

THE PARISHES OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST AND ST MARY MAGDALENE

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Pastoral Team: Alice Codling, Jennifer Morris and Chris Vinestock

Shared Parish House: 3 Sandford Gardens, EH15 1LP

Administrator: Enrico Fertini

(Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: 10am to 3pm & Friday 11am-4pm)

Web address: www.stjohnsportobello.co.uk

Web address: www.stmarymagdalenes.co.uk

Joint e-mail for our sister parishes: stjohnsandstmarymagdalenes@gmail.com



‘He gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him’. And his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.’

Tuesday, 2 February, is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (when Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the Temple forty days after his birth - and encounter Simeon and old Anna – Luke 2:22-38). It is also **the World Day of Consecrated Life** – and Archbishop Leo has written a Pastoral Letter for the day, which accompanies this newsletter.

We pray especially for our consecrated religious, **Sr Jennifer Lindsay** and **Mairi Clunas**.

A Reflection by Mairi Clunas on the Feast of the Presentation – this Tuesday, 2 February.

On 2 February, 40 days after Christmas, the Church celebrates the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. This is traditionally marked as a feast of light – sometimes called Candlemas and we are given lighted candles to hold as part of the liturgy: these recall our baptism.

It might therefore be a good moment to become more aware of our tasks as light bearers, to re-connect in prayer with the source of light who is Jesus. Every heartfelt prayer – whether petition, intercession, thanksgivings – brings a little more light into the world.

Moreover, our prayer is the sound or echo of the divine life within us, our baptismal union with Jesus, “the Light of the World”. For it is he who prays in us.

This week, you might choose one of the Mysteries of Light as a focus for prayer while you enjoy your daily walk.

(The 5 Mysteries of Light – the Baptism of Jesus, the Wedding at Cana, Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Transfiguration and the Institution of the Eucharist - were introduced into the Rosary by Pope John Paul 2nd in 2002, to be prayed alongside with the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries).

This Sunday, through the initiative of Jeremy Devlin-Thorp, we are reintroducing ‘**Tea and Coffee after Mass**’ – a chance via Zoom to chat with some at least of those we’re missing encountering each Sunday...for details of the meeting ID and Passcode see ‘This Week’.

THIS WEEK

(NB It is only possible to attend Mass online)

Saturday 30 January - 6.30pm – St John’s – **Vigil Mass** (livestreamed)

Sunday 31 January

11.00am – **Mass** (livestreamed from the Prayer Room)

12.15pm – Zoom meeting – **‘Tea and Coffee after Mass’ – Open to all**

To join in over Zoom, go to

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/76746013433?pwd=akN2R29FaEJ6YWRhY0I5RG1sSIFvZz09>

Meeting ID: 767 4601 3433 Passcode: 4uEa6j

Monday 1 February

10.00am – Prayer Room – **Mass** (livestreamed)

4.30pm – Skype – PEP meeting

7-8.15pm – Zoom Meeting – **Gospel Sharing and Reflection – Open to All**

To join in over Zoom, go to

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86911238347?pwd=aFI3bU55elJN2hnMlZuWFcwYXcvQT09>

Meeting ID: 869 1123 8347 Passcode: 649274

Tuesday 2 February

7.00pm – Prayer Room – **Mass** (livestreamed)

7.30pm – Zoom – an Edinburgh Jesuit initiative – **John Bell of the Iona Community – ‘Light in the darkness: exploring ways of coping with the Covid Crisis.’**

John is a Church of Scotland minister and a frequent contributor to Radio 4’s ‘Thought for the Day.’ He is also a well known hymn writer (eg ‘Will you come and follow me’) – and has worked in the area of music, worship, spirituality and social justice for over 30 years.

Zoom Login Information

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2365092814>

Meeting ID: 236 509 2814

Or join live on Facebook by [clicking here](#).

For more information contact edinburghjesuitcentre@jesuit.org.uk

Wednesday 3 February

9.20 – St John’s – **Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament** (livestreamed)

10.00am – St John’s – **Mass** (livestreamed)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

Thursday 4 February

10.00am – St John’s – **Mass** (livestreamed)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

Friday 5 February

10.00am - St John’s – **Mass** (livestreamed)

9.15pm – Zoom – **Night Prayer**

Saturday 6 February - 6.30pm – St John’s – **Vigil Mass** (livestreamed)

Sunday 7 February - 11.00am – **Mass** (livestreamed from the Prayer Room)

From Archbishop Leo’s Weekly Ad Clerum

Human Fraternity for Peace and Living Together - The Bishops' Conference of Scotland and the Ahl Al-Bait Scotland Society host this online conference to mark the signing of the document on Human Fraternity by Pope Francis and Sheikh Al Azhar. Keynote speakers are Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali and Cardinal Michael

Fitzgerald. Monday 01 February 2021, 5-7pm. To register, search 'Human Fraternity for Peace and Living Together' on Eventbrite.

