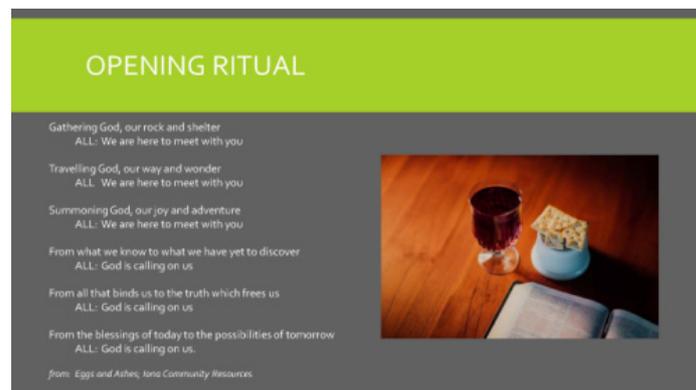


Lent: God's story; our story

A Lenten Retreat from the Salesians of Don Bosco UK and the Presentation Sisters

Opening ritual



Opening prayer:

Gathering God, our rock and shelter

ALL: We are here to meet with you

Travelling God, our way and wonder

ALL We are here to meet with you

Summoning God, our joy and adventure

ALL: We are here to meet with you

From what we know to what we have yet to discover

ALL: God is calling on us

From all that binds us to the truth which frees us

ALL: God is calling on us

From the blessings of today to the possibilities of tomorrow

ALL: God is calling on us.

(Prayer from: Eggs and Ashes; Iona Community Resources)

While the following hymn is being sung, place on a table near you –

- *Your journal or notebook*
- *a candle and something to light it*

- *a glass of wine or juice*
- *some bread or cake, or a cracker*

Hymn before we light our candle:

Come people in worship at table recline
Come sing out your praises in scripture and rhyme.
Our table is open, inclusive for all.
As we celebrate stories, our faith we recall.
As the sun shines upon us enriching our earth,
And the fruits of the seasons rejoicing the heart.
We bring to this table – lives in bread and in wine
To share on our journey with all humankind.

Light your candle

‘Shine as lights in the world,
Holding fast the word of life.’
Phil. 2:15-16



God's story; our story

This is our second Lent impacted by the pandemic. In Lent, as we focus on God's story, we try to find things to give up – but our new pandemic lifestyles mean we have already given up so much.

COVID-19 has affected everyone across the globe, but each one of us has experienced it differently, and we all have our own story of this past year.

What have you given up?

What do you miss? (Hugs? Family & friends? Earning a full wage, or even having a job? Going to mass? Socialising after church? Holidays? Playing sport?)

Take some time to get in touch with what **you** have given up ...

Take some time to get in touch with the extra things you have done ...

How have you experienced the love and care of others?



Lent Retreat Summary: God's story; our story – Salesians of Don Bosco UK & Presentation Sisters

Followed by sharing in small groups / or note thoughts in your journal

Music used: 'Many and Great', Youth Choir, courtesy of IIP Music Publishing

After groups come back, an opportunity to share anything that felt significant or moving

Where has God been in this?

Our God is a God who cares for each and every one of us—even in these pandemic times, when we might feel very alone.

God is with us every step of our difficult pilgrimage through these times.

Our God is not a masochist who wants to see us suffer and is only happy when we are in pain.

No! Our God is a God of love!

Every action of Jesus Christ shows that love to be real: feeding 5000, turning water into wine, calming a storm, healing a leper, forgiving a repentant thief.

To use the American term, our God is an AWESOME God, and Lent 2021 is our chance to share that 'awesomeness'

Music used: 'Our God is an Awesome God', in English and Arabic, Creative Commons licence by Peter via Soundcloud



Eucharist – Sharing the love of God

The Eucharist is central to our lives as Catholics - yet sharing the Eucharist has been difficult in the past year.

Jesus said, 'Do this in memory of me'.

What memories do you cherish? Which of your memories has been especially important to you during the pandemic?

Are there other things in our lives that we do in Jesus's memory – for his sake?

When we get back to 'normal' – what will you want to do again?

Note your thoughts.



Reflection

The following passages (slides) are a reflection written by Fr Gerry O'Shaughnessy SDB.

We are one body, one body in Christ.

The coronavirus has shown us that we are one body, one body in Christ—we do not stand alone. The social practices in place such as distancing and wearing face masks are not about how silly we look (we can do without vain politicians at this time!).



