

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

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BULLETIN C 19 – 3RD APRIL 2022 FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

My dear brothers and sisters,

We are now entering the final stage of Lent when our thoughts turn to the Passion of our Lord. You will notice when you come into church, or go on live stream, that the pictures and statues are veiled in purple to reflect the solemnity of this sacred time. The Crucifix is also covered and will not be seen until it is unveiled on Good Friday.

Now is the time to turn once again to the Lord seeking forgiveness of the sins that we have committed. Those sins from which we are absolved through the grace that comes to us from the crucifixion of our saviour Jesus Christ. Each year the church invites us through the "Easter Obligations" to receive Absolution in confession and to make our Holy Communion. This obligation, which still stands, can be achieved anytime from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost.

As so many will be making their confession at this time, it is a great help if you are able to come to one of the Reconciliation services, listed below, where more priests are available to minister to you. Other times of opportunities to make your confession are also given below, and indeed you can always make an appointment with me if that would be more convenient.

God bless you all
Fr. John

Last Sunday's Cash Collections was £130.00

TIMES OF MASSES & SERVICES THIS WEEK

Sun	3	Fifth Sunday in Lent	1000 Mass 1200 Mass 1800 Mass	People of the parish Vic Potter (RIP) Sadie Bell (RIP)
Tue	5	feria of lent	1900 Mass	Mary & Frank McKentee (RIP)
Wed	6	feria of lent	1000 Mass 1030 Adoration 1930 Reconciliation Service	
Thu	7	feria of lent	1000 Mass 1030 Lent Group	Catherine & Tom Denneby (RIP)
Fri	8	feria of lent	1000 Mass 1030 Stations of the Cross	Sadie Bell (RIP)
Sun	10	Palm Sunday	1000 Mass 1200 Mass 1800 Mass	Carmel Arbuthnott (INT) Peace in Ukraine People of the parish

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.

SERVICES OF RECONCILIATION BEFORE EASTER

Wednesday 6th April at 7.30pm at the Assumption of our Lady

Monday 11th April at 7.30pm in Holy Cross Harlow

Tuesday 12th April at 7.30pm in St Edmund of Canterbury Loughton

GOSPEL REFLECTION

There is a story from the early centuries of Christianity, when monastic communities grew up in the desert. These “desert fathers and mothers”, as they are usually called, lived a life that was more like that of hermits than the communal monastic life found in monasteries and abbeys today. That is not to say that their lives had no structure. For example, there would always have been an abbot or abbess – who was often renowned for wisdom. Some were so famous that people would travel miles through the desert just to hear the wise words of these remarkable holy people. Some also had a well-developed sense of humour – probably a very valuable gift while living in the wilderness. There is a story that one group of monks were walking through desert sands with their abbot until they came to a river. This also gave them the opportunity to replenish their supplies of water for the rest of their journey.

The monks were not the only ones at the water, however. There was a young woman there too, trying to find a way across the water, but with no success. The abbot saw her predicament and offered to let her cross the river on his back. She readily agreed and the two of them reached the opposite bank in no time. The abbot lowered her to the ground and she was able to continue her journey alone. The monks likewise continued on their way. The abbot was aware that one of the monks was particularly quiet. When they reached their destination, he asked the monk why he was so silent. The monk replied, “I am struggling to understand how you, Father Abbot, could possibly bring yourself to carry a young woman across the water.” The abbot replied, “I let that woman down as soon as we had crossed the water; it is you who appear to have been carrying her in your mind ever since.”

We find the same attitude among the scribes and Pharisees who had caught the woman in the Gospel in the act of committing adultery. This detail is necessary: only when someone was actually apprehended in the act could the capital sentence (stoning to death) be carried out. We must question the motives of anyone who would do such a thing as to spy on someone with the intent of catching them, sentencing them and then being prepared to carry out the sentence in such a horrific way. Jesus is present when they are ready to carry out the capital sentence and they address him: “Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?”

Scholars have pointed out that this passage does not seem to fit in with the wider context of the Gospel of John. Many commentators think it is a text that should not be anywhere in John, but should perhaps be in the Gospel of Luke, because it is much more like a typically Lukan story. Let’s consider why.

Famously, Jesus refuses to be drawn into expressing an opinion. Moses had stated the Law; Jesus does not contradict Moses. He writes in the sand. Countless attempts have been made to identify what Jesus might have written. It is futile to do so. Perhaps he is just doodling, refusing to be drawn into an argument of law. When he speaks, his words are devastating: “If there is one of you who has not sinned let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then he goes back to doodling in the sand. As usual, Jesus’ response is brilliant. He refuses to contradict Moses and the Law, but he also highlights the hypocrisy of sinners wanting to condemn and put to death another sinner. He alone is sinless and he chooses not to condemn the woman.

Instead of condemning the woman, Jesus challenges her to go and not to sin any more. How could that become possible? Only through a complete change of mind-set. Paul gives us a clue as to how to do so in today’s second reading. Paul believes that nothing can happen to him that would counter what he receives through knowing Christ. With this focus on Christ, he turns away from anything that is negative. This positive thinking could work for us too.