

FREE

**The Official Newspaper to
the Diocese of Lancaster**

Issue 329 + May '21

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through Holy Week
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HRH The Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh RIP 1921 – 2021

The *Catholic Voice* extends every sympathy to HRH the Queen and other members of the Royal Family on the death of Prince Philip.

*Eternal rest grant unto Prince Philip O Lord
And let perpetual light shine upon him
May he rest in peace Amen.*



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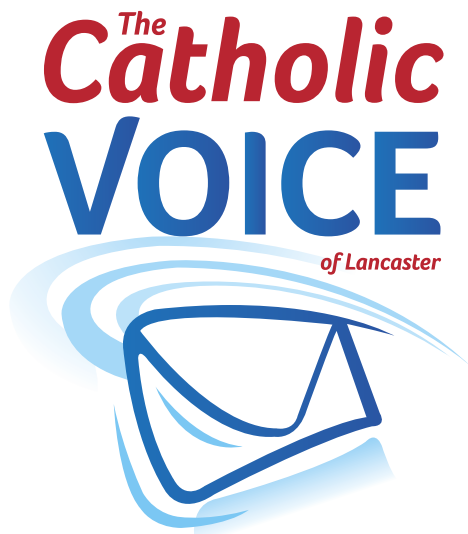
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Bishop Paul Swarbrick, on the announcement of the death of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh

The Roman Catholics of the Diocese of Lancaster join the nation and vast numbers across the world in extending to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, our heart-felt condolences on the announcement of the death of her dear husband Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. We commend him to Almighty God, whose good servant he has been for his 99 years, praying that he is richly rewarded by the God in whom he placed his trust.

We hold in prayer her Majesty in her time of profound grief, together with their extended family, remembering the consoling words of our Lord and Saviour, *'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted'*.

Prince Philip has given us so much over his long years of outstanding public service. But it is first and foremost his role as loyal and loving husband, father, grand and great grandfather that we acknowledge and value.

As a leading public figure at a national and international level he has worked for and embodied a way of life that upheld the Christian vocation of respect for everyone. He was gifted in being able to reach out and engage with people from all walks of life, in all circumstances. He has particularly striven to help the young to find themselves and embark on their adult life

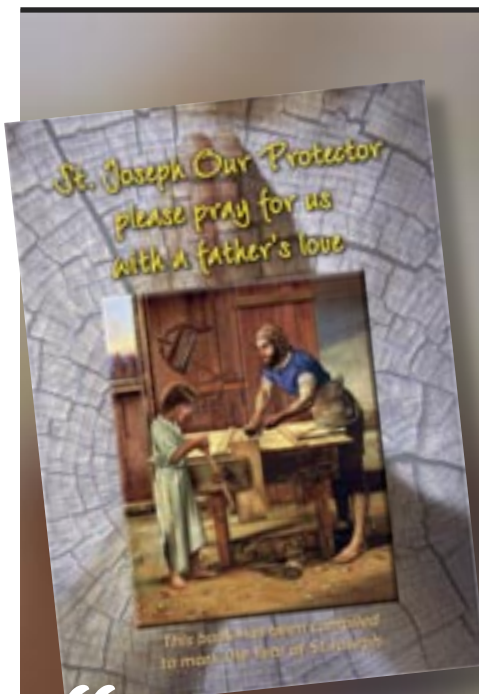
journey with confidence in themselves, respect for others and concern for the world, which we inhabit for a time, as stewards. In an age that is preoccupied by celebrity-culture, he has shown it is possible to step back and take on a supporting role for the sake of others, and shown that this is a worthwhile life-choice. In a wonderful way he has shown that such a life is not less of a life. He remained himself throughout.

At a time when the whole world is preoccupied coping with a pandemic, he has shifted our attention to the possibility of remaining true to those deep innate human values that have always triumphed over tragedy. Family was his primary focus. His family's tragedies were so often played out on the public stage, but he never allowed them to destroy the good that was also there. He knew that love endures.

The Monarchy often attracts unfair criticism, but in this country it has strong roots in our Christian Faith tradition. It provides an important counterbalance to a purely political system. It unites us with an identity across our beliefs and lesser loyalties. Perhaps, in our immediate sadness, we can each learn an important lesson in humility, and understand humility as a lesson in reality. Now it is our grieving Monarch who deserves our discreet attention and prayers, together with her immediate and extended family.

+Paul Swarbrick

Year of St Joseph Booklet by Frank & Emma McGrath



“

He is great in faith, not because he speaks his own words, but above all because he listened to the words of the Living God.

”

Pope John Paul II

Editors Note:

The booklet is published by T. Snape Printers, Preston and is available at £2 per copy inc of p&p from Frank McGrath, fjmccg@outlook.com

This booklet, which marks the Year of St Joseph, is a welcome reminder of the importance of the Patron of the Universal Church in our faith and as a shining example in our day to day lives. Frank and Emma McGrath (*parishioners at Our Lady and St Edward, Fulwood*) are to be congratulated on producing such an attractive and well-presented compilation of prayers, reflections and brief overviews of places, people and communities dedicated to, or connected with, St Joseph. The booklet provides an easy and readily accessible resource for us all as we seek, with the encouragement of Pope Francis, to strengthen our devotion to St Joseph, the “*Quiet Saint*”.

