



Image of the day
Lincoln Cathedral



A Service for Ash Wednesday

You are invited to join the Bishop of Down and Dromore, RT Rev David McClay, from 10.00 am on Ash Wednesday 17 February. Join Bishop David in Inch Abbey for a meditation on the Beatitudes. The service will be available live on the diocesan web site and on YouTube and Facebook. Taking part will be musicians Ruth Thompson, Rebekah Wilson and Tash Vincent (Knockbreda Parish) and Izzy Blair on violin (Willowfield Parish). See - <https://www.downanddromore.org/news/2021/02/a-service-for-ash-wednesday>

Irish religious leaders seek action against China over persecution of Uighurs

More than 50 Irish faith leaders have signed a statement condemning the persecution of the Uighurs and other Muslims in China, Patsy McGarry writes in the Irish Times.



Church of Ireland Archbishop Michael Jackson of Dublin is among the signatories calling ‘for justice, to investigate these crimes, hold those responsible to account’. File photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill

Included among the signatories are: [Church of Ireland Archbishop Michael Jackson](#) of Dublin; five Catholic bishops, Alan McGuckian, [Fintan Monaghan](#), [Larry Duffy](#), Phonsie [Cullinan](#) and Leo O’Reilly; [Rabbi Zalman](#) Lent of the [Dublin Hebrew Congregation](#); Shaykh Umar Al-Qadri of the Irish Muslim Peace and [Integration Council](#); and Rev Myozan Kodo Kilroy of Zen Buddhism [Ireland](#).

Other signatories include: Sr Stanislaus Kennedy; Mother [Marie Fahy](#), abbess at St Mary’s Abbey at [Glencairn](#), Co [Waterford](#); Dean of Waterford [Maria Jansson](#); Sr Kathleen McGarvey, provincial leader at [Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles](#); Rev Prof [Anne Lodge](#), director of the Church of Ireland centre at Dublin City University; and Canon [Elaine Murray](#), rector of [Carrigaline](#) Union of Parishes in Cork.

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They said: “As religious leaders and leaders of belief-based communities in Ireland, we join with our counterparts in Britain and elsewhere in affirming human dignity for all by highlighting one of the most egregious human tragedies since the Holocaust: the potential genocide of the Uighurs and other Muslims in China.”

The group said they had “seen many persecutions and mass atrocities. These need our attention. But there is one that, if allowed to continue with impunity, calls into question most seriously the willingness of the international community to defend universal human rights for everyone – the plight of the Uighurs.”

Prison camps

At least “one million Uighur and other Muslims in China are incarcerated in prison camps facing starvation, torture, murder, sexual violence, slave labour and forced organ extraction. Outside the camps, basic religious freedom is denied. Mosques are destroyed, children are separated from their families and acts as simple as owning a holy Koran, praying or fasting can result in arrest,” they said.

“The clear aim of the Chinese authorities is to eradicate the Uighur identity,” the group said, pointing out that “as faith leaders we are neither activists nor policymakers”.

They recalled how “after the Holocaust, the world said ‘never again’. Today, we repeat those words ‘never again’, all over again. We stand with the Uighurs. We also stand with Tibetan Buddhists, [Falun](#) Gong practitioners and Christians throughout China who face the worst crackdown on freedom of religion or belief since the cultural revolution.”

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There was “a simple call for justice, to investigate these crimes, hold those responsible to account and establish a path towards the restoration of human dignity”, the religious leaders concluded.

PCI support for Givan bill

Following the introduction of Paul Givan MLA’s private member’s bill to the Northern Ireland Assembly today (16 February), a bill which seeks to remove the diagnosis of non-fatal disability as a sole ground for accessing abortion, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has expressed support for the move.

Speaking after the first reading of the *Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill*, in the Assembly, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce, welcomed Mr Givan’s initiative, saying that it attempts to protect children in the womb after 12 weeks who develop conditions like club foot and cleft palate, as well as Down Syndrome. He also encouraged as many MLAs as possible to give their backing to the Bill, as he recognised that there would be support for it across most of the parties in the Assembly.

“We vigorously opposed the imposition of abortion legislation by Westminster on Northern Ireland, as we believed at the time, as we continue to maintain today, that it would create the most extreme and most liberal abortion regime anywhere in these islands, which it has done,” Dr Bruce said.



