

R.E. News

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Welcome to the second edition of R.E News for this academic year.

In this edition there are some useful resources for St. Brigid's day, articles on St. Blaise, St. Valentine and St. Patrick.

As we enter the season of Lent and Easter this edition has some useful resources for this period. There are Penitential services and a liturgy for the Stations of the Cross.

Brigid T. Gilligan.

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| St. Brigid | Page 2 |
| St. Blaise | Page 4 |
| History of Our Lady of Lourdes | Page 5 |
| St. Valentine | Page 6 |
| St. Patrick | Page 8 |
| Ash Wednesday | Page 9 |
| Lent/ Holyweek/ Easter | Page 10 |
| Stations of the Cross | Page 13 |
| Penitential Services | Page 15 |
| Senior Cycle RE: Jesus of Nazareth. | Page 20 |
| St. Aidan's Community School, Tallaght | Page 26 |
| St. Benildus Pastoral Centre | Page 30 |
| Useful Websites for teaching Religious Education | Page 31 |



Saint Brigid



Saint Brigid was born in Faughairt near Dundalk about the year 450. Her father was a chieftain named Dubhtach and her mother was a bond woman named Brocessa. Her parents wished her to marry but she wished to dedicate her life to God as a nun. About the year 467 she and seven others took the veil from Bishop Macaille. Her first religious settlement seems to have been in Westmeath. She later built a monastery at Cill Dara (The Church of the Oak), which became famous as a religious centre of great renown, with a scriptorium and school of metalwork. Tradition tells us that while explaining the Passion and Death of Christ to a dying chieftain she took some rushes from the floor and fashioned a cross. The old Irish custom of placing a St. Brigid's cross over the door of dwelling houses and animal sheds began. Brigid was a gifted teacher and is said to have visited Scotland and England. After a long life she died on February 1st 523. Her feast day is on 1st February. With Patrick and Colmcille she forms the Trinity of The Patron Saints of Ireland.

Liturgy for St. Brigid's Day

(Materials needed are rushes, scissors, elastic bands to tie the rushes. Holy water for blessing the crosses).



Opening Prayer

Today we come to celebrate our great patron Brigid. Brigid captures our imagination as a woman of great generosity enormous courage, extraordinary sensitivity to both the human and the non-human world. There are many stories of Brigid's closeness to nature. Let us share some of these stories today as we make our St. Brigid's crosses.

Story of Brigid and Brendan (Reader 1)



One day, Brendan was standing on a cliff looking out to sea and suddenly two whales jumped out of the water and began to fight. A great battle took place and gradually the smaller whale was getting weaker and St Brendan saw that it was only a matter of time before the bigger whale killed him.. But just as he was about to be killed the smaller whale shouted out with a human voice calling on St. Brigid to save him. And with that the big whale stopped fighting and went away leaving the small whale unharmed. Now, St Brendan was watching all this and he became very upset. He said to himself 'Why did the whale call on Brigid to save him and not on me? These whales are used to seeing me on the sea; they all know that I am a holy man and that I can get anything I want from God. Why then, did the whale ignore me and call on Brigid?'

St. Brendan could find no answer to this question, so he decided that the only thing to do was to ask Brigid herself for an explanation. So he called his followers and they got into their boat and rowed back to Ireland and proceeded to Kildare to consult Brigid. When St. Brendan met Brigid

he told her what had happened and asked her to explain why the whale had considered her to be a greater saint than himself and had ignored him even though he was actually on the spot when the incident occurred.

‘Tell me,’ says Brigid, ‘is your mind constantly on God? Are you constantly aware of God?’

‘Well’, says St. Brendan, ‘I am generally aware of God, but I live a very busy and a dangerous life. Often the sea is very rough and storms arise and on these occasion I forget all about God as I am so preoccupied trying to keep afloat.’

‘That is the explanation’, says Brigid, ‘for since the first day I set my mind on God I have never taken it away from God and I never will.’

Leader: (Play some reflective music).

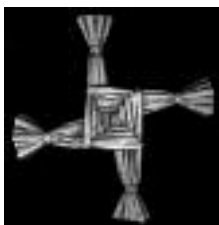
As we continue to make our St. Brigid’s crosses we can listen to the following story.

Reader 2: St Brigid

St. Brigid was a girl who gave, and gave and gave and gave.
It didn’t matter who owned what or how her folks did rave.
She gave away her father’s sword, in every beggar saw the Lord.
‘You’d try the patience of a saint,’
Her father roared and Brid felt faint,
but still she worked with might and main
Come winter, summer, wind or rain.
Her God was kind and hated slavery,
She taught His word and fought all knavery.
Her monastery was quite a model
In work and prayer there, none did dawdle,
But music, art and craic abounded,
While Brigid was by love surrounded.
The Kildare oak so strong and sturdy
Was like our Brid, Christ-like and worthy.
Her roots in earth, her hands outstretched
To shelter all, both man and beast.
We know that Spring is here to stay
On February First, St. Brigid’s Day.

Leader: *Now we will have some quiet time to reflect on the story we just heard.
(Play quiet reflective music in background.)*

Reader 3: Crois Bhríde – St. Brigid’s Cross.



St. Brigid was Abbess of the monastery at Cill Dara (the Church of the Oak in the 6th century. Her feastday is February 1st. Tradition tells us that as Brigid explained the passion and death of Christ to the dying pagan chieftain she took some rushes from the floor of the bothan and fashioned a cross. The Old Irish custom of placing a St. Brigid’s cross over the doors of dwelling houses and animal shelters thus began. People believed that in so doing Brigid would look after their households and stock and that full and plenty would be theirs in the year ahead. Later the custom of sprinkling the cross with holy water and invoking the following blessing began: “May the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and St. Brigid bless this cross and all who look upon it.”

This St. Brigid's Cross has been blessed with this ancient blessing.
La Fhéile Bhríde faoi mhaise agat!
Happy St. Brigid's Day.

Leader: Now I invite you to bless your St. Brigid's crosses with holy water.

Prayer: Concluding Prayer
Prayer to St. Brigid

Lord, you inspired in St. Brigid
such wholehearted dedication to your work
that she is known as the Mary of the Gael;
through her intercession bless our country,
may we follow the example
of her life and be united with her and the
Virgin Mary in your presence,
through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

St. Blaise

Feast Day: February 3. Patron of Throat Illnesses

Many Catholics might remember Saint Blaise's feast day because of the Blessing of the Throats that took place on this day. Two candles are blessed, held slightly open, and pressed against the throat as the blessing is said. Saint Blaise's protection of those with throat troubles apparently comes from a legend that a boy was brought to him who had a fishbone stuck in his throat. The boy was about to die when Saint Blaise healed him.



Very few facts are known about Saint Blaise. We believe he was a bishop of Sebastea in Armenia who was martyred under the reign of Licinius in the early fourth century.

The legend of his life that sprang up in the eighth century tell us that he was born into a rich and noble family who raised him as a Christian.

St. Blaise was a fourth century bishop who lived in Armenia and devotion to him has been popular throughout the ages. Much of what is known about the life of St. Blaise comes from the legends about his life. Historical proof exists that Blaise was martyred for the Faith in his diocese of Sebastea in Armenia in the year 316. The legends surrounding Blaise state that during the persecution of Licinius, Blaise was forced into exile into the hills in the backcountry of his diocese. There he lived as a hermit, spending his days in prayer and penance.

