



St Barnabas and Meon Valley Parishes

Lent Course 2026: Spiritual Giants



Welcome to the 2026 Lent Course. All welcome. No previous knowledge necessary. Please check the calendar below carefully as we have had to adapt due to our own commitments and the availability of the Paterson Centre. All sessions are in The Paterson Centre apart from Weds 18th March. Tea/coffee will be served from 11.15 and 7.15. Each session will stand alone so you don't have to attend all five. You can come to either session in any week so can ring the changes depending on your commitments. Please read ahead so you come prepared.

Session 1 St Ignatius of Loyola Kathy O'Loughlin

** This session will only run once on Friday 27th Feb 11.30 – 1pm

Session 2 St Francis and St Clare Jill Kingston

Wednesday 4th March 7.30 – 9pm; Friday 6th March 11.30 – 1pm

Session 3 St Cuthbert and St Cedd Nick Whitehead

Wednesday 11th March 7.30 – 9pm; Friday 13th March 11.30 – 1pm

Session 4 St Benedict Hazel Whitehead

Wednesday 18th March 7.30 – 9pm in Barnaby's; Friday 20th March 11.30 – 1pm

Session 5 St Julian of Norwich Ruth Schofield

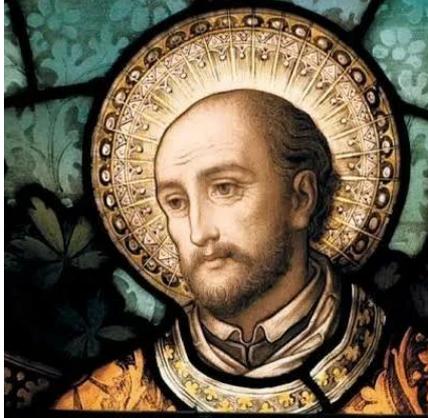
Wednesday 25th March 7.30 – 9pm; Friday 27th March 11.30 – 1pm

FAQs

- **Why are we bothering to think about people who died centuries ago?**
Ans: Throughout history, women and men have engaged with God. They have listened, learned, prayed and had experiences which stand the test of time and may teach us something.
- **How can we learn from people who knew nothing about our world?**
Ans: Although contexts are always different – across geography, traditions and time – there are certain principles which remain constant. It's our task to discern what those are, and to learn from the experience (and mistakes) of those who have gone before us.
- **Do people who shut themselves away to pray ever do any good for the world?**
Ans: How would we know? If we believe prayer is important, then we think they do. This is a very specific vocation for particular people who believe this is God's calling on their lives.
- **Why are there so few monks and nuns nowadays?**
Ans: Vocations to the religious life have waxed and waned throughout history, but the present decline can be linked to increased secularisation and non-faith-based organisations providing services previously associated with religious houses (education/nursing/ economic/ agricultural/ knowledge, libraries etc)
- **What are the criteria for sainthood?**
Ans: It depends who you ask! Paul calls all Christian believers saints. The Roman Catholic Church has changed its criteria from two to one proven miracle and has had a system since the 10th century. In Anglicanism, they are people recognised as having lived an exemplary, holy life. Literally, the consecrated ones from Gk hagios. Saints who had been canonised when the Church of England was in communion with Rome generally continued to be recognised as saints after the English Reformation in the 16th century. In 10th century BC, the Roman Catholic Church began to centralise and formalise the process of recognising saints through canonisation. A special cardinal and dept consider suggestions for who should be canonised.

Session 1: St Ignatius of Loyola

We begin by greeting one another and praying together



Teach us, good Lord,
to serve thee as thou deservest;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not for seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward
save that of knowing that we do thy will.
(St Ignatius Loyola)

Biographical Notes

Inigo of Loyola (1491 – 1556) was a Basque nobleman brought up in the Spanish court. He emerged in his twenties wild, lively, vain, and daring. In 1521 he was defending the city of Pamplona against French troops, who were very serious in numbers. The Governor wanted to surrender but Ignatius insisted on fighting on, until a cannon ball struck him, badly damaging his legs. He was sent home to recover. For months he lay in great pain, whiling away his time with daydreams which lasted for several hours. He imagined great deeds he would perform when better and the great lady whose love he would win. His only books were a Life of Christ by a Carthusian monk and a collection of saints lives. While daydreaming he began a second series of daydreams, now imagining himself outdoing the saints. He began saying to himself 'If Francis can do it so can I'. For weeks he alternated between the two types of daydreams, until he noticed something that was to change his life and many millions of lives as well.

