

A PARISH PREPARES

Since the announcement of the visit of the relics of St. Therese of Lisieux, the parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea has established a programme of preparation that will culminate in a parish 'pilgrimage' to the relics at St. Peter's Cathedral.

INFORM

The programme began in September 2008 with a display in the entrance to the church which outlined the life and significance of St. Therese in the life of the Church. The weekly bulletin also included biographical information about her and enabled parishioners to know a bit more about her. It is important to note, that whilst there was a statue of her in the church there was no tangible devotion to St. Therese of Lisieux in the parish – we were starting from scratch. Homilies during September made reference to her teaching and encouraged parishioners to journey along 'the little way'.



ENCOURAGE

The display also aimed to encourage parishioners to deepen their spiritual life through hosting a 'pilgrim statue' of St. Therese. Parishioners would have a statue for a week at a time and then pass this statue on to another parishioner. They were encouraged to sign-up over a six-month period.

Alongside the statue was an extensive resource pack that included two DVD's of the life of St. Therese (including a 'Blue Peter' documentary of her life), illustrated biographical material and prayer resources. Other information – on setting up the statue as a focus of prayer and devotion for example – was also included.

The statue would begin its journey on the Feast of St. Therese (1st October 2008) and be returned to the parish on 17th September 2009.

To launch the journey, the main statue in the church was moved onto the sanctuary and the feast was celebrated at the 10.00 a.m. Mass with added solemnity. The 'pilgrim statue' was blessed and presented to the family who would first host the statue.

SURPRISED

We have been surprised not only by the response we have received in terms of people willing to host the statue, but also the way they have gone about it. Many parishioners invite others to their homes during the week the statue is there to watch the DVD together and then pray together. The statue has provided a social dimension of bringing parishioners closer together. Many have reported on the graces they have received by 'welcoming Therese into their homes'. The number of parishioners who attended the day at Tabor as a result of this was also significant.

SCHOOL

The parish primary school has also hosted the statue of Therese and the children are sometimes quite upset when her time to move on comes!

TOO MUCH TO ORGANISE?

If we are honest, we were expecting some difficulties as the statue travelled round the parish (numerous phone calls about what to do, where she should be next etc. etc.) but as yet we haven't had any!

THE NEXT STAGE

After Easter the parish will become more focused on the life of St. Therese – the series of talks on St. Paul will come to an end and it is envisaged that there will be a number of spiritual conferences and catechetical talks on her life and teaching. The timing of these will be significant: many parishioners will not travel out of their homes in the evening so any talks will also take place during the day. We have found that after a morning Mass over a cup of tea is a good time!

This teaching focus will last until the start of the summer holidays when there will be a break but hopefully the seeds will have been planted.

AUTUMN

From the beginning of September the focus will shift from catechesis to spiritual formation. The main statue in the church will be moved onto the sanctuary to provide a focus for parishioners and the coach(es) will be booked (we are anticipating a lot of interest).

When the pilgrim statue returns to the parish (on 17th September) a period of prayer will begin which will include extended periods of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and other opportunities for personal prayer.

The year of preparation will culminate in a parish pilgrimage to Lancaster....afterwards who knows what will happen.