

NEWSLETTER

Parishes of St Anthony of Padua, Onchan; St Mary of the Isle and St Joseph, Douglas

Tel 01624 675509 Email saintmaryiom@rcaol.org.uk Website www.manxcatholic.org

3rd Sunday of Advent, 17th December 2023, Gaudete Sunday

(Page 87 in Mass Book)

(Year B for Sundays) (Cycle 1 for weekdays)



Third Sunday of Advent

Dear Parishioners

I read this piece by Libby Purves in The Times this week. It makes a wonderful Advent/Christmas message:

Four years ago this week, bored in a hospital bed, I ranted against a radio DJ too prim to play the Pogues' *Fairytale of New York*. He found it "nasty" and said Christmas songs should be about "children, ski lodges, reindeer, wrapping paper, Santa". I wrote a cross rebuttal in praise of Shane MacGowan's masterwork.

It really is one: for all his famously chaotic life and slurred, half-drunk performances this folk-punk star was a careful, disciplined, revising, thoughtful poet. He took time over that song, and it is a miniature epic of storytelling, vigour rising suddenly from melancholy nostalgia to the energy of two lost souls.

They berate one another from drunk tank to drug ward while above them an imagined chorus of cops sings an exile's ballad, and the Christmas morning bells ring out. Because it is about regret, hard pavements and lost dreams it perfectly suits a necessary theme of Advent: hopelessness and redemption.

No wonder that all day long on Friday, television cameras were transfixed by the upswelling of tributes at MacGowan's funeral. The streets of Dublin, only weeks after a stabbing led to angry racialised riots, were lined with people singing and playing instruments and laughing. At the Tipperary church service fellow musicians paid tribute, and nobody had a problem about the salty language of *Fairytale of New York* serving as "meditation after Communion".

His widow Victoria Mary Clarke talked of MacGowan's nature — "cantankerous and rude and sometimes hostile" — and his multiple self-harming addictions, but also of his loving compassion and insistence on forgiving. She told how he could never pass a homeless person in the street without stopping to help and enjoined us all to do so, "showing respect and compassion".

She told us in particular that he never held a grudge. With his friend Johnny Depp there, she gaily broke any Hollywood-style insider omerta by revealing that in his last days MacGowan had urged the star simply to forgive his ex-wife Amber Heard after their long, bitter public lawsuits. Then the music began again, and the MacGowan family and friends danced in the church.

Broadcasters knew what they were doing — and not only for the sake of British-Irish viewers or music fans — when they followed this day with almost the same passionate attention as to the funerals of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. Both of whom, by the way, were forgiven for being posh imperialist "Brits" by the staunch Irish republican, who so greatly admired them that his widow told us he wept at their funerals, and at Diana's.

He also spent his final months, sensibly, bingeing on episodes of *Father Ted* by Graham Linehan. Which might make some of that "cancelled" writer's prissy detractors in the gender revolution have a little think about forgiveness too.

This wild hooley of a funeral celebrated not only one dishevelled musician: it reminded us of the great warm human huddle, our failures and flaws and quarrels and primitive need to assemble for warmth, to jostle and sing and insult and make up, because what the hell, we're all in it together.

Such a reminder lands well for our time: not only do we have to contemplate terrible wars abroad, but we live in a miasma closer to home. We are cramped on every side by a spoilt, decadent addiction to unforgiving anger, sharp division, legalistic nitpicking and a neurotic, ungenerous hugging of offence and victimhood. Any relaxation from this atmosphere feels like a blessing. Anyone publicly displaying forgiveness and affectionate ease is solid gold.

It may be — to pluck just one example — a bit too optimistic to hope for a similar ceilidh of hugging, dancing and merrily forgotten grudges this Christmas if Montecito meets Sandringham. But hey, miracles do happen.

It isn't saintly figures alone who mend the world. Down the ages the message of forgiveness and peace to all men has sometimes come from a rickety figure, the kind that respectable Pharisees cross the road to avoid. MacGowan is no plaster saint, his years of addiction and self-damage no secret: even repairing his lost and ragged teeth eight years ago was an event recorded in *A Wreck Reborn* as the Everest of dentistry. But he was a man who prayed, hoped for some kind of heaven and did not pretend or signal virtue.

