

Diocese of Middlesbrough Adult Formation | Journey to Easter Episode 3 Transcript

00:00:06 Nicola

Welcome to Journey to Easter, the podcast where three friends come together to share our Lenten journey, struggles and triumphs. The aim is to encourage each other and you to make the most of this sacred season.

So, whether you're walking your first Lent or your 50th, grab a cup of tea, take a quiet moment and join us as we Journey to Easter.

Hello and welcome back to episode 3 of Journey to Easter.

My name is Nicola Sweetman, and I am Adult Formation Coordinator in the diocese and I'm here with my friends Emma and Father Phil really just to have a conversation about our journey in Lent and how it's going for us.

So, thank you for all of you who have got in touch who have shared how you're finding the podcast. It's a real encouragement to us to hear that you're finding it helpful, that you're finding it reflective, that someone said about joining in with our conversation and that's exactly what we hope for. We really want to be with you on the journey to Easter. So, let's hear how it's going. Emma, how's Lent going for you?

00:01:24 Emma

Yeah, good, thank you, Nicola. Yeah, I think I'm starting to hit the pace of it now, it feels like. Yeah, it's been, I think the fact the weather's warmed up and everything, it just feels a little bit less grim. I think I'm beginning to start to see the fruits of some of the things I've committed to, particularly some of like the prayer commitments I've made this Lent. I'm really starting to see, you know, a couple of weeks in, how that's starting to change my heart, change the way I'm viewing situations which is a real gift. What about you, Father Phil?

00:01:58 Fr Phil

I've had a few ups and I've had a few downs, I would say. I haven't always done well with the fasting part of prayer, but I am persevering. I get back up on that horse. But like you, I think the sunshine that we've had as March has begun has been really, really welcome. And the lengthening of those days has brought great optimism and excitement. And just, you know, so much of Lent is preparation for Holy Week as well. And I'm starting to put things together in place for the parish for those. So that's getting me excited about the end point as well.

00:02:40 Nicola

Wonderful, fantastic. So let's start off our episode as we have done with the other two by hearing from Sunday's gospel.

00:02:54 Fr Phil

So our gospel from the gospel of John and we'll hear part of that gospel of the Samaritan woman.

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me a drink. For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan woman said to him, How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

The woman said to him, sir, you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.

Jesus said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.

I love in this gospel how Jesus invites us into a conversation. He invites this encounter, this woman who he meets, into a conversation with him so that they may discover how he can give them life, how he can give them, in this situation, living water. And maybe that's a beautiful thing for us in our conversations with Jesus to discover that he gives us living water.

What does it say to you guys?

00:05:37 Nicola

This is one of my favourite gospel accounts, if I'm honest. And I'm always, it always instantly makes me think of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. That might say a lot more about me. But when the Catechism teaches about prayer, it uses this gospel account to kind of help us understand prayer. And it talks about how the woman's come to the well and she's thirsty, she's looking for something, but she meets the one who thirsts for her, who's waiting for her there, who knows all about her, knows everything about her, but desires to enter into this relationship with her.

And I feel like that is really what prayer, you know, a recognition that in prayer we think, we can think about it like we're going to God but actually like he's already there waiting for us. And that just, it just gives me like a little bit of encouragement, a little bit of hope that it's not all about me, you know, it's about this encounter with him.

00:06:47 Emma

Right. For our listeners, you can't see but Nicola and Father Phil have both pulled out their catechisms at this point conveniently next to their desks. Talk to your Catholic. I think for me, this passage similar to you, Nicola, that it really speaks into prayer. But the thing that I really notice is the woman's honesty and the woman's kind of realism, I guess, that she doesn't kind of put on this front with Jesus. She's like, I love the line like you have nothing to draw water with in some translations that's like, so you have no bucket. I just love the kind of that she's saying it how it is. And I think that's such an important starting point with prayer that often we kind of go into prayer thinking that we have to sort of say a certain set of words or be a certain way in front of Jesus when actually he wants to speak to us like this. He wants us to bring those real questions that we have, even if they seem kind of super literal or super kind of obvious. Yeah, I just love this passage.

What about you for Fr Phil?