The booklet has served as a reminder to me of how I have felt myself being particularly drawn to churches and parishes dedicated to St Joseph, in particular St Joseph’s, Preston; St Joseph’s, Lancaster and, in the neighbouring Archdiocese of Liverpool, St Joseph’s, Brindle.

But what does St Joseph actually mean to me?

Well, there are a number of key themes which come to mind including silence, action and calmness, all of which inspire me.

St Joseph is silent in the Gospels which, I think, must make him a great listener. Silence for me is the time that I take to remove myself (*as best as I can!*) from the noise and distractions of day to day life and reflect on my faith and to listen to what God is telling me, especially during times of difficulty.

St Joseph’s actions mean that he embraces what God has asked him to do and, in accepting the will of God, he quietly and without complaint supports Mary and becomes a father to Jesus. Action for me is living my faith; for example, in my interaction with others and by being involved and active in my own parish and also contributing in different ways to the wider Catholic community.

St Joseph is always a calming and steady presence. When situations or experiences are difficult and I find myself less than calm, a quick prayer to St Joseph or just a reminder of his steady and measured approach to all the problems he and Mary faced, often does the trick! St Joseph is a great source and example of faith, humility, courage and comfort.

Pope St John Paul II summed up St Joseph in the following words: “*He is great in faith, not because he speaks his own words, but above all because he listened to the words of the Living God*”.

David Gorman

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The Lord is always waiting for you – Pope Francis writes to young people



This is the cover of "Francis: God's Fool," a new book in Italian by Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, with a preface by Pope Francis addressed to young people.

(CNS photo/courtesy Edizioni Francescane Italiane.)

Faith is a gift that is never imposed on anyone but must be accepted with an open heart, Pope Francis wrote to young people.

"If you think about it, it is very beautiful and very respectful of our freedom," the Pope wrote to young people in the preface to a new book. Faith "is a gift that must be desired."

"Maybe you have sought the Lord and have not found him, but let me ask you something: How strong was your desire?" the Pope wrote. "Seek him with all the passion of your heart, pray, ask, invoke, cry out and he will let himself be found as he promised."

Taking the form of a letter to "my young friend who is searching," Pope Francis's preface introduces a book in Italian by Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa about St. Francis of Assisi as described by Brother Pacificus, a famed poet who became one of the first men to join St. Francis after meeting him early in the 13th century.

The book, Francis: God's Fool, was scheduled for release 9 April. Avvenire, the daily newspaper of the Italian bishops' conference, published the Pope's preface on 7 April.

When Brother Pacificus, then known as William of Lisciano, met St. Francis, "he saw the splendour of his holiness and through him saw the beauty of God's face," Pope Francis wrote. "That which he always sought, he finally found and found thanks to a holy man."

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the crowd, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

"Those are strong words," the Pope wrote. "But we can ask, 'Should we take them seriously? If I ask the Lord, does he really listen to my request? If I seek him, will I find him? If I knock, will he open the door?'"

Those are understandable and important questions, the Pope said, especially when one looks around and sees how many people "knock on the doors of heaven and hear nothing but silence from the other side."

A line from the Book of Jeremiah may hold the key, he continued. It says, "When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me."

"God does let himself be found, yes, but only by those who seek him with all their hearts," the Pope wrote. "Open the Gospels; read about Jesus' encounters with the people who went to him and you will see" that he fulfilled the desires of those like the insistent widow or the repentant sinner or the leper in need of healing — all of whom sought Jesus out with a single-minded drive.

"The one who seeks finds if he or she seeks wholeheartedly, if for him or her the Lord is as vital as water in the desert, as soil for a seed or sun for a flower," Pope Francis wrote. God has never quit waiting for people to open their hearts to him, the Pope said.

"And, maybe, he is making his voice heard more today than yesterday," he wrote. "If you just lower the volume on other sounds and raise the volume of your deepest desires, you will hear him loud and clear within yourself and around you."

God also continues to call people to devote their lives to him, the Pope said. "If you would have the courage to leave your securities and open yourself to him, he will open to you a new world and you, in turn, will become a light to others."

Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

“When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me.”

” Jeremiah



The Castlerigg Lottery

To help support the work of Castlerigg and the Youth Service, we have recently launched The Castlerigg Lottery!

It's just £3 per month and the winner of each monthly draw takes half the pot. The prize fund is currently up to around £100 and expected to grow as more people sign up.

Each month we are trying to come up with innovative ways to draw the winning ticket. This month, we did it by playing 'extreme darts' from the top of Castlerigg's tower, aiming at a target down on the lawn with all of the numbers fixed to it. The winner, after several dozen misses was eventually hit, and a delighted lady was informed by phone later that day.

Sign up at castleriggmanor.co.uk/lottery and check out our social media for the draw videos!!

Has Science Destroyed Faith?

In March, we had our first Online Study Session. Fr. Michael Docherty spoke to us about Salvation History. The next study session will be on Saturday June 19th and we'll be tackling one of the biggest topics of the age – has science destroyed faith?

Did you know that the Big Bang Theory, the Science of Genetics and the Heliocentric Universe were all ideas originally put forward by Catholic priests? Did you know that the current state of physics and cosmology actually does far more to prove God's existence than disprove it?

On June 19th, Jack Regan will be taking us through what faith and science are there to do, what went wrong, and how to properly understand the relationship between the two!

