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| **Services this week** |
| **Day** | **Time** | **Location** | **Celebration** |
| Saturday 25th | 6.30pm | Barnard Castle | First Sunday of Lent |
| Sunday 26th | 9.30am | Gainford | First Sunday of Lent |
| Sunday 26th | 11.30am | Gainford (Ord.) | First Sunday in Lent |
| Tuesday 28th  | 10am | Gainford | *Lenten feria* |
| Thursday 2nd | 10am | Barnard Castle | *Lenten feria* |
| Friday 3rd  | 12noon | Gainford (Ord.) | *Lenten feria* |
| Friday 3rd | 5.30pm | Barnard Castle | Stations of the Cross, followed by Holy Hour |
| Saturday 4th | 4pm | Middleton | Second Sunday of Lent |
| Saturday 4th | 6.30pm | Barnard Castle | Second Sunday of Lent |
| Sunday 5th | 9.30am | Gainford | Second Sunday of Lent |
| Sunday 5th | 11.30am | Gainford (Ord.) | Second Sunday in Lent |
| **Confessions:** after mass, by appointment or Monday and Thursday 5:30-6pm and Saturday 10-11am |
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| **Mass Readings** |
| First Reading | *Genesis 2:7-9,3:1-7* |
| Responsorial Psalm | *Psalm 50(51):3-6,14-14,17* |
| Second Reading | *Romans 5:12-19* |
| Gospel Acclamation | **Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory! Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!** *Mt 4:4* |
| Gospel | *Matthew 4:1-11* |

**St. Mary’s Catholic Church**

Birch Road, Barnard Castle, DL12 8NR

**Clergy Fr. Thomas Mason (Parish Priest)**

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Dear friends,

**Rota**

This week: Welcomers- Nadia Earl/Pat Estall; Reader- Pat Estall and Bidding Prayers- Nadia Earl

Next week: Welcomers- Fiona Bissell/Sheila Crabbe; Reader- Fiona Cooper and Bidding Prayers- Jane Roberts

The celebration of Sunday Mass sits right at the heart of Catholic life. Here the community gathers to take part in the highest form of Christian worship, to be drawn into Christ’s offering of himself on the Cross, and to receive his Body and Blood in Holy Communion. S. Jean-Marie Vianney said: “If we really understood the Mass we would die, not of fear, but of love.” Over the centuries, Christians have gone to extreme lengths to be able to attend Mass including risking martyrdom simply to be present. I know from meeting those who are unable to travel to Mass, how deeply they feel the pain of not being able to be there.

That love for the Mass faces a problem when logistical realities confront it. There is no way to avoid the reality that there are significantly fewer priests around than even quite recently; since 1980 the number of priests in this diocese has fallen by about a half, but the number of parishes has remained about the same. Sadly, this situation is going to continue to worsen as more priests retire each year than are ordained – please do pray for vocations to the priesthood, and definitely encourage any young men who might be called to explore this.

In our own context, I have been given the pastoral care of three communities: Barnard Castle parish, Gainford parish, and the Ordinariate group. Each of these has a legitimate and proper claim on my work and my time. For most of the week this is a matter of balancing the various demands and requests to try and ensure that people are given the priestly care which they deserve. When it comes to Sunday Mass the fact that I can only be in one place at one time is particularly challenging.

The law of the Church establishes that the norm is for a priest to celebrate Mass only once per day, but for the good of the faithful if needed that can be twice (e.g., a funeral Mass as a second Mass) and on Sundays and other major festivals three times (as last week on Ash Wednesday). The question then becomes how can those particularly important Sunday Masses be celebrated across those three communities in the best way – ‘best’ here meaning most appropriate for the local circumstances.

The pattern which I inherited was for Barnard Castle to have its Sunday Mass celebrated as a vigil on Saturday evenings (6.30), Gainford parish on Sunday mornings (9.30), and the Ordinariate group later on Sunday mornings (11.30) – with Middleton having a monthly Saturday vigil at 4pm. I understand that this pattern was introduced when the parishes were brought together under the pastoral care of a single priest.