The legends say that one of the products of Blaise's holiness was that even the most wild of animals became his companions without any harm to him. One day hunters discovered Blaise while seeking wild animals for the amphitheater and arrested him as a Christian. Blaise was taken to prison.

Prayer to Saint Blaise

May, Almighty God, through the prayers of St. Blaise, Bishop and Martyr, bless us and protect us from sickness of the throat. Amen.

History of Our Lady of Lourdes

Our Lady of Lourdes 150th Anniversary 1858 - 2008

The Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in southern France is the most visited pilgrimage site in the world -- principally because of the apparent healing properties of the waters of the spring that appeared during the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to a poor, fourteen-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubiroux.

The first apparition occurred February 11, 1858. There were eighteen in all; the last took place July 16, of the same year. Bernadette often fell into an ecstasy during these apparitions, as was witnessed by the hundreds who attended the later visions, though no one except Bernadette ever saw or heard the apparition.

The mysterious vision Bernadette saw in the hollow of the rock Massabielle, where she and friends had gone to gather firewood, was that of a young and beautiful lady. "Lovelier than I have ever seen" said the child. She described the Lady as clothed in white, with a blue ribbon sash and a Rosary hanging from her right arm. Now and then the apparition spoke to Bernadette.

One day, the Lady told the girl to drink of a mysterious fountain within the grotto itself, the existence of which was unknown, and of which there was no sign. But Bernadette scratched at the ground, and a spring immediately bubbled up and soon gushed forth. On another occasion the apparition bade Bernadette go and tell the priests she wished a chapel to be built on the spot and processions to be made to the grotto. At first the clergy were incredulous. The priest said he would not believe it unless the apparition gave Bernadette her name. After another apparition, Bernadette reported that the Lady told her, "**I am the Immaculate Conception**". Though the girl was unfamiliar with the term, the Pope had declared the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in 1854.

Four years after Bernadette's visions, in 1862, the bishop of the diocese declared the faithful "justified in believing the reality of the apparition" of Our Lady. A basilica was built upon the rock of Massabielle by M. Peyramale, the parish priest. In 1873 the great "national" French pilgrimages were inaugurated. Three years later the basilica was consecrated and the statue solemnly crowned. In 1883 the foundation stone of another church was laid, as the first was no longer large enough. It was built at the foot of the basilica and was consecrated in 1901 and called the Church of the Rosary. Pope Leo XIII authorized a special office and a Mass, in commemoration of the apparition, and in 1907 Pius X extended the observance of this feast to the entire Church; it is now observed on February 11.



*O Immaculate Virgin
Mary, you are the refuge
of sinners, the health of
the sick and the comfort
of the afflicted.*

*You know my needs, my
troubles and my sufferings.*

*By your appearances at the
Grotto of Lourdes you made it
a special sanctuary where
your favours are given to
those who visit it from around
the world.*

*Over the years many have
received a cure for their
sufferings, whether of
soul, body or mind.*

*Therefore I come to you with
enormous confidence to ask
for your motherly intercession.*

*Loving Mother, obtain
for me the granting of
my requests.*

*Let me strive to imitate
your virtues on earth so
that I may one day share your
glory in heaven.*

Amen

The Legend Of Saint Valentine



The Roman Martyrology commemorates two martyrs named Valentine (or Valentinus) on February 14th and there is some suggestion that both were beheaded on the Flaminian Way - one at Rome the other at Terni which is some 60 miles from Rome. Valentine of Rome was a priest who is said to have died about 269 during the persecution of Claudius the Goth (or Claudius 11 Gothicus). The other Valentine was allegedly Bishop of Terni, and his death is attested to in Martyrology of St. Jerome. Whether there were actually one or Valentines is disputed. One possibility is that two cults - one based in Rome, the other in Terni - may have sprung up to the same martyr that in the mists of time his true identity became confused.

In ancient Rome, February 14th was a holiday to honour Juno - Queen of the Roman Gods and Goddesses. The Romans also knew her as the Goddess of women and marriage. The following day, February 15th, began the Feast of Lupercalia (ancient Roman festival). At the time the lives of young boys and girls were strictly separate. However, one of the customs of young people was "name drawing." On the eve of the festival of Lupercalia the names of Roman girls were written on slips of paper placed in jars. Each young man would draw a girl's name from the jar and they would then be partners for the duration of the festival. Sometimes the pairing of the children lasted an entire year, and often they would fall in love and later marry.

Under the rule of Emperor Claudius II, Rome was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns. Claudius the Cruel was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join his military leagues. He believed the reason was that Roman men did not want to leave their loves or families. As a result, Claudius cancelled all marriages and engagements in Rome. Claudius had also ordered all Romans to worship the state religion's idols, and he had made it a crime punishable by death to associate with Christians. But Valentinus was dedicated to the ideals of Christ, and not even the threat of death could keep him from practicing his beliefs. Valentine and Saint Marius aided the Christian martyrs and secretly married couples, and for this kind deed Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who condemned him to be beaten to death with clubs and to have his head cut off. He suffered martyrdom on the 14th day of February, in either 269 or 270.

This is one legend surrounding Valentine's martyrdom. The second is that during the last weeks of his life a remarkable thing happened. One day a jailer for the Emperor of Rome knocked at Valentine's door clutching his blind daughter Julia in his arms. He had learned of Valentine's medical and spiritual healing abilities, and appealed to Valentine to treat his daughter's blindness. She had been blind since birth. Valentine knew that her condition would be difficult to treat but he gave the man his word that he would do his best. The little girl was examined, given an ointment for her eyes and a series of re-visits were scheduled.



Seeing that he was a man of learning, the jailer asked whether Julia, might also be brought to Valentine for lessons. Julia was a pretty young girl with a quick mind. Valentine read stories of Rome's history to her. He described the world of nature to her. He taught her arithmetic and told her about God. She saw the world through his eyes, trusted in his wisdom, and found comfort in his quiet strength.

One day she asked if God really existed and Valentine assured her that He did. She went on to tell him how she prayed morning and night that she might be able to see and Valentine told her that whatever happened would be God's will and would be for the best. They sat and prayed together for a while.

Several weeks passed and the girl's sight was not restored. Yet the man and his daughter never wavered in their faith and returned each week. Then one day, Valentine received a visit from the Roman soldiers who arrested him and they now destroyed his medicines and admonished him for his religious beliefs. When the little girl's father learned of his arrest and imprisonment, he wanted to intervene but there was nothing he could do.

On the eve of his death, Valentine wrote a last note to Julia - knowing his execution was imminent. Valentine asked the jailer for a paper, pen and ink. He quickly jotted a farewell note and handed it to the jailer to give to his blind daughter. He urged her to stay close to God, and he signed it "From Your Valentine." His sentence was carried out the next day, February 14, 269 A.D., near a gate that was later named Porta Valentini (now Porta del Popolo, Rome) in his memory.

When the jailer went home, he was greeted by his little girl. The little girl opened the note and discovered a yellow crocus inside. The message said, "From your Valentine." As the little girl looked down upon the crocus that spilled into her palm she saw brilliant colours for the first time in her life! The girl's eyesight had been restored.

Valentine was buried at what is now the Church of Praxedes in Rome, near the cemetery of St Hippolytus. It is said that Julia herself planted a pink-blossomed almond tree near his grave. Today, the almond tree remains a symbol of abiding love and friendship.

In 496 Pope Gelasius I named February 14th as Saint Valentine's Day. On each Valentine's Day, messages of affection, love and devotion are still exchanged around the world. This could be because of Valentine's work in marrying couples against the law, or because of the miracle worked for Julia and the message he left other. Others believe that people in medieval times sent love notes during February because it was seen as the mating season of birds, and that Valentine's feast falling in the middle of the month became the principle day for this.