Book online at castleriggmanor.co.uk/study

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St Patrick’s Primary School, Cleator Moor - Singing their way through Holy Week

We knew that we would not be able to come together as a school during Holy Week this year, so we decided to appreciate it in a different way. Our Reception pupils began our commemoration by re-enacting their very own ‘Last Supper’ so they could explore the momentous event when Jesus shared his final meal with his disciples. They ate bread rolls, fruit, and drank cherry juice, whilst listening to the hymn, ‘This Is My Body’. By participating in this event, our children were able to think about the words Jesus spoke and consider what they meant to them.

But our youngest pupils did not stop there! Whilst visiting the Stations of the Cross at our local church, St. Mary’s, they sung a beautiful hymn to celebrate Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey. This hymn was shared with our local community, via various social media platforms, to involve everyone in the celebration of Palm Sunday. We also shared a reading from Matthew’s Gospel to help everyone reflect on the significance of our King riding on a donkey.

“Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in

front of him and those who followed were all shouting: Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heavens!”

On the Monday of Holy Week, our Year 1 children wanted to share a hymn with everyone – to help them keep this especially important week at the forefront of their minds! They practised the hymn, ‘Freely, Freely’ a lot...and when it was finally performed, we all agreed that they sounded like angels! We felt the Psalm for this day was particularly meaningful, so we shared it along with the hymn:

“I am sure I shall see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living.
Hope in him, hold firm and take heart.
Hope in the Lord!
The Lord is my light and my help.”


It was Year 2’s turn to sing us into the Tuesday of Holy Week through their performance of ‘The Servant King’. This hymn was chosen as we felt that it helped us to think about Jesus’ role as a servant for us, and to consider how we too can be servants for all those around us. We have used the Scripture from John’s Gospel to help us reflect:

“Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am




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going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."

Maundy Thursday, the day when Jesus had the Last Supper and was then betrayed, is a day when we think of the humility and service of Jesus. A day when we think of the words, "This is my body, which is given for you" and what it means to us and to the world. Year 3 sung the hymn, "This is My Body" to support our reflection on this special day.

Whilst visiting the Stations of the Cross, our Year 4 children performed "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" for Good Friday; the day when we commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. As this is a day for us to fully contemplate the significance of this sacrifice, we wanted to share the following Scripture:

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

The Easter Vigil hymn was sung by our Year 5 children through their rendition of "This little light of mine". We felt this hymn allowed us to focus on light and the Resurrection; how Jesus is our Light, particularly during this last year.

"He is Risen!"


Our Holy Week journey of singing and reflection concluded with the Resurrection. Our Year 6 pupils celebrated this occasion through a very hearty performance of "Christ the Lord is Risen Today!"


We feel that sharing our journey with the rest of our community, and engaging in reflection, has brought us closer to each other and to God.

St Patricks School, Cleator Moor





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'Glory be to Him whose power working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.....' - Ephesians 3: 20

Lifelong commitment celebrated with Fish and Chips!

Christine Doyle of Hornby and an Oblate of the Bernardines recently made a lifelong commitment to the Order. Here she shares her story with the Catholic Voice.



Having recently made a lifetime commitment as an Oblate of the Order of Bernardines of Esquermes, (the Sisters at Hynning Monastery, Carnforth) I was asked to write an article outlining my journey there. Not a subject I'd ever given any consideration to previously.

So what is an Oblate?

Oblates, sometimes known as lay associates, are lay people, both men and women, who have a special link with a religious order and wish to deepen their spiritual connection. In the case of Bernardine Oblates he or she discerns with one of the Sisters the way God is calling them to live out their association and there will be regular retreat days during the year. Oblates are welcomed from all the different Christian traditions. At Hynning our group includes an Anglican vicar, a Methodist lay worker and married and single Catholics.

An Oblate is a person who feels a calling from God to lead a contemplative and spiritual life in the world, a life modelled on the wisdom of Cistercian values and practices, and who seeks a community of like-minded people... (Cistercian family website www.bernardine.org)

I have to begin my story with the undisputable fact that I am bog standard ordinary. The reality, of course, is that we all are but it generally takes a lifetime of striving to be 'par excellence' before we grasp it. If we truly believe, not understand, but believe that we are all children of the one God then ordinariness is fine.

The questions posed to me by way of stimulating thought appeared to me to have little bearing on my path, since I don't consider my path to have its culmination in becoming an Oblate unto death. This event, for me, is a stepping stone nearer to my ultimate union with God in the company of a powerfully spiritual family, together with a heightened awareness of our very real relationship with Our Lady and all the saints....my birth family & step mum included, who I'm convinced are saints.

The Bernardine community has been a bedrock for me for the past 43 years. There is only one grave in their cemetery whose occupant I have not personally known. During my working life I visited for weekends at least every six weeks. It was my place of peace and in the old days when the Chapel was a room in the

house, I could creep out of bed and sit at the feet of the Lord when everyone else had gone to sleep.

Gosh how very holy this sounds! I also went out raving to the odd Liverpool night club, had great holidays, slagged off anyone who crossed me etc. Bog standard in fact. My centre was always in the palm of God's hand. It had nothing to do with me but with Him. I didn't even recognise it. So on it went. Life was lived and Hynning was always there.

There was no way I would consider living with a group of women so forget a 'vocation'. However at the end of an Advent retreat, many years ago, I realised that my home was, in fact, full of women and I had been doing this for some time. Bells began to ring. Thinking needed to be done and decisions made. I had elderly relatives who would need support in their later years and I opted for being around for them. 14 yrs later, on the death of my last aunt, I rapidly applied for early retirement and told the Sisters I was on the way. Fortunately they knew me well and allowed me in as a postulant. I only lasted 4 months...enough said!

