

THE PARISHES OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST AND ST MARY MAGDALENE

35 Brighton Place, Edinburgh EH15 1LL

Bingham Avenue, Edinburgh EH15 3HY

Parish Priest:

Fr Jock Dalrymple:

0131 669 5447

Deacon:

Revd Eddie White:

07986 015772

Sacrament of Reconciliation: after the Vigil Mass (7.30pm on Saturday) or any time by appointment

Pastoral Team: Jennifer Morris and Chris Vinestock

Shared Parish House: 3 Sandford Gardens, Edinburgh, EH15 1LP

Parish Administrator: Enrico Fertini

(Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: 10.00am to 3.00pm & Friday 11.00am to 4.00pm)

Web address:

<https://www.stjohnsandstmarymagdalenes.com>

Joint Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/StJohnsandStMaryMagdalenes>

Joint e-mail address for our sister parishes:

stjohnsandstmarymagdalenes@gmail.com

26 MARCH 2023 FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



'Lazarus, here! Come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him. (John 11:43-45)

The popular little book of reflections - 'Living Faith' - is available at the back of both churches, with a reflection for each day from April to June – free (but a donation of £2 would help us cover costs!)

AN APPEAL FOR CYCLONE-HIT BLANTYRE IN MALAWI

This Sunday there is a leaving collection for the STEKA Fund – in response to the devastation caused a fortnight ago in Blantyre, Malawi, by a double hit from Tropical Cyclone Freddie: *'The Tropical Cyclone Freddy weather system brought torrential rains, with the equivalent of six months of rain falling in just six days, causing devastating floods and mudslides in Southern Malawi.. The record-breaking weather system hit Malawi at the end of the rainy season when rivers and water bodies were already at high levels...a week on, the number of people affected continues to rise, with over 563,000 people displaced and over 500 deaths as of 23 March.'* •

The STEKA Children's Home in Blantyre has received extensive damage from the flooding but its founder, Godknows Maseko, is more concerned with the impact on some of their destitute neighbours. On Thursday he wrote: *'Please, the situation here is very bad....having now gone out to make an impact assessment, we can see*

that there are many children now in camps in similar situations. We are hoping to do all we can to help those living locally – with clothes from our containers, and if possible with financial support from our donors overseas. Please help us...'

Emma Wood of STEKA Skills writes: 'Although we know that big charities will be able to make an important impact in the medium and long-term, right now, grassroots organisations such as STEKA with strong links to local communities, are well placed to help street children and others whose parents have been hospitalised or killed. Many of these children have already made their way to the STEKA home – although there isn't room to house them all, if the home can be repaired, and with money, these children could be given both physical, spiritual and psycho-social support. And this could also be spread to parentless children in nearby camps which Godknows is already visiting. In the longer term, with enough money, we could create safe spaces at our vocational skills centres and help people rebuild their lives there.

Donate here <https://www.justgiving.com/skekaskills>, or you can alternatively donate to StekaSkills directly by bank transfer – acc. name: StekaSkills, sort code: 80-22-60, acc. number 18555368.

Gift Aid forms can be collected from the Parish House or contact Gary Zoltie at garyzoltie@hotmail.com.

You can find out the latest news about the cyclone [here](#).

LECTIO DIVINA – '*Lectio divina*' means 'divine reading' in Latin and is a fitting name for this prayer practice of listening to Scripture with the ear of the heart' - **This Wednesday at 7pm in the Parish House Prayer Room, there will be a lectio group – all most welcome – no previous experience required – the focus will be on 'the beloved disciple' in John's Gospel.**

Our next Baptismal Preparation Course will take place on **Thursday 27 April** and **Thursday 4 May** at 7.30pm in the Parish House at 7.30pm. If you would like to participate, please make contact with Fr Jock.

THANK YOU to all who co-ordinated – and supported – last week's 40 Hours Adoration.

THIS WEEK

Saturday 25 March - FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

10.00am – St John's – **Mass** - livestreamed

6.30pm – St John's – **Vigil Mass** - livestreamed

Sunday 26 March – 5th SUNDAY OF LENT

9.30am – St John's – **Mass** - livestreamed

11.15am – St Mary Magdalene's – **Mass** - livestreamed

3.00pm – St Catherine's Convent, 4 Lauriston Gardens - **The Legion of Mary Acies Ceremony of consecration to Our Lady.** 'There will be Rosary and Legion prayers, a talk by our Spiritual Director, Fr John Peter, and Benediction in the beautiful chapel. Refreshments will be served afterwards. All members, active and auxiliary, and friends of the Legion are invited to attend this Ceremony. Please come along. You will be very welcome.'

