

St. Mary's Catholic Church
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Clergy Fr. Thomas Mason (Parish Priest)

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Second Sunday of Lent

Services this week

Day	Time	Location	Celebration
Saturday 28	6.30pm	Gainford	Second Sunday of Lent
Sunday 1	9.30am	Barnard Castle	Second Sunday of Lent
Sunday 1	11.30am	Gainford (Ord.)	Second Sunday in Lent
Monday 2	6.15pm	Barnard Castle (Lat.)	<i>Lenten feria</i>
Tuesday 3	10am	Gainford	<i>Lenten feria</i>
Thursday 5	10am	Barnard Castle	<i>Lenten feria (followed by Stations of the Cross)</i>
Friday 6	12noon	Gainford (Ord.)	<i>Lenten feria</i>
Friday 6	5.30pm	Barnard Castle	Stations of the Cross
Friday 6	6-7pm	Barnard Castle	Holy Hour
Saturday 7	4pm	Middleton	Third Sunday of Lent
Saturday 7	6.30pm	Barnard Castle	Third Sunday of Lent
Sunday 8	9.30am	Gainford	Third Sunday of Lent
Sunday 8	11.30am	Gainford (Ord.)	Third Sunday in Lent

Confessions: after Mass, by appointment, or Monday 5.30-6pm, Thursday 5.30-6pm
Saturday 10-11

Mass at Barnard Castle next Saturday evening, no Mass on Sunday morning

Mass Readings – Parish Mass Book, page 155

First Reading	<i>Genesis 12:1-4a</i>
Responsorial Psalm	May your merciful love be upon us, as we hope in you, O LORD. (Ps. 32)
Second Reading	<i>2 Timothy 1:8b-10</i>
Gospel Acclamation	Glory to you, O Christ, Wisdom of God the Father. From a bright cloud, the Father's voice was heard: 'This is my beloved Son, listen to him'. Glory to you, O Christ, Wisdom of God the Father.
Gospel	<i>Matthew 17:1-9</i>

Rota

This week: Welcome – Wynn; Reader – Michael L.

Next week: Welcome – Wynn; Reader – Sheila; Bidding Prayers – Nuala

Prayer over the People – an extra Lenten blessing

The sharp eyed among may have noticed an extra prayer at the end of Mass over the past week or so, along with a slightly different form of blessing; those with good memories may also remember having it during Lent in previous years. This prayer, known as the 'Prayer Over the People' has ancient origins, possibly as far back as the third century. It is older than the blessing at the end of Mass, and in many ways is a more solemn predecessor of it.

Sources going that far back are rather sketchy, but it seems that on certain occasions the Bishop would offer a short prayer specifically for those people present. This makes it different from most of our prayers at Mass which are aimed somewhat wider, including generally the whole world or all of God's faithful, rather than just those in church at that point.

Whatever its origins way back when, the practice of a prayer for 'the people' (i.e., those present) became connected with the season of Lent, as well as a few other penitential days. The logic seems to have been that during periods of fasting we turn ever more fervently to the Lord and seek to grow closer to him, and so a prayer offered by the Priest or Bishop to this end is useful. Also Lent has always been seen as a time of spiritual battle (the argument between Christ and the devil in last week's Gospel illustrates this); and so adding an extra prayer for the congregation strengthens them as they play their part in that battle.

This prayer becomes one of the standard 'orations' at Mass; these are the short prayers which are proper, that is, they change with each Mass and reflect the themes or ideas of the Mass. Like most of the orations (especially the older ones) they are short and written in very terse Latin; but within those few words do try to capture the sense of our need for God's support in our lives – especially during a time such as Lent.

These prayers sort of disappeared for a while. Wanting to avoid the repetition of having a blessing-like prayer and then a separate blessing a few moments later; when the missal was reformed a new form of solemn blessing was created, this includes a short prayer for the people followed by the actual blessing. These solemn blessings were provided for many more points in the year, rather than merely during Lent; however, they were placed into an appendix, and so were not often used. The decision was taken to restore them to their place alongside the other prayers for each day during Lent, which took effect when the 'new' English translation was introduced back in 2011.

As we make our journey through Lent, having these prayers is a reminder that this isn't just a period of self-improvement, but rather a journey with the Lord. Lent isn't about testing ourselves whether we can resist the thought of the chocolate bar hiding away in the kitchen drawer, but is a privileged time of putting things aside to grow closer to God (and therefore to those around us). We enter into Lent by asking for a special blessing through the ashes we receive, and the Church prays daily for us to be strengthened by God. When we hear those prayers, may we all be reminded of that central purpose of turning to the Lord and receiving his strength and blessing during this season. – Fr. Thomas.

Prayer List: Among the sick of the parish, please keep John Burgess, Anthony Cole, Norah Mackay, Izzy Herbert, Alice Musto, Diedre and Pat Estall, and David Brown in your prayers. We pray particularly for the recently departed including David Walkden, and for those whose anniversaries occur at this time, including Fr. John Caden. If you know of others who would like to be added to the parish prayer list, please let Fr. Thomas know. You may find the following prayer useful as a way of drawing our parish ever closer together round Our Lord. It is through his grace that we are turned from a gathering of people in the same place, into a parish, into a genuine community.