“There are many aspects of the current legislation we find morally wrong and unjustifiable and we welcome Mr Givan’s Bill, as it seeks to provide protection for children where there is a diagnosis of non-fatal disability before birth. This includes conditions like Down Syndrome.”

Dr Bruce continued, “While I speak as a Christian, there will be many who don’t share my faith, yet also recognise that Northern Ireland’s legislation goes too far. Is anyone really saying we shouldn’t take any opportunity we can to protect the lives of children with disability?”

Dr Bruce said that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that providing for abortion up to full-term on the grounds of non-fatal disability, as Northern Ireland’s current legislation does, risks creating a culture where termination is

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considered an option 'just in case' quality of life is not as good as had been expected in a child without a disability.

“Our current legislation sends a profound message to society about the value that is placed on all human life, not only at birth, but also for those who live with a disability,” he said.

“As a result, there is a challenge for all of us to actively support and care for those who live with non-fatal disabilities from birth and value their contribution to society as equals, which current abortion legislation simply does not do. Supporting this Bill provides an opportunity to send a strong and very clear signal that in this part of the world people with a disability are valued.

“I have today written to all MLAs asking them to support Mr Givan’s Bill when they have the opportunity to vote on its provisions during its second reading in a few weeks’ time. In so doing, I have affirmed our belief that we are made in the image of God, and that therefore all human life has dignity and value.”

Dr Bruce concluded by saying, “I hope our elected representatives will give due consideration to this Bill. At the same time, I also hope and pray that they will see the need to provide excellent perinatal care in every part of Northern Ireland for every woman facing a pregnancy crisis. Practical, emotional and spiritual support for women and their families is absolutely essential if we are truly committed as a society to life, well-being and human dignity.”

See also -

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BBC News: Northern Ireland abortion law changes proposed by the DUP

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-politics-56041850>

Historical institutional abuse victims to receive official apology

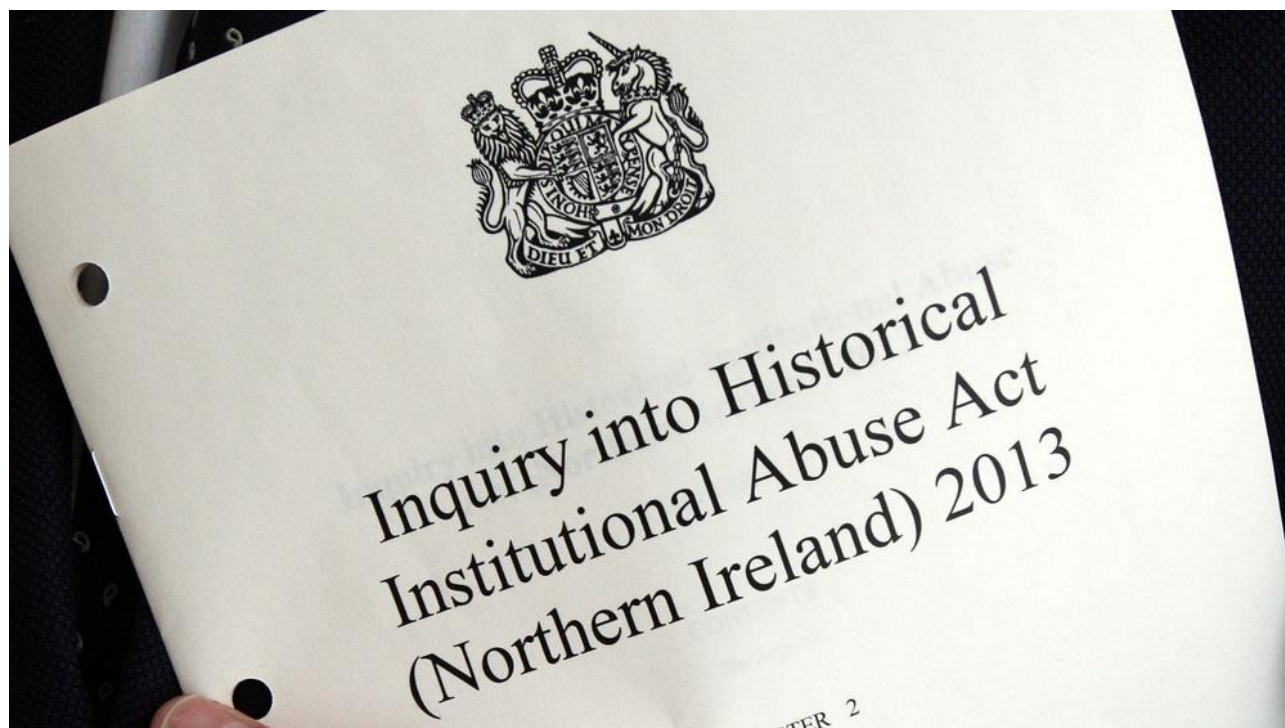
Victims of historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland are to receive an official apology, the Belfast Telegraph reports.

