



THE ARCHANGEL

St. Michael's School and Parish • Harts Lane • Burghclere • RG20 9JW

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Providence & Poverty

Dear parishioners,

As current troubles drag on, we are forced to remind ourselves of God's loving Providence. *"Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they?"* (Matt. 6:26)

God's Providence is a very mysterious thing. Our peace and confidence are challenged when our lives take paths that we did not plan or foresee. As we are forced to walk, and sometimes wander with little light to see the contours ahead, or perhaps even in darkness that takes away all sense of direction, we experience fear and agitation.

It is tiring to travel along unfamiliar paths. Like a boat lost at sea, we are at mercy of the winds and currents. Our supplies are limited and our needs pressing. We all aspire to peace and security, but, as we advance in God's ways, these seem to elude us at every turn. Will we alight soon, to rest and settle?

A good person recently wrote to me: "I feel that whatever I try or do, I become overwhelmed regardless, and then depression sets in. If only God would show me a clear path. No matter what I decide, I am filled with hesitation and self-doubt. Are these not signs that God is displeased? And yet I do want to follow His will. I just can't work out what it is."

Despite the simplicity and clarity of our Faith, as expressed in the catechism or, better still, in the Gospel parables, we often journey through life with the uneasy feeling of not quite knowing where we are going. Tepid souls shrug their shoulders and do not give it another thought. Serious souls ponder in moments of silent prayer and recollection. Some plough on, ready to adapt to the terrain when it becomes more rugged. Their strong faith assures them that God will provide. Others experience sadness and loneliness, often advancing with hesitant steps, hopeful that one day they will see more clearly and experience some sort of heavenly reassurance.

The latter category of souls is the most common a priest will come in contact with. They seek from the priest guidance and encouragement.

It is a way with Divine Providence that it only reveals itself when we look behind us after a decision has been made or a trial overcome. God loves to act in hidden silence. We call out to Him but no answer ever seems to come. We pray, we reflect, we analyse and we think, but He seems to hold back and watch us from afar, causing us to stumble on as best we can. This does not mean that He is indifferent to our plight.

On the contrary, like the good Father that He is, God watches us very closely and removes many obstacles that would otherwise halt our progress. Except in special circumstances, He most often refrains from carrying us to our endpoint. He will have us make our own way there, so that we stretch our minds and flex our wills in ways that develop our stature as men and women. He has given us tools and He would that we use them wisely, under the guidance of His Divine Revelation and in a spirit of faith and love.

God's Providence can be seen as an educational tool, the purpose of which is to bring us to spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is reached when we truly do believe ourselves as blessed when we are poor, when we mourn and when we suffer for justice's sake.

In the natural sphere, men and women are shaped and formed by a mixture of happiness and trial. Young children need happiness, but as they grow older they must experience challenge which prepares their adolescent wills for the responsibilities of adult life. They must develop the power of determination and resolve, the desire to overcome difficulties and uncertainties.

We are very much spiritual adolescents. We want a sure path, quick fixes and effortless progress. But God has invested too much in us to allow us to be mediocre disciples. Whether in this life or Purgatory, His Providence works always to shape us into worthy participants of His divine glory. Note the word "worthy".

God, therefore, delights to play a game of hide and seek. He thus forces us to use our wits, to study the Gospels and, most importantly, to exercise faith and trust in Him as we travel our path.

This method has the advantage of revealing to us the true extent of our spiritual poverty. Our discomfort

as we travel an unclear path stems not only from fear of what might lie ahead but also from the realisation that we are not as strong as we first thought. The idea of not coping brings home to us that we are far from self-sufficient.

An understanding and acceptance of one's interior poverty are the preliminaries of God's action in a soul. Poverty creates space that can then receive light and warmth. Poverty creates desire and longing, which, under the influence of divine grace, become a deep and irresistible prayer. Most importantly, the realization and acceptance of one's interior poverty strip us of our pride and self-sufficiency, to free God's hand so that He may guide us and take us where He will. To abandon one's self to Divine Providence is, paradoxically, to take God as a guide. We need only follow. Although the place of destination might elude us, we know we are travelling in a homeward direction.

Abandonment to Divine Providence is the highest form of adoration and worship. The faith and confidence abandonment requires constitute an act of loving submission to God and a recognition of our place in creation. We are God's children and, as good children, we must learn to trust Him implicitly. This means that we accept having to grope in the dark, to strike a path without certain knowledge and to run the risk of making mistakes. Humility does not fear to stumble and fall. The hope engendered of faith allows us to rise unscathed. Charity carries us each step of the way.

