

The Churches of St John & St Patrick

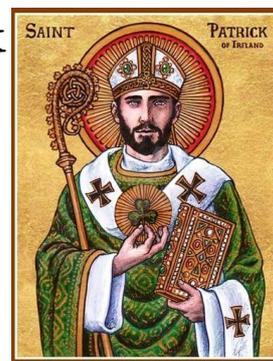
servicing the Parish of St William

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28th April 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Some of the greatest gifts that the Church has given to civilisation are its glorious churches and cathedrals. Anyone, believer or not, can rejoice in the splendour of St Peter's in Rome, of Durham Cathedral or York Minster. In Wigan we are not just proud of having some of the most beautiful churches in the diocese, we love them. And we want to get back to them as soon as possible.

But this enforced exile from the House of God can be an opportunity for us to remember that what makes these buildings holy, apart of course from the Real Presence of the Lord, is that God's Holy People meets in them. The building is called a church because the Church, that's you and me, gathers within its walls. At the moment we're not able to get together in church, but we are still the Church, still united in worshipping God wherever we are.

It's good to remember that our Lord was first worshipped in a stable and later in the home of Mary and Joseph at Nazareth. Good to remember too that although the Jews had a Temple and synagogues, the home was seen as a place of prayer. It was there, for example, that the Sabbath meal and Passover meals were celebrated. The first Christians too, for many years, celebrated the Mass in their homes before they were free to build churches.

It would be a great blessing if this challenging time led us to a deeper awareness that our homes can be places of prayer. I know many of you are praying a lot at the moment, watching daily Mass and other devotions on the TV or Internet. It's good too to get into the habit of saying Grace before and after meals. Pope Francis has asked us pray the Rosary every day in May. If you have young children, they might not be able to cope yet with the full Rosary. Try saying one decade each day as a family. Remember the old maxim: 'The family that prays together stays together.'

And your prayer needn't be confined to the house. Here's a simple way of praying in the garden, using each of your senses. First, settle yourself down in your garden chair and be still. Then start by praying with your eyes, really noticing the different flowers, bushes and trees, their shapes and colours and the way they move.

Then pray by listening, allowing yourself to be calmed by the coo of the woodpigeon in the tree, the gentle trickling of a water-feature, the sound of the breeze brushing the grasses in the garden, or the gentle buzz of the hedge trimmer a few houses away.

After a while, move on to savour the fragrance of the honeysuckle or the lavender. The smell of your evening meal drifting out from the house. Or of your neighbour's barbeque coming over the garden fence.

And now pray with your sense of touch. Enjoy how comfortable your chair is. Notice the breeze and its coolness. Feel the warmth of God's sun on the side of your face.

Then take in a deep breath of thankfulness and say: 'How great is Thy Name, O Lord our God, through all the earth.' (Psalm 8)

God bless you,

Father O'Shea

PS. You're probably thinking, 'But Father, you've forgotten the sense of taste.' Quite right. When you've finished meditating, open a nice bottle of wine, raise a glass to the Almighty and pray: 'Bless the Lord, my soul!... You make the grass grow for the cattle and the plants to serve man's needs, that he may bring forth bread from the earth and wine to cheer's man's heart.' (Psalm 103)