The issue was discussed at a meeting of Executive and church leaders.

First Minister Arlene Foster and Junior Minister Declan Kearney met with the Catholic Church's Archbishop Eamon Martin, Church of Ireland Archbishop John McDowell, and representatives from Barnardo's and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) to discuss the remaining recommendations from the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry.

The Inquiry, chaired by the late judge Sir Anthony Hart, called for compensation, a memorial to the victims and a formal apology.

A roundtable meeting will take place with the institutions involved in the running of children's homes in the coming weeks to discuss principles underpinning the financial contributions before individual discussions with each institution.



Other issues discussed at the meeting included progress on compensation and support services for victims and survivors and the views of victims towards an official apology. "All agreed that acceptance of responsibility and recognition of the harm done were central to the way forward. Historical institutional abuse should never have happened. Trust was breached and significant trauma caused to innocent victims," an Executive Office spokesperson said.

"Those present committed to work together to address the apology, memorial, and contributions to the costs of redress in a way that will put fairness at its core and will meet the needs of victims and survivors.

"The Executive Office will also continue to engage with the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse and with the institutions to ensure that a timely and appropriate joint official apology is made to victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse."

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The state is covering the cost of payments to victims, which have already begun, but is attempting to recoup much of its outlay from those in charge of operating the children's homes.

Victims and survivors of abuse were paid £5.7 million between May and December last year.

The scheme became operational at the end of March when a redress board was established as part of recommendations made in the HIA inquiry.

The HIA inquiry called for payments ranging from £7,500 to £100,000. Thousands of victims are believed to be eligible.

A “central estimate” of the cost of redress is up to £400 million.

Report courtesy the Belfast Telegraph 16.02.2021

Down and Dromore Mothers' Union busy offering a helping hand

Despite not being able to meet throughout the Covid pandemic, Mothers' Union members in the Diocese of Down and Dromore have not been idle!

Since lockdown began almost a year ago, branches have rallied in taking care of their members with phone calls and helping as much as they can within the parameters of the restrictions. Meanwhile at diocesan level, they have continued to support the projects to which they have a longstanding commitment.



Women's Aid

Back in December 2020, Down and Dromore MU's Social Policy Representative, Joy Silcock, visited St Colman's High and Sixth Form College, Ballynahinch, to receive a £250 donation from the school (pictured above).

Joy commented, "We were very grateful to St Colman's for their support again in this very challenging season. The money went to towards our project supporting families in the two Women's Aid Refuges in the diocese."

MU made several donations of food and toiletries to Women's Aid throughout the year. At Christmas further gifts were supplied as well as food items and food vouchers for distribution in 2021.

Hydebank Prison

Down and Dromore MU also delivered personal gifts and Christmas cards for the women and boys in Hydebank Prison. The Governor expressed gratitude for this wonderful gesture and emphasised that they were very much appreciated by all, especially as family contact had been restricted during the pandemic.

Baby clothes and toiletry bags

Mothers' Union also answered an appeal for baby cardigans and hats in size 0–3 months. One of their members had been in the maternity unit and noted that there was a lack of these items. MU members were very quick to respond to this request. One branch had also knitted a number of beautiful baby cot blankets which were donated to Baby Basics (an initiative of a number of our parishes in which Mothers' Union are involved). Donations of baby clothes were also made through Midwifery Services to families in need.

Donations of toiletry bags were made to the Ulster, Daisy Hill (Newry), and Craigavon Hospitals. These are very much appreciated by patients who are unexpectedly admitted to hospital in an emergency situation.

