In a bleak wasteland, Christ sits on the bare earth and looks down at the scorpion which he holds on the palm of his right hand. He holds the scorpion most carefully, with one hand under the other. His downward gaze suggests sadness, rather than fear or panic. There is a stillness about Stanley Spencer's Christ. Everyone knows the sting of a scorpion can kill. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus says is there anyone who…. if the child asks for an egg, will give the child a scorpion (Lk 11.12). “Perhaps the implication is that God is the Father who gives just such a thing to his Son. The hand that holds the scorpion is slightly swollen, suggesting that the scorpion may have already stung its host and yet he goes on gently holding it. There is another near his bare foot.

It is likely that Spencer' wilderness draws on the rough terrain of a battle-scarred Macedonia where he had served in World War I and that his experiences of war inform this painting. This painting is one of a series showing Christ in the wilderness, which the artist began around the time of the outbreak of World War II. It was also a time of personal crisis. He had lost his marriage and had left the family home because of a relationship with another woman. This second relationship failed as well. He intended to paint 40 scenes, one for each day of Lent. In fact, he completed just 8. Spencer said that by undertaking this project he hoped to find himself once more. Each painting was to depict Christ relating to some aspect of the natural world and draws on his sayings and parables. He said, “I felt that because you have not anything much in the actual life in the wilderness except the temptation, that one has an excuse for imagining what his life might have been like.”

It is clear then that the artist took as his starting point the Gospel accounts of Christ in the wilderness, but that he is not trying to depict the temptations. It strikes me that one interpretation of this line is that it suggests Isaiah’s prophecy of God bringing about a harmonious co-existence between the predator and its prey, as in the wolf and the lamb, the calf and the lion of (Is 11:6-9).
CONTINUED

However, like the landscape behind Christ, which is scarred by the hostility of war, in
these scorpions, Spencer presents the hostile side of natural world. Despite Isaiah’s
prophecy, most often in the Old Testament wild animals were a source of danger from
which God protected his faithful. For example, you can find this in the beautiful
Psalms 90 which we pray at Compline. To those who take refuge in the Lord, the
psalmist declares: “On the lion sand the viper you will tread and trample the young
lion and the dragon”. In the Psalm it is God’s angels who give the promised
protection. Ministering angels are mentioned in today’s gospel. But in this image
Christ does not call on his angels. Actually, Stanley Spencer may be evoking the
crucifixion in that Christ lets the scorpion sting him, just as he will let himself be
taken and crucified. If so, the sadness of his downward gaze would not be about
scorpion’s hostile nature but rather humanity’s fallen state and the hostility he will
encounter. In this way of reading the painting, Stanley Spencer is evoking Christ’s
obedience, “even unto death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Perhaps, in his sorry
circumstances, Stanley Spencer was pondering the sting of sin and Christ’s
forgiveness for a sinner. Perhaps he had taken to heart the words of today’s
passage, “repent and believe in the gospel.”

INSPIRE - LENT TALKS
Register now for the Archdiocese's INSPIRE talk series for Lent, which began last Tuesday. In these talks
speakers will guide you prayerfully through the season. All talks are on Zoom, Tuesdays 7-8pm.
TALK 2: Songs of the Redemption: The Benedictine Liturgy of the Hours, with Brother Joseph Carron. 7pm, 2nd
TALK 3: Prayer as a Relationship Reflected in St Teresa of Avila, with Sr Sally Rollo. 7pm, 16th March. Register:
bit.ly/LentRollo
TALK 4: Praying the Passion according to St Mark, with Archbishop Leo Cushley. 7pm, 23rd March.
Register: bit.ly/LentCushley

PRO-LIFE STATIONS OF THE CROSS
Stations of the Cross, organised by the Archdiocesan Pro-Life Office, will take place each Monday evening of
Lent at 7:45pm. The Stations will be followed by a short reflection. You can register now on Eventbrite:
http://standrewsandedinburgh.eventbrite.com/

FAITH IN THE TIME OF COVID
The last in this series of talks takes place today. This event is free and lasts 30 mins. Rt Hon Gordon Brown,

ARCHDIOCESAN YOUTUBE CHANNEL
If you miss any online event from the Archdiocese you can find it on YouTube. The link is bit.ly/ArchYouTube.
Among the recent uploads is ‘Fire & Water: The Power of the Sacraments”, which is a talk on Confirmation and
Baptism by Sr Anna Marie McGuan RSM, who is the Archdiocesan Catechetics Advisor.

PRAYER REQUEST
Please pray for the repose of the soul of Fr Angus McLaughlin OP who has died. Fr Angus was the oldest friar of our Province. Fr Angus served in Newcastle and London, before being assigned to our Glasgow community. During his time in the
Glasgow community, he served in the Parish of St Columbkille, Rutherglen, in the Diocese of Motherwell, and then for many years in the Parish of Our Lady of the Angels in Mingary in the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles. His funeral will take place at St
Albert’s on Wednesday 24th February at 11am. He died on Tuesday 9th February 2021, in the 92nd year of his age, the 60th of his profession and the 55th of his priesthood. May he rest in peace.

LECTIO DIVINA
Each Tuesday in Lent at 8pm there will be an opportunity to meditate on the Gospel for the coming Sunday using the
practice of Lectio Divina. This involves reading the text prayerfully a number of times with a brief (optional) sharing
between each reading. The sessions will take place on Zoom and be led by a different person each week. The first session at
8pm on 23rd February will be led by Revd Dr Harriet Harris, Chaplain to the University of Edinburgh. If you would like to participate please email Fr Dermot who will send you the text for each week and the Zoom link.

DAY OF RECOLLECTION FOR LENT
Sr Margaret Atkins OSA will lead a Day of Recollection for Lent entitled, “Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving at a moment of crisis?” on Saturday 20th March. The talks will be given on zoom. More details will follow. Sr Margaret is a Canoness of St Augustine at Burbank Hall. She has a long association with our Dominican Province and is a fellow of Blackfriars Hall, Oxford. See https://
www.bfriars.ox.ac.uk/people/sr-margaret-atkins-osa/

PRAYING COMPLINE IN LENT
During this time of COVID a number of parishioners have started to pray Compline (night prayer) regularly. If you would like to join them, not on zoom, but in spirit, you can find the texts on the website of the Justice and Peace Group: www.stajp.co.uk. This is a simple way of praying together, while apart.

PARISH BOOK CLUB
The next online meeting of the Parish Book Group takes place on Thursday 11th March at 7.30pm, when “Winter in Madrid” by
CJ Samson will be discussed. The following meeting of the Parish Book Group takes place
on Saturday 20th March. The talks will be given on zoom. For further details please contact stevenpmale@gmail.com

MASS TIMES AT THE CHAPEL OF ST ALBERT THE GREAT
Monday to Friday 5.15pm (live-streamed), Saturday 12 noon ((live-streamed), Sunday 5.15pm (live-streamed)

LIVE STREAMING MASS
The address is https://scotland.op.org/live/. If you miss the live streamed Mass you will be able to watch it later under the tab
“recordings”. If there is a problem with our website, please note that it will be available also at
https://www.churchservices.tv/edinburgh

St Albert’s Catholic Chaplaincy is a Parish of the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh, entrusted to the English Province of the Order of Preachers (the Dominicans) which is a registered charity in Scotland (SC039062) and in England and Wales (231192). Superior & Parish Priest, Bursar & Editor of the Newsletter: Fr Dermot Morris OP e: dermot.morris@english.op.org m: 07799 066849, 23-24 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD · Fr Samuel Burke OP: samuel.burke@english.op.org m: 07961 240037 . http://scotland.op.org 

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