

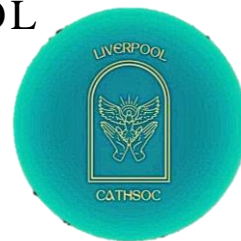
CATHOLIC CHAPLAINCY TO THE LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITIES

The University Church of St Philip Neri Church ~ "The Oratory Church"

30 Catharine Street L8 7NL Tel: 0151-709 3858

Chaplain: Fr Neil Ritchie n.ritchie@rcaol.org.uk

www.cathchap.org.uk unichap@rcaol.org.uk



23rd March 2025

Third Sunday of Lent (Year C)



"Moses, Moses...take the sandals off your feet, for the place you are standing is holy ground (Ex 3:4,5)"

Events for Students and University Members:

Masses & Services This Week:

Monday: 8.15 Mass at the [Missionaries of Charity](#) house (55 Seel St) – students always welcome!

Tuesday: Mass 5.30pm

Wednesday: Lunchtime prayer at Faith Express, 1pm; Mass 5.30pm

Thursday: 5.30pm: Stations of the Cross *

Sunday: Confessions 5.15-5.30pm; Mass 6pm

*events in the chaplaincy; enter via the Blackburne Place entrance

Today Bethany and Daisy from Castlerigg Manor retreat centre will be coming to the chaplaincy Mass and giving a presentation afterwards at 7.20pm about internship opportunities for next academic year. This will be of particular interest if you are leaving university this year and looking for opportunities of this nature...but may also be of interest to all of you as a possible opportunity for the future...

Faith Express: Wednesday lunchtime: Join us for lunch (bring your own!) and a reflection on the Sunday Gospel, preceded by Prayer during the Day. 1pm.

On Thursday, in place of Adoration with Evening Prayer, we will pray the Stations of the Cross in Church, starting at 5.30pm. Please come to the back door as usual. Soup etc will follow after, as usual!



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The last Sunday Mass of term will be on Sunday April 6th. Mass will resume on **Sunday April 27th**... which is the date on



which the Holy Father will canonise **Blessed Carlo Acutis**. Speaking of which, we will be placing an icon of Blessed Carlo in the chaplaincy 'chapel', and it will then be known as the "Carlo Acutis Room". The icon will be blessed on Sunday 27th April

Tuesday evening: House Prayer & Fellowship

Come and join us in the chaplaincy student house from 6.30pm for prayer (based on the Readings of the Day), tea and chat! You can come directly to the house at 30 Catharine Street (next to Church; ring the 'student's' bell or come through after 5.30pm Mass)

This week, Chaplaincy Assistant Arran reflects on

A Difficult Gospel Reading...

*“Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; But if not, you can cut it down.”
Luke 13:9*

Every so often in our Gospel readings we get something of a shock. In our minds the teachings of Jesus can tend to blend and blur together, forming the rhetorical equivalent of a warm and cosy blanket. Jesus is always smiling as he walks serenely about the Holy Land, which is somehow always pleasantly green and sunny, with the Sea of Galilee perpetually sparkling somewhere in the background. Him and his disciples walk from place-to-place, and every so often Jesus will choose a moment to say something incredibly thought provoking and wise.

Beware that figment of your imagination. Its harmfulness becomes apparent when you find yourself reading or listening to a Gospel passage where Christ says something that sounds harsh, or blunt, or discordant with our image of him as a gentle, harmless, cheerful fellow with flowing long hair and an immaculately trimmed beard. By basking in that image of Jesus, we fall into the same trap as the disciples did in last week's Gospel: we fail to see him for what he truly is and instead become fixated on preserving the image that we have constructed of him. So, we hear the difficult message of this Sunday's Gospel and gloss over it slightly, or we think, quietly and perhaps even unconsciously, that somehow Jesus mustn't have quite meant what we read now, or that this Gospel is somehow subsumed into the bigger picture, and can in some way be explained away by some larger, overarching message. We can be just like the disciples – hearing, but not really hearing. That is why I always imagine the Father to be speaking with a frustrated tone when he says, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”

It is vital that we remember that every word and action of Christ is an outpouring of God's Love. Love is not some concoction of happy emotion – Love is the word we use to express the mysterious, unknowable depths of God's own being. Indeed, far from being a moment of happiness, our clearest glimpse of this Love is given us amidst the sorrow of the Easter season that we are steadily advancing towards. So it is out of Love that Jesus speaks to us in this Gospel - “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Already I can feel the urge to shy away from these

words. But he spoke them, and their meaning could not be more clear. To choose to live in sin, to fail to repent and battle against it, is to choose the path of death. This is not something being imposed on us; it is an active choice that we are making, to reject Jesus, ‘the way, the truth and the life.’

We are reminded that Jesus has not come to give us platitudes and profundities. He is in the business of salvation, and that business deals in life and death. Further, and this needs to be said over and over because as human beings we're very adept at deluding ourselves about it: the time for us to make up our minds on this is extremely limited. This Christ says with his descriptions of the fig tree; “if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” We can presume that the year he offers us is that of our own lives – our lives that can be lived following Jesus or rejecting him. If we do not bear fruit, then we will be ‘chopped down.’ Death then, is the point where all this is to be decided; either Death will be the herald of full, new life to come, or it will be the end of things.

It's here that we come to the actual realisation that, though we may have a tendency to characterise some Gospel readings as more ‘difficult’ than others, in reality they're actually all as difficult as each other. Christ's message, though it has different turns and angles depending on the circumstances and the Gospel writer, is essentially the same throughout – it is the one proclaimed by the Cross on Calvary. Death and Life, salvation or condemnation, these lie within our own power; we can choose to accept the forgiveness which Jesus has won for us, or we can reject it. It is a great challenge; indeed, it is the only challenge, which every other circumstance and event of our life fits inside and is guided by.

We are offered an opportunity to take a step down the road of life each and every day. Don't be disheartened if you stumble, because that proves you're human, just like those first disciples. But also don't give up! Down that road of life, which is Faith, lies true Joy and Hope, in this world and the next. God is Love, and that Love will never end.

