

## Pope Francis' pandemic prayer 5 years later: 'Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?'

**P**ope Francis' historic "Statio Orbis" blessing during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic remains relevant for the Church



as it did five years ago. Before an empty and rain-covered St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis held Eucharistic adoration and gave an extraordinary urbi et orbi blessing, praying for the world during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Holy Hour on March 27, 2020, included a reading from the Gospel and a meditation by Pope Francis, who spoke about faith and trust in God during a time when people fear for their lives, as did the disciples when their boat was caught in a violent storm.

During the special moment of prayer on March 27, 2020, the Holy Father spoke about faith amid crisis — "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

These powerful words were a papal refrain throughout his 2020 address before an empty St. Peter's Square.

'Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?' Lord, your word this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us. In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things and lured away by haste," he prayed.

Pope Francis implored people to believe in God's presence during the time of COVID-19 when he spoke of Jesus' reaction to the cry of the disciples: "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" recorded in chapter 4 of St. Mark's Gospel.

The pandemic's impact on the life of the Church is yet to be fully researched and understood.

Recent studies from around the world suggest a decline in Church attendance in some regions. A new Pew study shows thousands of people have chosen to leave behind the religion of their childhood in some of the traditionally Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain. At the same time, the study acknowledges the report's figures "are not necessarily representative of the entire world's population."

While religious belief and practice may seem to be weakening in some parts of the world, the Holy Father's "Statio Orbis" prayer five years ago can still resonate with millions of people of faith who trust and hope in God's presence in times of world suffering and hardship.

According to the Vatican's 2025 Annuario Pontificio, the Catholic Church has grown worldwide after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the highest growth recorded in Africa. Between 2022 and 2023, the global Catholic population has grown from approximately 1.39 billion Catholics to 1.406 billion in the last two years. (Source: VA News)

## Found Alive Again



**I**n today's First Reading, God forgives "the reproach" of the generations who grumbled against Him after the Exodus. On the threshold of the promised land, Israel can with a clean heart celebrate the Passover, the feast of God's firstborn son (see Joshua 5:6-7; Exodus 4:22; 12:12-13).

Reconciliation is also at the heart of the story Jesus tells in today's Gospel. The story of the Prodigal Son is the story of Israel and of the human race. But it is also the story of every believer.

In Baptism, we're given a divine birthright, made "a new creation," as Paul puts it in today's Epistle. But when we sin, we're like the Prodigal Son, quitting our Father's house, squandering our inheritance in trying to live without Him.

Lost in sin, we cut ourselves off from the grace of sonship lavished upon us in Baptism. It is still possible for us to come to our senses, make our way back to the Father, as the prodigal does.

But only He can remove the reproach and restore the divine sonship we have spurned. Only He can free us from the slavery to sin that causes us—like the Prodigal Son—to see God not as our Father but as our master, One we serve as slaves.

God wants not slaves but children. Like the father in today's Gospel, He longs to call each of us "My son," to share His life with us, to tell us: "Everything I have is yours."

The Father's words of longing and compassion still come to His prodigal children in the Sacrament of Penance. This is part of what Paul today calls "the ministry of reconciliation" entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and the Church.

Reconciled like Israel, we take our place at the table of the Eucharist, the homecoming banquet the Father calls for His lost sons, the new Passover we celebrate this side of heaven. We taste the goodness of the Lord, as we sing in today's Psalm, rejoicing that we who were dead are found alive again.

Scott Hann



English Martyrs  
Vale of White Horse  
Pastoral Area

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### 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR C

**Entrance Antiphon: Is 66:10-11**

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

**First Reading:** Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

**Responsorial Psalm:** Ps 34

Taste and see that the LORD is good.

**Second Reading:** Corinthians 5:17-21

**Gospel Acclamation:**

**Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus.**

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you'.

**Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus.**

**Gospel:** Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

**Communion Antiphon:** Lk 15:32

You must rejoice, my son, for your brother was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.