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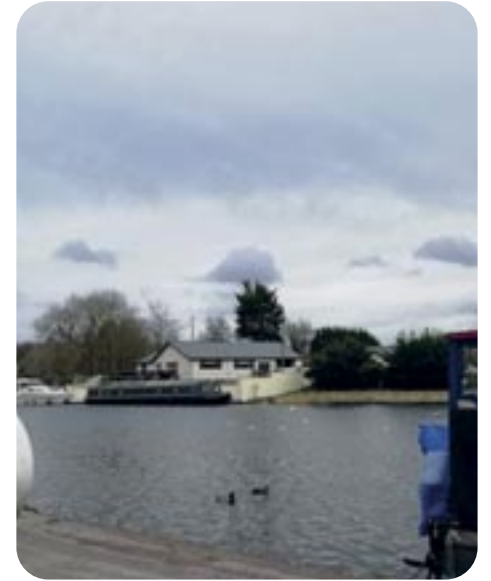


This year, in the middle of a Global pandemic, on the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, I cemented my place in the family by committing myself to *'preferring nothing to Christ'* for life - uniting my Yes to that of Our Lady. A very beautiful moment surrounded and supported by the Sisters as I became a lifelong Oblate of their Order - a privileged step on the way to full unity in God. Family, friends and other Oblates joined me as the ceremony was live streamed and I like to think that in that presentation it reached and evangelised people who would not normally have attended the ceremony outside of lock down. Like everyone else we wore masks and socially distanced.

To complete the *'bog standard'* picture, I celebrated by visiting a brilliant chippy in Carnforth and scoffed my lunch by the canal whilst contemplating the beauty of Gods wonderful creation...blue skies and sun shining on the water. Ducks, people and dogs all shouting out the Glory of God. *'In Him we live, and move and have our being'*. Acts 17: 28

If you are interested in becoming a Bernardine Oblate or want to find out more about why people feel called to be an Oblate and would like more details, contact Sr. Josephine Mary at the Monastery of Our Lady of Hynning, Warton, Carnforth, LA5 9SE.

Christine Doyle, Bernardine Oblate



support from my mentor, a Sister whom I first met when she was a schoolgirl of 16, I have kept chickens and cats, taught the piano and generally bumbled along my way to Oblature. Together we explored the Rule of Saint Benedict as applied to us people living outside community. We discussed prayer in our lives, the history of the Order and growth, or otherwise in my spiritual life which could not be separated from practical living. Along the way I made a commitment for one year, then three years and finally for life.

None of this is the exact way any other Oblate will have travelled as each of us has our own individual story but central to us all is the spiritual companionship with God, each other and the Bernardine Sisters.

Reading the Parable of the vine and branches in St John's Gospel, I like to think that Jesus is the vine, the Bernardines are a branch & we Oblates are leaves on the branch. We both receive nourishment from the vine and branch and provide some source of spiritual chlorophyll to complete the circle.





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Know your Faith - What does the Church say about Prayer

*I therefore invite you every
day to seek the Lord, who
wants nothing more than for
you to be truly happy. Foster
an intense and constant
relationship with him in prayer
and, when possible, find
suitable moments in your day
to be alone in his company. If
you do not know how to pray,
ask him to teach you, and ask
your heavenly Mother to pray
with you and for you*

– Pope Benedict XVI



This month we dip into the Catechism of the Catholic Church (*Compendium*) and take a closer look at Prayer. The numerical references relate to paragraphs in the *Compendium*.

560 What is the way of our prayer?
The way of our prayer is Christ because prayer is directed to God our Father but reaches him only if we pray – at least implicitly – in the name of Jesus. His humanity is in effect the only way by the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray to our Father. Therefore liturgical prayers conclude with the formula: *‘Through our Lord Jesus Christ.’*

561 What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Prayer?
Since the Holy Spirit is the interior Master of Christian prayer and *‘we do not know how to pray as we ought’* - *Romans 8:26*, the Church exhorts us to invoke him and implore him on every occasion: *‘Come, Holy Spirit!’*

562 How is the Christian prayer Marian?
Because of her singularly cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church loves to pray to Mary and with Mary, the perfect *‘pray-er’*, and to *‘magnify’* and invoke the Lord with her.

Mary in effect shows us the *‘Way’* who is her Son, the one and only Mediator.

564 How are the Saints guides for prayer?
The Saints are our models of prayer. We also ask them to intercede before the Holy Trinity for us and for the whole world. Their intercession is their most exalted service to God’s plan. In the communion of saints, throughout the history of the Church, there have developed different types of *‘spiritualities’* that teach us how to live and to practice the way of prayer.

565 Who can educate us in prayer?
The Christian family is the first place of education in prayer. Daily family prayer is particularly recommended because it is the first witness to the life of prayer in the Church. Catechists, prayer groups and *‘spiritual direction’* constitute a school of help and prayer.

566 What places are conducive to prayer?
One can pray anywhere but the choice of an appropriate place is not a matter of indifference when it comes to prayer. The church is the proper place for liturgical prayer and Eucharistic adoration. Other places also help one to to pray, such as a *‘prayer corner’* at home, a monastery or a shrine

*Do what you can, and pray for what you cannot,
and so God will grant you the ability to do it*

– St Augustine





It is possible to offer frequent and fervent prayer even at the market place or strolling alone. It is possible also in your place of business, while buying or selling or even while cooking

– St John Chrysostom

577 Why is prayer a battle?

Prayer is a gift of grace but it also presupposes a determined response on our part because those who pray ‘battle’ against themselves, their surroundings and especially the Tempter who does all he can to turn us away from prayer. The battle of prayer is inseparable from progress in the spiritual life. We pray as we live because we live as we pray.

