

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

21st December 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

<u>Monday</u>	Mass at 10.15 a.m. Sacrament of Reconciliation 4 to 5 p.m. (Fr. MacKinnon)
<u>Tuesday</u>	Mass at 10.15 a.m.
<u>Wednesday</u>	Mass at 10.15 a.m. MASS OF CHRISTMAS NIGHT 10 P.M. (Carols at 9.45 p.m.)
<u>Thursday</u>	CHRISTMAS DAY MASS 10.30 A.M.
<u>Friday</u>	Mass at 12 noon
<u>Saturday</u>	Mass at 10.15 a.m.

Friday is the Feast of St. Stephen; Saturday, the Feast of St. John

Our warmest congratulations to the young people who were confirmed last Sunday's very prayerful Mass. They remain our prayers, as do their families and teachers.

Our sincere thanks to those who set up our Christmas tree and our Crib, so beautifully decorated. They certainly help us look forward to our celebration of the Birth of Our Lord. After our Sunday Mass, the blessing of our Crib, children and tree will take place.

Our **Christmas Masses** will be as indicated in the noticeboard. Please remember that there are carols sung before the Mass of Christmas Night begins. Try to be there in time for that. This year, our parish's Christmas collection is for Aid to the Church in Need's vital work in Iraq, Syria and the Lebanon, specifically in aid of the courageous nuns who remain with suffering Christians and Muslims alike. We know that you will be as generous as always.

We pray for our Faithful Departed. We remember especially **Effie McFall** who has died very peacefully in Invernevis House. Effie was a person of deep faith and gentle goodness. May her Lord now welcome her into eternal peace and joy. We extend our sincere sympathy and prayer to George, Angus, Mike, Joan Marie, Alina, Margaret, Effie's brother Duggie, and all the family. As a funeral director, Mike has been there for so many of us in our own times of bereavement. He has a special place in our prayers. We pray also for those whose anniversaries are about this time: **Janet Jones, Mary MacPherson, Angus MacDonald, Jack Cronin, Mary MacDonald, Thomas MacLean, Hugh O'Neil, Chrissie MacIntyre, Maureen Thompson, Nell Holness, Alex MacDonald, Anthony Adams, Ritu McLaughlin, Gerald Mulrooney, Charles McLaughlin and Jan Wegner.** We remember all the loved ones who are close to our hearts as Christmas draws near.

We had a prayerful **School Mass** in St. Mary's on Friday morning. We wish teachers, children and staff a very enjoyable Christmas break. The school staff in particular will be in our prayers in the coming months, as we prepare to say farewell to our Catholic School in Fort William. And we should never forget that we live in an increasingly complex society and new demands are now being made upon the adults who work in our schools.

Fr. Kasule has sent you all his prayers and best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. Please remember him in your Christmas Masses.

It is always a pleasure to see **Kevin Cameron** back among us. He is doing very well at Aberdeen University and is as happy as ever to help out at our Masses.

Please note the period set aside for Confession **on Monday evening from 4 to 5 p.m.** Our thanks to Fr. James MacNeil for coming from Oban last Monday to be our visiting confessor. His mother is ninety this Sunday and we give thanks for goodness and the blessings she has shared with so many people, especially her family.

There is a sheet at the back of the church **for our Readers.** We are asking for your help at the two Christmas Masses.

We owe so much to St. Francis of Assisi, and that debt includes the Cribs we see throughout the world at this time of the year. His was a living tableau: a baby, an ox and a donkey. The artist Giotto depicted much of the life of Francis, and here we see his representation of the saint preparing the first Crib. While it is a beautiful work of art, it does not quite convey the simplicity of that first Nativity scene created in the woods near Greccio, a village in the east of Lazio.



Francis's first biographer, a contemporary friar called Thomas of Celano, conveys that simplicity:

"The manger was prepared. The hay had been brought; the ox and ass were led in. There, simplicity was honoured, poverty was exalted, humility was commended, and Greccio was made, as it were, a new Bethlehem."

How should we approach the Crib? Perhaps Francis has something to teach us. Here is a photo of the robe he actually wore, lovingly preserved to this day, every patch sewed on by the saint himself.



St. Francis saw his frayed and patched robe as an exact image of what he was within himself: a soul that was imperfect, wounded and weak. He had learned to accept his broken self, and so he was ready to encounter the truly unconditional love of God. That unconditional love is revealed in the Child in the manger. This Christmas, may we draw nearer to the Son of God with something of the humility of St. Francis. And we do have a Pope who chose the name Francis!



As Christmas draws near, Mary is very much in our thoughts and hearts. She has been through all the stages of pregnancy. In the final weeks of that pregnancy she has had to endure the upheaval and the fatigue of the journey to Bethlehem. Then there is deep anxiety as she and Joseph urgently seek shelter. The pain of childbirth will soon be upon her. Like every other mother, she will have to endure her suffering before experiencing the joy of holding her new-born baby. (Three decades later, her son would show his sensitivity to what childbirth involved: cf. John 16:21)

Surely some of the women in Bethlehem who saw Mary's condition would have rallied round this very young woman as she brought a baby into the world? Instinctively, they would have wanted to help, especially those who had given birth themselves. In every culture, women have been there for each other at such times. Some would have a special gift and skill, and in English they would be known as "midwives". Countless babies would owe their lives to such women.

Fr. MacKinnon once knew a nun from Eretria in Africa, Sister Roma. She had come to Glasgow to train for midwifery. She had a very special reason for becoming a midwife: her own mother had died in childbirth when Roma herself was very young. Now the city that gave Roma her training has become a place where midwives who honour the sanctity of life are denied full rights of conscience. The British Supreme Court has told two Catholic nurses - Concepta Wood and Mary Doogan, - that they no longer have the right to refuse supervision of nurses involved in abortions. The two women assert that the conscience clause as regards abortion is now in practice, "meaningless for senior midwives in a labour ward."

At no time is human life as potent and awe-inspiring as when a fertilised ovum becomes a child in its mother's womb. This is life! There is a sacredness about it that in turn gives an element of the sacred to the role of midwives. They are intermediaries of life. Can we still describe them as such, or will they be touched by the dark shadow of abortion? It is a shadow that goes far beyond the theatres where the termination of human life takes place.