration, please e mail us at comeandsee@hca.co.uk

Pilgrimage to Patmos

There are still a few places left on our pilgrimage in June. The setting of a vision of Jesus by the Apostle John which led to him writing the book of Revelation, this tiny island in the Greek Aegean sea is a unique blend of natural beauty and the hum of ancient piety. Voted as 'Europe's most idyllic place to live', the story of Patmos will be brought to life by this pilgrimage. We will spend time discovering the rituals, art and culture of the richly fascinating Greek Orthodox church. Reflections on scripture and contemplative prayer time in flower-filled courtyards overlooking turquoise waters will be a way of drawing near to God while Mass, led by the retreat priest, will take place daily in various locations, from the beach to the breathtaking highest point on the Island, Mount Elijah. Based at the charming Skala Hotel, with its seawater pool and harbourfront location, the pilgrimage promises to be a fun, relaxing and enriching experience in this special place. Contact Deacon Garth for more details and to book a place.

Race Night at Fr Carroll Centre

On Friday 23 February we are hosting another Race Night for our funds. Entry costs £2.00 and bets are 50p. Refreshments available. Tickets available now.

St Patrick's Day Fundraiser

A St Patrick's day fundraiser will be held on Friday 15th March at 7.00 pm at Father Carroll Centre, with music, bar and a good craic. Tickets cost £10.00 and will include Irish Stew and freshly baked bread (Vegetarian option available). All proceeds for the Restoration funds of St Mary's and St Illtyd's. Tickets available from Jane Shankland on 07899953898

"Walk with Me, Lent 2024"

This pocket-size booklet of prayers and reflections for Lent 2024 is now available. Archbishop Mark O'Toole has written a forward to the booklet and recommends it as an aid to prayer. In his introduction we read, "This year we celebrate Lent within the context of the Year of Prayer, a year of preparation for the

Jubilee Year, entitled **Pilgrims of Hope** We are asked to make the Lord's Prayer a particular focus, deepening our understanding of and devotion to it. This is what we do with Walk with Me journey through Lent". Archbishop Mark continues, "The Lord's Prayer reminds us of that wonderful truth that we are children of God, loved by our Father in Heaven and thus we enter in Jesus' own relationship with his Father. God is our Father who loves us more than we can imagine, and who comes to search for us lost sheep and draws us back to Him through the Death and Resurrection of His Son....What better way of living Lent than by truly entering into this prayer more deeply". Booklets are £1.00 each. Why not give a copy to a friend, relative or work colleague?

PRAYER FOR UKRAINE AND THE WORLD

Mary, Our Lady of Kyiv, Mother of God, we ask you to intercede for the people of Ukraine and the World, for their governments, and all who suffer because of war. Be with them as you stood beside your Son, Suffering on the Cross at Calvary. Give them strength and courage through faith, hope and justice. May we, in our turn, support them through prayer and generosity that human lives may be saved, that the injured may be healed that the dead may rest in peace, that there will be peace after war. AMEN

Mass Intentions

Please could all Mass Intentions be handed in **AT LEAST** one week before requested date.

2023 -2024 Year of Prayer

Pope Francis' Catechesis on Prayer, arranged for each liturgical week

First Sunday of Lent – 18th February 2024

In today's Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent we see Jesus driven out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for 40 days. Jesus shares our struggles as well as being our model of life. In Pope Francis' catechesis he starts with the certainty that no one's life is a "walk in the park", and shows us some ways to approach the struggles in prayer as they arise. The Struggle of Prayer Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! I am happy to resume this face-to-face meeting, because I will tell you something: it is not nice to speak in front of nothing, to a video camera. It is not nice. And now, after many months, thanks to the courage of Mgr. Sapienza, who said, "No, let's do it there", we are gathered here again. Mgr. Sapienza is good! And finding people, finding you here, each one of you with your own story, people who come from all over, from Italy, from the United States, from Colombia, then that little football team of four Swiss brothers, I think ... who are over there ... four. The little sister is missing, I hope she arrives.... And seeing each one of you pleases me, as we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord, and looking at each other helps us to pray for one another. Also the people who are far away but always make themselves close to us. The ever-present Sister Geneviève who comes from Lunapark, people who work.... There are so many, and they are all here. Thank you for your presence and your visit. Take the Pope's message to everyone. The Pope's message is that I pray for everyone, and I ask you to pray for me, united in prayer. And speaking of prayer, Christian prayer, like all Christian life, is not a "walk in the park". None of the great people of prayer that we meet in the Bible and in the history of the Church found prayer "comfortable". Yes, one can pray like a parrot — blah, blah, blah, blah, blah — but this is not prayer. Prayer certainly gives great peace, but through inner struggle, sometimes difficult, which can accompany even long periods of life. Praying is not something easy, and this is why we flee from it. Every time we want to pray, we are immediately reminded of many other activities, which at that moment seem more important and more urgent. This happens to me too: I go to pray a little ... and no, I must do this and that.... We flee from prayer; I don't know why, but that is how it is. Almost always, after putting off prayer, we realize that those things were not essential at all, and that we may have wasted time. This is how the Enemy deceives us. All Godly men and women report not only the joy of prayer, but also the tediousness and fatigue it can bring: at times it is a difficult struggle to keep to the time and ways of praying. Some saints continued it for years without finding any satisfaction in it, without perceiving its usefulness. Silence, prayer and concentration are difficult exercises, and sometimes human nature rebels. We would rather be anywhere else in the world, but not there, in that church pew, praying. Those who want to pray must remember that faith is not easy, and sometimes it moves forward in almost total darkness, without points of reference. There are moments in the life of faith that are dark, and therefore some saints call this "the dark night", because we hear nothing. But I continue to pray. The Catechism lists a long series of enemies of prayer, those that make it difficult to pray, that put us in difficulty (cf. nn. 2726-

