

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([00:00](#)):

This is Bishop Michael Burbidge and you are listening to the Walk Humbly podcast.

Tom Shakely ([00:07](#)):

Welcome to the Walk Humbly podcast from the St. Clare Studio here in the Diocese of Arlington. I'm Tom Shakely, Chief Communications Officer for the Diocese of Arlington, and I'm joined of course by our indefatigable host, Bishop Michael Burbidge. Bishop, how are you?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([00:21](#)):

I'm doing well, Tom. Great to be with you and our listeners today.

Tom Shakely ([00:25](#)):

It's good to be back. You know, believe it or not, for those who've been following closely, our Holy Father is still hospitalized. I think this is the third conversation we've had. He's still recovering, but recent signs have seemed pretty positive.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([00:37](#)):

No, that's right. I think it was March 16th the Vatican released a photo of the Pope praying in the hospital's private chapel, so that's a good sign. It was his first public appearance since his hospitalization. We remain hopeful for his recovery. As the Pope said himself, he is so grateful for the prayers of people throughout the world, and I know here in the diocese of Arlington, we are united in our prayers for Pope Francis.

Tom Shakely ([01:08](#)):

Well, Bishop, you know, as we're journeying here through Lent, there are some really incredible opportunities for spiritual renewal in the diocese. There always are, but especially in this season. What we're talking about, of course, is the Light is On For You, our special initiative that makes the sacrament of confession available at parishes across the diocese, every parish in our diocese, every Wednesday during Lent from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM. Bishop, you know, I heard you recently took part in the Light is On campaign yourself hearing some confessions at the cathedral.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([01:39](#)):

It's one of the greatest joys as a priest is to be the celebrant of sacrament of reconciliation, an instrument of God's mercy. Brings great joy to the priesthood. Yes, I was able to hear confessions at our cathedral. We'll do a couple other parishes this Lent. You know, as a bishop, I don't have that wonderful opportunity parish priests have to do so so frequently throughout the week and Saturdays hearing confession. Whenever I have the opportunity to do that, I'm really grateful. Sometimes it's funny when people, if it's face-to-face, they see me and they go, "Bless me Father. Oh, I'm sorry. Bless me, Bishop." "No, Father's great." That's who I am in this sacrament. I'm a Father, a spiritual Father of God's instrument.

([02:28](#)):

Yeah, I really encourage everyone to celebrate this beautiful sacrament. It's the gift of God's mercy. God's mercy is a gift. We don't deserve it. We don't have to work for it. We don't have to earn it. The only thing we have to have is a contrite heart and a desire to begin anew relying on God's grace. Then at that point, no matter what the sin is, no matter how serious, no matter how many times it was

committed, no sin is greater than the mercy and the love of God. I love that beautiful line from sacred scripture, "Though your sins may be as scarlet, they may become white as snow." We're completely forgiven, we're made pure and whole through this great gift of God's mercy. Encourage everyone at any point, you don't have to wait till the day before, the week before Easter, any point in the sacred season, you will feel such an incredible difference in your life being reminded your God's beloved. Nothing can separate you from his love.

Tom Shakely ([03:38](#)):

Thank you so much Bishop. Well, just last night, I know you were present for the 25th anniversary of Theology on Tap here in the Diocese of Arlington. Many listeners may have been participants in Theology on Tap at various locations over the years. If you haven't, it's worth checking out. It's a ministry that's been bringing young adults in particular together to grow in their faith, engage in discussion, and build Christ-centered friendships for a long time. Can you paint the scene for us?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([04:06](#)):

Yeah, Theology on Tap, maybe for listeners who are not aware of that ministry, started 25 years ago in our diocese, a very creative, innovative way ahead of what, you know, we would describe sometimes as a new evangelization knowing that the gospel, the truth of the gospel is not new, but what is new is how we bring it to others. Theology on Tap said we have to be making sure we go out to those who may feel separated from the church or just have, you know, wandered away from the church or to those who are seeking to deepen their faith and their knowledge and their sense of belonging to a community, but let's do it in a creative way.

([04:51](#)):

Theology on Tap is we'll gather at a pub and it'd be this social part. We have found out, especially since covid, we really need to be part of a community, and so let's come together in a relaxed setting. Maybe less intimidating for some people who aren't ready to make the full gigantic step to coming back to church, but at least willing to do this, be as often, you know, with young adults, mostly young adults, there's a social and then there's always a talk on a church or on a topic of theology, moral issues, dogmatic issues, issues of the day with a guest speaker and room for questions and answers. I've been so honored to participate in a number of them. It's enjoyable, number one, it's fun, but it's also enriching and inspiring. As last night as we celebrated the 25th anniversary, just seeing people who have been there through the years and so many of our young adults were there, I was just so inspired.

Tom Shakely ([05:57](#)):

Father Gould, was the founder?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([05:59](#)):

Yeah, he was the first.

Tom Shakely ([06:00](#)):

Well, the first speaker.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([06:01](#)):

Yeah, he was the first speaker. He was there last night. Another speaker was someone who was at that first talk and through Theology on the Tap met his future wife. That's not what it's for. It's not a dating platform.

