



Prayer Diary

March 2021

“If I was enjoying anything, I could give it up for Lent”

A cartoon from a few weeks ago was captioned with the above quote.

‘If I was enjoying anything, I could give it up for Lent.’ Most of us, by now, will be familiar - if not a little bit fed up - with neat comparisons between lockdown and Lent, or of the idea that last year’s Lent never really finished, or of the fact that the word ‘quarantine’ has its roots in the Venetian for ‘forty days.’ And yet, we are repeatedly told, with all due respect to our friend from the cartoon, that Lent is about so much more than giving things up. But the real stumbling block, for me, is not so much in the second half of the cartoonist’s quip, but in the first. For what do you have left to enjoy, if not God himself? And what better season to open ourselves to the possibilities of this enjoyment, than Lent itself? For Augustine, God is the supreme object of our enjoyment. It’s perhaps just as well, therefore, that our friend from the cartoon is not especially enjoying God at present, otherwise he might be inclined to give him up for Lent.

Admittedly, we’ve been deprived of many of the ways in which we might see ourselves as ‘enjoying’ God: church, community, live music. But spare a thought as well for the ‘hypocrites’ Jesus talks about in Matthew 6, who, owing to Covid restrictions, can no longer give alms ‘in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others’ (6:2). They’ve had to move online, for better or for worse.

The hypocrites, we are told, ‘disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting’ (6:16). Jesus is taking issue here with the performative aspect of their actions, but from a Lenten perspective, the fact that their faces are disfigured at all seems equally out of place: should we not observe Lent with broad smiles and cheerfulness? Lent is nothing if not positive, and God is nothing if not something to be enjoyed, rather than used to our own ends.

To draw direct comparisons between Lent and lockdown, therefore, sometimes risks doing an injustice to both experiences. This year, of all years, let us welcome the season of Lent with gladness. It offers us an opportunity to fulfil the vision of Matthew 6: to build the common good with humility and to encounter God ‘in secret,’ thereby fully enjoying his presence, his eternal truth and his promise of salvation.

Matthew Murphy
Intern to the Bishop of Coventry

The Great Outdoors at Wellesbourne

A highlight in an otherwise difficult COVID-19 hit year at Wellesbourne has been our family outdoor activities. During the summer months, a paddock area behind the vicarage was used for outdoor family services, ‘Paddock Praise’ with families sitting apart on picnic rugs. These fortnightly events attracted families with little or no prior connection to the church. Much fun was to be had, as we played games together such as Pictionary, listened to short snappy messages, prayed creatively and made use of action songs. There was always a lot of laughter, especially on the occasion that the heavens opened - we had to run!



Additionally, at Christmas St Peter’s held a ‘Walk Thru Nativity’ (as also mentioned in the January Prayer Diary) making use of the whole church site, with seven stations. Twenty-four separate family groups (at timed intervals) met the likes of the Shepherds, a Roman Soldier, an Angel then there were Wise Men, Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus (all in costume). This fun event, which took place by lantern light, served to further strengthen our links with young families, especially those who had previously attended Paddock Praise. Each family left with a Christingle kit plus, we hope, a magical experience of the nativity that they will never forget!



The COVID-19 crisis has really caused us as a church to think ‘outside of the box’ we’ve tried new things, not everything has worked but the rewards have been well worth the effort!

Cycle of Prayer - March 2021

With a focus on parishes and schools in Fosse Deanery

Mon 1 Today is Self-Injury Awareness Day. Awareness of self-injury leads to understanding, banishing judgement and fear, and reducing the number of people who suffer in silence. We pray that today raises awareness.
*David, Bishop of Menevia, Patron of Wales, c.601

Tue 2 The Dasset Magna Group of Churches. Clergy: Nicki Chatterton. Reader: John Davies. We pray for God's blessing upon the church members and the local community.
*Chad, Bishop of Lichfield, Missionary, 672

Wed 3 The Edgehill Churches. Clergy: Barry Jackson, Richard Cooke, Beren Hartless. Readers: Peter Ashton, Heidi Cartledge, Alan Hill. We thank God for the way people supported each other through 2020; for the teams that kept the foodbank running and for the networks of volunteers helping in our communities. Please pray for wisdom as we return to worship in church.

Thu 4 Alveston CofE Primary School, Tiddington. Headteacher: Anne Clewley. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.

Fri 5 This week is Eating Disorders Awareness Week. This is an international awareness event, fighting the myths that surround anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder and EDNOS. 1.25 million people in the UK live with an eating disorder and this number is rising. We pray for people living with eating disorders that they receive the help and support they need.

Sat 6 Hampton Lucy CofE Primary School & Nursery, Hampton Lucy, Warwick. Headteacher: Margaret Lunnon. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.

