

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

30th November 2014

St. Mary's, Belford Road, Fort William PH33 6BT. Tel. (01397) 702174

A Parish of the R. C. Diocese of Argyll & the Isles Charitable Trust

Registered Scottish Charity No. SC002876

www.stmarysfortwilliam.org



Noticeboard

Sunday Masses: Vigil Mass, Saturday, 6 p.m.
Sunday Morning Mass, 10.30 a.m.

Weekday Masses: 10.15 a.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation:

Saturday: 9.45 to 10 a.m. 4 to 4.30 p.m. 5.30 to 5.50 p.m.

Monday is the Solemnity of St. Andrew; Wednesday, the Memorial of St. Francis Xavier; Thursday, the Optional Memorial of St. John Damascene; Saturday, the Optional Memorial of St. Nicholas.

We wish you every blessing during this **holy season of Advent**. In all the busyness and demands of these weeks before Christmas, may Advent's special peace and promise touch your hearts.

We pray for our Faithful Departed. We remember especially **Margaret MacLean** who had died peacefully in the Belford Hospital. All her life, Margaret had a very special love for her parish and its community. She has left us an example of cheerful faithfulness. May her Lord now welcome her home. We extend our sincere sympathy and prayer to her brother, Dodo, to all the family and to Margaret's closest friends. The Funeral Mass will be on Tuesday at 11 a.m. We pray also for those whose anniversaries are about this time: **Marion Cumming, David Buchanan, Peter Ryan, John Kerr, Monsignor Roderick MacDonald, Allan MacLean, Margaret Barron, Penny Kennedy, Thomas MacPherson, Alistair Semple, Angus MacDonald, Lachlan Wynne, Roderick Gemmel and Agnes Gemmel**. May their souls and the souls of all the Faithful Departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

We thank **Martin Aelred** for singing so beautifully for us last Sunday afternoon. Martin was given a very warm reception by our audience and he would be very happy to return to St. Mary's and help raise funds for a local charity. That is something to look forward to! We thank you for the £560 collected for the street children of Colombia.

Father William Nolan of Motherwell Diocese has been appointed as the new bishop of Galloway. We wish him every blessing in his service of the clergy and people of that Diocese. Meanwhile, we continue to pray for a bishop who will be a blessing for us all.

Please note that the **Feast of St. Andrew**, a Solemnity in Scotland, has been transferred to Monday. We will observe the memorials of **St. John Damascene**, remembering Syria as we do so, and of **St. Nicholas**, praying especially for the children and young people of the parish.

Calendars and Christmas Candles are available for sale at the back of the church. We hope to have Christmas cards soon, although our supplier's stock has been greatly reduced.

As regards the new **Liturgical Year**, our Sundays are those of Year B and our weekday Masses readings are those of Year 1. There are only two Holydays of Obligation: Christmas Day and Ascension Day (14th May, 2015). No weddings are permitted on Good Friday (3rd April 2015) and Holy Saturday (4th April 2015.)

The Memorial of St. John of Damascus invites us to remember **the suffering people of Syria**. On the other side of this bulletin you will find an Aid to the Church in Need report. Our Christmas special collection will be for the Christians of Syria, especially the nuns of different congregations who, despite the many dangers, remain with their people, doing all in their power to help. They deserve our prayers and our support.



Sister Maria of Nazareth has committed herself to an extraordinary mission. The Argentine nun from the Institute of the Incarnate Word has been living in Aleppo, Syria, for the past two months. She has been ministering to a traumatized Christian community in the former million-strong metropolis in the north of the country, which has suffered some of the worst violence of the three year-old civil war.

Previously based in the Gaza Strip, Sister Maria has seen her share of violence.

"Our task in this country is very special. We are constantly confronted with people's suffering. The war is having a profoundly deleterious effect on human dignity. People are losing their loved ones, their freedom and their rights due to the violence. On top of this there is poverty and a lack of the most basic things, such as electricity and water," the young nun reports.

She lives in the compound of the Apostolic Vicariate of the Latin Rite in Aleppo, together with some fellow nuns. All of Syria's Roman Catholics come under the Vicariate.

"We work in a hostel for female students at the local university, which is operated by the Vicariate. We also take care of the sacristy and the liturgy in the cathedral," Sister Maria reports. "On top of that, we look after the faithful who visit the cathedral. Our main task is to listen to the people who are suffering, offer them words of hope, and help them best we can to meet their most basic needs. Certainly only the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ can bring about the miracle of sowing the seed of hope in these souls. But war is a terrible and cruel thing."

Archbishop Jean-Abdo Arbach of Homs, Hama, and Yabrud knows this all too well. The Catholic Melkite archbishop is coping with huge damage in his diocese, whose history goes back to the 4th century. Dozens of churches, some dating back to the local Church's very beginnings, have been damaged or destroyed.

"Last February, an armed gang broke into the Church of Our Lady of Yabrud, a 4th century church. They destroyed the fittings in the church, smashed the crucifix, threw the icons on the floor and tore the pages out of the Gospel. Then the gang burned the altar," the archbishop recounts.

However, some churches were destroyed not by the rebels, but by the Syrian army, such as the Church of St. George in nearby Nabek, which crumbled under an army bombardment in November 2013. Not only the infrastructure of the diocese is in terrible shape – it's mainly the people of the region.

"To date our archdiocese has counted 96 martyrs. The fate of 26 people is uncertain," the archbishop notes. More than 1,800 families from his diocese have left their houses to seek safety elsewhere in Syria, or have fled to Lebanon.

"From my visits to the houses of the families and from the reports by my priests, it is clear that everyone has been hurt by the tragic events. We have begun to support about 600 families with monthly assistance," says the prelate, explaining that Syria's high inflation rate is causing the local community great difficulty: "The prices are shooting up while wages are stagnating."

Despite all the hardships, however, the archbishop affirms that there are no signs that people's spiritual life is collapsing. On the contrary, he insists: "the crisis has triggered a major return to faith and prayer among those who have not left their villages. Though having to deal with fear and the constant threat of bombs, families are remaining loyal to their religious convictions."

The local Church is doing what it can to continue its catechetical work to ensure that the faith is passed on to children and youth. "About 3,300 young people take part in our catechetical classes. Some 350 teachers are looking after them," the archbishop reports.

Still, a number of Church facilities where those classes are held have been damaged in the fighting, and Archbishop Arbach relies on help from Catholic charities to find the means for repair and rebuilding initiatives.

"Our Church needs help of all kinds: spiritual, material, medical and psychological. The Church in this part of Syria will be in real danger if we don't react quickly."