Thus does our Lord often keep us in darkness and seemingly alone. When He hides from us, we are forced to dig deeper into the supernatural realm by many acts of faith, hope and charity. Unbeknown to us, He enriches our soul with manifold graces. As lost sailors at the mercy of wind and current, all we can sometimes do is ride each wave and wonder where it will take us. There is land in every direction, but our journey remains God's choice, not our own. We think we are drifting, but, in reality, we are riding a steady current home.

Fr. John Brucciani, Prior

The Art of Ministering Mercy

Before His ascension into heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ performed the final rite of Holy Orders. Breathing on His apostles, He said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (Jn. 22–23) Then and there, God fused to the priesthood the role of confessor.

Within the confessional, the priest is, first and foremost, a judge. Yet he is a vicarious judge standing in the place of the supreme Judge to Whom all power is given "in heaven and in earth." (Mt. 28:18) The confessor cannot exercise justice arbitrarily, according to his own affinities and antipathies. After all, he does not exercise his own justice, but God's. And God "is not a respecter of persons". (Acts 10:34) He calls the priest to be a most docile instrument, a conduit through which flows superhuman forgiveness.

Such sacramental docility, however, is not divinely sanctioned naïveté. Priestly absolution entails deliberation. Each penitent's interior life is unique, so the confessor has to acquaint himself with—at least in a general way—the complexion of each conscience. Just as the doctor records the patient's pulse as a preliminary to prescription, the confessor maps out the penitent's conscience as a preliminary to absolution.

A *delicate* conscience is one that neither presumes upon nor despairs of God's mercy. It is well formed in that it understands the structure of sin, i.e., it understands the innate disorder of some human actions. It also wields a sensitivity to its own operations, i.e., it understands its level of fidelity to God's actual graces. Given the presence of a delicate conscience in a penitent, the confessor will not hesitate to administer God's mercy.

Often enough, though, the confessor's deliberations do not involve a conscience of this type. They involve a conscience veering towards one of two extremes: the *lax* conscience or the *scrupulous* conscience. Simply put, the former is under-analytical and the latter is over-analytical. The lax conscience is inactive: it refuses to enter deeply within itself and acknowledge its misery. Presumption has dulled its sensitivity to sin. Contrariwise, the scrupulous conscience is overworked: it fixates on the possibility of overstepping God's law. Despair has exaggerated its sensitivity to sin. Given the presence of either, the confessor continues...



Regarding the lax conscience, he can be reasonably sure the penitent is confessing real sins because only clear-cut, categorical sins show on a lax penitent's interior radar. So the confessor's task is to discreetly investigate whether this penitent might need to confess other serious sins, as well as whether he exhibits contrition, even if imperfect.

Regarding the scrupulous conscience—a much more difficult case—the confessor cannot always be sure the penitent is confessing real sins. With scrupulosity, there exists the distinct possibility that the penitent has fallen prey to an oversensitive imagination and that what he confesses is “sin” in name only. While he seems to exhibit contrition, it is only illusory if joined to illusory sins. The confessor's task here is to help him recall any actual sins.

Now the teacher within the confessor takes centre stage, lest the unobservant penitent leave the sacred tribunal oblivious to what has transpired. The priest-teacher brings the penitent back to the rudiments of the catechism, viz., the three components of sin: 1) matter, 2) assent, and 3) consent. But the duty of the confessor “to instruct the ignorant varies with the subject in which the ignorance exists.” (Schieler, *Theory and Practice of the Confessional*) Hence, he will naturally elaborate on the concept of sinful matter to the lax conscience, and the concepts of assent and consent to the scrupulous conscience.

At last, the confessor, God's instrument of mercy, pronounces the words of absolution. And when those words reach the ears of the penitent, a beautiful work of divine art is made complete.



Preparing for End Times?

What should Christians be doing to get ready for the cataclysmic events preceding the end of the Age and the Second Coming of Christ? Given the current state of affairs in the world, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Christ may be returning soon. For some, faith and confidence in God is not enough. They are selling their homes, moving to remote desert or mountain locations, stockpiling food and buying weapons and ammunition. Is this right? Are we really supposed to run and hide as things worsen? Or should we stay where we are and continue to minister to the people around us?

Scripture clearly instructs us to be vigilant. But it also teaches that no one can say for certain that we are living in the “end times.” This is at best a debatable proposition. Jesus Himself repeatedly said that no one knows or can know the day or hour of His return (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7). To be sure, we are surrounded by events and developments that could be interpreted as signs of the end. On every hand we see famines, earthquakes, disasters, troubles, persecutions, wars and rumors of wars (Mark 13:7-9). But has there ever been a period in the history of the world when this was not the case?

