



TIMES OF THE LITURGY

Sunday - 7.45am - Lauds | 8.15am - Low Mass | 9.15am - Dominican Rite Mass (Extraordinary Form) | 11am - Sung Conventual Mass | 6pm - Low Mass | 7pm - Vespers.

Monday - Friday - 7am - Lauds | 7.30am - Conventual Mass | 6.15pm - Devotions and Meditation | 6.30pm - Vespers. [N.B. First Fridays of the month, Vespers in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament with a period of Adoration from 6.15pm.]

Saturday - 9am - Lauds | 9.30am - Conventual Mass | 4.30-6pm - Confessions | 6.15pm - Sung Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary | 6.30pm - Vespers.

THIS WEEK

- Sun 26 **THE MOST HOLY TRINITY**
- Mon 27 ST AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY
- Tue 28 *feria*
- Wed 29 *feria*
- Thu 30 St Walstan
- Fri 31 THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
- Sat 1 Justin Martyr
- Sun 2 **CORPUS CHRISTI**



CORPUS CHRISTI

Sunday 2 June

*11am Mass followed by a Procession,
and a bring and share picnic in the garden.*

CATHOLIC LEGACY WEEK, 20-26 MAY

This week we are reminding everyone of the importance of supporting our Catholic charities, including the Dominican Friars. An important way to do this is to consider leaving a gift in your Will: these provide a third of the friars' income and are essential for funding our mission.

- *A free leaflet, 'Writing your Will', is available at the back of church*
- *We offer our supporters a Free Will-Writing Service if you need to write or to update your Will. Details are on the leaflet.*
- *Fr Robert is available to discuss any related matters.*

We offer special thanks to those of you who shared your stories this week of ways that the friars have enriched your lives. The stories can be viewed at www.english.op.org/legacy2024



Lauds, Mass, and Vespers are broadcast daily on Radio Maria. To listen visit:

<https://radiomariaengland.uk/>

SUPPORT US

Our ministry relies on the generosity of our friends and supporters. If you would like to support us make a donation in the cloister, visit our website, or speak to or email the bursar, Fr Albert.

cambridge.bursar@english.op.org

Our next Communio/ Blackfriars Study Group meeting will be on Wednesday 5 June at 7.30pm in the Old Library. We will discuss an interview given in 2016 by Pope Emeritus Benedict in which he reflects on the theme of 'the mercy of God'. This theme has been central to the teachings of Pope John-Paul and Pope Francis, and it gives a better way of understanding what was achieved in Christ for our salvation than the long influential idea of 'the honour of God'. The Pope Emeritus then explores what this means for the mission the Church has in proclaiming the redeeming power of Christ for all.

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The next talk in the Holy Preaching series will be on Wednesday 29 May at 7.30pm at the convent, 155 Huntingdon Road Cambridge, CB3 0DH. All welcome.

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What is knowing? From 23 to 26 August 2024, the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst, Clitheroe will be offering a residential course on Divine, human, and artificial intelligence. For more information, please visit <<https://christianheritagecentre.com/events>>

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A Men's Day Retreat titled "Called to Serve" will take place on Saturday 6th July 2024 at the Catholic National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Join Fr Sean Connolly and a group of Catholic men from the Diocese of East Anglia to discuss and reflect on the mission of service within the family, the parish and wider community. For more details email mflcoordinator@rcdea.org.uk

MAGPIES AND SPIDERS

In the collection of letters by St Augustine, there is one letter to him by a pagan known as Maximus the Grammarian, which refers to an attack on him by Augustine. Maximus says, or at least affects to believe that the attack was pleasant and without a loss of charity. Nonetheless he wishes to reply to Augustine. Whatever Augustine had said or written, Maximus refers to conversations with Augustine so it could have been in person, the gist of Maximus' reply gives us some idea of how the pagans who did not accept Christianity tried to preserve their worship of individual Gods while still maintaining a sort of monotheism. Maximus admits that the idea of Mt Olympus being the home of the Gods is a Greek fable of uncertain trustworthiness. He does think that there are Gods in the marketplaces as he puts it. This is something we perceive and can test, as he puts it. Yet he then goes on to say that,

'...[T]here is one supreme God, without beginning, without natural offspring, who is, as it were, the great and mighty Father of all, who could ever be so and infatuated as to deny? The powers of this Deity, diffused throughout the universe which He has made, we worship under many names, as we are all ignorant of His true name, the name God being common to all kinds of religious belief. So it is that while with different prayers we follow after, as it were, his members piecemeal, we seem, in truth, to worship him entire.'