00:07:58 Fr Phil

Yeah, the honesty I think is great. You know, it's straight talking, isn't it? So you have no bucket. It's just so obvious, you know, and maybe sometimes in prayer, you know, we feel like we want to ask those obvious questions of the Lord, you know, Lord, why has this happened? Lord, do you love this person? Like what's going on?

And we tackle, you know, these questions with Jesus and hope for some new understanding as he's trying to give or some new insights. And maybe that's something of the beauty of prayer. When we're honest, the Lord comes back to us with those insights that we need.

00:08:39 Nicola

So I've been taught an acronym for prayer and it's sometimes called like praying like a pirate because it's A-R-R-R, like a pirate. The piracy has got nothing to do with spiritual life, I don't think. But it helps me when I sometimes when I sit down to pray and I don't know where to begin. So the A is to acknowledge and you just acknowledge like how you're feeling, what's going on for you. Some days you might sit down and I'm like, oh, I'm relieved that I've got to prayer today. Or other times you might sit down and think, gosh, it was a rush this morning, couldn't find a kid's shoes for school.

You know, you just acknowledge how you're feeling and then you relate that to God.

So the first R, you just relate it all to God. And then the challenging bit sometimes is to receive from him. So, you know, get into a place where Okay, so this is where I'm at Lord, but what do you want to say about that? What insights have you got into that situation?

And then listening to him and you might get a sense of what he's trying to say or you might, a bit of scripture you're familiar with might pop into your head or something and then the final R is respond. So how do you respond to what God's offering you? So it might just be, the response could be something as simple as like, thank you for reassuring me that you're with me today. Or it might be, oh yeah, you're right, I shouldn't lose my temper when we're trying to find school shoes, Lord. You know, so it can be different, it can be, there can be all kinds of ways of responding, but just, and I think that kind of in going back and forth makes prayer conversational, but also just recognising that it's just as important to hear the voice of God as it is for Him to hear all about what's going on for us.

I'll throw it out there in case it helps anyone else, you know. Acknowledge, relate, receive, respond.

00:10:39 Fr Phil

That sounds great, that Nicola. I think sometimes those sort of processes can help us, can't they, just to find a foothold, you know, that then help us to make steps on that journey of prayer. So that's great. That's a hearty way of prayer.

00:11:00 Nicola

I'll sometimes put my eyepatch on for it, you know. Just joking. I don't do that.

00:11:06 Fr Phil

Brilliant. And now Emma's going to tell our listeners that you've just put an eye patch on now.

00:11:10 Emma

She's actually got a sword as well.

00:11:16 Fr Phil

Emma, what have you found helpful in prayer?

00:11:19 Emma

Right. So interesting. I think one of the things I always think about prayer is I always. I always feel like it should come easier than it does, if you see what I mean. I think when I first started praying, I was like, oh, I should already have known how to do this. See, I think for me, the first thing actually is talking about it with people. So I think having people around you just to bounce ideas off, whether that's people in your parish,

whether that's sort of in the wider diocese, can just be so helpful to be like, oh, no, this can sometimes be difficult.

And I think the other thing that I find is getting it into the routine, and, you know, really committing to it, even when you do feel like it. So I realized, although I'm not a morning person, that the best time of the day for me to pray is in the morning, because actually, that means that like, it's your morning routine is like stricter than your, your evening routine. So just doing it when I feel like, you

Yeah, when first thing in the morning, when I'm not feeling kind of too tired from the day or too many things have already kind of hit my radar, I think that's super helpful to, yeah, get it into the routine. And yeah, and then similar to what Nicola said of just being real in front of God and yeah, like both trying to take these steps to both talk to God and share really what's happening, but also making sure to take that time to listen back as well to what he's saying.

00:12:50 Fr Phil

I remember when we were in World Youth Day in Lisbon, you offered some advice to the group there, Emma, and you were talking about the honesty of praying from the heart, and that was really helpful to the group, and that was life-changing for some people.

00:13:05 Emma

Right, yeah, we talked about that, didn't we? Yeah, we talked about how sometimes we get hung up with like praying the way we think we should pray and asking for the things that we think we should ask for. And that advice has now ended in a marriage. Like one of the girls brought back up in her wedding speech. And so I was, I had forgotten I'd said that until she brought it back up in her wedding speech. So yeah, sort of top tier advice is yeah, don't be afraid to ask for what's really on your heart, instead of what you kind of think you should be asking for.