Vocations Mass - Ahead of the World Day of Consecrated Life on Tuesday (2 February) **please join the monthly vocations Mass** from St David's Parish in Dalkeith, which will be posted on the Archdiocesan Facebook at **6:30pm on Monday 1 February**. If you are interested in the priesthood or religious life, you can have a chat with one of the Archdiocese's vocation directors: Father Andrew Garden: 0131 663 4286 or vocations@staned.org.uk. Sr Mirjam Hugens FSO: 0131 623 8902 or religiousvocations@staned.org.uk

Faith in the Time of Covid - Archbishop Cushley invites you to join a **series of Sunday talks from distinguished speakers** who will offer their thoughts and approach to the pandemic. Each event is free and lasts 30 mins. **Bishop Philip Egan, 5pm, 31 Jan. Register bit.ly/FaithCovid-Egan** (SOLD OUT) | Dr Mary Rice Hasson, 5pm, 07 Feb. Register bit.ly/FaithCovid-Hasson | Professor John Haldane, 5pm 14 Feb. Register: bit.ly/FaithCovid-Haldane | Rt Hon Gordon Brown, 5pm, 21 Feb. Register bit.ly/FaithCovid-Brown. All events will be broadcast on YouTube at bit.ly/ArchYouTube

St Margaret Lecture - Sister Catherine Droste OP will give this year's St Margaret of Scotland Lecture. Archbishop Cushley will conclude the event with a reflection. It takes place online on **Wednesday, 10 February**, 4:00-5:30pm. Registration details at <https://events.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Couples' Retreat - Married and engaged couples are invited to a **Valentine's retreat**. It features specially prepared video reflections from Canon John Udriş, Spiritual Director at St Mary's College, Oscott (Birmingham), to help you grow together in Faith. It takes place on Zoom and last 90 mins. 3:00pm, **Saturday 13 February**. This is a free event organised by the Archdiocesan Marriage Commission. Register now at bit.ly/CouplesRetreat2021

Archdiocesan YouTube channel - If you miss any online event from the Archdiocese you can find it on YouTube. The link is bit.ly/ArchYouTube. The latest upload is '**Fire & Water: The Power of the Sacraments, a talk on Confirmation and Baptism by Sr Anna Marie McGuan RSM**, the Archdiocesan Catechetics Advisor.

NOTICEBOARD

Sacramental Preparation for 'Parish Children' - 2021

Arlene Lauder writes: 'The Parish Sacramental programme at St John's and St Mary Magdalene's is one of which we are very proud. It allows us to engage with parish families who have children not attending a Catholic School. To that end, we would like to invite any such parish families to make contact with us if they have children currently in Primary 3 or 4 and Primary 7. These are currently key stages in Sacramental preparation covering Reconciliation (First Confession) in P3, First Holy Communion in P4 and the Sacrament of Confirmation in P7.

Please do make contact either with Father Jock at the Parish House or with myself, Arlene Lauder, (Sacramental Coordinator) on 07950880833 or email lauder.82@btinternet.com.'

SHARE A PHOTOGRAPH OF SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

For the last 9 months, Fr Jock, Deacon Eddie and Maureen Brogan have been sharing photographs of nature in and around our local areas – ever since Maureen's first photograph of the tiny freshly hatched cygnets in Figgate Park back in May 2020.

You are invited to help us expand the selection of photographs we share on Facebook, or in the newsletter. There have been some spectacular Sunrises, frost scenes, nature snaps and winter colours – and soon, hopefully, there will be some spring colour too.

The photographs we shared this year were from smartphones and cameras (about half and half) so it doesn't matter what you are using to take the photographs. Please email Deacon Eddie ewhite@outlook.com with any photographs you are happy to share, with a little description of to what and where the photo relates.

A New Initiative for Lockdown - Night Prayer/Compline over Zoom

Join us for 10 minutes at the end of the day

....at 9.15pm on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday this week for Compline, the Night Prayer of the Church.