Loving Father, we the people of St Mary's Parish offer ourselves to you, to be your people in this place, to be your Church in our community, and to be instruments of peace, forgiveness and love. Help us grow in gratitude so that we can recognise and thank you for all our blessings.

Instil in us a deep sense of generosity so that we are willing to share our gifts, our talents, our time and our resources. Help us face whatever the future holds and to make new beginnings in your name.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord. Amen.

Stations of the Cross – during the Stations will be prayed on Fridays at 5.30, followed by Holy Hour; and following Mass on Thursdays.

The Road to Emmaus during Lent, following Mass on Fridays, the Ordinariate Group will be having some reflections on the ways that Christ fulfils Old Testament prophecies. "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (*S. Luke 24:27*) All most welcome.

Lent Lunches will take place on three Fridays during Lent (13, 20, and 27 March), 12-1.30pm at the Parish Hall on Newgate. We are responsible for providing the meal, as well as serving, clearing up &c., on Friday 13 March – a sign-up list for volunteers is at the back of church. All welcome.

Diocesan Pastoral Strategy Following Bishop Stephen's pastoral letter last week (printed copies at the back of church if you haven't got one), we enter into a period of discernment as a parish regarding our mission and how best to fulfil it. The P.P.C. will meet shortly to reflect, and this will be followed by reflection on the part of the whole parish. Please keep this matter in your thoughts and prayers.

The diocese has material to assist with discernment on its web-site, including a webinar which takes place on Tuesday evening and is open to all. <https://diocesehn.org.uk/pastoral-strategy/>

Children's Liturgy. As noted last week, we are preparing to offer a children's liturgy during Sunday Mass. Volunteers are most welcome to help with, if you are interested please speak to Fiona Bissell. Those who have already expressed a willingness will be contacted regarding D.B.S. checks.

Our Outstanding School as some of you may already know, S. Mary's School recently had a visit from the Catholic Schools Inspectorate – this focuses on the Catholic life provided by the school rather than pure education. The school was rated as Outstanding in all three areas (Catholic life and mission; Religious education; and Collective worship). The report begins:

“St Mary’s Catholic Primary School has a warm and welcoming atmosphere, deeply rooted in its Catholic identity and mission, which is proudly proclaimed and enthusiastically lived by everyone.” This wonderful outcome is the result of incredible hard work by the whole team – congratulations to everybody. As always, please do keep this important part of our parish in your prayers.

Holy Island SVP Summer Camps 2026 Applications are now open for children in school Years 5-7 for Holy Island Summer Camps. The children spend a week in our centre on the island over the Summer holidays. Transport takes the children from Tyneside to our residential centre and all meals, accommodation and activities are included in the cost. For more information please visit our website: Holy Island SVP Vinnies Camp <https://svp.org.uk/microsite/ozanam-camp>

Do you have some spare time on your hands and want a fulfilling volunteer role? Our residential centre on Holy Island needs volunteers in 2026. There are lots of roles: Working with the children on our Vinnies Summer Camps, during the Summer holidays as a caretaker, kitchen assistants, cooks, and volunteering to work directly with the children. It's hard work, but so much fun and very worthwhile! No cost, just your time and patience for an interesting week on this beautiful island! Or perhaps you are retired or have flexible holidays and could give some time to help at our Term Time Camps. We need people who can take on a caretaking role or help in the kitchen with serving meals, cooking or operating the dishwasher! These Camps allow hundreds of children from the Diocese and further afield have a great residential holiday in our centre.

Guaranteed hard work but fantastic memories too!

To join our fabulous team or find out more information about any of the roles and to volunteer, please visit our website: Holy Island SVP Vinnies Camp <https://svp.org.uk/microsite/ozanam-camp> or contact BarbaraT@svp.org.uk

Safeguarding The Parish operates in accordance with Statutory Safeguarding Guidance and Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) and Diocese’s policies and procedures at all times. Our Parish Safeguarding Representative is Fiona Bissell or alternatively the Diocesan Safeguarding Team can be contacted on 0191 2433305 or at safeguarding@diocesehn.org.uk

Prayer for England

As the jubilee year has finished, we return to offering the prayer for the conversion of England at the end of Mass.

O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England, thy Dowry, and upon us all who greatly hope and trust in thee. By thee it was that Jesus, our Saviour and our hope was given unto the world; and He has given thee to us that we might hope still more. Plead for us thy children whom thou didst receive and accept at the foot of the Cross O sorrowful Mother. Intercede for our separated brethren, that with us in the one true fold they may be united to the chief shepherd, the vicar of thy Son. Pray for us all, dear mother, that by faith and fruitful in good works we may all deserve to see and praise God together with thee, in our heavenly home. Amen.