Tom Shakely ([06:18](#)):

It can't hurt.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([06:19](#)):

Part of God's plan, the husband and wife met there and just were part of the evening last night as well. It's really a great opportunity. I encourage our young adults who are listening, we do this throughout our diocese and there's always notice of when it's available. If you have not been, consider coming. We'd love to have you be part of it.

Tom Shakely ([06:42](#)):

That's so great.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([06:43](#)):

I thank our youth and young adult ministry office for great work in organizing the anniversary celebration.

Tom Shakely ([06:49](#)):

We'll link to a recap of some photos and maybe video from the event.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([06:54](#)):

Yeah. Did you know last night too, Tom, they had a special beer brewed?

Tom Shakely ([06:59](#)):

Oh, is that right?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([06:59](#)):

Yeah, and it was called More Beer, M-O-R-E in honor of St. Thomas More.

Tom Shakely ([07:05](#)):

Okay. Okay.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([07:06](#)):

A special anniversary beer.

Tom Shakely ([07:08](#)):

That's a homegrown home brew.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([07:10](#)):

Yeah.

Tom Shakely ([07:10](#)):

That's really fitting. That's good stuff. Well, all right. Well, we're talking about deepening communion, deepening relationships. Another great way to do that is to liberate ourselves from some of our tendency to look at our screens. On that count, we've got an exciting thing happening. We've done it once before. We're doing it again. It's the Diocesan Day of Unplugging. Bishop, I know in your homily at Ash Wednesday at the cathedral, you talked about your chapel, which was under renovation, and you used that I think really well, to talk about the fact that we're in need of spiritual renovation. The Day of Unplugging might be a unique way to do that. It's Friday, March 28th this year during Lent. Can you speak a little bit about it, why you love it, and how you can participate?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([07:56](#)):

Sure, yeah, definitely. It's one of the things I suggested in the Ash Wednesday homily. We know as we go under the spiritual repairing, which we call conversion, those time-tested disciplines, work, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and I suggested that when we consider fasting, maybe one of the things we should fast from is the constant use of our devices and our screens. I suggested that as an opportunity to do so each day for even just for a few moments to make that fast. "I don't need this right now." The reason we do that isn't just to stop looking at the screen, but to create the space. When we do that space, there's not going to be a void. God will enter into that space. It's necessary to create that space. I love this idea of unplugging on Friday, March 28th, because it's always great to do things together. Let's do this as a diocesan family, let's know that we're not alone, we're doing this together, supporting each other because it's not easy. It's not easy to put down the devices that we have.

Tom Shakely ([09:17](#)):

No, it feels like actually that we must have them, right?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([09:20](#)):

Right.

Tom Shakely ([09:21](#)):

We've come into a place in the world where it's way beyond pagers a generation ago, where maybe you get a message, maybe you run to a phone nearby and try to resolve it. Now it's like you get the most mundane notifications.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([09:35](#)):

Right. Right.

Tom Shakely ([09:36](#)):

It's like there's a sale on something on eBay, do you want to tap into the app?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([09:40](#)):

No.

Tom Shakely ([09:41](#)):

No, I don't even want to see this.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([09:42](#)):

That's exactly right. We too know Tom, that it's addictive.

Tom Shakely ([09:47](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([09:48](#)):

Those people who are appearing on our screens, they know the tools of how to get us not to be able to go away. We have to, I think fasting from this kind of constant use of technologies is, it really practices the virtue of temperance, moderation, and also vigilance. We have to be careful. We have to be very careful of how the space and this constant distraction can take us away from what truly matters.

([10:27](#)):

In fact, in my gospel tweet today, it's about the rich man who, there's Lazarus with all his sores, a man and very much in need and compassion. He was right at the doorstep of the rich man. The rich man didn't see him, or the rich man ignored him. Sometimes we are constantly rushing, hurrying, allowing unnecessary distractions like this come into our lives. What's another danger of that? We miss the Lazarus at our doorstep, the person right in front of us this day. It could be someone very dear to us, a family member, a friend, a co-worker. We can miss that person because we're distracted and we miss the opportunity instead to give a loving and compassionate response to not a thing, but a person who needs us.

Tom Shakely ([11:25](#)):

Yeah, that's exactly right. I think as we think about this unplugging imperative, there's so many things that, if you've been following these kinds of things and concerned about them in your own life, your family's life, we're talking about a day of unplugging right now, but I know many families have considerable, what's something I can do as kind of a long-term solution? One day is a good way to start into it, but some families have things, they'll have like a bin or a box or something and it's like, "Friday night we put our phones there and we don't get them for the rest of the weekend," that kind of thing.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([11:56](#)):

That is exactly right.

Tom Shakely ([11:57](#)):

Or, "We don't use our tablets around each other," those kind of things.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([11:59](#)):

Yeah.

Tom Shakely ([11:59](#)):

You need limits.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([12:00](#)):

You need those practical tools to help you.