Sun 7 Barford, Sherbourne, Wasperton, Charlecote, Hampton Lucy and Loxley. Clergy: Andy Larkin, John Horton. Readers: Ann Fawcett, Chris Farr, Malcolm Dawson. We thank God that we were able to bring our communities together and worship in our buildings at Christmas. Please pray for wisdom as we look to serve our villages.
Third Sunday of Lent

Mon 8 We pray for International Women's Day: #ChooseToChallenge
*Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln, 1910
*Felix, Bishop, Apostle to the East Angles, 647
*Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, Priest, Poet, 1929

Tue 9 Yesterday was International Women's Day. More than a century after the day was first launched, much more needs to be done to protect and free millions of women from the inequality they face every day. Many women across the world face pay discrimination, sexual harassment, denial of the right to education, and violence. We pray for equality among all people.

Wed 10 Shotton St Andrew's CofE Primary School, Stratford upon Avon. Headteacher: Sarah Marshall. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.

Thu 11 Stratford upon Avon, Luddington and Clifford Chambers. Clergy: Patrick Taylor, Steve Jarvis, Kay Dyer. Reader and Children and Families Minister: Phil Harper. We thank God for new contacts we have made through online services and outreach. As we prepare to open Holy Trinity church again to visitors please pray for the teams of volunteers who will welcome them.

Fri 12 St.Peter's CofE Primary School, Barford, Warwick. Headteacher: Mary Baker. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.

Sat 13 Wellesbourne CofE Primary and Nursery School, Wellesbourne, Warwickshire. Headteacher: Lindsey Oscroft. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.

Sun 14 On this Mothering Sunday, we pray particularly for those who have lost their mothers, those who never knew their mothers and those who have had difficult relationships with their mothers.
Mothering Sunday

Mon 15 Walton d'Eivile with Wellesbourne. Clergy: Greg Bartlem, Wendy Biddington, Barry Coleman. Readers: Richard Bacon, Paul Gifford, Tina Lamb. We pray for God's blessing upon the church members and the local community.
We pray for the Diocesan Business Committee which meets this morning.

Tue 16

St Andrew, Shotton. Clergy: Craig Grocock, Paul Edmondson, Michael Stewart. Readers: Sarah Cushing, Jan Walker. We give thanks for the appointment of Mike Stewart. Please pray for Mike's ministry and growth as he prepares for priesting. We pray for church life post Covid and for the development of our digital worship and online community

Wed 17

We thank God for all the clergy in our diocese who serve in rural parishes. We pray for the Diocesan Board of Education which meets today.
*Patrick, Bishop, Missionary, Patron of Ireland, c.460

Thu 18

Kineton CofE Primary School, Kineton, Warwickshire. Headteacher: Margaret Pollard. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
We pray for the Bishop's Core Staff Team which meets today.
*Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, Teacher of the Faith, 386

Fri 19

Joseph of Nazareth

This month we are invited to remember women affected by Ovarian Cancer, those who care for them, and those seeking to treat the disease. We pray for greater awareness of the disease and the often 'silent' symptoms so that many more women can be treated early and successfully.

Sat 20

We pray for all the schools in the diocese as they journey through Lent and prepare to celebrate Easter.
We pray for Diocesan Synod which meets today.
*Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne, Missionary, 687

Sun 21

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Loxley CofE Primary School, Loxley, Warwickshire. Headteacher: Emma Barrick. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.
*Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Reformation Martyr, 1556

Mon 22

Today is World Water Day. Billions of people across the world are living without safe water. Marginalized groups including women, children, refugees, disabled people and many others often face discrimination as they try to access safe water. We thank you God for the gift of water to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life and pray that safe water would be available for all.

Tue 23

Alveston. Clergy: Richard Williams, Mike Harris, Richard Smith. We are pray for all that we do with the children outdoors when possible and continue to pray and support our Childrens and Families worker, Claire Grimes, in all the imaginative ways she engages with our families. We pray for the Churchwardens & PCC as they go into interregnum later this year.

Wed 24

Mid-Fosse Parishes. Clergy: Lynda Lilley. Readers: Gillian Jones, Richard Woodfin. We pray for God's blessing upon the church members and the local community.
We pray for the Clergy Safeguarding Study Day taking place today.
*Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, Martyr, 1980

Thu 25

We pray for all who care for and steward God's wonderful creation. At this time of spring renewal, we pray for all farmers and shepherds who are spending long hours watching over and caring for their animals as they bring forth new life. We give thanks for their skill, dedication and patience.
We pray for the Glebe Committee which meets this afternoon.

Fri 26

Moreton Morrell CofE Primary School, Moreton Morrell, Warwick. Headteacher: Sarah Eadon. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.

