

STRONGER THAN DEATH

This is what consoles us in our times of sorrow and grief, when we are tempted to say: "Lord, where are you?" The Lord is crying with us, suffering with us. Through his compassion, he sows in us the seeds of faith and hope which blossom into resurrection and life. The tomb of our heart opens in the instant in which Jesus leads us to confess with Martha: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." Our faith in life after death is not based on philosophical arguments. We are persuaded that death is not the end of everything because the Lord has proved his faithfulness to us: he is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all... are alive" (Luke 20:37-38). We do not know how we can remain alive when our bodies disappear, but we trust God's promise: "whoever... believes in me will never die". This is why we rise from death the moment we say: "I believe in you, Lord." This act of faith is the authentic worship through which we live for ever: it stands against all evidence to the contrary, does not waver even in our grief; it knows that God's love is stronger than death.

Luigi Gioia is Research Associate of the Von Hügel Institute for Critical Catholic Inquiry, St Edmund's College, Cambridge University, and the author of *Say it to God: The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2018* and *Touched by God: The Way to Contemplative Prayer* – www.sayittogod.com



Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Give me justice, O God, and plead my cause against a nation that is faithless.

From the deceitful and cunning rescue me, for you, O God, are my strength.

FIRST READING Ezekiel 37:12-14

PSALM Psalm 129

RESPONSE **With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.**

1. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my voice!
O let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading. **R.**
2. If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive?
But with you is found forgiveness: for this we revere you. **R.**
3. My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word.
My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak.
(Let the watchman count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord.) **R.**

4. Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption, Israel indeed he will redeem from all its iniquity. **R.**

SECOND READING Romans 8:8-11

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glory and praise to you, O Christ! I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; whoever believes in me will never die. Glory and praise to you, O Christ!

GOSPEL John 11:1-45

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Everyone who lives and believes in me will not die for ever, says the Lord.

Next Sunday's Readings:
Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

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OPENING OUR GRAVES FROM WITHIN

There is a very cruel sentence in today's Gospel. It comes at a moment of great sorrow for Jesus. His friend Lazarus is dead. Jesus is greatly upset and cries. Someone, however, mistrusts Jesus' tears, thinks he is a hypocrite and disparages him: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" This is our voice. We think that God would prove God's love for us more by preventing death than by sharing it and its consequences with us. Jesus comes to be with us in our pain. He does not look at our suffering from the outside but endures it with us. He is distressed and cries with us. Despite all this, however, we do not believe that he means it; we question the reality of his concern for us. This terrible sentence shows how compromised our conception of God and of love is. Our love is cheap. We think that we can help others without losing our comfort, without authentic compassion, that is "suffering with" another.

This caricature of love attests that we still are prisoners of the tomb of our unbelief, enclosed in our hearts of stone. God comes to open the tombs of our unbelief by removing our hearts of stone and giving us hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). God persuades us of God's love for us not by trying to impress us, to seduce us with magical tricks or miracles that would set God above us. God comes to us in Jesus not armed with power but with determination to embrace the whole of our human plight, including the experience of death, including our grief. Thus, Jesus does not prevent the death of a friend, but shares Martha and Mary's tears and walks with them in their anguished path towards hope. He even exposes himself to the smell and the inexorable disintegration that death entails: "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus lucidly faces death in all its horror before accepting himself to die and to be locked up in a sepulchre. This is God's bewildering way of fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy: "Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves." Who could have foreseen that the Lord would open the graves not from the outside, but from within? Who could have predicted that he would open them not through a show of power and strength, but by sharing our tears?



The path to worship



Dr Luigi Gioia continues this series of reflections for Lent.

29 MARCH 2020

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I

Parish of St Mary, Middlewich & St Margaret Ward, Holmes Chapel

Parish Priest: Fr Peter Dutton, 2 New King Street, Middlewich ☎01606 832359 Deacons: Rev Tony Ford, 01270 759511
Rev Chris Wells 01606 738030 www.stmarysparishmiddlewich.org.uk . E mail: stmarysrcmiddlewich@gmail.com
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Fifth Sunday in Lent, 29th March 2020

Sunday	29th Mar	10.30am	Tony Barton Anniv
		12.00pm	National Prayers of Dedication
Monday	30th Mar	9.00am	Wickham Family
Tuesday	31st Mar	9.00am	Hough Family
Wednesday	1st Apr	10.00am	Joanne Barthorpe RIP
		7.30pm	Private Int.
Thursday	2nd Apr	9.00am	Vivian Fenning RIP
Friday	3rd Apr	9.00am	Mary Fewtrell RIP
Sunday	5th Apr	10.30am	Harry Hickland Anniv.

Sacrament of Reconciliation : On request in extreme need
Sacrament of Baptism On hold until further notice.