In 1835 an Irish Carmelite priest by the name of John Spratt was visiting Rome. He was well known in Ireland for his skills as a preacher and also for his work among the poor and destitute in Dublin's Liberties area. He was also responsible for the building of the new church to Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Whitefriar Street. While he was in Rome he was asked to preach at the famous Jesuit Church in the city, the Gesu. Apparently his fame as a preacher had gone before him, no doubt brought by some Jesuits who had been in Dublin. The elite of Rome flocked to hear him and he received many tokens of esteem from the doyens of the Church. One such token came from Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846) and were the remains of Saint Valentine.

On November 10, 1836, the Reliquary containing the remains arrived in Dublin and were brought in solemn procession to Whitefriar Street Church where they were received by Archbishop Murray of Dublin.



Saint Patrick



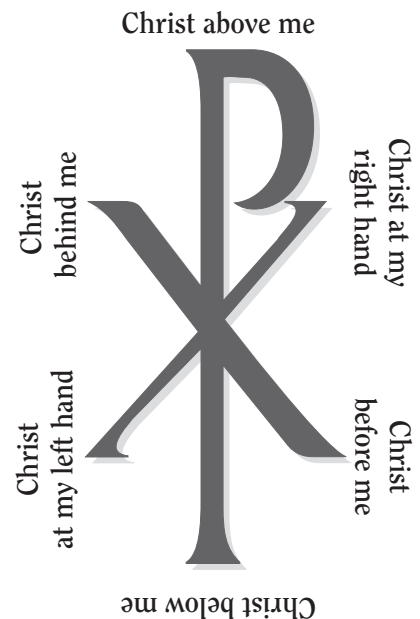
Patrick was born in Britain, probably in Wales. At age 16 he was carried off as a slave by a raiding party and brought to Ireland. He spent six years herding sheep on Slemish mountain in Co. Antrim. One night in a dream a voice told him "Your ship is ready." He left his master and walked southward for over 200 miles where he found a ship ready to sail. After some difficulty he was allowed on board and he returned to his people. He studied for the priesthood in Gaul and in 432 he was made bishop and sent to Ireland. He landed in the north and established his first church at Saul in a barn (sabhall) given to him by Dichu. He travelled throughout Ireland, preaching, baptising and founding churches for nearly thirty years. He used the shamrock to explain the Blessed Trinity, and the plant is worn on St. Patrick's Day on 17th March to commemorate this event. He died in the year 461 and is buried in Downpatrick. He is known as "The Apostle of Ireland."

St. Patrick's Prayer

I arise today
Through the strength of heaven,
Light of sun,
Radiance of moon,
Splendour of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftness of wind,
Depth of sea,
Stability of earth,
Firmness of rock.

I surround myself today with the power of God:
God's strength to comfort me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's good sense of guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to lead me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's angels to save me.

St Patrick's Breastplate



Christ Be Beside Me

Christ be beside me,
Christ be before me,
Christ be behind me,
King of my heart,
Christ be above me,
Never to part.
Christ on my right hand,
Christ on my left hand,
Christ all around me,
Shield in the strife,
Christ in my sleeping,
Christ in my sitting,
Christ in my rising,
Light of my Life.
Christ be in all hearts
Thinking about me,
Christ be on all tongues,
Telling of me.
Christ be the vision
In eyes that see me.
In ears that hear me
Christ ever be.

Ash Wednesday

*When a fire goes out completely
Only grey, dirty, dusty ashes remain.
When I distance myself from God,
When I distance myself from others,
It is as though I put on dull, grey clothes,
As though I put on clothes made of ashes.*

The name Ash Wednesday comes from an ancient custom which originated in the Roman Catholic Church. People were 'shriven' or cleansed of sin on Shrove Tuesday as a preparation for Lent. However public sinners or people guilty of serious sins and immoral acts were told to return to church on Ash Wednesday.



Early on Ash Wednesday palm crosses given out on Palm Sunday of the previous year were burned and blessed by the priest. Then each of the sinners was marked with ash on the forehead, in the shape of the cross. They were often given a hair-shirt to wear and were told that they could not re-enter the church until Holy Tuesday, three days before Good Friday.

During this period from Ash Wednesday to Holy Tuesday each of the sinners was given penance to do. This might include living away from their family, possibly in a monastery, where they would pray, do hard manual labour and acts of charity. Through this the sinners were properly prepared to join in the observance of Holy Week and the celebration of Easter.

The use of ashes as a sign of penitence and sorrow is a very old custom. It is often mentioned in the Old Testament and was a firm part of Jewish tradition. The Early Church seems to have accepted this from Jewish tradition and tried to preserve its original meaning. Later on Christians began to see penance as a means of preparing themselves for Easter, the most important festival in the Christian calendar. Many of them began to submit to the ceremony of ashes and its accompanying penance voluntarily. By the end of the eleventh century this had become a very widespread custom throughout Europe. The imposition of ashes continued to be an important event in the Church until the Reformation. Then, many Protestant churches dropped the practice. Ash Wednesday has continued to be an important day for Christians. It marks the beginning of Lent, a period of fasting and prayer in preparation for the observance of Holy Week and the celebration of Easter.

Lent



Lent is the period of forty days leading up to the festival of Easter which celebrates Christ's resurrection from the dead. The forty days represents the time spent in the Judean desert by Jesus before embarking on his public ministry. It is a time of repentance and preparation for the feast of Easter. Traditionally Lent was observed strictly, especially in the Roman Catholic Church with no meat, sugar, eggs, fat or dairy products allowed to be eaten and only one cooked meal to be eaten per day. Music and dancing were also

forbidden during Lent and weddings did not take place. This led to the practice of using up all the forbidden foods on the day before Lent began. This day was known as Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Tuesday as pancakes were made from many of the ingredients listed above. In some countries Pancake Tuesday or Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) became a carnival in which music and dancing feature and people dressed up in garish costumes and enjoyed themselves for one last day before the season of Lent began.

Nowadays the observance of Lent is a more private decision and fasting from certain foods is not obligatory, even in the Catholic Church (although many people still make and enjoy pancakes on Shrove Tuesday). Many Christian churches encourage their congregations to make some personal sacrifice for the period of Lent as a symbol of their repentance for their sins. This sacrifice can take the form of giving up something they enjoy for the forty days, or it can involve doing something positive, such as doing voluntary work or just making more of an effort to live a good Christian life.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday when many churches hold special services of repentance. In Roman Catholic, Orthodox and some Anglican churches ashes of burnt palm are mixed with oil and the priest marks the foreheads of the congregation with a sign of the cross. This visible mark reminds believers that one day they will die and return to dust and that they should be sure that they are in a right relationship with God when that time comes.

Holy Week and Easter



The week leading up to Easter Sunday is called Holy Week and during it Christians remember the events of Christ's last week on earth. On Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem with his disciples to celebrate the Jewish feast of the Passover. He rode into the city on a donkey and was greeted by hundreds of people who had heard of his miracles. They gave him a royal welcome waving palm leaves and shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David". In some churches this arrival is enacted and in many, the congregation receives palms which may be made into a cross and are kept at home for the coming year.