As soon as I arrived it became clear that this pattern was not universally liked, in particular many members of the congregation at Barnard Castle would prefer to have Mass on Sunday mornings and feel that the current pattern was imposed rather than being developed with the fulness of local considerations taken into account. The Parish Pastoral Council (P.P.C.) formally requested that the pattern be reviewed, and after consultation with the Episcopal Vicar for this part of the Diocese, that request has been accepted. The P.P.C. also produced a document giving reasons why it believes that this parish would be best served by having Mass on Sunday mornings rather than on Saturday evenings.

This review is being undertaken to see what the best pattern would be to allow the three groups to which I minister to flourish. For my own part, I am happy to celebrate Mass in whatever reasonable configuration works best for these communities; but to determine that pattern we need to know what you, the people of the parish, think about this matter.

I know that many will have strong views, I know that many will feel pain if the outcomes are not in-line with their hopes and expectations. I cannot promise that what comes out of this review will please everybody, but I do promise that before any decision is made the views of members of the congregations will have been listened to and reflected on carefully.

I would invite you to reflect carefully on what aspects of Mass scheduling are important for you; how particular times would be better or worse (and indeed in some cases entirely impractical). There is a questionnaire to be completed in which you can feedback your views and why these are important to you. Please do complete this, hearing from you is the only way that we can take your views into account. Please also pray for me, and for all of those involved in this review process – whatever the outcome, there will be some who feel distress at any changes or lack of changes. We are all one family, the Body of Christ, and we need to have love and care for each other.

Fr. Thomas.

**Q.R. Code for donations:** As you arrived today you may have noticed a number of Q.R. codes on display. These take you to a donations page for the church, which you may find more convenient than bringing cash or a cheque.

**Prayer List:** Among the sick of the parish, please keep Pat G., Mary Robertson, Pauline Traynor, and Anthony Cole in your prayers. Among the recently departed, please pray for the repose of the soul of Brenda Dickinson, and Rey Barnard.

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.

**Shrine Lamps:** We are all familiar with the practice of lighting a votive candle as a means of praying for our various intentions. An old tradition is for people to sponsor a sanctuary lamp which burns for a week. We have six locations where such lamps can burn – in each case the lamp will burn for a week, with a sign by it indicating the intention for which it burns. The main sanctuary lamp is the one in the centre, which indicates the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle; we also have the Lady Chapel, the Martyrs’ Altar; along with the statues of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady, and S. Joseph. If you would like such a lamp to burn, please complete one of the forms at the back or by the side door – indicate where you would like the lamp to burn, which week, and the intention for which you would like it to burn – and then return to Fr. Thomas or stick it through the presbytery letterbox. Each lamp costs £5.

**First Communion:** The parish first communion preparation began recently. Please keep Alfie, Amber, Edward, Robbie, and Tomek in your prayers as they progress towards making this important step in their relationship with Christ; as well as Amelia, Eleanor, and Max who are preparing with them from S. Osmund parish.

**School Governors:** The Diocese is adopting a new model for the recruitment of school governors, rather than dealing with individual vacancies it will be seeking to build up a pool a potential governors who can be appointed easily when a suitable vacancy occurs. There will be more details coming out shortly to encourage people to join this pool of governors; however, in the meantime please do reflect on whether this is a way in which you feel that you could help the Church and her mission.

**Lenten Reflections from Across the Diocese:** The Vicariate for Faith & Mission has now produced the first booklet of Lenten reflections, ahead of the beginning of Lent on Wednesday 22nd February. The reflections have been contributed by a mix of clergy, religious and lay people to express the richness and variety of our diocesan community. The reflections can be found on-line at: <https://bit.ly/DHNLent2023>

**Stations of the Cross:** One of the most popular devotions, particularly during Lent. As last year, Stations will be prayed on Fridays at 5.30 (before the usual Holy Hour); additionally, for those who would find it more convenient, they will be prayed following Mass on Thursday (beginning c.10.30).

**I am who I am:** Following the Ordinariate Mass on the Fridays of Lent there will be a discussion of the meaning of God’s referring to himself as ‘I am’ (Exodus 3:14), and how Christ uses the title in the Gospels. All are most welcome to Mass, to the bible study, or even better to both.