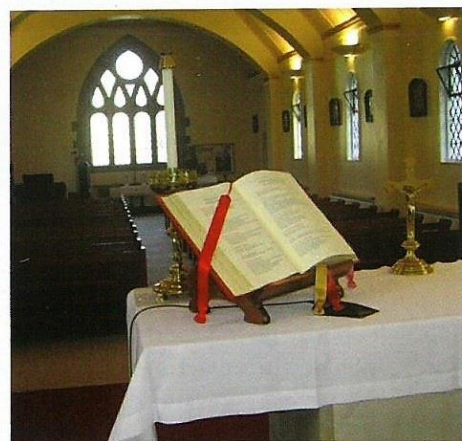


## A Place to Pray



Fr Martin Eckersley

### Fr Martin Eckersley is the assistant priest of St Francis Xavier's, Falkirk

#### Where is your favourite place to pray?

Partly because I'm nostalgic about it, partly because it's where I first really learned to pray, where I first encountered Jesus, is my home parish, Immaculate Conception in Jedburgh. Particularly on a Sunday night, at four o'clock, with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

#### How did you learn to pray there?

I was quite new to it. I had had a sojourn away from the Faith for a time, and this was my entry back into it, and I didn't really know what was going on. But there was something about Adoration, the candles, and the incense, that I knew that there was something more than ordinary there. I suppose that, for me, the connection of the Eucharist and Jesus was made in the Adoration in Jedburgh. As soon as I started to realise that God isn't away up there but he's actually with us down here, prayer took on a completely different dimension. It wasn't about trying to span the gulf between Heaven and earth, between God and us, because he's there.

#### What brought you to Eucharistic Adoration?

I was 16 when I was going back to church enough to be stabbing in the dark attempting prayer. We got a new, young, and charismatic priest, and at the same time I became friends with literally the only other Catholic in my school, Caroline. Caroline and I would go to Vigil Mass and then we would start going to Adoration to keep Sunday holy. Church, for us, became the place where our friendship kicked off. The combination of these two people started it. There was something there that was missing from anything else in my life.

#### What impact has it left on you?

I wouldn't be a practising Catholic, let alone a priest, if it weren't for the Immaculate Conception, Jedburgh. Seeing our Lord, the incredible people there, I'm sure everyone says this about their parishes but there's something about your own church. I think it's right that your own church should feel like the closest that you feel to the Lord.

#### What is your lasting memory?

Me and my friend always sat at the front-right. It's a small church so the incense would fill it. Candles would be the biggest source of light. I remember there'd be Confessions going on simultaneously. Especially because I had only just started coming back to the Church, I was gearing myself up to make my first Confession in a long while. I was thinking to myself, 'What sins can I tell this priest? I can't tell him what I've actually done or he'll never speak to me again!' Just before we went out to expose the Blessed Sacrament, the priest said, 'You know, it's the sins you don't want to say that Jesus really wants to hear.' And I remember that ringing in my ears as I was praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament preparing for Confession. Often, we get more hung up on our sins than God ever is.

#### What is special about Eucharistic Adoration?

It's one of these things: I know that our Lord is in the Tabernacle of every church throughout the country, but Eucharistic Adoration makes it so much easier. We're body and soul, and so the way that we pray matches that. When you can see Jesus actually there in the Monstrance, it makes it clear, just that bit easier. Prayer can be hard. It's not always the joy that you think it should be. Sometimes it's dry, sometimes it's hard and you're distracted. It's a relationship, and like any relationship, sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so good. The great thing about the 40 Hours Devotion is that it opens up Adoration, that point of meeting with the Lord, to so many people. It invites them to sample that way of having a relationship with Jesus if they've not done it in a while, or at all. It's beautiful, it's profound, it's a real gift.

#### Do you have any advice?

Just to recognise that the God who loved you enough to die for you, loves you enough to want to talk to you. You see it in the Scriptures, He talks to us in lots of different ways. He talks to us as fire and cloud, or the burning bush, or as invisible spirit. But the biggest way he speaks to us is in Jesus Christ. If you're looking to develop your prayer life, or even to start, I don't think there's a place that's better to do that than through going straight to Jesus Christ face-to-face adoration. ■