

PARISH OF ARDSTRAW WEST AND CASTLEDERG

St Mary's, Dregish · St Patrick's, Castlederg · St Francis of Assisi, Drumnabey

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SUNDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2021 – SIXTH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

GOSPEL: MARK 1: 40-45 – JESUS, FRIEND OF OUTCASTS

ASH WEDNESDAY, the first day of Lent, is on Wednesday of this week. It is a day of fast and abstinence. We will not be able to have the distribution of Ashes this year. This is a diocesan-wide decision, taken in the interests of everyone's safety and in keeping with the current restrictions. **Masses on Ash Wednesday will be celebrated in St Patrick's, Castlederg, at 7.30pm, and in St Patrick's, Aghyaran, at 10.00am.**

Additional Masses for Lent: St Patrick's, Castlederg, each Saturday morning at 10.00am; St Patrick's, Aghyaran, each Wednesday morning, at 10.00am. See full Mass schedule below. All our Masses continue to be live-streamed.

Trócaire Lenten Campaign: The main focus of our almsgiving during Lent is the Trócaire Lenten Campaign. Trócaire Boxes will be available in our churches this week – you can pick one up at your convenience.

MASS SCHEDULE

Weekend Masses in St Patrick's, Castlederg:

Vigil 6.00pm (every Saturday)

Sunday 11.00am (2nd & 4th Sundays of the month - 14 & 28 February)

Weekday Masses:

Monday: 7.30pm, Ash Wednesday: 7.30pm, Friday: 10.00am and Saturday (every Saturday during Lent): 10.00am

**You are invited to participate in our Masses on the parish webcam:
www.castledergparish.com**

Masses in Aghyaran are also livestreamed on www.parishofaghyaran.com:

Sunday Masses: Vigil 7.30pm, Sunday morning 11.00am (1st & 3rd Sundays of the month - 21 Feb & 7 March).

Weekday Masses in Aghyaran:

Tuesday: 10.00am, Ash Wednesday: 10.00am, Thursday 10.00am

Our churches continue to remain open for private prayer. Prayer is one of the three traditional pillars of Lenten observance (along with fasting and almsgiving). Two things Scripture tells us of Jesus' prayer life are that He sometimes went off to pray alone and that He prayed regularly. As we enter the Sacred Season of Lent with our churches closed for public worship, you are invited to come along to the church, regularly if you can, at a time that suits you, for private prayer. You are welcome to light a candle for your prayer intentions.

WALKING THE VIA DOLOROSA (THE WAY OF THE CROSS) WITH JESUS: We will journey with Jesus in a short liturgy **each Friday evening of Lent, starting this Friday (19th), at 7.30pm**, in which you are invited to participate via our parish webcam. The theme of this Friday evening's liturgy will be *'The agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane'*

THANK YOU for your generosity in last week's collection which amounted to £1,483 and €50. Your ongoing financial support of the parish is very much appreciated. Envelopes can continue to be left through the door of the Parochial House. Thank you also to those who contribute by Standing Order.

THANK YOU to all who joined in a very special nine days of prayer for the sick, in our Novena to Our Lady of Lourdes. They will bring many blessings on all those for whom we prayed. Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF ABUSE will be celebrated this Friday, 19 February (the First Friday of Lent). This Day is an initiative of Pope Francis and was first marked in Irish dioceses and parishes in 2017. The bishops of Ireland have blessed and dedicated Candles of Atonement for use in cathedrals and parishes throughout the country on the Day and thereafter during the celebration of Mass and other liturgies. If you can visit a church on Friday, you are invited to light a 'Candle of Atonement' for all who have been hurt.

Candle of Atonement Prayer

Lord, forgive us our many sins.

We grieve and repent with all our hearts for having offended you,
for our great failings and neglect of the young and vulnerable.

We place all of those who have been hurt by the Church in any way
into your loving hands and under the protection of Our Blessed Mother.

Lord, bring peace to their broken lives and show us all the way out of darkness and into the light of your Word.

May we as the people of God be more fully human, more fully Christ-like and more fully your people,
that we may see the errors of the past and go forward with renewed hope and faith in Christ and in our Church. Amen.