While both types of daydream were enjoyable at the time, he discovered that after he had dreamed of his great deeds and of the lady whose love he would win he felt bored, empty and sad. But after dreaming of outdoing the saints he felt happy, hopeful and encouraged. He reflected on this difference and so began a method of discernment he called The Spiritual Exercises a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices to help people deepen their relationship with God.

After a year he was well enough to leave home. He gave up his sword and life as a soldier, became a priest and with a small group, went on to found the Jesuit order. Having changed course, Ignatius learned in a deep way how to discern better God's path for him through life, an insight he would share with many.



Please think about the role of imagination in your life, its benefits and drawbacks.

During this session we will consider:

- A brief outline of the Spiritual Exercises
- The practice of Imaginative Contemplation
- The practice of the Examen, a prayer of review of the day.

Session 2 St Francis and St Clare



We begin by greeting one another and praying together.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (Prayer for Peace)

Biographical Notes: From Riches to Rags!

Francis (1181–1226) and Clare (1194–1253) were born and raised in Assisi, Italy. Francis was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. He had everything going for him—his father’s thriving business, the chance to ride off to battle with knights, and plenty of money. He loved people and parties! He had a calling from God, a conversion that began when he was captured in battle and thrown into prison.

When poor health caused his release, he returned to Assisi. During his convalescence he prayed and listened to God. He began to give his riches—and his father’s riches—to the poor. He now found little joy in the revelries of his previous life and responding to a call in prayer before the crucifix, he put his energies into rebuilding dilapidated churches.

Eventually recognizing his call to “rebuild the Church” had a deeper meaning, Francis set about preaching the Gospel and teaching people to find God in all of creation, in themselves, and in every human activity. Radiating a profound joy, Francis soon attracted followers numbering thousands in just a few years. With great love, Francis wrote for his followers a simple rule to define their life together.

Clare, also from a wealthy family and 12 years younger than Francis had a deep spirituality from a young age and was drawn to the teachings and lifestyle of Francis. She met with him on many occasions and finally, in the middle of the night following Palm Sunday, she left her parents’ home and found her way to Francis and the brothers. There Clare made her commitment to God and to the poor and simple lifestyle that Francis preached. Even when her uncles came to remove her from the convent where Francis had placed her, Clare did not waver. Nor did she falter when other women of nobility, including her younger sister, joined her. Like Francis, she cared for her followers, taught them by word and example, wrote for them a simple rule of life, and stood up to bishops and the pope for the privilege of living the life to which she felt called.

Clare founded the order of Poor Clare’s. Jill’s Great Aunt was a Poor Clare for 65 years until she died just prior to Jill’s ordination.

During this session we will consider:

- An outline of Francis and Clare’s rule of life
- What this simple and austere life means for us in 21st Century Britain
- Changes we could make to pray for others, listen and be closer to God.

Session 3: St Cuthbert and St Cedd

We begin by greeting one another and praying together

Ever-living God, be our companion on the road
and show us the path of life eternal.

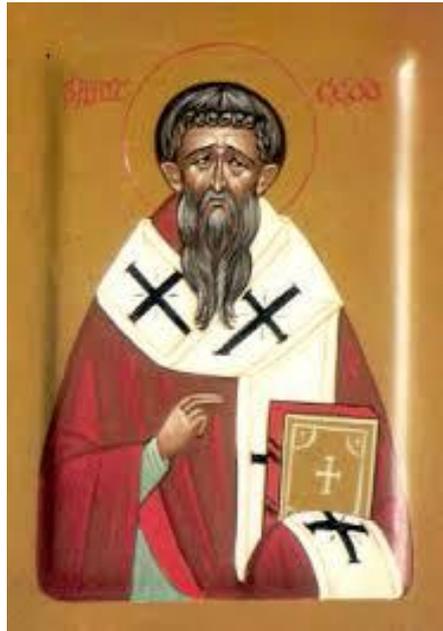
May all our journeys converge upon the journey home to you,
and all our longings find their rest in your unchanging grace.

Bring your peace and justice to our world and guide by your Spirit
the communities of the North.

Kindle in your Church the faith of Cuthbert, Aidan, Cedd,
and all the northern saints, that with simplicity, humility, and courage
we may follow in their way,
finding it none other than the way of Christ,
in whose precious name we make this prayer. Amen.



Wall painting of St Cuthbert
Durham Cathedral 12th century



St Cedd – Modern Icon

Biographical Notes

St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (634 – 20 March 687) was a saint of the early Northumbrian church in the Celtic tradition. He was monk, bishop and hermit, associated with the monasteries of Melrose and Lindisfarne in the Kingdom of Northumbria, Both during his life and after his death, he became a popular medieval saint of Northern England, with a cult centred on his tomb at Durham Cathedral. Cuthbert is regarded as the patron saint of Northumbria. He became a monk following a vision of the death of St Aidan.