573 Are there objections to prayer?

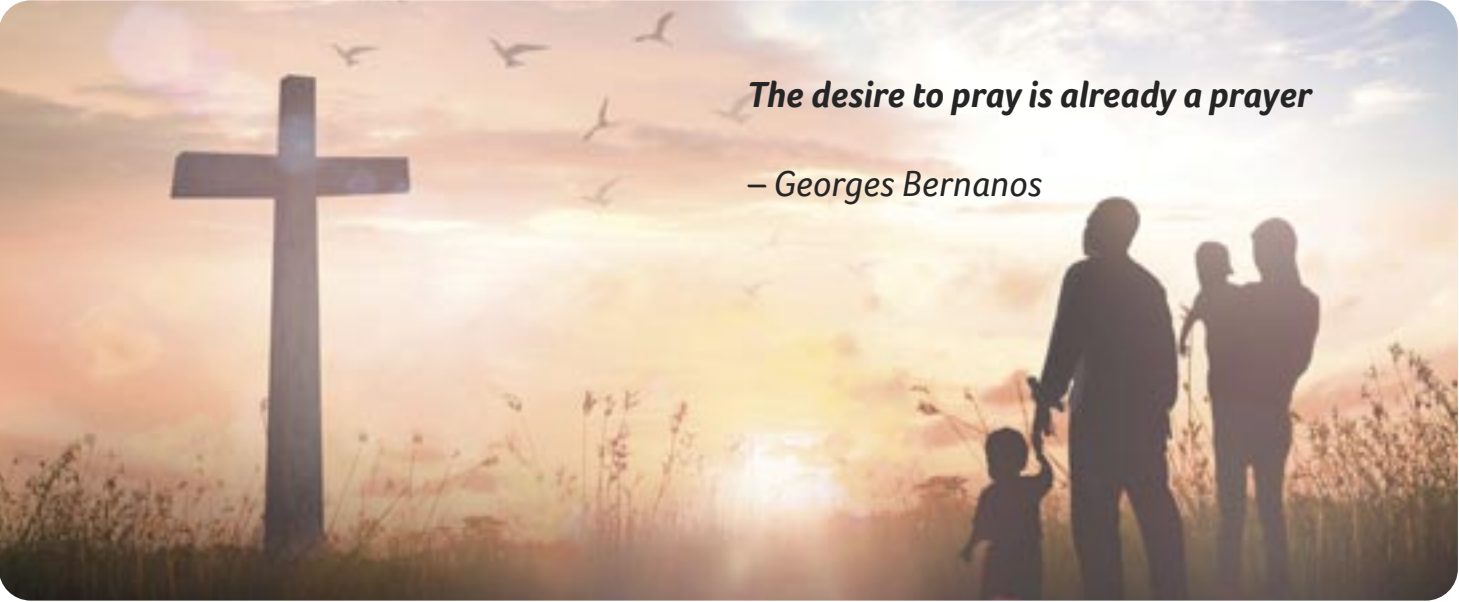
Along with erroneous notions of prayer, many think they do not have the time to pray, or that praying is useless. Those who pray can be discouraged in the face of difficulties and apparent lack of success. Humility, trust and perseverance are necessary to overcome these obstacles.

574 What are the difficulties in prayer?

‘Distraction’ is a habitual difficulty in our prayer. It takes our attention away from God and can also reveal what we are attached to. Our heart therefore must humbly turn to the Lord. Prayer is often affected by ‘dryness’. Overcoming this difficulty allows us to cling to the Lord in faith, even without any feeling of consolation. ‘Acedia’ is a form of spiritual laziness due to relaxed vigilance and a lack of custody of the heart.

576 Is it possible to pray always?

Praying is always possible because the time of the Christian is the time of the risen Christ who remains ‘with us always’ – Matthew 28:20. Prayer and Christian life are therefore inseparable.



The desire to pray is already a prayer

– Georges Bernanos



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The Spirituality of Venerable Mother Mary Joseph of Jesus CP *In Saeculo* Elizabeth Prout

Venerable Mother Mary Joseph of Jesus CP
(Elizabeth Prout)



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In the last edition of the *Catholic Voice* we reported that Fr. Ignatius Spencer had been declared Venerable by Pope Francis, here Sr. Dominic Savio CP provides more background into the relationship of Venerable Mother Mary Joseph CP with Fr. Spencer:

Blessed Dominic Barberi CP arrived in Aston Hall near Stone on 17 February 1842. From 27 November 1842 he celebrated Sunday Mass in Stone, preached on the Catholic Faith and gave instructions to converts. Elizabeth Prout, living nearby, could have become a Catholic at any time from late 1842. In December 1846 Father George Spencer entered the Passionist novitiate in Aston Hall. He and Elizabeth had certainly met by 2 May 1848 when Father Ignatius, as he then was, mentioned her in the Aston Baptismal Register as having been the godmother of a baby he baptised in the Stone workhouse. On 4 August 1848 Blessed Dominic appointed Father Ignatius Superior in Aston Hall, so that it is possible that he then became Elizabeth's Confessor. Before Blessed Dominic died on 27 August 1849, he appointed Ignatius as interim Provincial. By then, however, Elizabeth had experienced life in the Northampton convent, had become ill and, having recovered, was planning to enter a convent in Belgium.

