

Third Sunday of Lent, 23 March 2025

“It may bear fruit next year.”

We live in an age of fast food: if we are hungry, we want a meal now. We want TV on demand, too: if we like a series, we don't want to wait until next week for the next episode - we want it now! If we need to buy something, why wait until the next time we go shopping - we can order it online with next-day delivery. In an age of instant gratification, are we perhaps losing the art of patient waiting?

Perhaps this might also extend to the garden. Some might be impatient gardeners, demanding instant results or colour. If a plant isn't thriving, we might dig it up, throw it on the compost heap and pop to the garden centre to buy something bigger, better or more colourful. It's a symptom of a throw-away society. Why should a plant take up space in my garden if it's not going to flower?

Jesus often refers to seeds, plants and crops in the Gospel, and thirty-two references to fruit are in the New Testament! And Jesus says that we will know what kind of person someone is by the fruits they produce. In today's Gospel Jesus tells the parable of a man with a fig tree in his vineyard which has not produced any fruit for three years. The man tells his gardener to cut it down: it wastes space. But the gardener replies with patient optimism, “Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.” Many of us are like the barren fig tree. We take up space, bask in the sunshine, soak up the rainwater for ourselves, but give nothing back, producing no fruit for others to enjoy. We can be pretty happy to potter, with no more significant purpose in life, just being but not giving, failing to see that we must bear fruit to thrive and survive.

And if we are to bear fruit we must repent. **This is one of the common themes of our Lenten season. This repentance is sometimes portrayed as a 180-degree turnaround, like Saul falling off his horse and suddenly realising the error of his ways. But here it refers to a more gradual change of heart, a new way of seeing things — adopting a different perspective on life. Although repentance can be an instant dramatic event, for most of us it's an ongoing process of change, what Cardinal Newman meant when he said, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often”.**

Followers of Jesus are expected to make changes and do stuff. He commissions us “that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” - show kindness, give generously, help those in need, be compassionate and forgiving. It's all good to believe the right things, but we must also do the right things. Our Christian faith is not simply a feeling or a good intention. It exists only in the sense that it is demonstrated. We might imagine that we love, but this is just an idea unless we love another. We may think we are generous, but unless this is manifested in actual giving, then it is just a thought about who we think we are. As the Letter of James says: “Faith apart from works is dead.” These good works are the fruits of the Spirit.

We take heart that Jesus is a patient gardener—he doesn't write us off. He is always ready to give us a second chance and help us become the best people we can be. Imagine having another year to produce fruit for Christ. Can we ask him to dig around us, fertilise us with the Spirit, and encourage us to act kindly for others? What changes can we make in the year ahead to turn our barren fig tree into something beautiful for God, to repay the patient trust he has shown us? Our little fig tree will one day be no more, and its ability to bear fruit will accompany it. Let us not waste time; let us put our barren years behind us. Let us seize the opportunity whilst we still have time and see what fruit we can produce in the year ahead.

Parish Census Forms. We are conducting a parish census for the first time in ten years, and **we kindly request everyone to participate, whether you are currently registered with the parish or not. The old Parish Register will be deleted as its data storage does not comply with GDPR norms.** A new Parish Register will be created, so it is mandatory that you complete the census if you wish to be registered with the parish. Your input is invaluable to us. Please complete the census form by scanning this QR code (which is also available in the Narthex) or by using the provided online link. <https://forms.office.com/e/GTfhzBCTBx?origin=lpLink>



You can also find the information on the parish website - Select the 'About' tab, then 'Parish Registration.'

Your cooperation and participation are greatly appreciated.

Cardinal's Lenten Appeal. Your contributions will help fund vital projects across the Diocese of Westminster, including Youth and Evangelisation, Social Action, Marriage and Family Life and Catholic Education Initiatives. His Eminence, Cardinal Nichols, extends his heartfelt thanks to all who can give what they can to this meaningful cause. Donation envelopes are available in the narthex. You will find the donations box at the back of the church by the hymn Book trolleys.

Stations of the Cross are on Fridays in Lent at 7.00 pm.

LEPRA Appeal . We will be taking up a collection for Lepra on 5th /6th April. Lepra works to reduce the physical, emotional and social harms caused by **leprosy and lymphatic filariasis (LF)** . Please see the poster in the narthex for more information.

Signing of Certificates of Catholic Practice (CCP) for admission to St Michael's Nursery is in the presbytery on Monday, 31st March, 6.45- 7.30 pm. Please try to come at this time, rather than seeking an individual appointment.

Morning Teas and Coffees. Please join us for Teas and Coffees in the Presbytery Meeting room **after 9.15 am Mass on Tuesdays and Fridays.** All are welcome.

Easter My Day by Day booklets are now available in the narthex, £1.00. Please place your donation in the Publications Box in the box in the wall in the narthex.

Flower Arranging. We are looking for someone to take over the running of the existing team of flower arrangers after Easter. If you would like to take on the role and/or would like some more information, please speak to Shenda in the parish office on 01784 252230 or ashford@rcdow.org.uk

Mass Intentions. If you wish to book a Mass, please drop your intention envelope in the offertory collection box at the back of the church or through the presbytery letterbox. *If you are able to make your Mass offering under Gift Aid, please use the new blue donation envelopes.*

Bucket Collection. The Bucket Collection is for Shooting Star Children's Hospices. The donations box is in the wall at the back of the church.