2728). Some doubt that prayer can truly reach the Almighty: why does God remain silent? If God is Almighty, he could say a couple of words and end the matter. Faced with the elusiveness of the divine, others suspect that prayer is merely a psychological operation; something that may be useful, but is neither true nor necessary: and one could even be a practitioner without being a believer; and so on, many explanations. However, the worst enemies of prayer are found within us. The Catechism describes them in this way: "Discouragement during periods of dryness; sadness that, because we have 'great possessions', we have not given all to the Lord; disappointment over not being heard according to our own will; wounded pride, stiffened by the indignity that is ours as sinners; our resistance to the idea that prayer is a free and unmerited gift" (2728). This is clearly a summary list that could be lengthened. What should be done in the time of temptation, when everything seems to waver? If we look at the history of spirituality, we immediately see that the masters of the soul were very clear about the situation we have described. To overcome it, each of them offered some contribution: a word of wisdom, or a suggestion for facing moments fraught with difficulty. It is not a question of systematically developed theories, no, but of advice born of experience, which shows the importance of resisting and persevering in prayer. It would be interesting to review at least some of these pieces of advice, because each one deserves to be explored further. For example, the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola is a short book of great wisdom that teaches how to put one's life in order. It makes us understand that the Christian vocation is militancy, it is the decision to stand under the banner of Jesus Christ and not under that of the devil, trying to do good even when it becomes difficult. In times of trial, it is good to remember that we are not alone, that someone is at our side, watching over and protecting us. Saint Anthony the Abbot, the founder of Christian monasticism, also faced terrible times in Egypt, when prayer became a difficult struggle. His biographer, Saint Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, recounts one of the worst episodes in the life of the hermit saint when he was about 35, a time of middle age that for many people involves a crisis. Anthony was disturbed by the ordeal, but he resisted. When calm finally returned, he turned to his Lord with an almost reproachful tone: "But Lord, where were you? Why did you not come immediately to put an end to my suffering?" And Jesus answered: "Anthony, I was there. But I was waiting to see you fight" (*Life of Anthony*, 10). Fighting in prayer. And very often, prayer is combat. I am reminded of something I experienced close up, when I was in the other diocese. There was a married couple with a nine-year-old daughter, with an illness that the doctors were unable to diagnose. And in the end, in hospital, the doctor said to the mother: "Madam, call your husband". And the husband was at work; they were labourers, they worked every day. And he told the father: "The child will not survive the night. There is an infection; there is nothing we can do". Perhaps that man did not attend Mass every Sunday, but he had great faith. He left, weeping; he left his wife there with the little girl in the hospital, he took the train and he travelled seventy kilometres towards the Basilica of Our Lady of Luján, Patroness of Argentina. And there — the Basilica was already closed, it was almost ten o'clock at night, in the evening — he clung to the grates of the Basilica and spent all night praying to Our Lady, fighting for his daughter's health. This is not a figment of the imagination: I saw him! I saw him myself. That man there, fighting. At the end, at six o'clock in the morning, the church opened, and he entered to salute Our Lady: all night "fighting", and then he returned home. When he arrived he looked for his wife but could not find her. And he thought: "She has left us. No, Our Lady cannot do this to me". Then he found her, smiling as she said: "I don't know what happened. The doctors said that something changed, and now she is cured". That man, fighting with prayer, received the grace of Our Lady. Our Lady listened to him. And I saw this: prayer works miracles, because prayer goes directly to the heart of the tenderness of God, who loves us like a father. And when he does not grant us a grace, he will grant us another that in time we will see. But always, it is necessary to battle in prayer to ask for grace. Yes, at times we ask for a grace we do not need, but we ask for it without truly wanting it, without fighting. But serious things are not asked for this way. Prayer is combat, and the Lord is always with us. Jesus is always with us: If in a moment of blindness we cannot perceive his presence, we will succeed