#### SATURDAY 29th March

9:30 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... **Confessions after Mass**

4:30 pm Adoration and confession before Vigil Mass St John Wallingford

5:00 pm Vigil Mass St John Wallingford

5:50 pm Adoration before Vigil Mass English Martyrs Didcot

6:30 pm Vigil Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... Maria & Peter Tran RIP (Kim & Douglas)

#### SUNDAY 30th March ... Fourth Sunday of Lent

9:00 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... Krystyna 61st birthday thanksgiving (Keira, Logan, Izabela)

11:00 am Mass St John Wallingford ... Thanksgiving for Kim & Douglas

#### MONDAY 31st March ... NO MASS

#### TUESDAY 1st April

6:30 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot

11:30 am Stations of the Cross St John Wallingford

12:00 noon Mass St John Wallingford

#### WEDNESDAY 2nd April ... St Francis of Paola

9:30 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... Lorraine Barrett Healing following injury (Deborah Kennedy)

#### THURSDAY 3rd April

6:30 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... Thanksgiving for Kim & Douglas

9:30 am Mass St John Wallingford ... Thanksgiving for Kim & Douglas

#### FRIDAY 4th April ... St Isidore of Seville

9:30 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... Willis Capp 90th birthday thanksgiving (Deborah Kennedy)

6:00 pm Stations of the Cross English Martyrs Didcot

#### SATURDAY 5th April ... St Vincent Ferrer

9:30 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... **Confessions after Mass** ... Raymond Traynor RIP (A. Kershaw)

4:30 pm Adoration and confession before Vigil Mass St John Wallingford

5:00 pm Vigil Mass St John Wallingford ... Thanksgiving for Kim & Douglas

5:50 pm Adoration before Vigil Mass English Martyrs Didcot

6:30 pm Vigil Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... David Woodley RIP (Anne Johns)

#### SUNDAY 6th April ... Fifth Sunday of Lent

9:00 am Mass English Martyrs Didcot ... Joanne Bentair & All deceased relatives of Capp Family RIP

11:00 am Mass St John Wallingford

In your prayers, please remember: Margaret O’Conner, Anne O’Brien, Jenny Evans, Mary Guinan, Ann Tomline, Joan Walker, Joan Russell, Joan Turner, Nina Oakes, Jacob Oakes, Pat McLoughlin, Barry Molloy, Annie Furlong and all the sick and housebound of our churches.



### Second Collection for Diocesan Clergy Training Fund this Sunday

The Clergy Assistance Fund contributes to the work of the Department for Clergy Team. The Department for Clergy, which has four members of staff, exists to provide care and support for the ordained in our Diocese. The Diocese of Portsmouth is responsible for supporting the diocesan clergy in active ministry, those from religious orders, the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham or overseas, and our retired priests, who with dedication and care serve our parishes, chaplaincies, schools, outreach and mission: bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church. This appeal resources our Diocese to assist our priests towards holiness, happiness and health - to serve those who serve us.

The Clergy Support Team is responsible for looking after the welfare, ongoing formation and personal support of our clergy, such as the provision of spiritual direction, counselling, appraisal, ongoing formation and practical advice. It organises retreats, ministerial formation days, courses and sabbaticals. It looks after the junior clergy, the overseas clergy and especially the retired clergy. It is the principal mechanism through which the Bishop looks after the wellbeing of the clergy.

Parishioners are welcome to pay by cash to our collectors at the end of the mass, by our DONA device for contactless payment or scanning the QR code to access the online payment of Give as You Live.



### Jubilee Pilgrimage to Lourdes

Do you want to join a pilgrimage to Lourdes with others across the Diocese of Portsmouth in the year of Jubilee this summer? Led by Canon PJ Smith and facilitated by Joe Walsh Tours, the five-day trip to Lourdes will take place from 7th to 11th July. It costs £879 each (Youth Price: £825) including flights, coaches, accommodation and full religious programme directed by Canon PJ Smith. The pilgrimage always includes the key Lourdes experiences. There include Torchlight and Blessed Sacrament processions, International Mass, walking in the footsteps of St Bernadette, visit the Grotto, stations of the cross and responding to Our Lady’s call to bathe in the spring waters. Furthermore, pilgrims will take a trip into the mountains, taking in the Hautes-Pyrenees culture and for the brave, a mountain hike! Young people are especially invited to participate in the great tradition of service in Lourdes. People of all ages travel to Lourdes to seek healing in the spring waters and spiritual renewal and wouldn’t be able to participate in the pilgrimage if it wasn’t for teams of volunteers pushing wheelchairs, assisting them around town.

To obtain an application form, please visit <https://portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/discover-faith/support/pilgrimages/lourdes/>. All bookings on the Pilgrimage should be made through Canon PJ Smith in the Pilgrimage Office. Tel: 07780 221686, or email: [lourdes@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:lourdes@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk). Postal address: Canon PJ Smith, Lourdes Pilgrimage, St Edmund’s House, Bishop Crispian Way, Portsmouth. PO1 3QA.