On Thursday of Holy Week, sometimes called Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday, Christians remember the last meal which Jesus ate with his disciples before he was put to death. It was a traditional Jewish Passover meal but Jesus gave it added significance by blessing the bread and wine and telling his disciples that these represented his body and blood which would be sacrificed



for all people. He commanded them to do the same thing in remembrance of him. In this way he instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Also at this meal he tried to demonstrate to his disciples that he had come to serve and not to be treated like a king by washing their feet, a task usually performed by servants. He commanded them to behave as servants to each

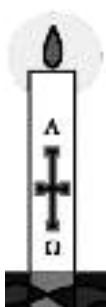
other and not to lord it over their fellow Christians. For this reason, in some churches the priests or ministers wash the feet of some members of their congregation as a sign of humility. In Britain, the king or queen takes part in the Ceremony of the Royal Maundy. This ceremony, held at a great cathedral, involves the distribution of Maundy Money to deserving senior citizens (one man and one woman for each year of the sovereign's age), usually chosen for having done service to their community. They receive ceremonial red and white purses which contain coins made especially for the occasion. The white purse contains one coin for each year of the monarch's reign. The red purse contains money in place of other gifts that used to be given to the poor. In Roman Catholic and some Anglican churches the altars are stripped at the end of Mass on Holy Thursday and the congregation leave in silence without any organ music in preparation for the sad and solemn ceremonies which take place the following day on Good Friday.



Good Friday is the day on which Jesus was crucified and Christians reflect on the sad events of this day in many ways. In the Roman Catholic Church there is a ceremony where the congregation reflect on a series of pictures on the wall of the church which depict different stages of Jesus last journey, carrying his cross on the way to be crucified. In some countries this journey is re-enacted outdoors and in the Philippines young men volunteer to be actually crucified in order to share in the suffering of Christ. (They are not left to die on the crosses, however.)

In Protestant churches there is often a solemn service which takes place between twelve noon and three o'clock in the afternoon which reflects in music, readings and short sermons, on the seven last sayings Jesus uttered on the cross before he died. These sayings include, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing", "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

There have been arguments between the Eastern and Western churches concerning the date of Easter for many centuries and even today it is celebrated on a different Sunday in the Orthodox church than it is in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. The difficulty arises because, once again, we have no mention in the gospels of when the crucifixion and resurrection actually occurred. All we know is that it occurred during the Jewish festival of Passover which was a moveable feast calculated on the lunar cycle. The moon is still used to calculate the date of Easter but the calendar on which it is based is now the calendar devised by Pope Gregory XIII whose reform of the Julian calendar (based on the solar cycle) was not accepted by the Orthodox Church. *(Easter Sunday now falls on the first Sunday after the full moon of the Vernal Equinox)*



No matter when it falls, the celebration of Easter is the most important Christian festival and the one celebrated with the most joy. In many churches the first service of Easter Day begins before midnight on Holy Saturday night when the church is left in darkness. Often a special fire called a Paschal fire is lit outside the church and from this fire a large white candle representing Christ is lit and carried into the darkened church. The congregation all hold smaller candles which are lit from the Paschal candle and the Light of Christ spreads symbolically throughout the church. The hymns and readings on Easter morning are extremely joyful and tell the story of how the women came to Jesus tomb and found it empty because he had risen.



Like Christmas, some elements of pagan festivals were incorporated into the Christian festival and given new meanings by the early Christian missionaries. For example, Easter eggs are painted in some countries, and chocolate eggs are given and received and are especially enjoyed by those who have given up chocolate for the forty days of Lent! In some places the children's Easter Eggs are hidden in the garden by the Easter Bunny (which is a symbol of spring rather than having any religious significance) and they have to search for them. The egg symbolises new life and is a very appropriate symbol for Easter which falls in the spring when nature is preparing itself for new life after the bleakness of winter. For that reason, many churches are decorated with colourful spring flowers and women sometimes wear Easter Bonnets, straw hats decorated with flowers.

Pentecost Sunday

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven is not celebrated with a public holiday but many churches have special services on this day, forty days after Easter Sunday when Jesus left his disciples and returned to his Father in Heaven. Ten days later the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and the story of the birth of the Christianity is remembered and read about in church services on Pentecost or Whit Sunday. As Pentecost falls on a Sunday many countries have a public holiday on the Monday after it.



The Stations of the Cross

In preparation for a classroom service on the Stations of the Cross students could spend some time:

- *making their own Stations in the form of a collage using newspaper photography and headings;*
- *selecting modern photographs (from newspapers or magazines etc.) which they associate with each of the Stations. The students' work should be mounted on the walls of the classroom prior to the service.*

Opening Hymn: 'Stay Here and Watch With Me' (Taizé)

We come together to remember all the ways Jesus showed his love for us. We remember especially how he showed his love for God and for us, in and through the events leading up to his death on the Cross.

Stations 1 - 3:

The students focus on each station as a Scripture Reading /Reflection is read.
Station 1. Jesus is Condemned to Death. Read: John 19:14-16 or Matthew 26:63-67.

Station 2. Jesus Accepts His Cross. Read: John 19:4 -7 or Luke 9:23-24.

Station 3. Jesus Falls for the First Time. Read: Mark 14 :33-37.

Listen to reflective music and meditate on

- What do you notice about Jesus in Stations 1 to 3 ?
- Which Station reminds you most closely of your own life? How?
- Pray about this... as you share in the suffering of Jesus what is he telling you, teaching you, asking you?

Stations 4 - 7:

The students focus on each station as a Scripture Reading /Reflection is read.
Station 4. Jesus meets His Mother. Read: John 19: 25-27 or Luke 2:35.

Station 5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his Cross. Read: Luke 23:26 or Mark 15:20-21.

Station 6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus with a cloth. Read: Matthew 11: 28-29 or Gal. 6:2.

Station 7. Jesus Falls for the Second Time. Read: Luke 22.42

Listen to reflective music and meditate on

- What do you notice about Jesus in Stations 4 to 7 ?
- Which Station reminds you most closely of your own life? How?
- Pray about this... as you share in the suffering of Jesus what is he telling you, teaching you, asking you?

Stations 8 - 10:

The students focus on each station as a Scripture Reading /Reflection is read.

Station 8. Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem. Read: Luke 23:27-28

Station 9. Jesus Falls for the Third Time. Read: John 18: 11

Station 10. Jesus is stripped of His Clothes. Read: John 19:23-24

Listen to reflective music & meditate on

- What do you notice about Jesus in Stations 8 to 10 ?
- Which Station reminds you most closely of your own life? How?
- Pray about this... as you share in the suffering of Jesus what is he telling you, teaching you, asking you?

Stations 11 -14: The students focus on each station as a Scripture Reacting /Reflection is read.

Station 11. Jesus is nailed to the Cross. Read: John 19: 17-20

Station 12. Jesus dies on the Cross. Read: Luke 23: 44-46

Station 13. Jesus is taken down from the Cross. Read: John 19:38-40

Station 14. Jesus is laid in the Tomb. Read: John 19:41-42

Listen to reflective music & meditate on

- What do you notice about Jesus in Stations 11 to 14 ?
- Which Station reminds you most closely of your own life? How?
- Pray about this... as you share in the suffering of Jesus what is he telling you, teaching you, asking you?

Concluding Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we recall together the story of how you died for us,
May we be more willing to show love for God and others, as you ask of us.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

Concluding Hymn: 'Jesus Remember Me'. (Taizé)



Lenten - Service Of Renewal

*Decorate room with items showing the contrast between winter and spring
(e.g. pictures, posters, flowers, weather forecasts etc.)*

Introduction:

Lent means Spring. For housewives, gardeners, farmers and others Spring is a time for cleaning and sowing, for taking stock and looking ahead. In bright sunlight, dust and cobwebs that weren't so noticeable before suddenly become eyesores.