He lived in turbulent times, with periods of rule by pagan kings, during which he travelled to remote villages and to the houses and courts of the nobility and of kings, preaching the Christian message.

St Cedd (probably 620 – 664) was an Anglo-Saxon monk and bishop from the Kingdom of Northumbria. He was an evangelist of the Middle Angles and East Saxons in England and a significant participant in the Synod of Whitby, a meeting which resolved important differences within the Church of England. His facility with languages was a key factor in the success of the Synod.

He was inspired by St Aidan who brought from the Island of Iona Celtic practices which set a different date for Easter from the Roman church, and whose organisation was centred on monasteries, rather than on Diocesan structures. In the former, Bishops were roving missionaries.

We will consider

- The Synod of Whitby, and its importance in English Christian history
- The place of miracles in the lives of the saints.
- The variety of Christian calling: priests, religious (monks & nuns), hermits and bishops.
- The cultures in which Christianity operates.

In preparation for session 4, please read the biographical notes and think about the balance of your life.

Session 4: St Benedict of Nursia 480 - 547

We begin by greeting one another and praying together

Gracious and Holy Father,
give us the wisdom to discover You,
the intelligence to understand You,
the diligence to seek after You,
the patience to wait for You,
eyes to behold You,
a heart to meditate upon You,
and a life to proclaim You,
through the power of the Spirit of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Monk, founder of The Benedictine Rule, patron saint of Europe, kidney disease and students, protector against evil. Festival is 11th July.



A very early representation of Benedict is in the 8th-century church beneath the present Church of San Crisogono.

Biographical Notes

Benedict was born into a noble family in Umbria. He was sent to Rome to study, but rebelled. He met a monk near Subiaco (modern Affile) and became a hermit for 3 years. Despite living a solitary life, he became well-known and was asked to lead a local monastery. However, his charges resented him and tried to poison him through wine and food. Miraculously, he was always saved – but he decided to leave and set up 12 monasteries. Eventually, he founded the largest one at Monte Cassino on a hilltop between Rome and Naples. He is recognised by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and Lutheran Churches and contributed more than anyone to the rise of monasticism in the West. His sister, Scholastica founded a nunnery near Monte Cassino.

Benedict maintained that a Christian should engage in four things every day: hard work (manual labour), relaxation and leisure activities, study of scripture and theology, prayer and worship. Our context may mean we cannot find an ideal balance every *day*, but we could strive to find it every week or month. Our context also means there are times when that's not possible e.g. if you have a young baby, or are nursing a sick relative, but the principle remains.



Please think about how balanced your life is at present.

During the session, we will consider

- The Rule of Benedict
<https://ccel.org/ccel/b/benedict/rule/cache/rule.pdf>
- Listen and Obey
- Balance in all things
- Community Life
- Rootedness

In preparation for session 5, please read the notes below, and think about



what makes you trust that God loves you.

Session 5: St Julian of Norwich

We begin by greeting one another and praying :

LORD, let not our souls be busy inns that have no room for you or yours,
but quiet homes of prayer and praise,
where you may find fit company,
where the needful cares of life are wisely ordered and put away,
and wide, sweet spaces kept for you;
where holy thoughts pass up and down
and fervent longings watch and wait your coming. Amen

Biographical Notes

Julian lived in Norwich, England in the 14th and early 15th century. She spent much of her life as an anchoress, a vowed religious, living by herself in an anchorhold attached to the parish church of St Julian at Conisford in Norwich. She was known as Dame (or Mother) Julian because of the church – her name isn't known.

Few facts can be asserted of her life beyond what she recorded, the witness of a few bequests, and the testimony of her contemporary Margery Kempe. According to her own account of her "shewings" or revelations, these were given to Julian at the age of 30, in May 1373. The shewings describe 16 personal revelations triggered by a serious illness that Julian suffered. We don't know when she died, but she received a bequest in 1412.

We will consider Julian's thoughts on:

- sin and forgiveness
- God's eternal love for us and for every created thing;
- the three wounds that Julian longed to have
- the importance of prayer.



This statue depicting Julian of Norwich was created by sculptor David Holgate. It stands at the entrance of Norwich Cathedral, and was completed in 2014.

And in conclusion, you may like to

- **choose one of these characters, or another spiritual 'giant', to delve into more deeply, thinking about their lives and their writings**
- **give thanks during Lent for the ordinary people throughout your life who have inspired and encouraged your journey of faith.**