Please Pray for

ALL who are sick at home and in hospital: Stephen Grey, Margaret McCallum, Sara O'Brien, Jamie Connor, John Bomford, Nathan Carter, Larry Porter, Gillian Robinson, Tim Bradbury, Roy Yearsley, Peter Hannon, Stan Rosiak, Sadie Everard, Alex Randall, Jenny Ogden, John Evans, Shirley Gaskell, Joan Upton, Karen Potts, Fr Pat Munroe, Mary Morris, Michael McCluskey, Jan D, Margaret Scarlett, Angela Kitchen, Fr Paul Hughes, Deacon Philip White, Martin Armitt, Emily Wickham, Fr Jim McGrath,



ALL who have died recently, especially Joanne Barthorpe & Marion Bickerton

ALL whose anniversaries occur at this time: Anthony Carr, Thomas Costello, Bill Armsden, John Edward Malloy, Mary Carter, Eugene(John) McNamara, Patrick Ryan, Robert Quinn, Ellen Reynolds, Harry Hickland, Margaret Mary Barry, Ada Taylor, Theresa Hazell, Tori Morrey, William Foley, James Jennings, Joseph Turnbull, Mary Fahey, Eileen Morris, Eileen Gilbert, Ellen Marmion, Rev Joseph Cahill, Rev Charles Woods, Rev Michael Lloyd, Rev George Crespin, Pope John Paul II, Rev Thomas Osbyrne, Rev Keith Brigham

Dear Parishioners,

You will have heard by now that the Bishops' Conference has suspended the public celebration of Holy Mass. This decision was not taken lightly but as Christians it is our duty to do what we can to support our neighbours.

Unfortunately we are no longer allowed to have church open for private prayer. We want you to know that Fr Peter will be saying Mass privately in the church at the normal times so please join him in spiritual communion. Masses will be offered for the intentions requested on specific dates. Any new requests for Masses should be put through the presbytery door. Fr Peter thinks he has now mastered the technology, with the help of Deacon Chris, and he will put our daily Mass on St Mary's RC Parish Middlewich Facebook page. He will also put Exposition on there on Monday evening 7.00-7.30pm. You can also follow us on @stmarysparishmiddlewich

There are various other ways to participate in Holy Mass. There will be live streams available from Shrewsbury Cathedral (details at <http://www.dioceseofshrewsbury.org/about-us/live-masses>) Wythenshawe: <http://wythcc.co.uk/> and in our own deanery at St Alban's Macclesfield www.stalbanmacc.org.uk/stalbanslivestream.html, also from several other parishes in the diocese. You can also read all the prayers and scriptures for daily Mass at: www.magnificat.com/free and the scriptures for Mass at: www.universalis.com/mass

Other useful sites: The National Catholic Shrine to Our Lady at Walsingham has a full broadcast schedule – including Mass, Rosary, Vespers, Exposition, Mass in Latin and even some talks. Visit its [Livestream area](#). The producers of the Magnificat have kindly provided [complimentary access to its online version](#) to help people follow the Mass and pray from home. The website, www.ChurchPaper.co.uk, contains over 600 editions of the many newspapers.

If anyone requires the Sacrament of the Sick, please ring the presbytery. It is not permitted to take communion to the sick, except in danger of death.

If you are aware of any elderly or self-isolating people who need help with shopping or picking up prescriptions please ring the presbytery as we have a list of volunteers who can help.

On a practical note, we still have to pay bills so, if you are in a position to do so, please put offertory envelopes through the presbytery door: your generosity will be much appreciated. Some new boxes of envelopes have been delivered, but lock-down came in the middle of our delivery system so we are now not in a position to deliver the rest until after lock-down. If you wish to change to giving by standing order, either permanently or during the "no public Mass era," please see the information below.

We would also ask that those of you who are able, continue to donate items for the Food Bank, as there will be more clients needing help as the crisis continues. Whilst church is not open, please use the collection points at supermarkets

Please pray for our Parish Community and for those affected by this pandemic and do not be downcast. Remember the words of Our Lord: "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." *Jn 14:27 (NRSV)*

Fr Peter, Deacon Tony, Deacon Chris

If you wish to set up a Standing Order either permanently or in order to continue to make your regular Offertory giving to the Parish during the period when Mass is not being celebrated in public, please contact Ken Worthington on 01606 737070

The funeral Service for Joanne Barthorpe will be celebrated by Deacon Chris at Middlewich cemetery at 10.00am on Wednesday, with the immediate family only. At the same time, Fr Peter will celebrate a Mass for her in church.

Cafod Fast Day:
Thank you for your generosity. Our parish donated £927.20, a good increase on last year's total.
Visit the Cafod website
www.cafod.org.uk
for extra prayer resources & online children's liturgy

Food Bank Shortages: Tinned meat, Coffee, Toothpaste, deodorant, custard, shampoo. Please use collection points at supermarkets whilst church is closed. The foodbank is short of volunteers as many of the usual ones are self-isolating due to age. Times needed: Monday 1-3 to start packing crates, Tuesday 9-11 continue packing crates, 11.30-2 to give out food to clients Friday 11.30-2 normal service for our clients. There is enormous demand for help, including many extra families reliant on free school meals. If you can help, email volunteers@middlewichdistrict.foodbank.org.uk, or ring the presbytery and we will pass on your details