Monday 27 March

10.00am – St John's – **Mass** - livestreamed

7.00pm – Zoom - **Gospel Sharing** (click [HERE](#) or type <https://tinyurl.com/5n8c5ezk> into your browser)

7.30pm – 2 Goff Avenue - **Lenten House Group** (Host – Ros McKay, leader – Bronagh Power)

Tuesday 28 March

2.30pm – 56/1 Moira Terrace – **Lenten House Group** (Host – Pauline McInnes, leaders – Jim and Evelyn Roarty)

7.00pm – Parish House – **Mass** - livestreamed

7.00pm – Zoom – **On-line Lenten House Group** – (Leader - Tanya White)

(click [HERE](#) or type <https://shorturl.net/3J9k7N> into your browser)

7.45pm – Parish House – **RCIA Meeting**

Wednesday 29 March

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

10.35am – St John’s – **Stations of the Cross**

11.00am – 5 Rosefield Street – **Lenten House Group** (Host – Pat Robertson, leader – Jennifer Morris)

7.00pm-8.00pm – Parish House - **An Invitation to knit a Prayer Shawl during Lent.** (Any questions please feel free to message Tracy Burgess - 07939662962).

7.00pm – Parish House Prayer Room – **LECTIO DIVINA**

Thursday 30 March

10.00am – St Mary Magdalene’s – **Mass** - livestreamed

1.30pm – St John’s – **P7 Tour of the Church**

7.00pm – 16 Greenfield Park, Musselburgh – **Lenten House Group** (Hosts Penelope and Freddie MacLellan Hawkes, leader – Dave Connarty)

7.30pm – 38 Milton Rd W – **Lenten House Group** (Host – Joyce Martin, leader – Sheila Tansey)

Friday 31 March

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

10.30am – St John Vianney’s – **Requiem Mass for Paul Igoe (Fr Jock)**

Saturday 1 April

9.30am – 1.30pm – St John’s Hall – **Pamoja Fashion Sale**

6.30pm – St John’s – **Vigil Mass with Procession with Palms** - livestreamed

Sunday 2 April – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF LORD

9.30am – St John’s – **Mass with Procession with Palms** - livestreamed

11.15am – St Mary Magdalene’s – **Mass with Procession with Palms** - livestreamed

From Archbishop Leo’s Weekly ‘Ad Clerum’

Palm Sunday talk - Archbishop Leo hosts a talk about Palm Sunday **this Monday 27 March at 7:30pm**. It is for those who want to better understand the background to the liturgy and prepare for the day. Register for this Zoom talk at bit.ly/palmsundaytalk

Archdiocesan Stations of the Cross - Start Holy Week by joining people across the Archdiocese online for Stations of the Cross. It takes place on **Monday 3 April at 7:45pm** on Zoom and is a chance to pray for all pro-life intentions. Includes a reflection from Archbishop Leo. Register at bit.ly/stations2023

Called & Gifted Workshop - Identify your charisms (spiritual gifts) and discern God’s call through the Called and Gifted Workshop. It is hosted by the Archdiocese in collaboration with the St Catherine of Siena Institute and takes place on Saturday 20 May from 9:00am to 3:30pm. Cost is £25 and includes materials, online access, and lunch. Details and registration at bit.ly/calledgifted2023.

*Peaceful was the night and deep the silence,
when my boat set sail on the open sea,
Gliding over the boundless ocean on the loveliest of journeys.
All was hushed beneath the vault of heaven
As if listening to the voice of the Eternal.*

*Suddenly the waves arose, engulfing my light barque –
It was the Trinity opening out to me:
In that divine abyss I found my deepest centre.
No more will you find me at the water’s edge;
I have plunged into infinity, where I belong.
With my Three I live in peace, in the wide freedom of eternity.*