00:13:41 Nicola

Yeah, because the desires of our heart are given to us by God. Sometimes we can doubt ourselves. You know, we think like, oh, why is it that I want this thing? Like, am I trying to push myself forward? Or is it, you know, something that I've come up with? But I think when we are, when we're in good relationship with God, like we shouldn't doubt that he gives us those desires in the 1st place, that he can kind of give us little inspirations.

You might think, oh, why is it that I want to, I don't know, ask my priest if we can open church 15 minutes earlier so we can pray before, you know, or you might have like little inspirations that come to you. And I would say, go for it. Like, you know, just respond to them because you don't know if they're not from the Lord, they'll probably be shut down pretty quickly, really.

But if they are from him, You don't know the kind of fruit that's going to come as a result.

00:14:35 Fr Phil

That's partly why one of my Lenten practices has been to do the examine. So it's this process of reflecting on where are those inspirations in our heart and the good things that the Lord wants to give us as encouragements and the steps of faith and trust. So to recognize those, a bit like a seed of the place within us, and then to sort of nurture that and to see if it's gonna grow. Cause at the turn of the year, I felt like I had a couple of inspirations from the Lord, where it would have been really easy to dismiss them. I won't go into them just at the moment, 'cause they're to do with things that are happening in the background, but hopefully will bear fruit in due time. And I thought, you know, I need to be aware of these, I need to be receptive to them and then just, this is part of my journey of faith becomes a real lived faith and not just a kind of mechanical saying of prayers each day, but actually, you know, Lord, you're active, you're placing these things in my heart, something's going on in my heart, in my imagination at times as well. And you want to lead me deeper in faith and on my journey of holiness through them.

00:15:55 Nicola

Yeah, and I think even this podcast is actually one of those little inspirations from the Lord in a way, because it was actually a priest friend of mine said to me, Nicola, you love to chat. You should do a podcast. And I was like, oh actually, you're right. I do love chatting. Maybe we should, you know, and I just kind of like brought that as a prayer. I'm like, is that a good idea? Tested it out, asked you to if you'd be up for doing it. And actually, now we're, here we are recording episode 3 and hopefully bearing good fruit. So you never know where you're going to end up or what the Lord might, little inspirations that might lead to different places.

What about things that have helped us, you know, in prayer, helped us set up a daily prayer life or kept us going in prayer? Any examples for that?

00:16:48 Fr Phil

I don't know about things that have helped us in prayer, but people who have helped me in prayer, I think of those as so I often tell people in my vocation story that one of the foundational experiences for me was the courage of my mum when I was in primary school to bring us together for family prayers. And it was a really simple thing. We just met together on a Friday evening. We said, one Our Father, one Hail Mary and a glory be. But for, so I'm the youngest of four, three brothers, you can imagine how rowdy that was. We were always throwing balls at each other. Mum's worried about stuff getting broken, fighting over the TV, whatever it might be. And so in the house, just for that moment of quiet was profound. You know, it's like, oh, we can be still.

And so many years later, when I was working nights at Tesco's actually, that's another story. I started going back to those prayers as a sort of foundational experience. So my mum was a really important part of inviting me, teaching me to pray.

00:18:04 Nicola

That's really encouraging for me, because I also try and pray with my family. And we try and do like a decade of the rosary, like just one, we manage most of the time. And my children don't know how to sit still. We had a time when they used to like try and do a cartwheel for each Hail Mary and I'm like, guys, we need to stop. We need to just sit still for prayers, okay? But even just that teaching of like, this is a time to be still because it's important what we do.

But then trying to punctuate the day with like, sometimes we pray just as we pull up to school and we'll say a little prayer for their day or grace before meals. We try and do and we pray like a little litany of family saints. So we ask all the saints that are linked to our names in our family to pray for us. Each one person's got a patron saint. And then the kids add their school saint, their house saint. They are in the mini Vinnies, so Saint Vincent de Paul gets thrown in there, and I'm pretty sure sometimes it's, you know, it's a lovely litany, but I think, are they just delaying bedtime by adding more and more saints to this list as they go along?