How do our lives look when we turn the harsh light of scrutiny on them? In the school year Lent marks one of the last signposts on the road to exams. We become conscious of the need to get our act together, to be more focused.

In our inner, spiritual lives we need to take stock too. How well do we live up to our human calling? What kind of friends, sons / daughters, classmates, team-mates, neighbours are we? Do we allow the divine image in which we are created to be revealed, to shine?

Scripture Reading:

A reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians' 5:8-16

Reflection: (with background meditative music)

We are now going to look at some of the ways in which we may fail to answer the call of Christ to be fully human, to have "life to the full".

Let us examine the ways in which we damage our relationships with others and our inner peace by reflecting on the following images and questions:

If you were to pick something from nature or an animal as an image of your self what would it be - sea, mountains, a rabbit, fox, snake,.....?

Pick an image at random and think about what that image says about you as person....

- Like a rabbit...Have I allowed my life to be dominated by escape holes? Into what burrows do I flee from the demands of family and school? Have I allowed such things as alcohol, drugs, videos to become my hole in the ground?
- Like a fox...Do I live in the narrow world of my own wants and desires? Have I allowed self-interest to dominate my life? Do I ignore the rights and needs of other people? Do I take advantage of those who are weaker or less smart than me?
- Like a snake.....Am I ever the snake? Treacherous, disloyal, two-faced? Do I take on protective colouring to hide my real intentions?
- Like a.....

Lenten Contract

Invite students to fill in Lenten contracts. When the contracts are completed, invite students to put them in sealed envelopes and gather them for redistribution and review during a service in Holy Week.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, during these weeks of Lent, we walk with you and you walk with us. Stay close to us so that through your warmth the winter cold of our sins might be replaced. May we share in your new life when we arrive together at Easter. We ask these things in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

It is Lent

A time of conversion.

Let us try to find in ourselves

And within our responsibilities

where we might die, to fixed patterns,

to live, a fuller life.

Don't think about extraordinary things

but about the ordinary ones.

Is there nothing that at this moment hinders you

And that you, nevertheless stick to?

Is there nowhere

Where you would be able to enlarge your circle

to do some good, to assist others

to be more fulfilled and happier?

Let us pray to the Father for the courage to let go – Our Father.....



Penitential Service for Senior Classes

Introduction

We are fathered in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

He continues to invite into relationship with him those who fail, those who fear, those who are guilty, those who feel they do not belong, those who have gone away from him, those who want to live good lives but find it hard to keep up the effort, those who are human.

Jesus invites people – you, as you are.

Prayer

.....a few moments in silent prayer.

Father, God of all that is real, help me to see myself as I really am and not as I pretend to be.
Through Christ Our Lord Amen.

First Reading

Who do you want to be? Do you find yourself being forced into a mould by other people? Here is what Kahlil Gibran wrote in “The Wanderer”.

“It was in the garden of a madhouse that I met a youth with a face pale and full of wonder. And I sat beside him on the bench, and I said, “Why are you here?”, and he looked at me in astonishment, and said, ‘It is an unseemly question, yet I will answer you. My father would make of me a reproduction of himself; so also would my uncle. My mother would have me the image of her illustrious father. My sister would hold up her seafaring husband as the perfect example for me to follow. My brother thinks I should be like him, a fine athlete, And my teachers.....each would have me but a reflection of his own face in the mirror. Therefore I came to this place. I find it more sane here. At least, I can find myself.’ ”

Hymn

Play a piece of reflective music or song.

Gospel Reading -Luke 13:34

How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you have refused:

Examination Of Conscience

| | | |
|-------------------------|----|--|
| Do I Respect God | or | Do I create other Gods: e.g. money, power, ownership, success. |
| Do I Respect God’s Name | or | Do I misuse it: e.g. perjury in court, wishing evil on others. |
| Do I Respect God’s Time | or | Do I disregard it: e.g. refuse to listen, fail to build |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|--|
| Do I Respect Parents/Authority | <i>or</i> | a believing community, laziness, ungrateful. Do I cause pain: e.g. demanding, unhelpful, disrespectful, fail to grow in responsibility. |
| Do I Respect Life | <i>or</i> | Do I diminish it: e.g. drinking, eating, use of addictive substances. |
| Do I Respect Sexuality | <i>or</i> | Do I exploit it: violence to self & others in behaviour & relationships. |
| Do I Respect Property | <i>or</i> | Do I damage it: e.g. school property, home property, public property, environmental property. |
| Do I Respect Truth | <i>or</i> | Do I lie: to myself and others about my behaviour in the masks I wear. |
| Do I Respect Commitments in | <i>or</i> | Do I disrupt them: by greed, jealousy, infidelity, neglect, irresponsibility, selfishness. |
| Do I Respect Belongings of others | <i>or</i> | Do I abuse them: fraud, shady business practices and unjustified claims. |

Prayers of the Repentance

Lord,

For the times we have failed to build our relationships with you and have chosen to be blind to your presence in Scripture, creation, community and ourselves.

Lord, we ask your forgiveness.

For the times we failed to grow in family relationships by selfishness, lack of affection, broken promises and unforgiveness.

Lord, we ask your forgiveness.

For the times we have failed to build friendships and community through indifference, laziness, fear, jealousy or violence.

Lord, we ask your forgiveness.

For the times we have failed to grow in truth to ourselves:

For the times we have abused ourselves by eating, drinking or drugs.

Lord, we ask your forgiveness.

For the times we have caused damage to the environment and property and for the times we have fraudulently sought the belongings of others.

Lord, we ask your forgiveness.

Conclusion

Before we finish....we look to the future realising that we are all slowly growing towards that person we will yet be. With that in mind, we might listen to the following piece of advise found in 1962 on a Baltimore tombstone.

- Reader A:** Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant, they too have their story.
- Reader B:** Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others you may become vain and bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.
- Reader C:** Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtues there are; many persons strive for high ideals and everywhere life is full of heroism.
- Reader D:** Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love for, in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.
- Reader E:** Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.
- Reader F:** You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here: And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with GOD, and whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life and keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.
BE CAREFUL: STRIVE TO BE HAPPY.

Final Prayer

May the love and peace of Christ be with you always.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Lord, We pray that what we do may be just
That we may show constant love,
And live in fellowship with You. Amen.

Conclude with a hymn.

Senior Cycle RE: Jesus of Nazareth

Paul's Missionary Journeys

A. Antioch

In Antioch the Holy Spirit inspired Paul and Barnabas to go and preach the news of Jesus to different communities. They set off in 45 CE and firstly arrived at Cyprus and in Salamis preached in the synagogue. They travelled the length of the island to Paphos and from there they set to sea again for Antioch in Pisidia.

B. Antioch in Pisidia



In the synagogue Paul proclaims Jesus as the Saviour so that, 'through him the forgiveness of your sins is proclaimed.' Acts 13:38. Afterwards many Jews joined them. Some Jews, however, rejected the message and expelled them from Antioch. This was significant because after the Jews had rejected the message, Paul and Barnabas decided to preach to those who were non-Jews, the Gentiles. It was here that the followers of Christ were first given the name of "Christians" who marvelled at the way in which this group loved and cared for all its members equally.

C. Iconium

At Iconium many became believers but Paul made more enemies than friends amongst the Jews and they planned to stone him to death. Wisely they departed at once for the towns of Lystra and Derbe but worse lay in store for them.