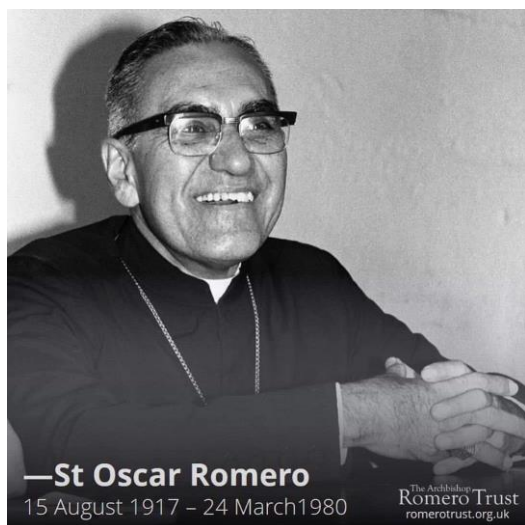
(St Elizabeth of the Trinity, 1880-1906)

SAINT OF THE WEEK

1. ST OSCAR ROMERO - Archbishop and Martyr of San Salvador (1917-1980)

24 March

"I rejoice, brothers and sisters, that our church is persecuted precisely for its preferential option for the poor and for seeking to become incarnate in the interests of the poor.... How sad it would be in a country where such horrible murders are being committed if there were no priests among the victims."



—St Oscar Romero
15 August 1917 – 24 March 1980

The Archbishop
Romero Trust
romerotrust.org.uk

The selection in 1977 of Oscar Romero as archbishop of San Salvador delighted the country's oligarchy as much as it disappointed the activist clergy of the archdiocese. Known as a pious and relatively conservative bishop, there was nothing in his background to suggest that he was a man to challenge the status quo. No one could have predicted that in three short years he would be renowned as the outstanding embodiment of the prophetic church, a "voice for the voiceless," or, as one theologian called him, "a gospel for El Salvador." Nor could one foresee that he would be denounced by his fellow bishops, earn the hatred of the rich and powerful of El Salvador, and generate such enmity that he would be targeted for assassination - the first bishop slain at the altar since Thomas Becket in the twelfth century.

Something changed him. Within weeks of his consecration, he found himself officiating at the funeral of his friend Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit priest of the archdiocese, who was assassinated as a result of his commitment to social justice. Romero was deeply shaken by this event, which marked a new level in the frenzy of violence overtaking the country. In the weeks and months following Grande's death, Romero underwent a profound transformation. Some would speak of a conversion - as astonishing to his new friends as it was to his foes. From a once timid and conventional cleric, there emerged a fearless and outspoken champion of justice. His weekly sermons, broadcast by radio throughout the country, featured an inventory of the week's violations of human rights, casting the glaring light of the gospel on the realities of the day. His increasingly public role as the conscience of the nation earned him not only the bitter enmity of the country's oligarchy, but also the resentment of many of his conservative fellow bishops. There were those among them who muttered that Romero was talking like a subversive.

The church in El Salvador was not the first church to suffer persecution. The anomaly was that here the persecutors dared to call themselves Christians. Their victims did not die simply for clinging to the faith, but for clinging, like Jesus, to the poor. It was this insight that marked a new theological depth in Romero's message. For Romero, the church's option for the poor was not just a matter of pastoral priorities. It was a defining characteristic of Christian faith: "A church that does not unite itself to the poor in order to denounce from the place of the poor the injustice committed against them is not truly the Church of Jesus Christ," he wrote. On another occasion he said, "On this point there is no possible neutrality. We either serve the life of Salvadorans or we are accomplices in their death.... We either believe in a God of life or we serve the idols of death."

Once his course was set, Romero followed his path with courageous consistency. Privately he acknowledged his fears and loneliness, especially the pain he felt from the opposition of his fellow bishops and the apparent distrust of Rome. Constantly he was accused of subordinating the gospel to politics. At the same time, he seemed to draw strength and courage from the poor campesinos, who embraced him with affection and understanding. "With this people," he said, "it is not hard to be a good shepherd."

The social contradictions in El Salvador were rapidly reaching the point of explosion. Coups, countercoups, and fraudulent elections brought forth a succession of governments, each promising reform, while leaving the military and the death squads free to suppress the popular demand for justice. As avenues for peaceful change were systematically thwarted, full-scale civil war became inevitable. In 1980, weeks before his death, Romero sent a letter to American President Jimmy Carter appealing for a halt to further U.S. military assistance to the junta, "thus avoiding greater bloodshed in this suffering country." On March 23, 1980, the day before his death, he appealed directly to members of the military, calling on them to refuse illegal orders:

We are your people. The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters. When you hear the voice of the man commanding you to kill, remember instead the voice of God. Thou Shalt Not Kill....In the name of God, in the name of our tormented people whose cries rise up to heaven, I beseech you, I beg you, I command you, stop the repression.

