

ST ETHELBERT PARISH

Welcome Meetings Schedule 2016 Seven Pillars of Catholic Spirituality

Session 1: Tuesday, 23rd February [with Father Duncan]

Welcome, Mass and Church's Year, Parish Activities, the Church building

Session 2: Monday, 29th February

Bible, Spiritual Reading, Life of the Saints, Pope Francis

Session 3: Monday 7th March

Daily Prayer and Rosary

Session 4: Monday, 14th March

Sacraments, especially Confession, Eucharist and prayer

Session 5: Tuesday, 22nd March [with Father Duncan]

Q&A, Where do we go from here?

Venue: Parish Room, St Ethelbert's Church, Hawthorne Street, Bolton BL3 5RG

Time: 7.30pm until 9.00pm [including refreshments]

Please remember that attendance at **ALL** meetings is absolutely necessary. Please find a Babysitter for the Meetings. *Thank you!*

WELCOME MEETINGS 2016

Welcome!

To be a Catholic means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It is an “encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” In other words, the Faith impacts every part of a Catholic’s life. Consider a man who falls in love with a woman and she with him. He has a decisive “encounter” with this woman, and because of this encounter, his whole life will change. Instead of living strictly for himself and his needs, now his life is directed towards another. His choices regarding a career, family, recreation and housing all are impacted by his relationship with the one he loves. Likewise, when someone has a decisive encounter with Jesus Christ and decides to live as a Catholic, every aspect of his life is affected. No longer does the Catholic live for himself – he lives for Jesus Christ. In addition being a Catholic means being part of a family - the Church. The Catholic Church is not simply a social organization of like-minded people– it is the family of God. As with any family, membership confers certain privileges and responsibilities.

How do I become Catholic?

Every Catholic is a member of a parish, the local church where the sacraments are celebrated, the Word of God is proclaimed and the greater community is served. Therefore, to become a Catholic, the first thing to do is to contact your the Parish Priest, Father Duncan [01204 62653]. In most cases, you will be asked to take part in our “Welcome Meetings” [see overleaf for this year’s dates]. This might sound intimidating, but it is simply the process by which you can learn more about the Catholic Church and follow the necessary steps for becoming Catholic. These Welcome Meetings - led by St Ethelbert’s Parishioners - can be a great way to learn more about the Catholic Faith and pray for God’s guidance in your own spiritual pilgrimage.

How do I live as a Catholic?

It is important to remember that Catholicism is not a label that we just wear at Mass on Sunday– it is a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. This encounter, if it is truly authentic, will lead us to live in ways that honour and please God. Everyone will follow Christ in a personal, unique way, but there are a few principles that should be followed by every Catholic:

1) LIVE A SACRAMENTAL LIFE. Christ gave us the sacraments as opportunities for intimate encounters with him throughout our lives. We must regularly partake of them to fortify our relationship with him. Practically, this means being baptized, going to Mass every Sunday (and on weekdays if our schedule permits) and going to the Sacrament of Confession (Reconciliation) regularly (such as once a month). The sacraments are not just for Sunday mornings, but to help us in our daily lives. One sacrament that especially is given to us for this reason is the Sacrament of Matrimony (marriage). So, it is important that you marry in the Catholic Church. If you are already married, having your marriage blessed by the Church will enable you to receive the graces of the sacrament.

2) LIVE THE BEATITUDES. Jesus was not just any ordinary moral teacher or wise philosopher. He preached a radical way of life, one that is often contrary to the wisdom of the prevailing culture, but that brings contentment and joy to those who follow it. The core of his teachings can be found in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) where Christ tells us, among other things, to be “poor in spirit,” “meek,” “pure of heart” and to “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” It takes a lifetime to truly embrace this type of living, but every Catholic should work and pray every day to infuse these beatitudes into his life.

3) FOLLOW THE COMMANDMENTS. When we decide to become a follower of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church, we freely agree to live by the commandments that Jesus gave us. Far from

being limitations on our freedom, these commandments offer us a roadmap for joy-filled living. Just as a couple agrees to certain “restrictions” when they marry, Christians embrace a particular way of living in order to be free to love God fully. The restrictions on married persons are a vital means for spouses to show their faithful love towards one another. The same is true of the commandments Christ has given us.

4) SERVE OTHERS. An essential element of being a follower of Jesus Christ is the abandonment of self-centeredness. Jesus said that when we serve those who are lowly in this world – the poor, the oppressed, the prisoner – we are really serving him. We want to be like Christ, who gave his whole life for us, and so we should be willing to give of our time and resources to serve those less fortunate than ourselves. This service to others also includes sharing the Good News about Jesus Christ, for we do not only want to help others materially, but also spiritually. Finally, every Catholic should own a Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Special Circumstances

I’m divorced, can I be Catholic?

Yes! The Catholic Church teaches that divorce is a grave offence against the natural law, and that a marriage is intended to last until the death of one spouse. However, the Church is not a place for the perfect, but a refuge and home for sinners. If the Church only allowed those who were “pure” through its doors, it would be empty! Therefore, if you have been divorced and have not remarried, you may become Catholic and receive Communion like any other Catholic.

What if I remarried?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ – ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery’ the Church maintains that a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God’s law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists.” It is possible that a previous marriage was not valid in the eyes of the Church, and therefore can be annulled. If you are divorced and remarried and wish to become Catholic, please visit your local Catholic parish and speak with the priest. Know that the Church welcomes you with open arms and desires for you to be reconciled to Christ – please do not hesitate to contact your parish no matter your life circumstances.

I’ve had an abortion, can I be Catholic?

Absolutely. Scripture says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23); in other words, there is no one who can claim to have no sins in his past. The Church ardently desires that you find healing after your abortion, and Jesus is the great physician who can take away your pain and regret. The Catholic Church exists to reconcile people to Christ, and those who have had abortions are no exception to that mission – you too may find forgiveness in Sacramental Confession. Know also that any sins that you confess in the Sacrament of Reconciliation will remain absolutely private, bound by the seal of confession.

We are waiting for you and welcome you to the Family of the Church!
Please don’t hesitate to get in touch!
God bless!

Father Duncan McVicar SI
Parish Priest