



The Catholic Parish of Saint Gregory the Great Northampton



PART OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON, REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 234091

OUR
VISION

**“A truly thriving Catholic community
confidently and humbly proclaiming the
Good News of Jesus Christ.”**

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VISION

On the choice of Hymns

In the psalms we find the expression ‘New song’ or its equivalent six times, in such words as “O sing to the Lord a new song” (Psalm 96:1). Sadly, for many congregations, a new song is the very last thing they want to sing. It is reported that there are congregations with a repertoire of about twelve hymns which are used over and over again. Most other congregations would find such a limited choice boring in the extreme, but there are those who resent ‘modern’ hymns, and there are those who dislike most ‘traditional’ hymns.

Most of us have our favourite hymns, and probably also some we detest, but there is no accounting for taste, and there would be no general consensus of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ hymns.

Hymns have two components by which they can achieve popularity or not; the words and the tune. A hymn with good words set to a difficult tune might never be sung; sometimes hymns with terrible words can become popular because they have the advantage of a good tune.

It is the words of hymns that should drive their choice, and the best of hymns (words) are, in themselves poems and valuable spiritual writings. Last Monday we sang words written by Charles Wesley, and published in 1762.

O thou who camest from above
the fire celestial to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up the gift in me.

Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat;
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make my sacrifice complete

In the original text of Charles Wesley, above the hymn is the Biblical passage which inspired it: “The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar, it shall never go out.” (*Leviticus 6:13*). He wrote it while staying in Bath during an attack of gout which prevented his active ministry, and used his time to write over 1,000 poems inspired by passages of Scripture.

This poem, like many in the collection is intensely personal and reflective of his own faith. It is also inspirational for the faith of others.

The passage from Leviticus is part of the instructions of the various sacrifices of the Old Testament, and the one spoken of here is the burned offering, wholly consumed. Wesley sees this as the offering of the whole life in the service of God, up to the point of death which makes the sacrifice ‘complete’.

The fire of the burned offering might remind us of the words of Jesus: “I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled” (*Luke 12:49*). This fire was given in the act of the gift of the Holy Spirit which descended as tongues of fire rested on the Apostles at Pentecost.

Jesus is the one who ‘camest from above’, and who sent the Holy Spirit (*see John 16:7*), and the ‘flame of sacred love’ is the Holy Spirit, whose first fruit is love. (*see Galatians 5:22*) The reference to the ‘heart’ is one which Wesley understood well, for his brother, John described his conversion as “his heart strangely warmed”. St Philip Neri described an even more dramatic event in his life when “a globe of fire entered his chest and exploded inside, doubling the size of his heart”. Such was a life-changing experience for both Wesley and for St Philip. Such too should it be for us, and this fire should not be put out. The poem speaks of prayer and praise as being the response from our heart, which are addressed to God who first lit that fire.

The prayer that the ‘heart’s desire’, which was formed at the time that the fire was lit may be ‘confirmed’ is that the desire may be strengthened (made firm), and reflect the commandment in Deuteronomy to love the Lord with all our strength (to work for the Lord); to talk about the Lord when you are at home and when you are away, when you sit down and when you rise (to speak of the Lord) and to keep these words in your heart (to think of the Lord). (*See Deuteronomy 6:4-7*).

The words ‘stir up’ are drawn from the English translation of the opening prayer for the last week of ordinary time. The same words were in the prayer used that week in the days of Wesley. The Latin word is ‘excite’, which in its English form makes our faith so much more exciting than merely stirred up. Indeed, our Christian life should be exciting!

Our whole Christian life is written in ‘acts of faith and love’. Faith is not simply a state holding an opinion about God; it must be made real by acts of love. (*see James 2:26*) The final verse is a commitment this is a lifelong intention; that the Christian life is a total offering as was the burned offering, wholly consumed, of the Old Testament.

The best of hymns are full of references to Scripture and other traditional texts, and the hymns that are sung at St Gregory’s are chosen with care and with prayer to reflect the scripture readings or the feast being celebrated, or they speak to us of our present circumstances. They are not simply words to go with a good tune, but prayers in themselves and worthy of our attention.

When the crowds at Cardiff Arms Park sing ‘Bread of Heaven’, may they give thought to that of which they sing. But equally, when we sing hymns in the church, may we too give thought to that of which we sing.

Notices of Interest

Fr Andrew thanks everyone for their generous gifts for his anniversary of ordination, as well as the generous gift at Christmas.

Bible Alive for January is now available - only £3.00! If you wish to purchase a copy, they are near the hand-sanitiser in the narthex as you come into church.

Repository: I would like to give heartfelt "thank you" to the very small band of devoted helpers. Some of you may have noticed we have not been able to cover all Masses this year as there has been a limited response to my pleas for more help. None of us is getting any younger and it would be a shame if this service has to be curtailed. It requires only a few minutes after Mass and all stock is clearly marked. *Kathleen Healey.* PS There are still some Church Art Calendars and Diaries available.