Young people under thirty encouraged to share their thoughts on inter-faith dialogue in essay competition

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has announced an essay competition for youth who want to reflect on the theme 'The Future of Interreligious Dialogue'.

The contest marks the 50th anniversary of the WCC's Office of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, and the Interfaith Working Group of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue is encouraging young people from the Church of Ireland to consider taking part.



The contest aims to encourage people under the age of 30 with interests in the field of interreligious relations and engagement to develop and share their ideas on different subjects such as: Christian theologies of interreligious engagement; some aspect of another religious tradition which is relevant to its relationship to Christianity; religious pluralism more widely; or the theory or practice of interreligious dialogue. Essays may also reflect on interreligious cooperation for the sake of the common good; or the World Council of Churches and interreligious relations.

The five best essays, chosen by a panel of judges comprising of WCC programme executives and faculty from the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, will be published in the 2021 issue of *Current Dialogue*, the WCC's journal for interreligious encounter. Further, the prizewinning authors

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will have the opportunity to present their work in a conference on 'The Future of Interreligious Dialogue' (either physically or virtually) that is being planned for 2021. At this stage, it is likely that participation in this conference will be virtual.

“We hope that this essay competition will attract participation that will be wide in terms of its diversity, and deep in terms of its content,” said Rev Dr Peniel Rajkumar, WCC programme coordinator for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. “It is envisaged to be an exchange of opportunities. While young people will have the opportunity to share their gifts of vision and discernment with the worldwide ecumenical movement, the ecumenical movement will have the opportunity to be inspired and challenged by the hopes, fears and aspirations of our young people.”

All entries, should be 3,500–5,000 words in length (including notes), and be written in English, following the WCC style guide which is available upon request at Media@wcc-coe.org

Contributions must be the original work of the participants and should not have been published elsewhere.

The deadline for the competition is Monday, 15th March 2021.

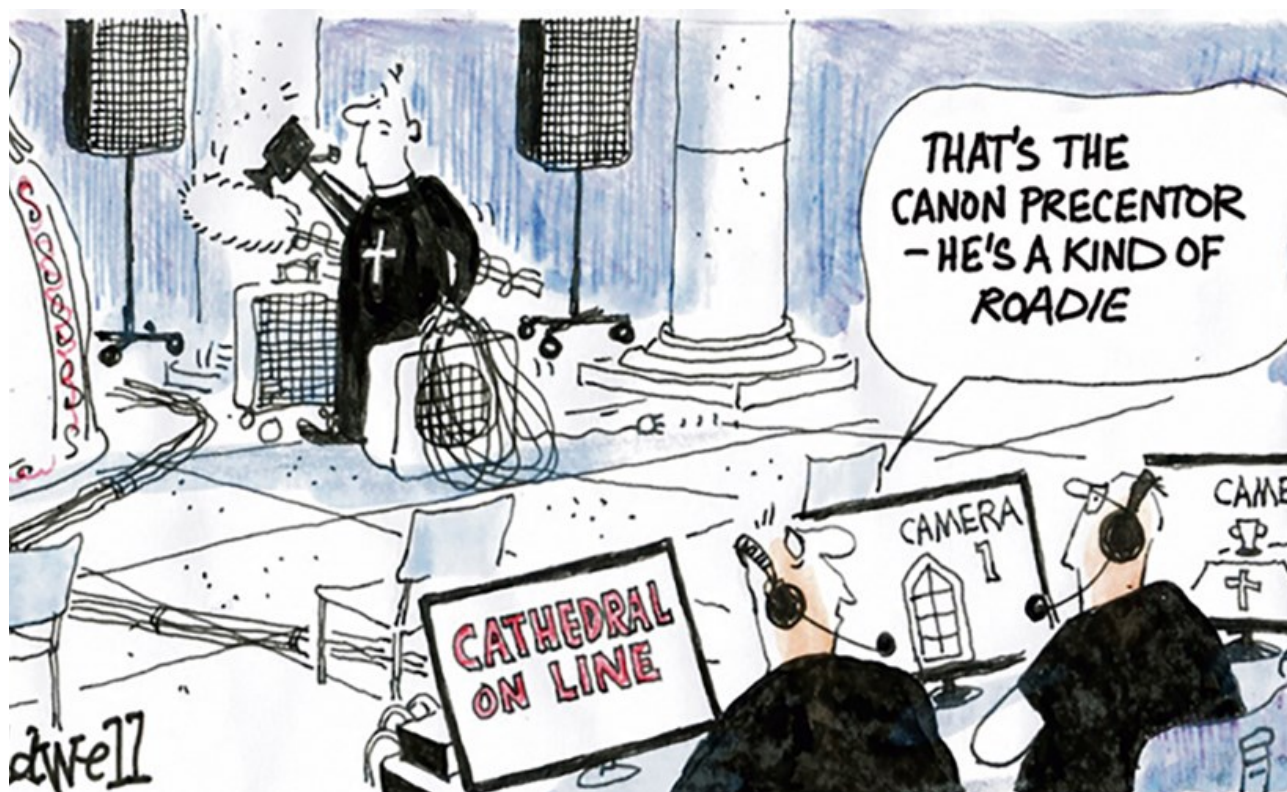
Rules for the essay competition are available at - <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-essay-competition-for-youth-interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation-0>
churchnewsireland@gmail.org