Diane Brown RIP. Please pray for the repose of the soul of Diane Brown, sister of Lawrence, Debbie, David and Graham. Her Funeral will be held at Hanworth Crematorium on **Friday 4th April at 12.20pm.**

Annual Mass of Thanksgiving for Matrimony at Westminster Cathedral on Saturday, 17th May 2025, at 2:30 pm. The Cardinal invites couples in the Diocese to celebrate in 2025 their 5th, 10th, 25th, 30th, 40th, 50th, and 60th (and any year over 60) wedding anniversary of Catholic marriage. If you would like to attend, please give the following details to Shenda in the parish office **by Monday, 31st March:** husband and wife's names, wedding date, number of years married, postal address, email (or phone number, if no email).

Lourdes Pilgrimage 25th July - 1st August 2025 – Registration for the Westminster diocesan pilgrimage led by Cardinal Vincent Nicholas is now open via the online form at <https://pilgrimages.rcdow.org.uk> or by contacting the Pilgrimage Office on 020 7798 9173. Options to travel by plane or train are available and there are many volunteering opportunities for those wishing to serve.

All applications need to be submitted **by Wednesday 30th April.**

Feltham Choral Society. Easter Concert at St Matthew's Church, Ashford **on Saturday 5th April** at 7.30pm. Works to be performed are Haydn's Nelson Mass and Stabat Mater by Perogolesi. Tickets £10.00 (cash only) available on the door. All welcome.

This Sunday's readings, Third Sunday of Lent, 23 March 2025

Exodus 3: 1-8a, 13-15; 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13: 1-9

Next Sunday's readings, Fourth Sunday of Lent, 30 March 2025

Joshua 5: 9a-12; 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21; Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

Offertory Collection. Thank you for your offertories last week:

Loose Plate £849.68; Envelopes £195.00; Standing Orders £900.00

Contactless £290.00

CAFOD: £80.00

MANNA Foodbank. This week's shortages: *Tinned Green Beans; Tinned Mixed Vegetables; Cup-a-Soup; Crisps; Deodorant for Women; Deodorant for Men; Washing up Liquid; Shaving Foam/Gel; Laundry pods/liquid/powder/capsules; Men's warm gloves (new only) for our Homeless clients; Easter Eggs/Treats (best before date of at least end of April).* Please leave your donations in the box in the narthex.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

During Adoration after Saturday morning Mass (and by appointment)

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

To arrange a baptism please refer to the parish website:

(see: Parish Life → Sacramental Preparation → Baptism)

For the parish Mass timetable, please refer to the parish website:

<http://parish.rcdow.org.uk/ashford>

Safeguarding If you've any concerns or require advice regarding the safety or well-being of a child or vulnerable adult, please contact our parish safeguarding rep, Tiziana Demurtas on 07778 533932 or ashfordsg@safeguardrcdow.org.uk
You can also contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team on 020 7798 9356 or safeguarding@rcdow.org.uk

PLEASE PRAY

for all the sick and housebound in our parish.

for anniversaries in March since 2018: Winifred Atkinson, Ben Boone, Kevin Carroll, Lena Chapman, Peggy Collins, Tina Edwards, Elizabeth Floyd, Christina Hunt, Jennifer Langan, Jeremiah McMullen, Lorraine Munro, Noel O'Neill, William O'Rourke, Barbara Parker, Joan Peters, Christopher Worley.

for Fr Philip Baptiste and the parishioners of St Theodore of Canterbury, Hampton in the Upper Thames Deanery.

for the Holy Father's Prayer Intention that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts, even in their differences.

Mass Intentions 23rd – 30th March

Sun 23rd Third Sunday of Lent

(Saturday Vigil Mass) 06.00pm

Joakim Souza RIP

09.15am

The people of the parish

11.30am

John and Mary Daly RIP

06.00pm

Juanita Oropeo RIP

Mon 24th

09.15am

Fr Luciano Felloni RIP

Tues 25th

The Annunciation of the Lord

09.15am

Joan McKinnon's intentions

Wed 26th

06.00pm

Rocky Fernandes RIP

Fri 28th

09.15am

Lee Gibson's intentions

Sat 29th

09.15am

Leonard Towns RIP

Sun 30th Fourth Sunday of Lent

(Saturday Vigil Mass) 06.00pm

Ann Hawkins RIP

09.15am

Mother Jacoba's intentions

11.30am

Lesley Westlake RIP

06.00pm

The people of the parish

St Michael's Catholic Church

112 Clarendon Road, Ashford, Middlesex TW15 2QD

Telephone: 01784 252230

Email: ashford@rcdow.org.uk

Website: <http://parish.rcdow.org.uk/ashford>

This parish is part of the Westminster Catholic Diocese Trustee Charity no. 233699

Fr Sidon Sagar FDP: Parish Priest, Fr Carlo Mazzotta FDP: Assistant Priest

Parish Secretary: Mrs Shenda Holmes

Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 9.00 am – 1.00 pm