In the meantime, however, on the recommendation of Father Gaudentius Rossi CP, she went to teach in Manchester. There, in partnership with

Father Gaudentius and Father Robert Croskell of St Chad's, she founded the Sisters of the Holy Family. It was Father Ignatius who gave Father Gaudentius permission to collaborate with them in that way. From then, as Venerable Ignatius told her Sisters in July 1864, several months after Venerable Mother Mary Joseph's death, he 'worked for her' and was 'mixed up with all her affairs'. On 24 October 1853 he visited her and her Sisters in Manchester during their fever crisis. In early January 1854, at the request of Father Gaudentius, he gave them a Retreat, the first real one they had had, at Newton Heath, Manchester, where they were still recovering from fever. Writing to his cousin, Mrs Canning on 4 January 1854 he testified that the Sisters were young women who wanted to become Religious but because of their lack of money could not enter the existing Congregations which required a dowry. They were supporting themselves by taking in needlework, dressmaking etc. besides teaching in schools, with the approval of Bishop William Turner of Salford. Venerable Father Ignatius thought that despite the struggles of infancy they would spread widely. He thus testified to Venerable Mary Joseph's option for the poor and for Religious Life. He also testified to his confidence in her as the Foundress. On her side she wrote to Father Gaudentius to tell him 'of the good Father Ignatius had done amongst the Sisters'. Father Ignatius also entered into his Mission and Retreat Book that he 'had good reason to be satisfied and highly interested with the result of



Blessed Dominic Barberi



Ven Fr Ignatius Spencer

the Retreat' and he testified to their contemplative lifestyle, to Elizabeth's spiritual leadership and to their fervour during the Retreat. Venerable Elizabeth's spiritual leadership was obviously good. In June 1855, at the request of Father Gaudentius, Venerable Father Ignatius gave the Sisters another Retreat. His comments again testify to Mother Mary Joseph's own spirituality as he had been

'greatly struck with the progress in spiritual life and virtue which was to be seen in the Community generally since he was with them before.'

He was particularly pleased with the individual conferences he had had with the Sisters and especially with the two Superiors, Venerable Mother Mary Joseph and Mother Mary Paul Taylor. Moreover the Congregation was growing numerically under Mother Mary Joseph's spiritual leadership. Venerable Ignatius also testified to her own personal search for holiness.

When Father Gaudentius was leaving for America in 1855 he asked Father Ignatius to take his place with the Sisters, as, he told Mother Mary Joseph, he *'had great confidence in him – and full confidence in his personal virtue or rather extraordinary sanctity.'*

As soon as Father Gaudentius had departed, Venerable Father Ignatius

visited Bishop Turner, Father Croskell and each Sister in all four convents privately to discuss their spiritual welfare and to hear Confessions.

Similarly when Father Ignatius returned from a long period on the Continent in 1856 he again visited each Sister and gave a short Retreat in Levenshulme. Then he had to leave for Ireland where he sought postulants for her Congregation. He did not forget Venerable Mother Mary Joseph's own spirituality. Writing to her on 11 January 1857 he encouraged her to seek sanctity.

'Do not disappoint the expectation of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph, of the Church, of the Institute, of Father Gaudentius and, let me add, of poor myself'

and she replied that it was her *'sincere will and desire to become perfect'* and she *'loved her dear Lord'*. Both her spiritual and physical sufferings were acute. They became even more severe as a Sister involved the Congregation in deep debt; previous benefactors withdrew their support; even Father Croskell abandoned them; and Bishop Turner had to hold an investigation into their affairs. But Venerable Father Ignatius, returning from Rome with instructions to rewrite Father Gaudentius Rossi's Rule, told Mother Mary Joseph, *'Take courage, do you not see that this is the time of trial? The children of*

Blessed Paul did the same ... but God gave others more faithful and worthy, and so He will give you.' He had great confidence in Venerable Mother Mary Joseph. He did all he could to solve her practical difficulties and he held spiritual conferences with all her Sisters. He arranged for her to go to Ireland to beg and possibly to find postulants, as he was doing for her.

In 1862 he rewrote the Rule with her co-operation, making it a distinctly Passionist Rule and he assisted her in opening a new foundation in Ashton-under-Lyne. In 1863 he took the revised Rule to Rome and obtained the approbation of the Holy See. Venerable Mother Mary Joseph was *'completely beside herself with joy'*, when she received his letter with that news and

'having read it for her dear children, who were also greatly rejoiced, they went to the chapel to make a thanksgiving to Our Dear Lord.'

By August 1863, however, Mother Mary Joseph had developed consumption. Venerable Father Ignatius returned to Sutton. By October there was no hope of her recovery but as Ignatius told Bishop Turner, she was in *'happy dispositions'*. The Bishop arranged for the General Chapter to be held as he and everyone wanted her to be elected as the first Superioress General, as, of course, she was and in *'full vigour for her office'*.