But yeah, so that's encouraging to me to know that actually these habits that we're trying to form in our home can hopefully then have like a lasting impact in their lives. Good to know.

00:19:35 Emma

I would just 100% echo that from Father Phil. Similar experience of praying as a family, but also seeing my parents pray. So before Mass, my dad always used to kind of kneel down and pray, however kind of rowdy we were all getting as kids. My dad would always kneel down and pray. And I actually didn't realise how significant that was until I brought one of my university friends. She was just sort of visiting the family for the weekend. And I brought her home and she'd been raised Catholic too. And we went to mass as a family and my dad, did what he always did and knelt down and prayed. And she's like, Emma, what do you mean you've seen your parents pray? Like just how moving that was for her because she was like, I just never had that growing up. But to actually just seeing the witness of my parents taking that time for that personal prayer as well, when they're not even trying to kind of keep us controlled, but actually have their own personal relationship with God, I think is a huge, again, inspiration and just something to kind of, to look back on.

00:20:41 Fr Phil

I've always thought of courage as being an important part of prayer, but I think it is. I think on the one hand, what we've spoken of, the courage to enter into honest conversation with God, the courage to be open to those inspirations that he puts within us, courage perhaps at times in our, community in our society to be the one that says, should we pray? Or can I pray for you? Or even just on our own, like, you know, your parents that you've spoken of there, Emma, that they've knelt down and prayed, you know, it's, yeah, it's courageous.

00:21:20 Emma

I was just thinking back to the passage actually and just looking even the first sort of two sentences of that the woman comes to draw water and Jesus says give me a drink and actually, when you imagine that in your head, it's quite a deep well, that she says it's a deep well, that there's an element of sacrifice involved in that as well, that she'd come to draw water for herself. She wanted, you know, that time and that effort could have quite easily just got into her and her family. But there's something that, you know, that prompts her to give that water, that kind of effort, and that's the time that that's taken her to draw that up to Jesus. And I think that's really important for me, part of prayer that actually, yes, I am going to have to sacrifice maybe sort of 15 minutes of my day. I'm going to have to get up 15 minutes earlier or, you know, put something else aside, maybe sacrifice 15 minutes of scrolling time as well.

00:22:17 Fr Phil

We used to use language like...to make a morning offering, and maybe sometimes in school as well, sometimes they use that sort of idea. And it brings back, doesn't it, in prayer is an offering, so I suppose these days, prayer can be a temptation towards my own sense of peace, maybe it follows some of that sort of meditative practice that's out there, or perhaps when I'm asking for something, I'm trying to get something from God, who's already given me life and all those other wonderful things as well.

And of course, like our Father is generous with us. He wants to give us good things. Peace is absolutely a fruit of prayer.

That's...absolutely part of it. But maybe coming back to the root of that sense of offering, as you've identified there, Emma, is a really important thing for relationship as well. Actually, if I'm giving something of myself to this, in a friendship, it's going to grow.

And likewise, in prayer, it's going to grow with Jesus too.

00:23:24 Nicola

Absolutely. And that reminds me just of one of the things that I'm trying to do this Lent is make space for those encounters with God. And one of the ways I'm doing it is getting back into the habit of charging my phone downstairs so that the first thing I think about in the morning, I still actually still think like, oh, check my phone and it's not there next

to me. So instead I'm like, oh no, it's about you, Lord, like this. And I just say, we'll just say simply, I give this day to you, everything that's going to happen, I give it to you. And I find that those days are just, I feel like just I go into the day a little bit better because the first thing, even though. I'd love it if I woke up and was like, I give this day to you, Lord, rather than thinking, where's my phone first? But that's the goal, you know, that it becomes such a part, like a habit. You have to like build it up like a muscle of prayer, you know?

00:24:19 Emma

Yeah, I 100% agree with that about just being careful about our phones first thing in the morning before prayer, that I once had a really nice quote, it's like, let the first voice you hear on the morning be his, that before I open up my phone, I see all of my messages from my friends and all of the horrific news that we're hearing, that I sort of spend that, you know, first 15 minutes of my morning just getting rooted in him.