Sat 27

We thank God for the provision of the Mission Fund and for the support it has offered to many churches and deaneries in their projects and efforts in mission. We pray for continued access to support, and enthusiasm for making new disciples in all areas of this diocese.

Sun 28

Palm Sunday

This week is Debt Awareness Week. This week is all about encouraging people to act early on the problem of debt. We give thanks for charities like Christians Against Poverty (CAP) who work to release people from debt. We pray for CAP's debt counselling, community groups and work with churches.

Mon 29

Monday of Holy Week

We thank God for the buildings and spaces he has entrusted to as places of worship. We ask God to help us steward these spaces well.
We pray for those who serve in local and national government. We thank God for their commitment and drive for a better society.

Tue 30

Tuesday of Holy Week

Holy Trinity CofE Primary School, Stratford upon Avon. Headteacher: Jo Herrero. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors in this school community.

Wed 31

Wednesday of Holy Week

The Dasset CofE School, Fenny Compton. Headteacher: Suzanne Corry. We pray for God's blessing upon the pupils, teachers, staff and governors.
*John Donne, Priest, Poet, 1631

Inside Out

How have congregations managed under COVID restrictions? 'Congregation' – now there's a word we look forward to using again (when congregating is off the illegal activity list).

Churches blessed with technology (or able to rustle it up pronto) have conveyed services online, of course. Some have sadly not been in that position. But in sharing experiences of how some Fosse deanery parishes have continued worship, fellowship, even outreach, a common theme emerges of taking the message beyond our walls, and going OUTDOORS.



The rural nature of much of Fosse deanery can prove useful – eg St Peter's in Wellesbourne holding their 'Paddock Praise' in summer (see the separate article), and in December walk-through scenes that recalled the barely-sheltered first Nativity. At Holy Trinity in Stratford-on-Avon, another walk-through idea enabled parishioners to experience Christmas at church by processing through it, with displays, lighting, floral decoration and carol-singing by the choir conveying the spiritual atmosphere and significance of the celebration. Visitors could pre-book, outdoor queueing was measured out, so that in a carefully planned and safe way the grounds and church interior could be utilised.

In Shotton, parishioners marked Pentecost by making a bright bunting of 'flames', strung across St Andrew's hedged frontage on a popular route for daily exercise (particularly during that hot, blue-sky May). Information about Pentecost and significance of the 'flames' was posted on the noticeboard for walkers to read.

Children have often been the ones to miss out since services went online. This February (2021) Shotton's young 'Illumin8' group has set a 'Heart Trail' around the church grounds – with home-made hearts (drawn, sewn, knitted) hung out or hidden around the grounds, together with a QR code quiz.

Such ideas make the Gospel's message more accessible to church-shy locals, and bear witness that faith and worship continue. Our noticeboards proclaim: 'The Church isn't a building', but churchyards can have their uses.



Holy Trinity commemorates St Thomas Beckett

On 9 September 2020, Covid-19 notwithstanding, Holy Trinity's Revd. Patrick Taylor opened a new St. Thomas Becket exhibition with prayers and a blessing and later, on 22 November a commemorative sermon was broadcast by Canon Dr. Tim Naish from Canterbury Cathedral, starting by the tomb of John de Stratford.



2020 marked the 850th anniversary of the brutal murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral on 29 December 1170; it was also the 800th of the Translation (relocation) of his remains from the cathedral's crypt to a magnificent shrine in its Trinity Chapel on 7 July 1220. Canonised within three years of his murder, Becket became a saintly medieval superstar, with Canterbury a focus of pilgrimage throughout Europe, surpassed only by Rome and Santiago de Compostela, and ensuring him an enduring international celebrity.

Holy Trinity also became a focus of medieval pilgrimage, to the chantry chapel of St. Thomas Becket in the south aisle of the nave, built in 1331 by John de Stratford, then Bishop of Winchester. He was later made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1333 and narrowly escaped a similar fate to Becket. Hence Canon Naish's acknowledgement of de Stratford, and the inclusion of the history of Holy Trinity's Becket Chapel and world-wide pilgrimage in the exhibition, project managed by Dr. Lindsay MacDonald, who also provided the images.

The bold, impressive display boards, designed by Orion Johnson, were supplemented by a beautiful watercolour of the church's Becket chapel, imagined in its medieval heyday by local artist, Janet Hall. Both generously volunteered their time and creative gifts to the project. Their contributions can be viewed, with Canon Naish's sermon and associated articles researched and written by Sandra MacDonald on the Holy Trinity website (www.stratford-upon-avon.org).

A Trinity Players production of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, directed by Ursula Russell, is sadly postponed until the church re-opens.