So, in this final celebration, and especially that communal singing of a rude Christmas ballad of New York lowlife, he seemed to join certain legendary figures. There has always been fascination and relief in tales of holy drunkards too humble for heroism: the prodigal son who wasted his inheritance, Graham Greene's whisky priest, Evelyn Waugh's

Sebastian, the beggar in Mark's gospel who is rebuked as an embarrassment by Jesus's entourage but calls for mercy and receives it.

A dangerous glamour attaches to hell-raisers like Brendan Behan, Jimi Hendrix, Peter O'Toole, Richard Burton and the rest, and certainly it is a poor ambition to be one of them. Rather than being any kind of inspiration you are actually more likely to be plain selfish, viciously harmful to your family and die young. Or almost worse, reform and become a terrible bore about your achievement in learning to behave.

Yet there are, in every age, a few spirits who, while fighting their own weakness and damaged souls, somehow do inspire. They blame nobody, ask no praise or much sympathy, but offer their songs or jokes or unexpected wisdom from the gutter. They hold out a hand, ask for forgiveness and generously give it. They belong to Christmas.

- **Hosanna Rock:** We look forward to welcoming to St Mary's church the pupils, teachers and staff from **St Mary's School** this **Monday 18 December** at **10.30am** when the children will perform their Christmas celebration "**Hosanna Rock**". Thanks to the teachers, school staff, parents and pupils who together put a lot of work into this performance. "**Hosanna Rock**" will be livestreamed for family members who are unable to attend.
- An **Evening of Festive Music and Verse** with the **Tallis Consort** will take place in St Mary's church on **Thursday 21 December** at **7.30pm**. Admission is free. Everyone welcome.
- The '**Warm and Cosy Hub**' is open on Mondays and Fridays from 10am until 2pm for the winter months in the Columba Club, Circular Road, Douglas. Hot soup with bread & butter will be served with tea, coffee and biscuits.
- **Living Hope at St Joseph's Church, Willaston** are offering a **free Community Christmas Day Meal** from 12 noon to 3pm on Christmas Day. Booking essential. For transport or more information please call Sue on 07624 470802.
- The **Memory Support Group** would like to say a big **thank you** to the Ukulele band who entertained at their recent pre-Christmas gathering. It was very much enjoyed by all. The Group would also like to **especially thank their volunteers** who so kindly give up their free time to support them and supply endless cups of tea and coffee to attendees. The **Group will next meet on Tuesday 9 January 2024** from **10.30am to 12noon**. All welcome.

Masses and Services for the coming week

All Masses and Services from St Mary's are live-streamed

Saturday 16th December 3 rd Sunday of Advent	5.00pm	St Mary's	Jim Kneen, anniversary
Sunday 17th December 3 rd Sunday of Advent <i>Gaudete Sunday</i>	9.30am 11.00am	St Anthony's St Mary's	Scarlet Linehan, anniversary People of our Parishes
Monday 18th December	10.30am 12.10 noon	St Mary's St Mary's	'Hosanna Rock' by St Mary's School Jasmine, sick
Tuesday 19th December	10.00am 12.10 noon	St Anthony's St Mary's	<i>Eucharistic Service</i> Terry, recently died (in Kent)
Wednesday 20th December	12.10noon	St Mary's	Gerry Haydon, recently died
Thursday 21st December St Peter Canisius, SJ	10.00am 12.10 noon 7.30pm	St Anthony's St Mary's St Mary's	Ted Lawrence-Corrie, recently died Frances & Denis Dougan, deceased <i>Tallis Consort Festive Music</i>
Friday 22nd December	12.10 noon	St Mary's	Jocelyn Marquez, deceased
Saturday 23rd December 4 th Sunday of Advent <i>Day of Prayer for Expectant Mothers</i>	11.00am to 12noon 5.00pm	St Mary's St Mary's	Exposition and Confessions The Wood Family
Sunday 24th December 4 th Sunday of Advent	9.30am 11.00am	St Anthony's St Mary's	All our Christmas Intentions All our Christmas Intentions
Sunday 24th December <i>First Masses of Christmas</i> <i>The Nativity of the Lord</i>	12.30pm 5.30pm 8.00pm (Carols 7.30pm) 10.00pm (Carols 9.30pm)	St Mary's St Mary's St Anthony's St Mary's	'Come to the Manger' Service for young children and families All our Christmas Intentions All our Christmas Intentions All our Christmas Intentions
Monday 25th December <i>The Nativity of the Lord</i> Christmas Day	9.30am 11.00am	St Anthony's St Mary's	All our Christmas Intentions All our Christmas Intentions