Thursday Holy Hour & Adoration: As a trial, Holy Hour will be Holy Two Hours, from 9am until 11am. This can only continue if there are sufficient numbers to sustain it. No one is expected to remain for the entire two hours, come for as long as you can or want to.

Residential for all in Year 7-Year 13: NYMO are once again running our annual LUX weekend from 3rd-5th Feb. The weekend is packed full of fun activities, moving times of prayer and inspirational talks. Come and join around 100 other young people from all parts of the diocese for an unforgettable weekend! For more information and to book a place check out our website www.nymo.org/lux

Bl. Cyprian Tansi Prayer Group continues to pray together online via Skype and by telephone.

Tots @ St Gregory's: Re-starts 10th January: tots and their carers welcome, 9.30-11.30 on Tuesdays during term-time £1 per adult!!

Change of Date: Now Saturday 25th March 2023 Encounter Northampton, a day hosted by Mission Northampton in St Gregory's Hall from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. More details later!

Choir Matters: The next practice is after Sunday Mass on 5th February. This will finish by 1pm or even earlier if people sing more quickly. *Alec*

Flame 2023: The theme of Flame 2023 – which is exactly 150 days before World Youth Day in Lisbon – takes the WYD Scripture “Mary arose & went with haste” and crystallises it into the theme, “Rise Up!” Rise up after the pandemic, Rise up as young Catholics, Rise up – as Mary did – for the surprising and beautiful adventure that is our Catholic faith. **Sat 4th March 23 - book the date - more details soon**

Church Heating: The Church heating has to be on for two hours before it even begins to warm up, so not running it for weekday Mass is a way of making a considerable saving. Please come in warm clothing! We will heat the church and hall on Sundays, but the extra cost of this will be more than the saving on weekdays.

A course on the Psalms: It is sub-titled “The School of Prayer”, with the invitation to ‘learn to pray like Christ’. The course will continue for two more sessions after Christmas; on 18th and 25th January.

Food Parcels: Please contact Gregory Care (01604 713015) if you or anyone you know would benefit from receiving a food parcel.

Sing along to 60s/70s Music

By the Burton Latimer Ukulele and Drum Group

In aid of 'The Cathedral Foodstore'

7.00 pm Monday 23 January — St Thomas Centre

Admission: £5

The God who Speaks: The ‘Year of the Word’ continues and the Diocesan Bible Study sessions for the Sunday Mass readings are continuing. On January 11th (this Wednesday) there will be an introduction to the Year of Matthew (Year A in the lectionary). This will be on Zoom and will start at 7.30 pm. Anyone who would like the link for this is asked to email to Fr Andrew.

400th Anniversary of the death of St Francis de Sales

Pope Francis has issued a new Apostolic Letter to commemorate the 4th centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales ‘Totum amoris est’. He sees the spirituality of St Francis de Sales as particularly relevant in our day as, just as now, 400 years ago the world was undergoing great change, and he saw this as a vital time to proclaim the Gospel, and to find new ways to do this. “We are challenged to be a Church that is outward-looking and free of all worldliness, even as we live in this world, share people’s lives and journey with them in attentive listening and acceptance. That is what Francis de Sales did when he discerned the events of his times with the help of God’s grace. Today he bids us set aside undue concern for ourselves, for our structures and for what society thinks about us, and consider instead the real spiritual needs and expectations of our people.”

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

Baptism Preparation: The next session will be on Monday 16th Jan at 7pm in the Sacristy. Please note you will need to phone Deacon Michael on 07999808997 before you attend, to book a place.

First Holy Communion 2023: Congratulations to all children who have enrolled on the First Holy Communion programme. You will now have all the dates of sessions. Please try to attend them all, and please enjoy the course!

Confirmation in 2023: Those interested in Confirmation preparation should have spoken to Helen and will know the plan for the coming months.

CAFOD is looking for people to give some time and join in our parish mission of global outreach. Could you help develop our work in parishes or Catholic schools? Training and support is provided. See cafod.org.uk/Volunteer for more information or get in touch - Deborah Purfield 07786 114 390 | dpurfield@cafod.org.uk

St Gregory's Brownies: St Gregory's has a Brownie Unit who meet in the hall on Wednesday evenings. We have some spaces due to some of our girls going up to Guides and would love to meet some new prospective Brownies. We are all aged between 7 and 10 years. Please get in touch with the leaders on tw.lewis@ntlworld.com for more information or a little chat.

Parish Finances: Much the easiest way to support the parish financially is through a standing order directly from your own bank account. The information required for this is as follows:

Bank; **NatWest**
Sort Code; **60-06-11**
Account Number; **46898093**
Account Name; **Northampton Roman Catholic Diocesan Trust**
Payment Ref; Parish Name/Area: **(St. Gregory's, Northampton)**

Refreshment Donations: This is the last Sunday for donations to the Hope Centre both at the Crib and in donations given after Sunday Mass. Last year we were able to send just over £1,500. So far this year, donations have raised nearly £800. From next week, donations will be given to Gregory Care which supports those in material need in our own parish, but also operates the toiletry collections for the Cathedral Foodstore.