Can you imagine what it was like to be a believer in Rome under the emperor Caligula, or Nero, or Domitian? To face the arena, the stake, or the lion's den for your faith? What do you suppose Christians were thinking when the legions captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in A.D. 70? Or when Attila overran Europe in the 5th century, the Vikings in the 9th, Genghis Khan in the 13th, or the Muslim Turks in the 16th? Might anyone have concluded that the end was near when the Black Death decimated Christendom, wiping out entire towns and claiming more than 25 million lives between 1347 and 1352? How did the situation look to believers at the beginning of the last century, when the so-called Great War destroyed the flower of an entire generation (37 million casualties)? Or a few decades later, when the shadow of Hitler and the Third Reich was rising over Germany and Eastern Europe? Clearly, the early 21st century has no monopoly on death, disaster, devastation, and terror. You don't need to know a great deal about history to realize this.

But let's assume for a moment that these are the end times. What then? How should a Christian respond? Fortunately, the apostle Peter gives us a straightforward answer to this question. Writing specifically with reference to the end of the age, when “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, [and] both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up,” Peter does not suggest that believers head for the hills, adopt a “fortress mentality,” and start stockpiling food and weapons. Instead, he asks, “Since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (II Peter 3:10-12).

As Peter sees it, end-time Christians are called to do one thing: they are to practice holiness and do good to others wherever and whenever they can. They are supposed to work the works of God “while it is day” (John 9:4). Paul seems to have been thinking the same way when he wrote to the Galatians, “Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).†

CHRISTMAS RAFFLE

A big thank you to all who purchased tickets for the school Christmas Raffle.

We raised £ 5158!

Top ticket sellers were:

- Fr. Barrett, who raised £896
- Fr J. Brucciani, who raised £715
- Marcus Sherry, who raised £333

Top ticket seller teams were:

- SMS Priests, with £1641 in sales.
- Southern Sudlows, with £365 in sales.
- Sherry Family, with £358 in sales

Thank you to all teams and promoters. Having retired the 21 yr old commercial dryer, we have been able to purchase a new one and continue repairs throughout the property (fire doors, windows, plumbing). The priests have also exchanged their mini hand basins for normal bathroom sinks. Fr O'Hart knows his plumbing.

BAPTISMS 2020

1. Agnes Bevan
2. Izabella Kurtis
3. Chloe Rodriguez
4. Matthieu Flynn
5. Fintan Fitzpatrick
6. Eliana Tomczynska
7. Madeleine Cullen
8. Michael Friar
9. Anna Flynn
10. Beatrice Neal

There were 12 baptisms in 2019, and one so far this year (Clementine Finch).

Deo Gratias!

Liturgical Calendar and Mass Times - February

1	St. Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop & Martyr	7:15
2	Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary	6:30, 7:15, 19:00
3	Feria - St. Blaise, bp, mart.	7:15
4	St. Andrew Corsini, Bishop & Confessor	7:15
5	St. Agatha, V. & Mart, 1st Fri - Holy Hour 6:00 PM	7:15 / 19:00
6	St. Titus, Bishop & Confessor - 1st Sat.	7:30 / 12:00
7	Sexagesima Sunday	6:30, 7:30
	<i>2nd Collection for District seminarians</i>	9:00, 17:00
		18:00 Benediction
8	St. John of Matha, Confessor	7:15
9	St. Cyril of Alexandria, Bishop, Confessor & Doctor	7:15
10	St. Scholastica, Virgin	7:15
11	Our Lady of Lourdes	7:15
12	Seven Holy Servite Founders, Confessors	7:15
13	Saturday of Our Lady	7:30 / 12:00
14	Quinquagesima Sunday	6:30, 7:30
		9:00, 17:00
		18:00 Benediction
15	Feria	7:15
16	Feria	7:15
17	Ash Wednesday	7:15, 9:00, 19:00
18	Thursday after Ash Wednesday	7:15
19	Friday after Ash Wednesday	7:15
20	Saturday after Ash Wednesday	7:30 / 12:00
21	First Sunday of Lent	6:30, 7:30
		9:00, 17:00
		18:00 Benediction
22	Chair of St. Peter	7:15
23	Feria of Lent	7:15
24	St. Matthias, Apostle	7:15
25	Feria of Lent	7:15
26	Ember Friday of Lent	7:15
27	Ember Saturday of Lent	7:30 / 12:00
28	Second Sunday of Lent	6:30, 7:30
		9:00, 17:00
		18:00 Benediction
1	Feria of Lent	7:15

MASS ATTENDANCE REMAINS REGULATED.

Please use the noticeboard booking system to ensure that everyone is spread out across all the Masses. Please also observe as best possible the hygiene requirements of these strange times, out of respect for others.

<https://noticeboard.sanctusmichael.com/stmichaels/>