Rather, they show our concern for the community. Most of us 'stayed home to save the NHS' because we genuinely believed that it would help and prevent death.

As one body, we have a shared responsibility for each other. Pope Francis and the popes before him are correct when they say that the economy should serve people, not the other way around.

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A Eucharistic people in a post-pandemic age

We are beginning to see an easing of the lockdown that has been our normal for the past few months. Some are excited about the possibilities it might bring, while others are scared and feel that we are doing too much too soon.



Covid-19 is not the first time that the world has had to face a global pandemic, but it is the first within living memory.

Catholic parishes across the world have been closed or numbers allowed to take part in worship have been drastically reduced.

Millions of Catholics have been unable to physically take part in the celebration of the Mass for weeks or months, and may not be able to again for months, even with a return 'normal'.

The coronavirus pandemic is fundamentally changing how we 'do' and 'be' church

Photo by Whoisjohngalt, [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Whoisjohngalt_20200401_01.jpg) via Wikimedia Commons

Living the Eucharist

We have been unable to experience that touch and feel in the lockdown Church: priests webcast the Mass, the central community experience of our faith, from empty Churches, while the majority of us watch at home.



However, what have you learnt from that experience: we care for our spouse or partner and our children.

Lent Retreat Summary: God's story; our story – Salesians of Don Bosco UK & Presentation Sisters

We have learnt to turn our living rooms into classrooms, gyms, restaurants and cinemas. From our lockdown and inability to use those normal social avenues, we have found new ways to enhance our community from zoom coffee breaks to family quizzes.

While we have not been able to break the bread of life and share the cup of blessing in Holy Communion, we have LIVED Eucharist. Shopping has been done for others, especially those having to shield; cards, emails and calls have been made to cheer fellow parishioners up; we have discovered other forms of worship from novenas to new ways of praying and using the rosary.

In the virtual church, there is a chorus of "What do you need?" "Can I shop for you?"

Our virtual parishioners are more eager than ever to respond to the simple incarnate needs in others' lives — as simple as the bread and wine that we shared pre-pandemic. We need to ensure that we do not lose this basic experience of being Church when the new normal returns.

Compassion of frontline workers

As Christians we firmly believe that our NHS and all health and care work follows the example of the healing Christ who reached out to those who were sick and in need.

We have seen just how important the NHS is to our nation: it physically and dramatically shows a growing secular nation that it is important to care, show empathy and heal.

Resources have to be made available and all workers from the cleaner to senior consultant must receive a living wage and care package that reflects our thanks.

We must never forget that many of these frontline workers put themselves at risk and many of them died in the service of their patients



Call to justice

This call to justice applies across the board: we are all entitled to a fair wage for our labour. Poor work practices need to be consigned to the dustbin of history.

As a Church we need to ensure that our care for the weak and vulnerable continues as we slowly get back to normal.

The experience of COVID-19 has made us aware of our interconnectedness beyond racial and economic divides.

Let us learn that this one vulnerable body can be vibrant church when we work together for justice and the wellbeing of the whole



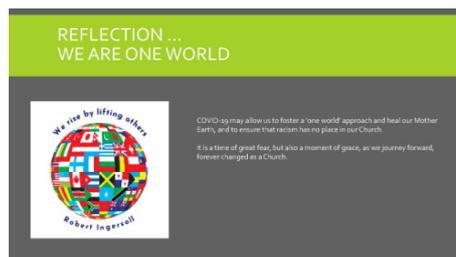
We are one world

In an era of nationalist politics across the globe, the 'blessing' of COVID-19 may be that it allows us to see beyond our own wants and needs to those of others less fortunate.

It may allow us to foster a "one world" approach and heal our Mother Earth, and it may allow us to look at our sisters and brothers from other countries and cultures as a source of inspiration and leadership and ensure that racism, no matter how subtle, has no place in our Church. It is time we opened ourselves to a world beyond our own shores and egos.

This time of trial is a living sign not only to the spirit of our common faith, to make it over to the other side, but also to the creativity of our sense of church.

This is a time of great fear, but it is also a moment of grace, as we journey forward, forever changed as a church.



What lessons have we learned?

What has your own experience of the pandemic taught you?

What are your hopes for the Church, and the world, as we enter a new era?