And as you say, Nicola, it's not like we all wake up with our perfect hair and suddenly feel inspired to give the day to Jesus, that there has to be a bit of a, okay, I'm going to make this an intentional offering.

00:24:55 Nicola

And even if you're in the stage of life where I am, where your first words in the morning might be, Mummy, is it morning? Shouted from another room, you can still be like, okay, they're awake, but I still give this day to you, Lord, and I'm going to need your help, so let's go. You know, we can, whatever state of life we're in, whether we can wake up and we've got that space straight away, or whether we're up in the night, you know, even or whether we're, getting up early for a shift or whatever it is we are, even just the briefest moment, turning our gaze back to God can really be a wonderful way to start the day.

00:25:33 Emma

Yeah, one of the best advices about prayer overheard was pray as you can, not as you can't. And just this recognition that, how my life looks, either on a day-to-day basis, but definitely compared to my friends.

I've got a friend similar to you, Nicola. She's currently got, she's got newborn twins. It was the twins we were talking about last week in the baptism. But you know, how my prayer life looks and her prayer life looks is totally different at the minute because I come home and shut my door and it's just me and the Lord in the house. And how your prayer looks when you're in that situation is 100% different.

So definitely not, I think, yeah, not comparing ourselves to each other when it comes to prayer, but taking those kind of helpful tips. But yeah, praise you can, not as you can't is super helpful advice. Yeah, that is great advice.

00:26:25 Nicola

Wonderful. So, I mean, I think for me, the biggest thing in prayer is just doing it, just like you said, whatever way you can. And I feel like the church offers us so many different devotions that we can use to help us build up a life of prayer. You know, whether you pray in the office each day, like if you're a priest or in religious life, or even some, you know, lay people do that too, praying those prayers of the church. Whether you're, devoted to praying the rosary or you're asking a particular st for intercession or, reading a bit of scripture each day, whatever it is you're doing, I think just like the woman at the well and the depths of the well, you know, there's a depth of prayer that we can enter into.

And I feel like the Lord, wherever we're at right now, he's always got more to give us. Like there's always more we can discover of his love. There's always more we can discover of his plan for us, his desires for us. And just taking that next step, not being settled where we are, but just inviting the Lord more and more into our hearts, into our lives is the thing I would just encourage for everybody. You know, that's just our lifelong journey.

00:27:50 Emma

Right. And I think to add to that list, Nicola, just as you were saying, I know we've obviously got a podcast going and I don't want to promote other podcasts, but there's some really, really helpful kind of audio guides to the two that I've used and kind of integrated into my routine.

Pray As You Go, which is just, it talks you through the real beautiful kind of prayerful reflection on each daily scriptures. And then the other one that everyone gets a lot out of is Hallow that they have loads of different devotions on there that can be used as well.

So perhaps if you're whatever space you're making to listen to this podcast, you need to think about how we can integrate some kind of prayer, audio or something into our daily lives is a super, a super helpful way of getting it integrated for sure.

00:28:43 Nicola

And on that note, maybe we should pray, maybe we should just finish our conversation there and just end our time together with prayer.

00:28:56 Emma

So I would just like to invite, after hearing that conversation about prayer, perhaps all of our listeners would just like to join us in this prayer and really take that first step of just acknowledging the presence of the Lord before us right here, right now.

And as Nicola said, when we pray like a pirate, just acknowledging how we are at present before the presence of God to you.

Lord Jesus, we thank you so much that you desire so deeply to have a relationship with each of us, a relationship that is personal, a relationship that is deeply held in love.

We just ask you to come and give us your wisdom and your understanding, that we will each be able to grow in prayer and in relationship with you.

Guide each of our hearts to show us how to pray.

Lord, we ask you this today. Teach us how to pray.

We ask that you will send the right people, the right resources to help us grow in our life of prayer and that through doing so, we may bring your kingdom ever closer.

We ask all of this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your son.

Amen.

Nicola

Thank you for joining us. We hope today's conversation has inspired you to take another step in your own Lenten journey. We'd love to hear from you. Share your thoughts or reflections with us on social media or contact us via e-mail, adultformation@rcdmidd.org.uk.

And let's keep each other in prayer as we journey to Easter.