The prayers for all seven nights are available on this link:

<http://stjohnsandstmarymagdalenes.com/news/night-prayer/>

Night Prayer is a beautiful and peaceful way to end the day. The words will be available on the screen in the Zoom call, or you can print them off from the link above. Donald Scott and Tracy Burgess will lead us. You are invited to say the prayers with us, or just experience Night Prayer without saying a word.

If you are able to join us for these ten minutes on Wednesday, Thursday and/or Friday then please follow the zoom link below or email Deacon Eddie on ewhite@outlook.com for the link.

Link to Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83916544352?pwd=VGlVSnZ5dDhwMGICMEU0eUJscTd1Zz09>

Meeting ID: 839 1654 4352 **Passcode:** compline

THE SEARCH

*Who was it who decreed
we must find God
through the hard labour of hunger
or years of rocky islands?*

*Why should God not also be
found listening in a simple glade
where morning is being born
in the soft calling of birds?*

(Kenneth Steven)

Ask your MP to sign a parliamentary motion calling on the Government to introduce new guidance on fetal pain

Daniel Turner of 'Right to Life' writes: 'A new parliamentary motion (EDM 1340) is calling on the Government to introduce new guidance on fetal pain. The evidence that babies can feel pain in the womb, and during many abortions, highlights the humanity of the unborn child and provides another important reason to introduce legislation to protect the unborn child from abortion.

Right To Life UK have set up an easy-to-use tool which makes it simple to contact your MP, and ask them to sign this motion calling on the Government to introduce new guidance on fetal pain. It only takes 30 seconds using this easy-to-use tool. This tool can be accessed by visiting the link below:

www.righttolife.org.uk/FetalPainMotion

Citizens' Rights Project

'All EU/EEA/Swiss Citizens and their family members must apply to the EU Settlement Scheme in order to continue living in Scotland - even if they have lived here for many years. The deadline for applications is 1 June 2021, however, for some people the application can take some time, and already since the start of 2021 there have been changes and challenges for those who do not yet have their Settled or Pre-Settled Status.

If you, or anyone you know, is unsure of how to go about applying Citizens' Rights Project can help. We are an organisation set up to support EU Citizens in Scotland. We have a lot of information on our website about the EU Settlement Scheme which can be accessed in multiple languages including Polish and Italian.

<https://citizensrightsproject.org/>

We also offer free individual consultations with our regulated volunteer advisors, which can be arranged to take place online, also in multiple languages. Booking is thorough the website or email us at: info@citizensrightsproject.org

We also have free in-person events coming up over the next month in Lothians and the Borders, to speak to one of our advisors for help in applying. All Covid safety measures will, of course, be in place. To attend you must book in order to ensure social distancing. Events will be held at: Meadowbank, Edinburgh on 30 January and 27 February Dunbar on 3 and 20 February - Chirside, Scottish Borders on 10 February
For more information and to book see here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1403402139991919>

THE TWO

*This morning early the mother and her cygnet
crossing the dark water underneath my window
in among the meltings of last night's ice.*

*The wind-still trees all lifeless, leafless –
the road above just trashing traffic –
a hurry that does not touch of hurt them.*

*The cygnet fluffed with brown and downy,
not broken yet into the whitest snow –
sculpted out of silence both.*

(Kenneth Steven)



Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline (24 hours)

☎0800 027 1234

PARISH REGISTER

Please pray for those who have died recently: Molly Lugton and Betty Blaney

Please pray for those whose anniversaries occur around this time: Patsy McAnenny, Maureen Brown and Arthur Delaney

St John's Jan.30:- James McGuire (1991); Elizabeth Keogh (1986); Bridget Meldrum (1986); Edward Stone (1975); Alice Boyle;
Jan.31:- Maureen Brown (2015); Beryl Donegan (2010); Jamesina Laidlaw (2006); Alex. Begg (1974); John Ward (1920); **Feb.1:-** Umberto Tesoro (2013); Fr Daniel McGuinness (1997); **Feb.2:-** Margaret Malcolm (1998); **Feb.3:-** Bernadette Heron (2012); Jean Anderson (2006); Harry T Johnson (2006); Thomas McCreadie (2000); Douglas Begg (1960); Kate Barrins (1959); Thomas Conner (1948); **Feb.4:-** Margaret Early (2003); Margaret Blaney (1976); Mrs Hendry (1958); Patrick Rooney ; **Feb.5:-** Beatrice Crolla (2015); Nora Glancy (2015); Margaret Kelly (1999); Michael Gallagher (1985); Arthur Delaney (1974); Mary Malcolm (1969); Bridget Hanlon (1954);