The next day, as he was saying Mass in the chapel of the Carmelite Sisters' cancer hospital where he lived, a single rifle shot was fired from the rear of the chapel. Romero was struck in the heart and died within minutes. Romero was immediately acclaimed by the people of El Salvador, and indeed by the poor throughout Latin America, as a true martyr and saint. For Romero, who clearly anticipated his fate, there was never any doubt as to the meaning of such a death. In an interview two weeks before his assassination, he said:

I have frequently been threatened with death. I must say that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death but in the resurrection. If they kill me, I shall rise again in the Salvadoran people. Martyrdom is a great gift from God that I do not believe I have earned. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life then may my blood be the seed of liberty, and a sign of the hope that will soon become a reality.... A bishop will die, but the church of God - the people - will never die.

Oscar Romero was canonised on 14 October 2018.

See: Oscar Romero, Voice of the Voiceless (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985); James R. Brockman, Romero: A Life (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989).

Lord, take my heart and break it:
*break it not in the way I would like,
but in the way you know to be best.
And because it is you who break it,
I will not be afraid,
for in your hands all is safe,
and I am safe.*

*Lord, take my heart and fill it with your joy,
not always in ways I like,
but in the ways you know are best,
that your joys may be fulfilled in me.
So, Lord, I am ready to be your friend, your servant.
Amen.*

(Archbishop Michael Ramsey)

‘SAINT’ OF THE WEEK

2. Sister Thea Bowman - African-American Franciscan (1937-1990)

30 March

"Maybe I'm not making big changes in the world, but if I have somehow helped or encouraged somebody along the journey then I've done what I'm called to do."

Thea Bowman was one of the great treasures of the American Catholic church. As a Franciscan Sister, she managed, in her manifold witness to the gospel, to integrate the resources of her Catholic faith with her identity as an African-American woman. Ablaze with the spirit of love, the memory of struggle, and a faith in God's promises, she impressed her many audiences not just with her message but with her nobility of spirit. No one she encountered, whether school children, college students, cynical journalists, or a convention hall of bishops, could fail to catch a measure of her joy and gratitude for the gift of life. She was a particular inspiration to the black Catholic community, helping them to assert their pride of place among the People of God, while also encouraging them to enrich the wider church with the gifts of their distinctive culture and spirituality.

She was born Bertha Bowman in rural Mississippi in 1937. While attending a parochial school she was baptized as a Catholic at the age of ten. The most formative experience of her childhood came when her parents switched her to a new school run by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. There she found her love of learning but also



her vocation to become a nun. To her family and friends, it was an astonishing decision. Nevertheless, she entered the convent when she was sixteen and took the name Sister Thea ("of God").

As the only black face in a white religious order, she tended to stand out. But whatever the expectations of her community, she had no desire to "blend in." She brought with her a strong sense of her identity as a black Catholic woman, and over time she came to believe that this identity entailed a very special vocation. She was committed to asserting a black way of being Catholic. Previously black Catholics were expected to conform to the spirituality of the white Euro-American church. The gospel hymns, the spirituals, the dancing, the testifying in the spirit - all features of the Protestant black churches - were foreign in the Catholic church. But for black Catholics, Sister Thea believed, this accounted for a sense of cultural marginality. Not only should there be room in the Catholic church for the spiritual traditions of African Americans, but their experience had much to contribute to the wider church. Part of this experience was the history of slavery and oppression. But part of it also was a spirituality of survival and resistance reflected in the tradition of the spirituals, the importance of family, community, celebration, and remembrance.

"What does it mean to be black and Catholic?" she asked. "It means that I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the Church."

After earning a doctorate in English, Thea returned to the South to work with the church in Mississippi and Louisiana. In 1980 she helped to found the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans. This became the base for her ministry as a speaker and evangelist. Thea was an extraordinary, spellbinding speaker. A combination of storyteller, preacher, and performer, she brought to her lectures the atmosphere of a revival meeting. Punctuating her speaking with renditions of the spirituals, she generally had her audiences, black or white, singing along with her before she was finished.