### Jubilee 2025 – Youth Pilgrimage to Rome!

To celebrate Youth Week in the Jubilee Year 2025, Bishop Philip is inviting anyone who is 17+ to take part in the Diocese of Portsmouth Youth Pilgrimage to Rome. The pilgrimage will run between 28 July and 4 August, coinciding with the World Youth Day. Pilgrims will follow a full programme in Rome led by Bishop Philip, including visits to the Vatican and World Youth Day Jubilee events. During that week, there will be thousands of young people in Rome at the invitation of the Holy Father. We will also be there for the Mass and ceremony at which Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, Patron of our Youth, will be canonised. The cost of the pilgrimage is £1,350. This includes all flights, together with transport in Rome, hotel accommodation including breakfast and an evening meal at the hotel and 20kg of luggage. Pilgrims will need to have a valid passport, a valid EHIC or GHIC and provide their own travel insurance. They will also need some spending money in Rome to buy refreshments, lunch and any souvenirs they would like to bring home! If you are interested, please contact the Parish Office or Fr Dominic for more information. Thank you.



### Prayer Board for First Holy Communion

Our First Holy Communion Team would like to invite you to participate in a prayer chain to pray for the lovely children who are preparing for their First Holy Communion and their families. There is a ‘prayer board’ set up in Didcot, with the self portraits and name of the children. If you want to participate in this prayer chain, please use the pins provided to post a praying hands icon next to the children’s name and say a prayer for them. The First Holy Communion will take place during the Corpus Christi Sunday mass on 22nd June.



### GiftAid Envelops Now Available

The new Gift Aid envelope boxes for the coming tax year are now available and ready for collection at the entrance of Church. If you are a taxpayer and you give to the Church, we applaud you. You can claim back 25p every time on every £1 you give when you sign the giftaid form. You have nothing to lose. Please collect a form for yourself and a friend. You can reach the parish Finance Administrator via email if you need clarifications by email at [accounts.didwal@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:accounts.didwal@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk). Thank you.

### Next Seniors’ Lunch is 10th April

Join our next Seniors’ Lunch at 12 noon on Thursday 10th April. You have a choice of mains including Vegetable Quiche and Egg Fried Rice, served with mixed vegetables salad and complimented with jelly, ice cream and fresh fruit for desserts. Tea and coffee served at the end. Please put your name on the list on our notice board outside the tearoom. There will be NO MASS before the lunch. Please save the date. Thank you.



### Food Donation in Lent

In the period of Lent, we remember those who are suffering and need our help. We share what we have and can give with those who are in need. Please bring food items for donation to the Didcot and Wallingford Food Banks. Food items need to have 3 months best before dates. Thank you.



### Formation for Extraordinary Ministers

Fr Anthony Fyk, Director of Liturgical Formation, will be running further formation days, one for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion which will include a session on taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound on Saturday 3rd May and another for Readers which will include a session on Lectio Divina on Saturday 18th October. There will also be a day for Ministers of Children’s Liturgy on Saturday 7th June, further details to follow. The sessions will take place at St Bede’s Church/Hall in Basingstoke. Anyone interested is encouraged to register by sending an email to [liturgy@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:liturgy@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk).



### Święconka—The Blessing of Easter Baskets

The blessing of the Easter baskets is one of the most enduring and beloved Polish traditions on Holy Saturday. It is called Święconka. This special event takes place in many of our parishes across the diocese because of our Polish families who enrich our parish and liturgy. Are you Polish? Do you want to organize or be part of those to organise it on Holy Saturday 19th April? Please let the Parish Office and Fr Dominic know if you want to help. Thank you.



### Divine Mercy Sunday is 27th April

Divine Mercy Sunday is Sunday 27th April. Come join us at English Martyrs Didcot at 2pm. We hope to think of the Message of Divine Mercy, Hour of Mercy, Divine Mercy chapel, Adoration and Benediction, Veneration of the Image of Merciful Jesus and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.



### Palm Sunday Outdoor Procession

This year, Palm Sunday falls on 13th April. Weather permitting, we plan to witness to the Lord by publicly carrying our palms in procession and singing to the Lord! This procession will begin from Didcot Girls’ School driveway into the Church. We plan to gather in the space at 8:45am to begin the procession at 8:50am so as to get into the Church for Mass at 9am. Please come let us celebrate the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Bring palms or symbols of Christ entry into Jerusalem that are particular to your country. Thank you.