

PARISH OF ARDSTRAW WEST AND CASTLEDERG

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

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SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2020

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: GOSPEL: ST MARK 13:33-37 'STAY AWAKE'

This First Sunday of Advent is the first day of the new liturgical year – Year B – when we will listen, most Sundays, to the Gospel of St Mark. Advent gets its name from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning 'coming' or 'arrival'.

In December, our immediate thoughts might be on Christmas and, of course, it is Christmas, the celebration and the wonder of the birth of Jesus, our Saviour, that our Catholic faith asks us to prepare for, in our hearts and minds, during this Advent season. The preparation of which the Gospel speaks today, however, is for the coming of the Lord at the end of time, when He will take all creation to Himself. Jesus tells us to 'Stay Awake' - to be ready! In effect, we are called to live our daily lives to the best of our ability, guided by Scripture and prayer, and nourished by the Eucharist so that when the time comes, we will, one day, earn a place in God's heavenly kingdom.

We pray today that we will use well the opportunities that the prayerful Season of Advent provides for spiritual growth so that, as we journey together in hope, we will be a watchful people, well prepared for the Christmas celebrations.

ADVENT BOOKLET – FOR PERSONAL AND FAMILY PRAYER IN YOUR HOME

As you prepare for Christmas at home, I invite all our parishioners to pick up a free copy of the ADVENT booklet – from the churches, or from Dinny McCrory's shop.

This booklet contains many ideas for personal and family prayer during this holy season of Advent.

SUNDAY MASSES:

Vigil, Saturday, 6.00pm – live-streamed from Castlederg

Sunday Morning, 11.00am – live-streamed from Castlederg

WEEKDAY MASSES:

Monday: 7.30pm – live-streamed from St Patrick's, Castlederg

Tuesday and Thursday: 10.00am – live-streamed from St Patrick's, Aghyaran

First Friday: 10.00am – live-streamed from St Patrick's, Castlederg

Live-streaming: www.castledergparish.com or www.parishofaghyaranparish.com

Unfortunately, for the next two weeks, we are unable to have a congregation present at Mass. However, the Churches WILL ALL BE OPEN at the usual times, other than when Mass is being celebrated. Please feel free to come and pray or to light a candle. We urge all parishioners, when entering and leaving the church, to use the hand sanitiser provided, and to wear a face covering if possible when in the church.

ST VINCENT DE PAUL collection: Normally at this time of year the local SVP members organise a 'church gate' collection. This year, in support the invaluable work done in our community by SVP, we have introduced an envelope to the parish envelope boxes to facilitate your contributions. The envelope is in your envelope box for next Sunday, 6 December. You are asked to be as generous as you can towards this collection. Your financial support, particularly at this time of year, is very much appreciated.

THANK YOU - I take this opportunity to offer sincere thanks to the SVP members in our parish for their ongoing good work in helping people in our community who are in need.

The helpline number for SVP locally is 028 7138 4488.

THANK YOU for your generosity in last week's collection, which amounted to £1,489. Collection envelopes can continue to be left through the door of the Parochial House.

CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICE: Sadly, this year, we are not able to enjoy worship and carols together for the switching on of the lights in the Diamond but, not to be defeated, the local clergy got together last week at the *Once in Royal David's City* garden at Aghyaran, to record a special service. This has now been published on social media.

CHILDREN IN CROSSFIRE 2020 Advent Appeal: Boxes are now available at the door of Castlederg and Drumnabey churches. This focus of this year's campaign is building hand washing and sanitation facilities for 700 schools in Tanzania, to help keep up to 80,000 children each year safe from disease.

DREGISH COMMUNITY GROUP Covid-19 safe visit by Santa, at St Eugene's Hall, Sun 13 December, at 3.30pm, for the local children. Children and parents will remain in their car and Santa will give the children a gift. Please let us know by tomorrow if you and your child(ren) intend to come along. Contact 07887756084 or dregish@aol.com

THE NEW CHURCH (LITURGICAL) YEAR starts today, on the First Sunday of Advent. It is Year B. We will listen, most Sundays, to the Gospel of St Mark. While Mark's Gospel is presented in the Bible as the second of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John), it is believed to be the first written of the four Gospels (thought to have been written between 50 - 70 AD). It is the shortest of the Gospels, with just 16 chapters. Mark's Gospel tells of the ministry of Jesus, from His baptism by John the Baptist to His death and burial and the discovery of the empty tomb. Presenting Jesus as the Son of God, and the messenger of God, Jesus is pictured by Mark as a man of action and authority. He presents His teachings in a straightforward, vigorous way, with emphasis on what He did, rather than on His words. Mark was not one of the first disciples of Jesus, but he was a companion of Peter (Simon Peter) and, although the book was written by Mark, much of it is thought to be the eye-witness accounts of Peter during Peter's ministry with Jesus. Most importantly, Mark's Gospel gives us a vivid portrayal of authentic discipleship and, as the disciples of today, we are called to apply it to our lives in a practical manner.

SYMBOLISM OF THE ADVENT WREATH

The Advent Wreath draws us to focus on the advent (coming) of the Light of Christ into the world.

- ♦ **The wreath is made of evergreens, signifying everlasting life.**
- ♦ **The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolises the eternity of God, unending love, the immortality of the soul, and the promise of everlasting life in Christ.**

- ♦ **Cones and berries can be used to decorate the wreath, and are symbolic of the fruits of salvation.**

- ♦ **The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent:
(1. Hope, 2. Peace, 3. Joy and 4. Love).**

**They are lit gradually - one each week - drawing us out of darkness into light.
This symbolises not only First Coming of Christ into the world,
but His Second Coming at the end of history.**

- ♦ **Three candles are purple, the penitential colour used in Advent (and Lent).
One candle is rose; it is lit on the third Sunday of Advent,
known as *Gaudete Sunday*, (*Gaudete* meaning *Rejoice*),
symbolising our joyful expectation of the imminent coming of the Light of Christ.**

- ♦ **The white candle in the middle represents Christ, and is lit on Christmas Day.**

NEXT SUNDAY, the Second Sunday of Advent, we will listen to is St Mark 1:1-18: *Prepare a Way for the Lord*. As we start the new liturgical year, you may wish to familiarise yourself with the Word of God before hearing it at Sunday Mass, to give yourself an opportunity to better understand what God is saying to us in the Sunday Scriptures. If you are interested in looking at the Scripture Readings in advance of Sunday Mass, you can access them on website: www.catholicbishops.ie/readings. (The weekday readings are also available on this site).

"Lockdown 2.0"

Over the next two weeks we are not permitted to have a congregation in attendance at Mass. In spite of this, I hope that you will join with me as Mass is streamed live from St Patrick's, Castlederg. You are invited to make an act of Spiritual Communion at the time when Holy Communion would usually be distributed. Below is a copy of the prayer I will lead:

ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

**My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.**

I continue to be available during the next two weeks and, although I am not permitted to make routine house visits, I will be glad to visit the sick in case of emergency. In these circumstances, I will take every precaution to keep you and your family safe.