D. Lystra



In Lystra Paul healed a cripple but some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and this time they actually did stone Paul and dragged him from the town thinking he was dead. Somehow Paul recovered and the next day they moved on to Derbe. There they inspired the community and encouraged them to have faith. It was very important for these new communities to receive such support considering the hostility towards them from the Jews. They put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith. "We all have to experience many hardships," they said, "before we enter the Kingdom of God".

Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in the churches on the first journey as part of their efforts to give strength and guidance to these communities. Their first journey was completed when they returned back to Antioch from where they had first set out but controversy awaited them there as well. This was the year 49 CE.



When they arrived back in Antioch some devout Jews who had become Christians insisted that if anyone wanted to become a believer in Jesus they first had to become a Jew. It appears Paul and Barnabas didn't take too kindly to this and 'had a long argument with these men'. A Council of the young church was held in Jerusalem in 49 CE to resolve the matter and decided that, as Jesus had clearly chosen Gentiles as well as Jews to the faith, and as Christ had been rejected by the majority of the Jewish community, the only condition for salvation that should be put on Gentile converts to Christianity was belief in Jesus Christ.

The controversy at Jerusalem highlights many important aspects of the early Christian communities. The early Christians believed that Jesus was the Messiah, God's anointed prophet and king. However, initially they didn't see themselves as separate from the Jewish people. The very first community of believers in Jerusalem continued to attend the Temple gatherings. They believed Jesus was the climax to a long story of the relationship between God and his people as spoken through the prophets of the Old Testament. God's call was to the Jews first and the call to the non-Jews or the Gentiles was at the centre of the dispute in Jerusalem. Traditionally the church in Antioch was more liberal in these matters while the Church in Jerusalem was more conservative. As we have noted already the latter was located in the city of the Temple and all its strict regulations and observances.

In Jerusalem the devout and conservative Jews insisted that all believers become strict law abiding Jews. Paul and Barnabas felt that this was too much of a burden for the Gentiles as the Jewish religion had many rules. Paul later became known as the 'Apostle to the Gentiles'. It was then Peter spoke up in defence of Paul's position saying that the law was indeed very burdensome and that all, Jews and Gentiles are saved not by the Mosaic law but through the "grace of our Lord Jesus."

Paul's Third Journey

A. Ephesus



Paul spent much of his time on this journey establishing a large church at Ephesus. Paul stayed here for over two years preaching and teaching persuasively about the kingdom of God. After Paul left Ephesus he travelled to Macedonia and then from Miletus, Paul said farewell to the elders of Ephesus. This was a very important moment in the development of early Christian communities. Up until then the responsibility of leadership rested with the apostles and Paul, but then Paul handed on this responsibility to the elders: "Be on your guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to feed the church of God which he bought with his own blood." This turned out to be a sad and difficult time for the leaders who had to assume responsibility under challenging conditions in the knowledge that they would never see Paul again. The year was 57

CE. After departing Ephesus Paul went on to Kos, Rhodes and then Patara. He stayed at Tyre for a week and then moved onto Ptolemais and Caesarea.

B. Jerusalem

When Paul arrived back in Jerusalem the tensions between him and the conservative Jews became apparent and he was arrested and some Jews vowed to kill him. Acts 23:12. In order to protect him, the Roman authorities sent Paul to Caesarea and there he was placed under house arrest for two years from 58 to 60 CE. After this he was sent to Rome but on the way he was shipwrecked and had to stay on the island of Malta. Eventually in 61 CE Paul reached Rome where he remained under house arrest for two more years.

The Death of Paul



According to tradition Paul was arrested in Rome under the persecutions of Emperor Nero. He was beheaded, as was the death penalty for a Roman citizen in 67 CE. His head is said to have bounced three times after it fell from his body and each place his head struck a fountain sprang up. The site of Paul's execution can be visited in Rome today at 'Tre Fontane' and the basilica of San Paolo Fuori le Mura.

Sources of Evidence

The central figure in the beginnings of Christianity is Jesus of Nazareth. Our primary sources of information for this figure are from the Gospels in the Christian New Testament and from historians during that period in history.

The basis for the Christian gospels is the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We know that he was a historical figure who made quite an impact on the Roman authorities. He was born sometime between 6-4 B.C.E. in Bethlehem and grew up to follow his father's trade as some type of artisan. When he was around thirty years of age he began preaching about something called the 'Kingdom of God'. He was a teacher and is said to have performed miracles. His ministry lasted but three years. Many believed that he was a great prophet but those in authority felt he was a threat and he was subsequently executed around 30 C.E.



Josephus

Josephus c. 37-97 C.E. was a Jewish leader and historian who wrote about Jesus almost sixty years after his death. He noted that there were disturbances in Judea around the time Pilate was governor of the region. The Jews were behind the trouble because of a man named Jesus whom Josephus tells us was crucified by Pilate. He says that Jesus was, **'a wise man... a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of men who receives the truth with pleasure'**.

Tacitus

Tacitus was a Roman historian (c. 56-117 C.E.) and unlike Josephus was unfavourable towards Jesus and Christianity, which he referred to as a wicked superstition. He wrote about the death of Jesus during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius and later he referred to how the emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome even though Nero himself was probably responsible. Tacitus claimed that Nero then persecuted many Christians. They were, 'covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.'



Suetonius

Suetonius (c. 69-122 C.E.) was a Roman historian and lawyer. He wrote about many of the Roman emperors and when writing about Claudius he states that Jews were expelled from Rome because of disturbances caused by a figure known as 'Chrestus'. It is generally agreed by historians that 'Chrestus' was Christ.

Pliny the Younger



Pliny the Younger (c. 61-113 C.E.) was a governor in one of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor. The governors were always concerned about any new sect that might cause trouble because it was of paramount importance for the Romans to maintain 'Pax Romanus' (Roman Peace) in order keep the status quo in occupied territories. This stability allowed the Romans to better defend themselves against their enemies. Pliny wrote to the emperor Trajan for advice on what to do with the Christians. Pliny the Younger mentions Jesus in his letters but gives no detailed information.

The gospels as sources of evidence

Having examined in some detail the historical sources for evidence about the life of Jesus we realise that the historians didn't give much information about the details of Jesus' life. They were only interested in facts. If we do want to know more about the life of Jesus we turn to the four gospel accounts in the Christian New Testament. The evangelists were not historians. When they wrote the gospels their main interest was to help people believe that the man Jesus had risen from the dead and was the Son of God.

The gospels are not biographies of Jesus' life. They give no details of his date of birth, what he looked like, what he worked at, who were his best friends or how he got on with his parents. The evangelists were interested in giving a different type of information based on a faith in the 'good news' about this person Jesus. The word gospel itself means 'good news' and the word evangelist means, 'to announce good news'. The work of the evangelists was to proclaim the good news that Jesus was remarkable and they believed that he could change people's lives in a wonderful way.

The Jewish people had long awaited a 'Messiah' or one especially anointed by God who would save them. Another word for Messiah is 'Christ' which means 'the anointed one'. Based on the event of the resurrection Jesus, followers believed that he was the Christ. The resurrection was central for Jesus' followers in defining who he was:

‘For this reason the whole house of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.’ Acts 2:36. After his crucifixion, the early followers of Jesus expected him to return to them shortly. Hence, they felt no need to preserve the stories and sayings about him. As time went on and he hadn’t returned, the communities decided to write down all that they could remember. Many of the people who were witnesses to Jesus’ teaching and deeds were beginning to die and so their testimony needed to be recorded in order to be passed on to future generations.