She was invited to speak before hundreds of groups, including the U.S. Catholic bishops at their annual meeting in 1989. In one speech she noted that women were not allowed to preach in the Catholic church. But this shouldn't stop them from preaching everywhere else! *"God has called to us to speak the word that is Christ, that is truth, that is salvation. And if we speak that word in love and faith, with patience and prayer and perseverance, it will take root. It does have power to save us. Call one another! Testify! Teach! Act on the Word! Witness!"*

By this time Sister Thea was compelled to bear witness in a different way. She was diagnosed in 1984 as suffering from breast cancer. Though increasingly ill, Thea continued her extensive travels and speaking, even when she was confined to a wheelchair. With her bright African robes and her now-bald head, she was, as always, a striking figure. But now when she sang the spirituals *"Sometimes I feel like a motherless child / A long way from home"* - her audience detected an even more personal and poignant confession of faith.

The faith that had sustained the slaves, the hope expressed in the spirituals, the love embodied by St. Francis, now sustained her in her personal way of the cross. And to her other mighty gifts to the church, she now added the witness of her courage and trust in God:

When I first found out I had cancer, I didn't know what to pray for. I didn't know if I should pray for healing or life or death. Then I found peace in praying for what my folks call "God's perfect will." As it evolved, my prayer has become, "Lord, let me live until I die." By that I mean I want to live, love, and serve fully until death comes. If that prayer is answered...how long really doesn't matter. Whether it's just a few months or a few years is really immaterial.

Asked how she made sense out of her suffering, she answered, *"I don't make sense of suffering. I try to make sense of life... I try each day to see God's will... I console myself with the old Negro spiritual: 'Sooner will be done the troubles of this world. I'm going home to live with God.'" Sister Thea died on March 30, 1990, at the age of fifty-three.*

See: Celestine Cephress, ed., Thea Bowman: Shooting Star (Winona, Minn.: Saint Mary's, 1993).

PARISH REGISTER

Welcome to the world, *Matilda Rennie*, a first child for *Marie McGarrol* and *Martin Rennie*, born on 3 March.

Please pray for those who have died recently:

*David Cahill - Sara Alkhatari
Jackie Gold - Patrick O'Callaghan
Patricia Cooper*

Please pray for those whose anniversaries occur around this time:

*Tom Thornton - Tom Gray - Celia Roberts - Elizabeth McEwing - Helen Budge - Samuel Casement - Gerry Higgins - Alison Stewart
Liz Davis - Helen Hanlon
Celeste Crolla - Ellie Meagher*

Please pray for those Parishioners who are sick:

St. John's:

Valentino Raviele, Una Laing, John Freeman, Kim O'Neill, Mike and Patricia Lawler, Harry Allan, baby Damon McDonald, May Thomson, Bob Kelly, Carol Simpson, Pat Dickin, Charlotte and Fred McGregor, Kitty Dykes, Kenny O'Connor, Gerry Gallagher, John Cregan, Rose Thornton, Kathleen Brown, Mike Noonan, John Whyte, Maria Pacitti, Fiona Connel, Ann Dobie, Sheelagh Dobson, Chloe Sutherland, Norah Bruce, Ruth Vizor, Mary Grady, Pauli Walker, Anna Butler, May Flynn, Vincent Knowles, young Saoirse Golden, Frances Cunningham, David Reid, Betty Dougal, Anne Thomson, Sarah McManus, Mike Burns, Sr Jennifer Lindsay, Maureen Low, Mary Slight, Norman Telfer, Kathie Gallagher, Erin Corbett, Roz Byers, Marie Angela Crolla and Lorraine Syme.

St Mary Magdalene's:

Allan Guthrie, John McLaughlin, Mary McGovern (jnr), Carolynne McCann, Tom Bauld, Sam Burns, Jacqueline Marinello, Sandra Watt, Mary Cole, Chris English, Andrew Farmer, Margaret Duffy, Maria Scott Jnr, Louise Gorman, Bridget Malone, Charles Malcolm, Margaret Ryan, Jacqueline Hannan, Julie Keegan, Rose McKay, Annie Watson, David O'Donnell, Jude Ferguson and Mary and James Muir.