Pancakes and Prayer in Saintfield



A team of 'Pancake Posties' from Saintfield Parish delivered a Lent Prayer and pancake pack to 90 households in the village in time for Shrove Tuesday.

“We had the idea to combine the two ‘Ps’ for Shrove A



Church Times take on Online services

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Tuesday – prayer and pancakes – and share food for the body and soul in preparation for Lent,” said the rector of Saintfield, the Revd Chris Pollock.

“The packs contain homemade pancakes made by our bakers Julie, Myrtle, Phyllis and Robyn along with jam, a teabag and a prayer. A big thank you to them and to our team of Pancake Posties who made the deliveries around the parish.”

Churches education body for NI thanks schools for commitment, professionalism and service

The Transferor Representatives’ Council (TRC) has written to the principals and boards of governors of all controlled schools in Northern Ireland to thank them and all of their staff for their continuing work.

In particular, the TRC thanks principals, teachers, all other school staff, and governors “for their commitment to pupils and their mental health and wellbeing, the delivery of education, their dedication to the schools and for their service at this time of global disruption and anxiety.” The letter adds: “Their professionalism is recognised and their service deeply appreciated.”

The Chair of the TRC, Miss Rosemary Rainey OBE, said, “At a recent meeting of the TRC Executive, many heartfelt tributes were paid to school principals, senior leadership teams, staff and governors for the manner in which they had

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all responded to the additional demands and extra workloads associated with the delivery of the curriculum to pupils throughout the current pandemic.

“In writing as we did, we wanted to commend principals and staff for putting in place arrangements to enable remote learning and for maintaining regular communication between teachers, parents and pupils. Together, the TRC recognises that boards of governors have continued with their responsibilities for oversight of the curriculum, finance, health and wellbeing of pupils, the provision of education for pupils with special educational needs, and maintaining links with the community. We also wanted to recognise those teachers who have undertaken further professional development to enable pupils to learn by means of online



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teaching and supervision over the past year – all of which is a credit to them and the profession.”

All school governors in Northern Ireland serve in a purely voluntary capacity and, in respect of controlled schools, boards of governors are representative of the Department of Education, the Education Authority, the TRC, and parents and teachers.

The TRC concludes by encouraging “everyone who believes in the power of prayer” to keep school principals, senior leadership teams, teachers, support staff, pupils and school governors on their regular prayer list: “All need support, encouragement and pastoral care at this time.”

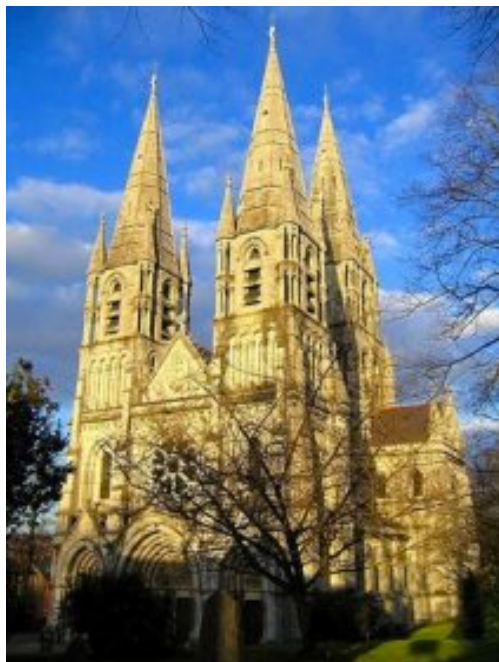
RTÉ Service: Sung Litany and Choral Eucharist for the First Sunday in Lent

A Sung Litany and Choral Eucharist for the First Sunday in Lent will be broadcast from St Fin Barre’s Cathedral, Cork, this Sunday (21st February) at 2.15pm on the RTÉ News Channel.