At the same time, the various communities of faith that already existed needed to continually hear the good news and so people decided to gather all the available material and edit it into a full story of Jesus’ life. Different evangelists wrote for different communities. For example, Mark’s community in Rome were suffering great hardships and therefore in Mark’s gospel there is much emphasis on the death and suffering of Jesus. No two gospels are completely alike because the communities that they were written for differed in their needs.

The Four Gospels

When the gospels came to be written there was a great deal of material available to the authors of the gospels in the form of stories, teachings, sermons, hymns and prayers. Scholars now think that any one gospel can’t be attributed to any one person. Instead there may have been a few people involved but when the final text was ready, the script was attributed to a particular individual who was central to the writing of that particular gospel. Again we must bear in mind that each gospel was written for a particular community and this affected the approach of the writers.

The first three gospels are referred to as the synoptic gospels. The authors of these works relied heavily on each other’s texts and because of this their similarities can be seen by viewing them side by side. The word synoptic means ‘to see together’.

Matthew’s Gospel



It is apparent in the gospel of Matthew that he was a Jew who converted to Christianity. He showed an extensive knowledge of the Jewish faith and the Old Testament. He viewed Jesus as the new Moses and the fulfilment of God’s promises and of Jewish expectations for a Messiah. He relied heavily on both Luke and Mark for his writings and therefore was probably not an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry. He may however have relied heavily on the accounts given by the apostle Matthew.

The gospel was written from around 85-90 C.E. for Jews who had converted to Christianity. It is very clear and well laid out and because it connects the Jewish religion with Christianity it would have been very useful for those Jews who wished to convert to Christianity.

Mark’s Gospel



It would appear that Mark’s Gospel was written around 65- 70 C.E. in Rome for the community there and also for non-Jewish readers or Gentiles (People at the time of Jesus with non-Jewish faith). There is no definite agreement as to who Mark was, but in the Acts of the Apostles there is a reference to a John Mark, a Jew who lived in Jerusalem who may have heard about Jesus from the apostle Peter. In Acts 12:24 John Mark is mentioned as a follower of Paul.

The emphasis in Mark's gospel is on suffering, probably because the community in Rome was under terrible persecution from Nero for the burning of the city. The crucifixion and death of Jesus is central in his gospel, which would have helped his readers realise that they were not suffering alone and that God was with them as they were persecuted for their faith.

The symbol for Mark's gospel is a lion. A lion is heard in the wilderness and in the wilds.

Luke's Gospel



'Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well-founded the teaching is that you have received.' Lk 1: 1-4.

So begins the gospel of Luke and it is apparent that he has studied the available material handed down through tradition and has decided to write an ordered account of the life of Jesus so as to help Christians learn more about their faith. His emphasis is on the compassion and mercy shown by Jesus throughout his life. The example set by Jesus for his followers is a life of love and forgiveness. The message of Christ is for everyone, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile.

There are many pieces of Mark's gospel in Luke's which would suggest that it was written after 70 C.E. Scholars generally think it was written in Antioch in Syria around 85 C.E. There are references to Luke in the New Testament as a companion of St. Paul's and in the letter to the Colossians 4:14 there is a reference to Luke 'the doctor'. Luke was not an apostle and therefore had no eye witness accounts of Jesus' ministry and so had to rely on sources in tradition.

The symbol for Luke is the ox because he emphasises that Jesus sacrifices himself for all people and in a similar way the priest offers the sacrifice of an ox in the temple.

John's Gospel



This gospel differs from the others because it deals so deeply with the mystery of who Jesus was and his relationship with his Father. It is often referred to as the 'spiritual gospel' because of its rich symbolic language and beautiful imagery. The authorship of this gospel centres on references in it to 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 13:23). It is now thought that this person and John the apostle are not the same person. It is currently thought that the gospel was written by a group of people founded by the 'beloved disciple'. The gospel was written sometime between 90-100 C.E.

John wrote his Gospel for Christians throughout the Mediterranean world almost sixty years after the death of Jesus. This gospel therefore shows a development in the understanding of exactly who Jesus was.

The symbol for John is the Eagle. An eagle begins its flight in the heavens and soars down to earth. In the same way John begins his gospel by speaking about Jesus as God's son.

St. Aidan's Community School, Brookfield, Tallaght

The evening of December 5th 2007 saw the culmination of great effort on the part of many people with the opening of our refurbished Oratory here in St. Aidan's Community School. St. Aidan's is a community school in Brookfield, West Tallaght opened more than 20 years ago. Although it has always had a dedicated prayer room, thanks to the foresight of Michael Meade the retired principal, this space was in need of an overhaul.

Perhaps more than anywhere else St. Aidan's is a school that needs a quiet, peaceful place where students can be with themselves and their God, however they express that reality. It was with this need in mind that Sr. Ann O'Donoghue, then school chaplain, now deputy principal, set about finding the resources to improve the space.

The Mercy Sisters, who had been part of the trusteeship of the school, gave a donation to begin the work and this was further subsidised by anonymous donations through the Loreto Sisters and others. Sr. Ann worked closely with Erin O'Brien, one of the art teachers to design the new layout and select colours and fabrics and Erin was on hand again to create a beautiful stained glass window on the theme of the Burning Bush. The caretaking team in the school worked tirelessly to get most of the work done during the summer holidays.

The curved walls, the deep pile carpet, the soft mood lighting, the rich curtains and the stained glass windows all add to the prayerful atmosphere of the room. You can imagine my delight when I arrived as new chaplain to find such a wonderful space ready for use!

We have much to be proud of here in St. Aidan's and it was decided that the opening of the prayer room should be an occasion to celebrate who we are as a school community, our wonderful students, the generosity of the many people who support what we do here in St. Aidan's, including the Loreto Past Pupils Union, and our place in the wider community. Almost a hundred guests were invited including Bishop Eamon Walsh, local Church of Ireland Minister, Rev. William Deverell and Presbyterian Minister Rev. Mary Hunter. This number was further boosted by students, parents and teachers.

We were anxious that the prayer room would acknowledge the faith of all our students and to this end the woodwork department worked to make each of the symbols of the major world religions in wood. These hang on the corridor leading to the prayer room.

Our prayer service was based on the theme of 'This is Holy Ground' and was rich in symbol and language, evoking the senses using candles, incense, water and dance to help us enter into the prayer experience. Our main symbol for the night was the flame and each student had taken time to write their dreams, hopes and prayers on their own personal flame. Together we had the burning bush of the life of our school – indeed Holy Ground. Bishop Eamon Walsh blessed the space and gave a thoughtful reflection.

After the prayer service Sr. Ann thanked the many people who had helped to bring this dream to reality and the evening ended with lots of chat over a cup of tea and wonderful treats prepared by the Home Economics Department.

Prayer service used for the opening of refurbished Oratory in St. Aidan's Community School. Tallaght.

Introduction

We gather in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Reading from the Book of Exodus

(Student enters holding lantern and stands while the reading is taking place. Then places lantern on Altar)

The Angel of God appeared to Moses by means of a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that although the bush was on fire it did not burn up. Moses thought, "I will go and see this amazing sight, why is the bush not burning up?"

Welcome

Welcome to our prayer service this evening to mark the official opening of our newly refurbished Oratory. This is our sacred space, a holy place where we can come to be quiet, and a place where we can become aware of God's presence in our lives. Here in this place, we are like Moses. We are drawn into the place, curious about what might happen here, we show respect as we acknowledge this as a holy place and also respect the holy ground of our own lives. Then we go back out to the world to be people of hope wherever we find sadness and suffering.