At first glance this might suggest a capitulation to the idea that there is one God, but Augustine will have none of this. He suggests that Maximus is only saying this as a sort of joke. Augustine then insists that it is not good enough to continue to see the Gods as members of the one God. It gives Augustine a chance to explain who the true God is, and that it is meaningless to see this transcendent God as having parts or members. Maximus in fact wishes to preserve an idea of Gods as real and present. When St Paul comes to Athens, he is appalled by the many signs of idolatry that he sees.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols (Acts 17:16).

I suspect that St Paul had thought that he would find a city full of Philosophers, instead of crude idols, which as a Jew used to rejecting all images of living things, would have appalled him. Maximus though is a good example of how the Pagans found it impossible to let go of idols. He needed the images to be close to him, which is why he can easily reject the Gods of Olympus but not the Gods of the marketplace of his own town. The temples and statues were a source of pride and prestige for pagans, and Maximus is particularly contemptuous of the Punic gods, the gods of the ancient Carthaginian world in which both he and Augustine lived.

All this took place in the fourth century but in fact the contradictions of polytheistic religion had long created tensions in the ancient world. I would like to look at how this plays out in the great poem of Ovid, the *Metamorphoses*, written hundreds of years before this argument between Maximus and Augustine. The *Metamorphoses* was the greatest poem of the Roman poet, Ovid, and it consists of a series of stories of people being changed into animals, flowers, trees, mountains and rivers. If we look at it as stories of people losing their humanity, these stories would seem horrific. This is the wrong way round. For Ovid, it is more a case of the natural world being symbols of human life, so that all these natural things have a sort of humanity about them. A rock over which water continually pours brings us the story of Niobe who boasts of her many children and is punished by Juno having them all die. Then Niobe is transformed into a cliff face of marble which seems to weep continuously.

The colours, shapes and structures of Ovid's world are explained by the work of the Gods. Religion for them is a world of actions, music and art, drama and celebrations. It is hard to give up all this, and it was a problem for early Christianity. Ovid's poetry has survived and been used by many poets and artists, not least Dante who makes many explicit references to the stories of Ovid in his own great poem, *The Divine Comedy*. The idols had to be suppressed until such time as they ceased to mean anything, so that in the Renaissance they would survive as pure works of art. Then the idols are just statues, and music and poetry could flourish. It should be said though that even in Ovid we start to detect a certain uneasiness about the stories of the Gods. There are two particular transformations, which I refer to in the title of this article. In Book Five, the Pierides, a group of sisters who are wonderful singers, claim to be better singers than the Muses. In a contest they are easily defeated and turned into

magpies, a particularly harsh sounding bird, for their arrogance. Dante refers to this in the first canto of the Purgatory, where he seeks to raise the tone of his poetry. 'Of which the miserable magpies felt the blow so great, that they despaired of pardon.' Since the sisters challenged the Muses, the gods of the arts, they deserve their punishment. Yet Ovid then tells another story of transformation, where Juno vies with Arachne, who boasts of being a better weaver of tapestries than anyone else. Juno appears to Arachne and challenges her to a contest. The astonishing result is that Arachne wins. Her work is better than Juno, and moreover, the subjects of the tapestries show a very different view of the gods. Juno portrays the gods' giving gifts to humanity, the olive, the horse and wisdom, but Arachne portrays the Gods as punishing, and deceiving humanity, including stories which had occurred already in Ovid's poem. Juno loses but in a fit of spite hits Arachne, who hangs herself out of shame. Juno then revives her and changes her into a spider, who may continue to weave her webs for all time.

There is an implication of something going wrong with humanity's view of the Gods. The later Roman poet, Statius, goes even further in seeing both humanity and the divine forces as engaged in relentless evil. Dante has Statius appear in Purgatory as a secret Christian, for which there is no historical evidence, and C S Lewis suggests that this is because of Statius' negative view of the Gods. By the time of Maximus, we can see that the Gods have become embarrassing, in their continual misbehaviours. The time was ripe to accept that there was one God, and he had allowed us to worship him. Augustine ends his reply to Maximus in these (edited) words, 'Finally I want to tell you something you should know. Catholic Christians, worship no dead man, and adore nothing as a deity that was made and created by God; they worship only God himself, who made and created everything'.

This was Augustine at an early stage of his conversion. He had not yet begun to develop a fuller understanding of the profound change in our humanity that the incarnation had brought about. Ovid saw humanity in everything, through the work of divine forces which he did not understand and was clearly suspicious about. It was only with Christianity that we began to see humanity as truly loved by God, because we are made in the image of God. The transformation in Christ is a miracle beyond even Ovid's imagination.

THE PRIORY OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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