Offertory 19 March 2023

St Mary Magdalene's, £180.94 total, including £118.94 Offertory and £62.00 Gift Aid.

St John's, £1183.70 total, including £350.90 Offertory, £137.80 Gift Aid and £695.00 online donations.

Special Collection (Papal and Episcopal Charities): £199.95 + £522.94

Anniversaries:

St John's:

Mar.25: Margaret McCartney (2012); Frank Connelly (1992); John Allen (1964); Maurice Brosnan; Natalie Valente; **Mar.26:** Mary Brown Fusco (2005); Angelo Young (1995); **Mar.27:** Eileen McCann (2017); James Lacey Jun. (1991); Alice Baron (1970); Dorothy K Lynch (1964); Sarah Ferrier; **Mar.28:** Helen Hanlon (2019); Bridie Hughes (1994); Charles Marrins; Edward Baxter (Killed in action) (1943); **Mar.29:** Constance Miller (2013); Robert Duffy (2011); Charles Herriott (1998); John Ogilvie; **Mar.30:** Tom Thornton (2017); John Harkin (2003); Giuseppina Nicora (1947); Jean Joyce; **Mar.31:** Elizabeth Kelly (2008); Peter Sheridan (2003); Anthony John (2002); Margaret Thackery (2002); Agnes Clyne (1956); Alison Stewart (1994); **Apr.1:** Celeste Crolla (2022); Ellie Meagher (2016); Kathleen Craig (2014); Hedley Smibert (2008); Margaret Smith (2007); James McAlinden (1987); Mary Anne McWilliams (1972); **Apr.2:** Mary Burke (1997); Mrs. Brennan (1993); James Magee (1962);

St Mary Magdalene's:

Mar.25: Stephen Archibald (1998); James Donoghue (1983); Kathleen Edwards (1981); **Mar.26:** Elizabeth McEwing (2019); Helen Budge (2002); **Mar.28:** Irene Valentine (2013); **Mar.30:** Christina Renton (1980); **Apr.1:** Liz Davis (2016); **Apr.2:** Samuel Casement (2015); Hugh Boyle (1997);

Please pray for sick friends and relatives of our Parishioners:

Elizabeth Mcgrath, and Granny Elizabeth, Andrew Muldoon, John Havard, Mary Wallace, Allan Crombie, Cath Renwick, Kieran Smart, Jim Gray, John Cudlipp, Ellen Green, Sandy Ferguson, Sophie Robinson, Louise Young, Emma Blackman, Anthony Kramers, Tricia Scott, Harriet Wingfield Digby (aged 9), Alan Proudlock, Evelyn Walsh, Kate Mackay, Grace Stuart, Stephen Norwood, Bill and Audrey Jones, Richard Johnson, John Miller, Lydia Reid, Douglas Edington, Agnes Clarke, David Fenwick, Maurice McAllister, Rita Noonan, baby Lucas McCourt, Ava Simpkin (aged 12), Ellen Dow, Chris White, members of the McGrath Family, Maureen Hutchinson, Hans Zaunbrecher, Judith Franklin, Clare Johnston, Mary and Derek Lamarque, Anne Morris, Baby Josh Simpson, Keiran Smart (aged 15), Michael Doherty, Carol Turnbull, Jean Wylie, Mary Conefrey, Angela Khan, George and Ann McDermott, Suzanne O'Callaghan, Lucille McFadden, Tara Kuppinger, Jessica Haggerty, Charlotte O'Brien, Gwen Cullimore, young Martha Moyes (aged 5), Jennifer Kay, Margaret Troupe, Seval and Kazim Kazimoglu, Ann Watt (Mgr Rae's sister), Jan Meise, Melanie Ford, Mary Taygarth Roger Bromley, Tony Rigg, Henrietta Fraser, Stuart Falconer, Elizabeth, Colin Sandham, Elizabeth and Gordon Marron, Dawn Clarke, Katie McAnenny, John Kellagher, Colin Raasch, Annabelle Cervantes, Emily Buchanan, Ann Thorp, Dani Miniette, Peter Millar, Joan Murray Hamilton, Sr Margaret Mary, Betty Blyth, Lauren Fitzpatrick, Michael Igoe, Clare Richardson, Laura Anderson, Richard Reid, James O'Rourke, Tommy Muir, James Shepherd, Peter Hanley, Andrew Franklin, Jamie Mitchell, Edward Caulfield, Igor Rekowski, Joan Brooks, Mary Turnbull and young Ray Donovan