(Student enters holding shoes and places them in centre piece)

Yahweh saw that Moses was drawing near to look, and God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He replied, "Here I am". Yahweh said to him, "Do not come near; take off your sandals because the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Blessing

A bowl of Holy Water and a palm leave is brought forward

Bishop: We gather this evening to bless this space, to consecrate it to God as a special place where we gather to listen to God, to praise God and to ask for God's help.

We ask God to draw us to him every day in prayer. May all who pray here be open to the mysterious and gracious ways of God. God keep calling to our hearts and reminding us of your everlasting love.

Sprinkles room with holy water and says the following:

Let this water bless this room and call to mind our baptism into Christ who has redeemed us by his death and resurrection.

As we bless this holy ground we ask that God will touch each of our hearts.

We bless the door and ask God to protect each one who enters and leaves this place.

We bless these windows and ask God that each person will look with kindness and love on those who live in this area.

We bless each one here with the ancient blessing of the Jewish Community: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

R. Amen

Reflection by Bishop Walsh

Moses hid his face lest his eyes look on God. Yahweh said, "I have seen the suffering of my people in Egypt and I hear their cry when they are cruelly treated. I know their suffering. I have come down to free them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a beautiful spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Go now! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the sons of Israel out of Egypt!"

Prayers of the Faithful

We pray for all students, teachers and staff here in Saint Aidan's. May we always work together to keep our school a safe and happy place.

We thank God for the generosity of so many people; those who gave money, those who used their gifts and talents and those who gave of their time.

We pray for all people in our world who are suffering because they are cruelly treated. We remember children who are abused, those caught up in wars and violent situations and those who are hungry.

God help us to make time for you in our lives. We pray that we may take a little time everyday to talk to you, to thank you and to ask for your help.

We pray for all who we have known who have died. God welcome them into your heavenly Kingdom.

Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the people of Israel out of Egypt?" God replied, "I will be with you and this will be the sign that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Christ has no body now but yours

(Liturgical Movement and powerpoint reflection.)

Sign of Peace

(*'What price is peace'* is sung)

(*Student enters with incense sticks and places them on the altar*)

Moses answered God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them: 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' they will ask me: 'What is his name?' What shall I answer them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO AM. This is what you will say. I AM sent me to you." God then said to Moses, "You will say to the Israelites: 'YAHWEH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me.' That will be my name forever, and by this name they shall call upon me for all generations to come."

Each person gets a candle to light before the final blessing.

Final Blessing

Touching the forehead: May you approach all other people with Christ-like compassion, observing them with kindness. May you let go of all harsh judgments.

R. Amen.

Touching the ears: May you be aware of the suffering of those around you, and of all those in the world. May your ears be open to hear their cries of distress.

R. Amen

Touching the lips: May you have the courage and wisdom to speak up for those who are wronged, to be a voice for those who suffer from injustice of any form.

R. Amen

Touching the hands: May you be open to receive from others when you are in need. May you be ready to give when someone needs to receive your gifts.

R. Amen

Touching the heart: May you be willing to meet your own suffering. May you do so with deep compassion for yourself.

R. Amen

Touching the shoulder of the person next to you: May you always know the shelter of God when you are hurting and in pain. May you trust our compassionate God to protect you and to comfort you. May you leave this holy ground in peace.

R. Amen.

Bishop: May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts and may the word of Christ in all its richness dwell in us, so that whatever we do in word or work we will do in the name of the Lord.

Amen.

Closing Hymn: This little light of mine

Benildus Pastoral Centre

The mission of Benildus Pastoral Centre is to foster a caring, warm and compassionate environment of hospitality and welcome, which promotes the faith development of young people.

The Centre is committed to providing a space, where all who journey here are accompanied in their Christian search. Together, we cultivate a creative and artistic climate where imaginative responses and individuality are expressed and encouraged.

We pray that those who spend time here will have an experience that will touch their lives in a meaningful way.

So...what to expect?

Our team offer retreats from Confirmation up to leaving certificate classes. Each year has a different theme, which is approached through discussion, self-reflection and creative work. We also incorporate meditation into the day and we have found that many of the students find this a grounding and wholesome experience. We continually discover that many young students yearn for quiet reflective time out of the school environment and this, we believe can have a deep and lasting effect on them.

We have within our team a deep sense of the sacred and a strong motivation to help the faith development of all that pass through our doors.

The Centre is set in tranquil and aesthetically pleasing surroundings, a perfect setting for the retreat we offer. We can cater for up to 30 students at a time and their experience here will engage them in both large and small group work. The cost of the day is €15 per second level student, and €12 per primary student. Access to the centre is easy due to the many options of Dublin bus and the luas line is a mere stroll away.

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Fax: (01) 2964168

E-mail: benilduspastoralcentre@eircom.net

Website: www.benilduspastoralcentre.com

Useful websites for teaching Religious Education

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning> - check out the religion and ethics section and “world religions.

<http://www.educationguardian.co.uk>

<http://www.eblast.com> – encyclopaedia and links to web.

<http://school.discovery.com/>

<http://www.teachnet.ie> - check out the projects for religious education, both primary and postprimary.

Religious Education

<http://www.ress.ie>: a support service for Junior and Leaving Certificate religious education.

<http://www.antobar.ie> - a religious education resources site compiled by An Tobar, Marino College, Dublin.

<http://www.logos.ie> - web resources for Junior Certificate religious education.

<http://www.religiousresources.org> - a comprehensive listing of religious resources on the web.

<http://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/gcscn./index.html> - The GCSE R.E. site with good resources on world religions, Mark's Gospel and Christian perspectives on life and living.

<http://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/> - The Religious Education Exchange Service founded by the Church of England provides good materials on world religions and on ethical and moral issues.

<http://www.theresite.org.uk> - all extensive range of resources relevant to religious education.

<http://www.education.cant.ac.uk/rennet>. The website of RE Net with useful website links and resources.

<http://eleo.ucsm.ac.uk/content/profpolicies/assessment/assessment-sheets/re/re.htm> - useful guideline questions for preparing students to visit a sacred place.

<http://www.osb.org/liturgy/> - a good site on liturgy.

<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org> – all the mayor religious events and dates.

<http://www.adherents.com> – up-to-date statistics about numbers and distribution of major religions.

<http://www.faithcentral.net.nz/inclass/history.htm> - a good site on Church history.

www.mythicjourneys.org/bigimyth/ - creation myths form around the world.

www.silk.net/RelEd/lessonplans.htm - resources for Roman Catholic schools in the US.

www.faithcentral.net.nz – resources for Roman Catholic schools in New Zealand.

www.refit-ucsm.ac.uk – case studies showing how Information Technology can be used as a tool in R.E.

www.abc.net.au/religion - the section on sacred writings and stories contains a very comprehensive list of sacred texts that are downloadable.

www.religion-online.org – a collection of essays and books on topics of theology by reputable scholars.

Churches and Religious Organisations

www.ireland.anglican.org

www.presbyterianireland.org

www.irishmclhudisl.org

www.catholicireland.net

www.cori.ie

Justice and Human Rights

www.trocaire.org

www.oxfam.org

www.oneworld.net

www.developmenteducation.ie

www.savedthechildren.org.uk

www.bbe.co.uk/education/humanrights/

www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net

www.thetablet.co.uk