

### **Monday in 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Easter – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2026:**

Deacon Stephen is diligent in his task of being a herald of the gospel, preaching amongst the Hellenists, people from his own background. The testimony from one of our own can convey wonder and amazement, but also illicit concern, even hatred, for it brings into question something the community holds dear – the proclamation of the truth rocking their once certain belief structures. When we go online, we often see an irrational hostility to Catholicism, it being easy for people (*without qualification*) to deliberately misrepresent the Christian message. In the UK, we preach the good news with love, never forcing the issue but by a sincere and convincing argument. Like Stephen we must speak as if we are filled with the grace and the power of the Spirit. God has imparted a divine character upon us which compels us to share our paschal joy with the world – even if they are not ready or do not want to hear it!

### **Tuesday in 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Easter – 21<sup>st</sup> April 2026:**

The Church Fathers believed that those who suffer for Christ enjoy the glory of the Trinity. We pray this will be sufficient consolation for us when we are persecuted for our faith. In the UK, we are grateful for our religious freedoms, but this is not universally true for Christians around the world and both the House of Lords, and the Foreign Office have acknowledged the extent of the Christian persecution, with Christians the targets of about 80% of all acts of religious persecution. Closer to home, we are more likely to experience a '*white martyrdom*', especially in the online forum for there are plenty of self-appointed judges who will start the ridicule of our faith, and lots of people waiting in the wings to join the online pile on, a lynching that might not cause physical harm but causes people to think less of us because our world's ability to think philosophically on matters of truth and virtue is compromised.

### **Wednesday in 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Easter – 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026:**

The death of Stephen was a catalyst for a great persecution in Jerusalem which caused many Christians except the apostles to flee from the city and begin to proclaim the good news outside of Jerusalem, much to the concern of Saul who was worried that they might be successful. Persecution cannot stop the spread of the gospel; in fact, it often seems that it emboldens the message, giving it credibility. Indeed, Deacon Philip found that the crowds paid great attention to his preaching and saw and experienced the grace that accompanied his message.

### **The Solemnity of St George, Patron of England – Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026:**

We know little about the real life of St George, other than that he was an officer in the Roman Army and died during the persecution of Christians by emperor Diocletian who had ordered the arrest of Christians in the army, insisting that, to prove their loyalty, all soldiers should offer incense in veneration of the Roman Gods. St George protected the Christians and refused to burn incense because he too had converted to Christianity. As George was a popular officer, Diocletian tried bribe him, but he stood firm. In George, the Christian can find a wonderful example of discipleship, a faithful, brave, kind and compassionate man, who accepted his cross, for the sake of the gospel recognising that *'the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come'* and that having been redeemed by the blood of the lamb, we may, therefore rejoice, with the promise of dwelling in the heavens!

### **Friday in 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Easter – 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026:**

Saul chased after the followers of the Way, concerned that the eloquence of the Christian message would make many converts in Damascus. If we know our faith and speak the truth with love, it is attractive to the listener, and they want to hear more because they're offered answers to their deepest questions concerning the meaning of their life. Saul was not distant from God, but like many others had been given the wrong idea the Messiah. Jesus' death on the cross was, to the mentality of the world, a failure and proof that he was not the Messiah. Saul had also been taught that the chosen people of God were special and set apart – that there was a universal scope to the Messiah's mission, that all nations were being called into a fraternal relationship in the Kingdom was inconceivable and frankly abhorrent to him. In receiving a direct intervention from God, he is switched on to the gospel and no longer is the Cross a scandal to him, but the sign of salvation and God's unconditional love for humanity.

### **The Feast of St Mark, Evangelist – Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2026:**

John Mark was an associate of Paul and Barnabas, accompanying them on their journeys. He is also with Peter in Rome, scribing for him, giving a succinct account of the good news to Christians experiencing persecution in the city. Mark is a *'realistic theologian'*, giving people what they need to understand the challenge they face, giving them hope that the Lord wins in the end. Mark's own gospel ends, with Christ's command: *'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation'*.