These are Fr Gerry's own hopes for the Church:

My hope for the church as it emerges from the era of COVID-19 is that we rediscover and learn to value what is essential to the faith; that all of us work together to build up the Church and so we can recognise:

- the work of women, children and young people
- the value of honesty, transparency and expertise
- An awareness that our knowledge is only provisional
- the working of the Spirit in unexpected places
- that we hold our religious leaders to these essential standards



We share our stories

Gather up your stories of the lessons learned over the past year.

Share in your groups or note in your journal:

What are you going to keep?

What are you going to be rid of?

How will your life change because of Lent 2021?



St John Henry Newman said: 'To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.'

Even the SMALLEST of movements is change!

Sharing in groups / noting thoughts in your journal

After groups come back, an opportunity to share anything that felt significant or moving

Closing ritual

We are a Eucharistic people. The word 'eucharist' means 'thanksgiving'.

In the sharing we have done today, we have been breaking the bread of our lives together.



Hymn

Here at our table, we recall many ways
We've been nourished and fed for the length of our days.
Creation's own table in abundant regard
Reminds us that God's love is vividly shared.
As the sun shines upon us enriching our earth,
And the fruits of the seasons rejoicing the heart.
We bring to this table – lives in bread and in wine
To share on our journey with all of humankind.

Prayer:

We gather here in the power of the Holy Spirit,
Source and well-spring of all that energises or enriches creation.
United in the empowerment of that One Spirit,
We give thanks for all that nourishes and sustains us.
May that Spirit come upon us afresh,
To awaken within and among us,
The transformative power of holy energy;
May our hearts be renewed and our spirits awakened.

Our agape meal

Hold the glass of wine or juice and the bread, cake or cracker in your hands

Silently in your heart – or out loud ...



The Bread of Life

I give thanks for these gifts, the gifts of your life and the lives of others. The gift of God.

Eat your bread / cracker

Moment of Silent Gratitude – remembering all who hunger for genuine nourishment.

The Cup of Liberation:

Raise the wine glass and say: I raise this cup with the desire for: (e.g. healing for ... /peace in ... /justice for ...)

Drink

Moment of Silence for those stirring in our hearts.

Your own intentions: I want to pray for

The Lord's prayer – (as it might have been in the Aramaic; based on J.D.Crossan)

O Cosmic Householder, Source of our wisdom, protector and provider,

Embracing all that dwells in the Heavens, naming all for holiness and justice in the
Companionship of Empowerment,

spread throughout the entire creation, as willed by Holy Wisdom.

In justice, may all be sustained by daily food and relieved of the burden of crippling debts.

Lead us not into collusion with any type of violence and deliver us from all forms of violent oppression.

For yours is the empowering desire to radiate on earth the non-violent justice of enduring hope.

Hymn

May blessings abundant sustain us ahead
In the justice we seek that all may be fed.
To open our table as the hungry implore
For love and inclusion – in creations great store.
As the sun shines upon us enriching our earth,
And the fruits of the seasons rejoicing the heart.
We bring to this table – lives in bread and in wine
To share on our journey with all of humankind.

Final prayers:

With your love to enfold us and your peace to enfold us

ALL: We go on our way

With your word to guide us and your heavenly host to guard us

ALL: We go on our way

With the gift of the Spirit with and among us and your blessing upon us

ALL: We go on our way.

ALL

Glory be to God our Father whose love is over us

Glory be to Jesus whose love shares our human lives.

Glory be to the Holy Spirit alive and powerful as love within us

To the one God, eternally love, be glory and praise forever.

Amen

(by Ian Cowie, in Eggs and Ashes, Iona Community Resources)

Thank you



Thank you for joining the retreat, and for your generosity in sharing, and in listening.

We are hosting another retreat on Saturday 20 March on a different theme. Please join us. You can find further information and register for that event on the Salesians website www.salesians.org.uk, or on our Facebook and Twitter feeds @salesianlink, or please email clare.lewis@salesians.org.uk

Finally, we ask you to remember in your prayers:

- all those who have lost their lives during the pandemic, and their loved ones;
- those who are suffering the economic impact of the pandemic;
- Pope Francis, as he continues his historic visit to Iraq, and the people of Iraq.
- And, as young people and education are close to the hearts of the Salesians and the Presentation Sisters, we ask you to pray for our school leaders, teachers and pupils, as they begin a new chapter of school life on Monday.
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Thank you!