VIRTUAL LOUGH DERG PILGRIMAGE: Bishop McKeown invites those who can to join him by webcam from St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry, on Friday (19 February) for a 24-hour period of prayer and penance (similar to the Virtual Pilgrimage of the first weekend of Lent last year). In stating that it is fitting to hold this time of prayer and penance on the World Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse, the bishop said he proposes "to mirror some of the key elements of the centuries-old Lough Derg pilgrimage." Fast starts at 12midnight on Thursday 18 February (finishing after 6am Mass on Saturday). The 24-hour Vigil starts at 6.00am on Friday, with Morning Prayer. For those interested in participating, full details of the virtual pilgrimage can be found on <https://www.derrydiocese.org/news/day-of-prayer>

KNOCK SHRINE – ONLINE LENTEN PROGRAMME: Knock Shrine is hosting a series of online discussions on the Thursday nights of Lent, at 8.30pm. Under the title 'Living Christian Faith – Lenten Conversations', there will be a different theme each week. *Where do we find hope and joy in our lives? How can our faith build mental strength, wellbeing and resilience? How has the Covid pandemic impacted upon our faith?* These are just some of the questions that will be explored over the six weeks. Join in on www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live or on Facebook @knockshrine

ST VINCENT DE PAUL: SVP members encourage those in need of help or anyone who is struggling in any way, especially as a result of the pandemic, to call them. Do not suffer in despair: call the helpline now in the strictest confidence, 02871384488. Here to help you!

THE NET: The February edition of The Net is now available to download on www.derrydiocese.org. You can also access it on our parish Facebook page. As always, it is full of interesting news, articles, interviews and photos.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURES: Next Sunday, 21 February, is the First Sunday of Lent. The Gospel we will listen to is St Mark 1:12-15: *'Jesus prays in the wilderness for forty days'*. You can access the Readings on: www.catholicbishops.ie/readings - or in your bible!

Going off ashes this Lent

There's something about Ash Wednesday that seems to draw us in. People who don't go to church regularly still like to 'get their ashes'. What is so important about smearing our foreheads with a black cross-shaped smudge? There is nothing magical about it. It doesn't change me inside. So, why do we bother?

In the 20 years I spent teaching in Catholic schools I had to sit through so many staff training days about developing the Catholic ethos. It really came to be something of an irritation, because nobody ever seemed to be able to put their finger on precisely what the 'Catholic ethos' is supposed to mean. Eight years before I retired from teaching, I went to work in a school in the South of England. It had the kindest, most dedicated staff and we took wonderful care of our students and of each other. But it wasn't a Catholic school - and in those eight years I learned more about the Catholic ethos than I had managed to learn in the previous twenty. I learned about it because it wasn't there. I missed the community gatherings; I missed the celebration of the great feasts of Easter and Christmas and the wonderful seasons of Lent and Advent. I missed the activities we put together to raise funds for the third world and the way we pulled together to help people in far off lands who were affected by earthquakes and tsunamis. I missed the welcome that we gave to visitors and the way we supported those in our community who were affected by illness or bereavement. I only came to appreciate the Catholic ethos because it wasn't there.

Perhaps this year, as we begin Lent by celebrating Ash Wednesday without ashes, we might come to a deeper understanding of the purpose of Lent. The ashes merely point towards the deeper signs of repentance, renewal, and reconciliation (the three 'R's). These three 'R's yield the fruits of the Spirit in our life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Imagine how much better our homes and our world would be if we all made choices that encouraged life in the Spirit. As we make our Lenten promises, we must try to ensure that they make us better people and draw us closer to God and to each other. There is no merit in going off chocolate for Lent in the hope that I will lose weight (I've tried it, and it doesn't work). In denying myself something that I love on the outside, I am making a statement that my love of God is more valuable than my love of chocolate; and the money that I would have spent on those things can be used to help buy food, clean water or a Covid-19 vaccine for someone living in a developing country. My little sacrifices help me to grow and help others at the same time.

So, although I can't begin this Lent by being marked with ashes, I can commit to creating a sacred space at home. I am going to put into my sacred space a cross made of palm (which was sent to every home last year) and a Trócaire Box (that can be picked up from the porch of our churches). As we journey through the next 40 days we can use this sacred space to remind ourselves to make God and the needs of others more central in our lives. I hope that you will join me on this journey and make this (very unusual) Lent a time of Repentance, Renewal and Reconciliation. I will share ideas with you for prayer, study and discussion using the parish Facebook page and I pray that this will truly be a journey to new life at Easter for us and all those whom we love.

Wishing you a blessed Lent. Fr Paul

St Valentine's Day is celebrated today. The following Valentine Prayer is taken from the Family Prayer Book:

I said a Valentine prayer for you and asked the Lord above
To fill your heart and bless your soul with the precious gift of love.
I asked him for sincere love, the kind that's meant to stay,
Just like the generous love You give to those You touch each day.
I prayed for love from family and for every cherished friend,
Then I asked the Lord to give you His love that knows no end. ***St Valentine, pray for us.***