

Parish of the Assumption of Our Lady Old Harlow, Essex CM17 0HA

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BULLETIN C 13 – 20TH FEBRUARY 2022 SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

My dear brothers and sisters,

On 2nd June this year I will have been in the ordained ministry for 40 years, the last 10 of which as a Catholic Priest. During this time I have been richly blessed by God, and have been supported by those to whom I have been privileged to serve. I shall be celebrating this milestone with a Mass of Thanksgiving on Tuesday 2nd June at 7.00pm. I would very much like it if you would be able to join me on this occasion for the Mass and Refreshments afterwards. As the Assumption of Our Lady is a small church, it would be very helpful if you would book your seat, there is a sign list in the porch for this event – please PRINT your name.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday 2nd March. During Lent the Stations of the Cross will again be prayed on Fridays at 10.30am. There will be Lent Study Groups meeting on Thursday mornings after mass and Thursday evenings at 7.00pm. These Groups will commence on Thursday 3rd March.

God bless you all,
Fr. John

TIMES OF MASSES THIS WEEK

Sun	20	7 th in Ordinary Time	1000 Mass	June Warner (RIP)
			1800 Mass	People of the parish
Tue	22	Chair of St. Peter	1900 Mass	Irene & Patrick Wall (RIP)
Wed	23	St. Polycarp	1000 Mass	Sheila Flaherty (RIP)
			1030 Adoration	
Thu	24	feria	1000 Mass	John Clarke (RIP)
Fri	25	feria	1000 Mass	
Sun	27	8 th in Ordinary Time	1000 Mass	People of the parish
			1800 Mass	

TIMES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION THIS WEEK

Fr. John will hear confessions on Tuesday at 6.30pm, Wednesday at 10.30am or by appointment.

Diocesan Pilgrimage to Walsingham – 28th May 2022: Join Bishop Alan and other parishes around the Diocese of Brentwood in Walsingham as we celebrate the Year of the Family 'Hearing and Doing the Word of God'. We will celebrate Mass at the Basilica before walking the Holy Mile to the grounds of Walsingham Abbey to celebrate Vespers and Benediction on the site of the Holy House. If you would like to come please let Fr. John know.

Parish Administrator required for the Parish of Our Lady of Walsingham, Royal Docks working at St Anne's RC church, Berwick Road, E16. 20 hours per week (9am-2pm Monday-Thursday) £11,492 p/a (£11.05 p/h). Starting 21st March 2022. Please send a CV and covering letter to fdanielkelly@dioceseofbrentwood.org. Closing date: 14th March 2022.

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Ice cream, chocolates, doughnuts... many of us crave sweetness. Sugary food may not be a healthy option, but it triggers the release of feel-good chemicals in the brain that give a momentary rush of pleasure. So does the thought of getting even with those who hurt us. Neuroscientists have discovered that revenge really is “sweet”, for that part of our brain responsible for reward also governs vengeance. Like things full of sugar, thinking about how to get our own back may seem irresistible. Some might say not just irresistible, but justified. After all, revenge is provoked by someone else’s wrongdoing. Taking matters into one’s own hands may be tempting where there is no effective system of justice. However, so-called “honour killings” still take place even in the most advanced societies when people react with extreme violence to protect their reputation or their family name.

Revenge may be sweet, but it is sweetness of the bitterest kind. It does not try to reform the offender’s behaviour but rather to inflict pain. The sweetness is only momentary, for after the “sugar rush” follow feelings of despondency. Research has found that an act of vengeance merely intensifies our focus on the wrongdoer and makes us brood even more on what they have done to us. In the end, people are no happier for getting their own back.

Jesus taught us to love our enemies. The idea sounded preposterous at the time. The Jewish nation was under occupation and its people felt justified in despising their Roman oppressors, as well as others outside their own religion. Revenge was enshrined in Jewish Law, from where we get the phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. The commandment to “love your neighbour” was important to the Jewish people, but they understood the term “neighbour” to be restricted in its scope – which is why Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus taught that every human being is our neighbour and that peace is something anyone can make. He detailed the kind of provocations people might face and suggested radical ways of dealing with them. You might, for example, treat your enemies well, only to find that they treat you badly in return. So what do you do? Keep on loving them just the same. If they mutter curses, mutter blessings back. If they abuse you, pray for them. If they slap you in the face, give them the other cheek to slap. If they pinch your coat, hand over your shirt. Whatever they might take, let them. Don’t ask for it back.

This was revolutionary talk, a completely undefended way of being. It ran counter to the human instinct to be self-protective. Kindliness is natural within families and between friends, and easy enough when it is in our interests. Jesus, however, taught *indiscriminate* kindness to everyone, even when it is never reciprocated, nor likely to bring us any benefit. Why? Because that is how God is, forgiving the ungrateful; showing kindness to the undeserving. Be like God, said Jesus.

Everyone gets annoyed from time to time. Anger is natural, but it need not trigger insults or violence. After the flaring up of irritation comes a choice and, by a steadfast refusal to retaliate and a quiet insistence on meeting negativity with goodness, we choose to imitate the way God is with us. Sometimes the loving choice may be to stand up to unacceptable behaviour, to be protective, or to help people understand the consequences of their action. That is not revenge. Love restores and teaches and heals: it does not harm or destroy.

More important than feeling love for our enemies is *showing* love. It was by watching how Jesus showed love that people began to understand what God is like. When Jesus, with his dying gasp, forgave those who jeered at him, the Roman officer said in amazement, “In truth this man was a son of God.” All who imitate the loving forbearance of God are recognisably God’s children. People can see God’s likeness in us whenever we look for the good in others. Jesus calls us to transcend our instinctual behaviours in order to imitate the ways of God. And it’s as we forgive others that God forgives us. Jesus used the colourful analogy of someone who deals out as generous a measure as possible, pressing it down and shaking the container to make space for more. So God pours love and mercy into our hearts and lives.