St Mary Magdalene's Feb.1:- Isabella Connor (1999); Frank Risi (1972); **Feb.2:-** Michael Edward Kempton (1991); **Feb.4:-** Mary Doyle (1967);

Sick Parishioners - St. John's: Catherine McHardy, Gena Gallagher, Isabel Murie, Alex Telford, Mary Grady, Pauli Walker, Dolores Jones, Bill Laidlaw, Ian Thompson, Nora Bruce, Evelyn Oldershaw, Anna Butler, May Flynn, Vincent Knowles, John Cregan, young Saoirse Golden, John Whyte, Chloe Sutherland, Frances Cunningham, David Reid, Sheila Tansey, Frank Logan, Charlotte McGregor, Betty Dougal, Anne Thomson, Eileen Brown, Mike Noonan, Sarah McManus, Patricia Lawler, Mike Burns, Sr Jennifer Lindsay, Ernie Moran, Maureen Low, Pat Hunter, Alan Blyth, Mary Slight, Mary Phair, Rose Thornton, Kitty Dykes, Norman Telfer, Philip Jamieson, Alf MacNamara, Stan McKay, Maureen Lawrie, Kathie Gallagher, Erin Corbett, Roz Byers, Marie Angela Crolla and Lorraine Syme

Sick Parishioners - St. Mary Magdalene's: Jim Gallagher, Chris and Louise English, Jacqueline Marinello, Sheila and George Service, Ray Donnelly, Sam Burns, Clive Davis, Ella Ayers, Isobel Phillips, Denis Davidson, Margaret Duffy, Maria Scott Jnr, Louise Gorman, Ann Dockrell, John Prior, John Newell, Michael McPhillips, Bridget Malone, Charles Malcolm, Margaret Ryan, Jacqueline Hannan, Julie Keegan, Rose McKay, Laurie Wallace, Annie Watson, David O'Donnell, Andrew Banks, Jude Ferguson, and Mary & James Muir.

Please pray for sick friends and relatives of parishioners, including: Diego Dinis, Gavin Findlay, Peter Bickmore, baby Baxter Sweeney, Sr May Lewis, Joan Murray Hamilton, Sr Margaret Mary, Billy McPhillips, Anthony Finnerty, Angela McGuigan, Jean Nelson, Margaret Anne Marton, Anne Harty, Betty Blyth, Lauren Fitzpatrick, Fr Christy Fox, Joe Greenan, Martin Carr, Michael Igoe, baby Josh Simpson, Katie McAnenny, Robert Shaw, baby Kinsley McMillan, baby Francesca Horwood, John Walsh, Linda McKean, Moira McConville, Kathleen Kay, Margaret and Victoria Roddam, Hazel Yeoman, John Williams, Clare Richardson, Karen MacKay, Laura Anderson, Gloria Crolla, Richard Reid, James O'Rourke, Tommy Muir, Janice Todd, Lauli Ridge, Jan Meise, Seval Kazimoglu, Anne Young, James Shepherd, Carla Zanetti, Peter Hanley, Jennifer Kay, Janie Low, Ranier Carpo, William Young, Marie Baird, Andrew Franklin, Frank Palmer, Paul Henderson, Ellen Green, Andrew Preston, Jamie Mitchell, Eunice Macdonald, Peter Bromley, Audrey Burgess, Kathleen Cawley, Margo Law, Misia Jack, Hannah Muldoon, Emma Bromet, Edward Caulfield, Mike Enfield, Sharon Anderson, Igor Rekowski, Diana Hibbert, Rokšana Moczulstra, Joan Brooks, Mary Turnbull, Stuart Falconer, Jake Jorden and young Ray Donovan Syme



Offertory Collections – 24 February 2021

St Mary Magdalene	St John the Evangelist
not available	Gift Aid of £304.80 and £794.00 Online Donations – £1098.80 total

Welcome to the world...**Niamh Elizabeth Todd**, born on Friday 29 January, a daughter for Kate and Donald, and a little sister for Killian.

Giuliano Crolla's Requiem Mass will take place at 10.00am on Wednesday 10 February at St John's.

A request from a parishioner for urgent prayers for Piotr and his family in Poland, very distressed.