A REFLECTION ON THE GOSPEL FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT – JOHN 11:1-45

(The author of this reflection is a friend of Fr Jock who lives in Northumberland)

Towards the end of my training, I was sent on pastoral placement. I would go there for four days a week, returning to the college for the other three. The priest I lived with attached a great deal of importance to our bonding time together. His must watch TV programme was the old ITV News at Ten with Reginald Bosanquet. Sometimes I would arrive a few minutes late but my tumbler of whisky, having been poured, sat on the side table next to my chair as a silent reminder that my presence was never an option - always an expectation. While we sat sipping whisky (if only I had been able to sip, rather than gulp!) Miss Chapman, the housekeeper would be in the kitchen busying herself with all manner of chores – darning, sewing, ironing. She was always last to bed and preferred to be the one who locked the house. It was with her that I became a co-conspirator. It was never intentional on my part and came about completely by chance. I have always been something of a lark and always tended to rise early. It has always been a comfort to me to be up and about before everyone else, to greet the dawn, to possess for a fleeting moment the whole of creation before other humans imposed on my peace and solitude. One morning, I was up earlier than usual and although I thought I had been considerate and quiet in my early use of the bathroom, I found myself overtaken at great speed by the housekeeper as she sped down the staircase, desperate to reach the kitchen before me. I don't know which was the more impressive – her speed or the voluminous housecoat enveloping my head and threatening to suffocate me even as it blinded me. At the kitchen door, she turned, and with eyes full of pleading, begged: 'Please don't say a word to Father! Please!' She opened the kitchen door and quietly roused a sleeping figure, bedded down on the floor. 'John! John! You'll have to get up now.' I recognised the figure before me, looking cosy and secure on his make-shift bed on the floor. He was a frequent visitor to the house, - usually looking for a cup of tea and a biscuit. The housekeeper had her own bathroom (propriety in all things) and each month he would use it and she would have found fresh clothing for him courtesy of jumble sales and the like.

Back to News at Ten. Out of the blue, he asked: 'Do you remember that old chap that used to come to the door asking for a cup of tea and a biscuit? Have you seen him lately?'. Panic! He had found out, hadn't he? Miss Chapman had blurted the truth. I was being tested before being sent back to college in disgrace. Did he sense my discomfort? I started to stammer and could feel my face resembling a nuclear reactor in thermal meltdown, The 'old chap' was well known in the town. He was never aggressive, never rude, never drunk. He was a Gentle-Man. Not landed gentry, grant you, but a real gentle-man. My confidence was returning: 'They found him on North Road sidings a few weeks back. He'd been sleeping in a derelict railway outhouse. He died of natural causes; I think. Miss Chapman told me that she had been to his funeral'. I added, by way of casual nonchalance: 'Did she not tell you?' 'No', he replied. He paled. 'Are you ok? You look as if you've seen a ghost'. 'I was horrible to him the last time he came', he confessed. 'I was on my way out. I could have stopped to make him a cup of tea, but I sent him away with a flea in his ear.' Then he humbly added: 'I'll have to live with that now'. There was nothing I could say. Dignified silence seemed the better option. He didn't need a comment from me and so he made his way to bed with guilt for company and grief at his lost Christian awareness and charity. For some reason, the story of Lazarus that we read about this weekend, always makes me think of John, dying alone in a derelict railway building.

The Gospel presents a wonderfully domestic scene. We can surmise that the three siblings were close. As popular as they were close, they are one of only a few family units we hear or read about in the gospels. Many had come to offer respect and sympathy. Jesus was close to them and when Lazarus was ill, the two sisters sent a message: *the man you love is ill*. They are anxious that Jesus arrives while there is still time. Are there any words in the whole episode more important than: ***Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart*** and ***Jesus wept***. In these two actions, Jesus consecrates our own grief. Over the years we have grieved for many, our hearts have ached, our tears have scalded. In raising Lazarus, Jesus has made all those occasions moments of holiness, consecrated moments, life-giving emotions. Whether our funeral be packed or witnessed by a solitary Miss Chapman, it will be a moment of intense sacredness, because Jesus has been there. When he was there he wept, he sighed, he grieved – and he reaches his hand to support us, and to bear us up.