The cantor will be the Revd Ted Ardis and the celebrant will be the Very Revd Nigel Dunne.

The service is designed to provide a reflective beginning to the season of Lent, and will be sung by the Lay Vicars Choral (socially distanced) who will be directed by Peter Stobart, Director of Music.

The following music will be performed as part of the service:



Setting of the Litany by Henry Loosemore (1627–1670)
Setting of the Eucharist: Missa Brevis – Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525–1594)
Motet: Call to Remembrance, O Lord – Richard Farrant (c.1525–1580)
Organ voluntary: Prelude and Fugue in C minor BWV 549 – J.S. Bach (1685–1750)

A Prayer for Entering Lent

God of mystery and wisdom,
be with us this Lenten season.
It's been a long way, already
sickness, worry, isolation, fear, waiting
our hearts are heavy
our souls are weary
our bodies are hurting
our hope is wavering
yet, you are with us.

God of mystery and wisdom,
be with us this Lenten season.
Show us your grace
in the small moments of silence
the prayers offered in person or virtually
the kindness of a stranger
the lighting of a candle
the listening to a friend
the care of neighbors,
you are with us.

God of mystery and wisdom,
be with us this Lenten season.

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Settle our hearts
revive our spirits
increase our faith
spread our love.

God of mystery and wisdom,
be with us this Lenten season.
In ashes and dust
reading and listening
wandering and walking
praying and singing
eating and fasting
show us the way forward.

God of mystery and wisdom,
be with us this Lenten season.
As we walk to the cross
keep our eyes fixed
on you and your love –
caring for others
crossing boundaries
reaching out to the poor
taking our pain
transforming death into life
over and over again.

God of mystery and wisdom,
be with us this Lenten season.

Speaking to the Soul

Two Consoling Messages

[Gen. 9:8-17](#)

[Ps. 25:1-9](#)

[1 Pet. 3:18-22](#)

[Mark 1:9-15](#)

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“And the Spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for 40 days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him” (Mark 1:12-13). We too are “assaulted by many temptations” (Collect). We survive this testing by resisting the devil, steadfast in faith, and we survive even when we fall because Christ died for sinners, and we survive because there are ministering angels in the wilderness of our lives.

Angels are *messengers*, and there are two consoling messages in the appointed lessons that we do well to hear and claim.

The first concerns an opened heaven. “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him” (Mark 1:9-10). This stands as a reversal of an ancient curse, when Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, when God “placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). Although shut out of the garden, God came again and again to the help of his people, and yet a pall of guilt and shame remained over them. In Christ, heaven, the paradise of God and humanity, is opened again.

Heaven’s door will not be closed, for Jesus Christ our Lord is the one “in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him” (Eph. 3:12). Jesus is our great high priest, through whom we “approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

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How human it is to experience a time of need. We are sometimes afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, forsaken, struck down, and we always bear in our bodies the death of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:8-10). Our human predicament is a cross to bear, yet we who have died with Christ have also risen with him, and our prayers and cries, our lamentations and exaltations, rise up through an open heaven. Meditate on this angelic message: “he saw the heavens opened.” The second message concerns the power of Christ to break open the gates of hell. “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous,” bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).

The dear are among those brought to God. “He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the *spirits in prison*, who in former times did not obey” (1 Pet. 3:18-20).

Here we see Adam and Eve, symbols of all humans, trapped in a murky wasteland of the dead. In Christ, they are locked up no more. An ancient homily imagines the event: “Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. ... He took him [Adam] the hand and raised him up, saying: ‘Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’ ... I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell.” (*An Ancient Homily on the Lord’s Descent into Hell*). Heaven is open. The gates of hell are broken. All is full of love and victory.

Look It Up: Phil. 3:14

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Think About It: Hear the upward call of God.