Prayers for Ukraine: Please continue to pray for an end to the war in Ukraine:

O God, author and lover of peace,
to know you is to live,
to serve you is to reign.
Defend against every attack
those who cry to you
so that we, who trust in your protection,
may not fear the weapons of any foe.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen

Scripture Readings 12th January 2020, Baptism of the Lord, Year A

In this “servant song” second Isaiah rejoices when, in 539 BC, King Cyrus released Israel from their exile in Babylon. But he asked how had this come about? It was not any human agency. It was Israel’s God who freed his servant, Israel, whom he had formed and chosen for a purpose, and given his spirit.

After calling all to praise the Lord, the psalm describes a magnificent theophany: God’s majesty revealed in a tremendous thunderstorm.

In Acts, Peter applies this message to Jesus, whom “God anointed with the Holy Spirit”. Peter had just had a vision showing that nothing we eat can make us unclean. Therefore he felt willing to enter the house of Cornelius, against the Jewish Law. Then the Holy Spirit came upon this Gentile household. So Peter had to

baptise them: he now understands **how** the Gospel must be taken to Gentiles, in spite of Jewish purity laws.

After a big build-up by the Baptist about the coming of the powerful messiah, the adult Jesus appears for the first time in this Gospel, and quietly insists on being baptised by John. Jesus has to be identified with sinners to fulfil God’s plan. God then confirms Jesus as his Son. Thus fortified, Jesus will then be led into the wilderness to be tested by the devil.

Psalm Response: **The Lord will bless his people with peace.**

(Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7; Psalm 28(29); Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17)

Chris Oliver

Warm Welcome

St Gregory’s hall has been offering a warm welcome since the cold weather began a few weeks ago, and we have been given a generous donation of food for anyone who comes. We are one of a number of places in the neighbourhood which are offering a place which is heated and providing food and welcome; between them all there is welcome throughout the week.

Each house that is heated is not only using up the energy supply which is not unlimited, and if the weather turns colder again (which is likely) there is a risk of power cuts, but also is generating greenhouse gasses which

contribute to our carbon footprint, and add to climate change. Taking advantage of the ‘warm welcome’ not only saves money; it also helps save the planet!

There are children’s toys, and we now have a Wi-Fi provision for any who are working ‘from home’, and continuous provision of tea, coffee and soft drinks. Please do make use of this facility.

The End of Christmastide

This Sunday marks the end of Christmastide, and on Monday we start the season called ‘Ordinary Time’, which is characterised by the colour green, a colour of nature and growth. However, the first two Sundays in this season are given particular themes. Next Sunday is styled ‘Peace Sunday’, and the Sunday after that is the Sunday of the Word of God. That falls within the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and we are hosting the shared Bible Study on Tuesday evening, 24th January at 7.30 pm in the hall (refreshment available from 7.00 pm). For too long interpretation of the Bible has been a source of division. Christians of different traditions have studied the Bible in their own communities, and it is a triumph of the ecumenical movement that now we are able to study it together. This shared exploration into the Scriptures needs to go much further, but we are making a start!

The last days of Christmastide are the days after the feast of the Epiphany, which, this year is for only three days, so we get little time to appreciate what has happened. By the time the Magi (wise men) arrive, the Holy Family have found lodging in Bethlehem as we are told that when they arrived there, they found Mary in a house (not a stable or a cave), and the child (not a baby) with his mother. Herod had all the children under two massacred which suggests that the child Jesus might have been anything up to two years old by then. Our crib is faithful to the Scriptures in how the arrival of the Magi is depicted.

The image of Our Lady and the child Jesus is from our shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham, and since our statue was carved an interesting discovery has been made. In 1925 the Victoria and Albert Museum in London had bought an ancient statue of Our Lady, which became known as the ‘Langham Madonna’. More recent research has put forward the theory that this might actually be the original image of Our Lady of Walsingham. This is founded on genuine academic scholarship, and is being taken seriously. Our statue, as it appears in the crib bears a striking likeness to the ‘Langham Madonna’, and if the theory is true, then our statue of Our Lady of Walsingham is very close to the original. Although the ‘approved’ history tells us that the original image was burned; there is plenty of evidence that those who resisted the despoiling of the shrines created copies which were seized by Thomas Cromwell’s commissioners, while the originals were hidden or smuggled abroad, it was the copy that was destroyed. For example, Our Lady of Ipswich is now at the shrine of St Maria Goretti in Nettuno in Italy.



The Langham Madonna
© Victoria and Albert Museum

As we go through the season of ‘Ordinary Time’, we read from the Gospels about the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus. We have been reading the ‘infancy narratives’ through Christmastide; we read the Passion narratives as we approach Easter and the Resurrection narratives after Easter, but in ‘Ordinary Time’ we read the teachings of Jesus and hear of his miracles and the events of the three years in which he was teaching his disciples. With them, we hope to learn how better to follow Jesus.