Thanks to the generosity of the family of the late Cathy Walls, we now have wi-fi installed in St John's church. This enhances the quality of the live streaming of our Masses (much to the relief of *our in-house media team...!*)

A Rosary Group has been meeting on Fridays at 11am since the first 'Lockdown'. Anyone can join, especially if you have Facebook Messenger, but also on WhatsApp or just on the phone. 'We try to accommodate everyone. Sometimes it takes time for us all to join in, but we always manage. The only week we cancelled was at Christmas, as Christmas Day was a Friday. Please join us. - message Maria Igoe on 07981333219 or mariaigoe@yahoo.co.uk'

BIBLE QUIZ

Following the Sunday of the Word of God, Enrico, our Administrator, is keen to encourage us all to become more used to opening our Bibles – so each week he intends to offer a multiple choice quiz – the correct answers will be given in the following week's newsletter – and the first person emailing in all four answers will receive a copy of the Gospel of Mark...

Q: In the Book of Genesis (2:15), what is the name of the Garden where God put Adam?

- A:
- 1 - Garden of Life
 - 2 - Garden of Eden
 - 3 - Garden of Truth
 - 4 - Garden of Light

Q: How long did Solomon's reign last? (You can find the answer in 2 Chronicles 9:30)

- A:
- 1 - 33
 - 2 - 10
 - 3 - 40
 - 4 - 99

Q: Who was the disciple who(according to the Gospel of John 13:6) during the night Jesus was betrayed, asked him: "Are you going to wash my feet?"

- A:
- 1 - Thaddeus
 - 2 - Simon Peter
 - 3 - John
 - 4 - Thomas

Q: How old was Joseph (according to Genesis 41:46) when he was released from prison and was brought in front of the Pharaoh king of Egypt to resume his service,?

- A:
- 1 - 101
 - 2 - 30
 - 3 - 33
 - 4 - 21

Q: Which of the 12 Apostles (according to John 13:29) was the one who looked after the 'common fund'.

- A:
- 1 - Simon Peter
 - 2 - Judas
 - 3 - Bartholomew
 - 4 - James



A Reflection on the Readings for the Fourth Sunday of the Year

Deuteronomy 18: 1-20;

Mark 1: 21-28

‘Jesus made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes he taught them with authority.’

Thursday saw a conversation with my cardiologist. My heart isn't behaving as it should. We spoke about different medications that might help, their side effects – long and short-term - including one that might or might not make my skin go blue if I am exposed to too much sunlight. (I kid you not!) In 1968, the Beatles released a cartoon film ‘Yellow Submarine’ where the main baddies were the Blue Meanies, and they represented all that is evil in the world. All I could see was these characters. Was I to become one of these? But the main problem I had/have is having to agree or disagree with the recommended treatment. Why can't someone just tell me what I must do? All this personal responsibility is debilitating. I just need some authoritative advice. Its probably why I hate attending an eye test. Too many subjective questions – ‘Looking at the third row of letters, does this lens make it clearer – or less clear? Focusing on the red light – can you tell me what happens when I do this? And this? I quickly evolve into a jabbering wreck of confusion and doubt. Surely someone can just invent a machine that looks into my eyes and prescribes the remedy. Yes, I would appreciate – even crave sometimes – authoritative advice. But not always! I don't enjoy aggressive authority – the sort favoured by **some** police officers and **some** employees in the Tax Office. These I can well do without. And don't get me started on politicians, particularly the ones who lie when the truth is perfectly adequate. They have no authority whatsoever because they have denuded themselves of integrity. And this double idea of integrity being linked with real authority is at the heart of our Gospel reading this weekend.

In this weekend's Gospel Mark tells us: *(Jesus) made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes he taught them with authority.* When they listened they became spellbound. His teaching was clear, they knew where they stood with him and they could understand his teaching. They had no desire to leave his company. Every now and again we encounter an individual of integrity and it's that very integrity that enables us to hang on to their every word. They speak with authority and we are comfortable with their advice and guidance. We value their friendship. The ‘them’ in today's Gospel are Jesus' followers, they are our forebears in faith – they, like us, are searchers involved in the quest for meaning and purpose. They had been drawn to him and their journey found them in the synagogue where Jesus sets about the task of explaining the scripture but also sharing with them his own personal knowledge of what it means to be in relationship with God as Father – not God as ogre or God as dispenser of vengeful justice.