She continued to conduct the business of the Congregation but by the end of November *'she was sinking'*. On 3 January 1864, the birthday of St Paul of the Cross, as Venerable Father Ignatius celebrated Mass in the Sutton convent, he recalled all that God had done for the Congregation and his own great zeal and affection for it. Thus he paid a great tribute to Venerable Mother Mary Joseph. He heard what was possibly her last Confession on 9 January. Then he had to go away but he returned to Sutton in the afternoon of 11 January. When about 5 p.m. the Sisters realised she was dying, they sent for him. As he entered the room to give her a last Absolution and Blessing, she turned and recognised him with a grateful glance.

Then, as Venerable Father Ignatius gave her a final Blessing, Venerable Mother Mary Joseph peacefully and calmly breathed her last.

Mother Mary Joseph of Jesus (Elizabeth Prout) CP was declared 'Venerable' by Pope Francis on 21 January 2021 and Father Ignatius Spencer CP a month later on 20 February. Father Spencer directly and Mother Mary Joseph indirectly, through her Sisters of the Cross and Passion, have both had enormous influence on St Peter's Parish, Lytham and, through the CP Sisters, also on Fleetwood, Cleveleys and St Annes-on-Sea. *Sister Dominic Savio CP**

* Historian, Cause for the Beatification of Venerable Mother Mary Joseph, Elizabeth Prout.

St John of the Cross –



Biography

St John of the Cross (1542-1591) was born and brought up in extreme poverty. He joined the Carmelite order, and was on the brink of leaving for the Carthusians when he met St Teresa of Avila who persuaded him to remain and reform the male branch of the Order. Attracting the envy of his brothers who objected to the Reform, he was abducted and imprisoned. It was in prison that he wrote some of his finest mystical poetry. His insights on the dark night of the soul and dryness in prayer, are a great help and comfort to many.

Teaching

St John teaches that we go to God by two means: mortification and prayer. St John's teaching on the first – the way of self-abnegation – is an application of Our Lord's teaching to deny oneself daily (Lk 9.23). He wants us to extinguish every appetite however small, since these frivolous attachments (*even to trifles*) impede union with God. A little bird is as unable to fly – he explains – if it tied to a fine thread, as if it were attached to a thick cord. It is for the joy and beauty that

attends a deep relationship with the Lord that John wants this freedom for us, and urges on us the renunciations which are the means of attaining it.

The principal need for the soul that seeks God is solitude. John invites us to enter our inner room to pray to Our Father, and to 'shut the door' on all the memories, and distractions, and selfish preoccupations that can get in the way. John, like Teresa, teaches us to discern and to use those things that help us to God, but cast aside whatever takes us away from Him.

Meditation

John wishes us to imitate Christ. To imitate Christ, we must get to know Him, and we know Him by reading and pondering the Gospels. Devotion to the humanity of Christ and the love of Scripture is something we never abandon.

John teaches us the true purpose of meditation:

'The end of meditation and mental consideration of divine things is to obtain some knowledge and love of God' (Ascent II, 14.2).

John wants us to have immense desires. He doesn't leave us a method of meditation but the following describes an approach that was used by his novices:

The most important first step in prayer is 'making contact with God', and setting aside all our other preoccupations and personal projects. Without this, the whole enterprise can hardly get off the ground: *'Before reading the material for meditation, we should take great care to put ourselves in the presence of God, seeking by means of an energetic act of the will to put aside all alien thoughts, all preoccupation and haste. 'God is always present to us, but it is we who are not always present to Him.*

Therefore, we must establish contact with Our Lord and place ourselves near Him, by a conscious realization of His presence' (Fr Gabriel, Divine Intimacy, p. 450).

We can put ourselves in the presence of God either by:

- considering the Most Holy Trinity dwelling in our heart,
- or by approaching Jesus in the tabernacle,
- or by picturing to ourselves interiorly a scene from the life or passion of Christ.

We read the Gospel and then speak with God about it, as friend to friend, child to father. As we become aware of the love God has for us, this may lead us into expressions of gratitude, contrition and making resolutions and asking God to help us keep them. Getting into a conversation with the Lord about the subject we are pondering is the main end of meditation.

Indwelling/Recollection

St John of the Cross teaches that God is within a soul in the state of grace through the presence of friendship: *'If anyone loves Me... My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make our home with him' (Jn 14:23).*

'O soul, most beautiful of all creatures, that so greatly desires to know the place where your Beloved is, in order to seek Him and be united with Him... It is a matter of great contentment and joy for you to see that He is so near you as to be within you. Rejoice and be glad in your inward recollection with Him, since you have Him so near. There desire Him, there adore Him, and do not go to seek Him outside yourself' (Spiritual Canticle 1.7,8).

'Dryness' (lack of consolation) leading to the Prayer of 'Loving Attentiveness'

John gives very helpful insights on the state of spiritual dryness, and how this can be a very real gift from God who is drawing us into a deeper form of prayer.

He gives guidance on how to distinguish whether this loss of consolation in prayer comes from infidelity, indisposition (*illness or fatigue*) or attachments, or when it is God inviting us to let go of more discursive meditative approaches to prayer, for a simpler prayer of loving knowledge.

Though it may not feel very satisfying

in reality God is giving the person a very great blessing. The person praying should apply himself or herself *'to remaining calmly in the presence of God attentive to Him by means of a simple glance of faith and love. It should stay there and keep Him company, glad to be with Him, even if it has no feeling of His presence.... It is in contact with God in a way which is substantially better than that which it formerly had'.*

So what do we do in this state?

'Let the soul learn how to be still in God, fixing its loving attention upon Him, in the calm of the understanding though it may think it is doing nothing' (Ascent Book II 15.5).

Fr Gabriel explains *'This loving knowledge of God ... consists in a general, obscure 'sense of God, who secretly enamours the soul, without the assistance of feeling. This is why the soul, especially at first ... has the impression that it is no longer doing anything' (Divine Intimacy, ch. 158).*

It is still good to prepare for prayer, with the Gospels, and begin always by making contact with God. As we become more sensitive, we will have a sense of when we are in the presence of God, albeit in obscurity, and when we are really in the middle of a tenacious distraction and are no longer really praying. At such moments we can pick up the Gospels again. We might 'yoyo' for some time between meditation and this simple glance of love: *'As long as the soul can reason with pleasure in meditation, it should not stop doing so until it is in the peace and quiet ... of loving attentiveness to God' (Ascent II 13:2-4).*

In these times when we feel no love, St John encourages us, then is the time to give Him concrete proofs of love – doing little acts of love, simply to please Him. It is ultimately living the virtues of faith, hope and love that John believes prepare us for contemplative prayer, and unite us to Christ and transform us into Him.

The gains which come from this state are very great. The person becomes much more aware of her poverty and total need of God, more established in a continuous remembrance of God (1 Dark Night 13.4) and enjoys a greater reverence for Him. S/he is less tempted to judge others.

Reading John

Fr Norbert Cummins OCD recommends starting with John's minor works – his Precautions, letters, Sayings and Maxims, and then reading The Spiritual Canticle, before embarking on the Ascent and Dark Night which logically ought to come first. To glimpse the beauty and joy of the journey's end (*transformation in Love and the bliss of union with God*), will mobilise us more readily to undertake the Way of the Cross that takes us to it, doing away, bit by bit, with our self-centredness and all that obstructs our path to God.

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Loving knowledge of God

God is always present to us, but it is we who are not always present to Him.

Prayer

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The Seven Last Words and Beyond

During Lent St. Joseph's Ansdell were able to reflect once a week via Zoom, on the Seven Last Words with Fr. David Burns.

Fr. David reminded us that Jesus was surrounded by hostility. In our world, Jesus is once again surrounded by hostility. The whole of Jesus' ministry was prayer and forgiveness. His words 'Father forgive them' resound now in us, in our lives so that we can bring forgiveness into our world.

And the thief said to Jesus, "Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!" Jesus said to him, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." Others believed because they saw his miracles, heard his words. This man believes in the battered, bruised, bloodied and torn Jesus. Jesus is serene in his love and the Salvation he offers us. We should reach out for it and ask to be put back together again.

Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son. Then to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother. Mary is given to us and we like the disciple must bring Mary to our house. Our role like that of the priest is to stand with Our Lady at the foot of the cross, to look at one another's suffering and share it. There are so many situations where we can't take the suffering away but just stand with the situation or person and follow Mary's instruction 'Do whatever he tells you.'

"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" This is the heart of the mystery and power of the Cross. The Cross is a painful, slow and lingering death. Jesus' suffering literally tears soul and body apart. He came out of love to save us and we reject him and nail him to the cross. So, He suffers a double agony. The Father doesn't save or console him in his humanity, he allows him to suffer. Jesus' love and trust overcomes sin and suffering and we are saved by Jesus' overcoming. Think about the suffering in your own family and how it feels to be rejected by someone you love. Go to the Cross and like Mary stay close to Him.

It is not surprising that Jesus 'thirsts' after what he has been through. He fulfills the scriptures 'Like water, I am poured out'. God thirsts to be thirsted for. God is thirsting for our faith and love. At the Marriage feast at Cana Jesus says 'My hour has not yet come'. Now the hour of Jesus' glorification has come, what do we give? - Sour wine [vinegar] in place of an abundance of the best wine. Wine from the Cross is flowing, but it won't flow if we don't believe. We have to bring what we've got and God will take it and make it fruitful.

"It is finished." In Hebrew tradition on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest offers a special sacrifice, he kills an animal, and emerges to say 'it is finished'. All sins are placed on the animal and thereby removed. Jesus is telling us all our sins

are remitted to-day and every day. The Mass makes present Jesus' sacrifice and Christ's words continue in time. At Mass, we renew the covenant with God and one another. We thank God and pray to make Jesus present to our world.

Jesus commends his spirit into his Father's hands and dies. He commends all men to God so when we die we are being commended into the Father's hands. We come from God and go back to God. This is our destiny.

The Youth Stations of the Cross
Throughout Lent we were able to walk the Way of the Cross in Ansdell. The route was just under 3 km long and took about half an hour to walk not counting any stops for prayer. The Stations were beautifully portrayed by the young members of the parish and years 7 and 8 of St. Bede's High School. They were printed in a lightweight but sturdy A5 format in colour and hosted by the Well Church, St. Joseph's Church and 12 gardens mostly on trees or gates or gateposts. A map and GPS coordinates were provided as a guide. We are very grateful to the artists, and all the hosts including Churches Together in Ansdell.

We have no way of knowing how many people walked the Way of the Cross. We do know that a friendly van driver gave directions and a postman stopped and asked what it was all about. One escapee Station was recovered by a friendly dog

and dog walker who happened to have walked the Stations herself. They stayed up in the wind and rain and at times gathered groups of people in prayer. They are far less formal than those featured in the church and in their simplicity very direct and thought provoking. They will now be hung in St. Joseph's Church Hall (our original church). **Wanda Kruszynska**



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