This is ‘news’ to them steeped as they were in the God of the Old Testament. And yet, even though this message is so radical, it gains traction amongst his followers because it is shared with **authority** and it comes from a man of obvious integrity. This authority is, for his listeners, perfectly summed up in the way he addresses the man possessed of the unclean spirit. Our sanitised translation has Jesus saying: ‘Be quiet’ - a more accurate translation of the Aramaic would be: ‘Shut up’. If Jesus were to allow himself to become soiled by the corridors of power today, I wonder how many times he would utter those words – Shut Up? If he walked into the boardroom of a multi-national company would he sit quietly, murmuring acquiescence with the men of wisdom who passed as Directors or would he cry out ‘Shut up’?

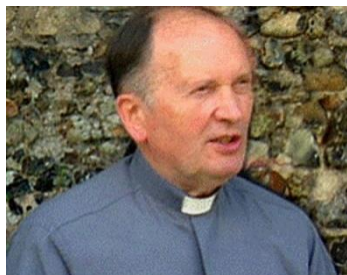
Now, of course, ‘Shut Up’ is not a solution to the problems we face unless it is followed by ‘let me speak’ or ‘Listen to what I have to say’. Jesus did just that and, as Mark reminds us: *(And) his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all of the surrounding Galilean countryside.* Notice it's just Galilee. Galilee was wide enough. Jerusalem would wait for another day. So it is with us. We each enjoy a small orbit of influence. This is sufficient responsibility. We have no need for fame and even less for notoriety, but we are obliged to bear witness, to speak with authority, the type of authority that is rooted in integrity. Siren voices will always try to lead others away from Him. Our voices will counteract and negate their influence. Sometimes we will have to say: ‘Shut Up and listen to what I have to say’. Don't worry about finding the right words. For in the first reading, Moses assures us that God himself will put the right words into our mouths.

OUR NEW SERIES – FINDING YOUR HIDDEN TREASURE

by Benignus O'Rourke

BENIGNUS O'ROURKE (1929-2019) was an Augustinian friar and a member of the Community at Clare Priory in Suffolk, who led hundreds of men and women, people of all faiths and none, on the way of silent prayer for more than forty years.

Sitting There All Peaceful and Quiet



Some time ago an elderly lady complained to me that she could no longer pray. 'Father,' she said, 'I can't pray like I used to. I come here to church after my shopping and sit here all peaceful and quiet. But, she sighed, 'I can't pray like I used to.'

I tried to suggest that perhaps sitting there all peaceful and quiet was prayer. Maybe it was a gift God was offering her at this stage of her life. But she was not convinced. Prayer for her meant keeping her mind on the words, battling with distractions, concentrating. Sitting there all peaceful and quiet would have seemed to her like laziness and failure.

What my parishioner was discovering, in fact, was one of God's loveliest gifts, the purest form of prayer. She rejected it because it was not what she had been taught. And she is not alone.

Many people who come to the retreat house where I live, to attend Sunday or daily Mass, or in search of peace and quiet or guidance, share her anxiety about praying. Many of us will remember being taught that prayer is a lifting of our minds and hearts to God. This teaching can lay a heavy burden on us. We feel that we must make an effort to speak to God, to praise him, to give thanks, to ask for help. We normally use words, thoughts, and images, and feel we have to keep our minds fixed on what we are saying. But there are times when we cannot find the words, or when the well-known prayers which usually inspire and comfort us strike no chord in our hearts. Or we may be singing God's praises while our hearts are heavy, or empty. And our hearts become heavier because our feelings do not match the words.

We are perhaps tired of words, anyway. Tired of asking God in words that have no life in them. Tired of thinking about God. Tired of being talked to about God. Tired of saying prayers that may be beautiful in themselves but are not bringing God closer to us. Then, perhaps it is best to simplify our prayers and follow the age-old advice, to go from many words to few words, from few words to one word, and from one word into silence.

Sometimes when we pray, our words, any words, can be barriers. They come between us and God. The deepest communion with God comes through silence.

There is a form of prayer where we do nothing, where we sit in stillness and silence, not straining or striving. We abandon all words and reflection, and we rest. We put ourselves in God's hands and wait in silence, to let God's Spirit pray in us.

Sitting there all peaceful and quiet, like the elderly lady in church, is what this kind of prayer is all about.

I would have knelt long, wrestling with you, wearing you down.

Hear my prayer, Lord, hear my prayer.

As though you were deaf, myriads of mortals have kept up their shrill cry, explaining your silence by their infirmness.

It begins to appear this is not what prayer is about.

It is the annihilation of difference, the consciousness of myself in you, and you in me.

(‘Emerging’ by 1996 Nobel Prize in Literature Nominee R. S. Thomas, a Welsh clergyman, exploring the true nature of prayer.)