Tom Shakely ([12:02](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([12:02](#)):

I'd recommend three things. I would first of all pray, right, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you with how you should spend this time offline. Okay. "Lord, if I'm going to go offline, how do you want me to spend this time? How are you inviting me to enter into your presence, which is very beautiful," and prepare, make up your mind, especially when it's Diocesan Day of Unplugging specifically. That's not to say I'm going to unplug.

Tom Shakely ([12:33](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([12:34](#)):

Specifically, what are you going to do? I've already made up my mind, I'm going to unplug. I like getting updates. I love getting updates on sports, the latest news, even political news or whatever. I'm constantly finding myself checking. If it was major news, I'm sure I somehow would hear about it.

Tom Shakely ([12:57](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([12:57](#)):

I feel this need of, "Okay, what's the latest trade rumor," or what's the latest this, or what's the latest that?

Tom Shakely ([13:04](#)):

Who got injured?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([13:06](#)):

At least on March 28th, I'm not checking it. I'm going to put my phone down. I can't shut it off completely. There's others who may be in that position because if there is an emergency, you need to be contacted, parents I'm sure. We can say, "Well, what am I going to disconnect from?"

Tom Shakely ([13:25](#)):

Just like you're saying, right, yeah, you can go into those settings in your phone and you can say, "Okay, what are the apps I really need?" The phone app. Okay. Messages. Okay. Email may be okay, but the rest maybe you can just turn those off.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([13:37](#)):

Yeah. That's great. That's a great suggestion. I'm asking all who are listening, talk about this with your family members, "What are we going to do together on March the 28th?" Isn't it great, and not with your blood relatives, but also know you're doing this with a diocesan family?

Tom Shakely ([13:53](#)):

Yes. Yes, exactly. We'll link in the show notes to our Diocesan Day of Unplugging page that describes a little bit more about the whole purpose of this and how you can get engaged not just for one day, but maybe for the year to come.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([14:06](#)):

Yeah. I want to say too, Tom, that when we discuss this with you and your team, we want to make sure this is not a gimmick.

Tom Shakely ([14:14](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([14:16](#)):

It's a powerful reminder and we all need reminders in our spiritual lives. Hopefully everyone sees this as the spiritual reminder we need.

Tom Shakely ([14:26](#)):

Well, Bishop, let's dive into a topic that's been sparking conversation. I know at least in certain parts of the Catholic community, this is about the age of confirmation. Here in the Diocese of Arlington, the sacrament is traditionally received during eighth grade, around the ages of 13 or 14. Just recently the Archdiocese of Baltimore made a pretty significant change moving the age of confirmation down to nine years of age. I think the shift has raised some questions for some. I know it's different in different places, but questions like, what's the reasoning behind different dioceses setting different ages, or how does the timing of the sacrament affect a Catholic's faith journey? What are the key considerations for making a decision like this?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([15:09](#)):

I get asked this question a great number of times and letters about it frequently and often. The letter concludes, "How come the bishops just don't agree on a single policy?" That would be a miracle. I've been in the conference of bishops for like 23 years and we've discussed this topic so many times. The thing is, there are options and you can approach this theologically, should it be closer with the sacraments of initiation, sacramentally with formation. As far as the helping those in faith formation, what's the best age where they could really benefit greatly from the reception of the sacrament? You can approach it in all different ways. What happens, and because the church allows for the diocesan bishop to decide, of course in consultation with his priests and directors of religious education. Again, there's never a complete agreement there. When I was an auxiliary bishop in Philadelphia, we were confirming in sixth grade, and then I became bishop in Raleigh and they were confirming in 11th grade.

Tom Shakely ([16:34](#)):

That's a pretty big difference.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([16:35](#)):

Yeah. The first thing I realized I needed a different homily because you can't preach until 11th grade with the way you do in a sixth grader. Then I came here to the Diocese of Arlington, and the practice has been around the ages of 13, 14, usually around eighth grade, maybe ninth grade, which, we'll revisit this question. We should revisit it every once in a while. This is maybe a good reminder to do so.

[\(17:02\)](#):

I like this age because the candidates are mature and they're also usually getting ready for a new stage in their lives, a new transition. They're going from the security of a smaller grade school, many if they're in a Catholic education or faith formation, that kind of security. Now they're going to go out into a bigger world where practicing their faith, living their faith, explaining their faith, defending their faith is going to take a great deal of strength. What better way to prepare them to give them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the graces of the sacrament of confirmation. I'm very pleased. This is the tradition that I inherited coming here, I am very pleased with it, but actually, this topic is something we should always revisit.

Tom Shakely [\(17:52\)](#):

Yeah, yeah. It's good, it's good to talk about, I think especially it is probably more significant these days as Americans have become more mobile, right?

Bishop Michael Burbidge [\(18:00\)](#):

Yeah, exactly.

Tom Shakely [\(18:01\)](#):

That ability of a bishop or the diocese as a whole to come to a decision, well, if you were born and raised in a particular area, then that was life, right?

Bishop Michael Burbidge [\(18:10\)](#):

That's right.

Tom Shakely [\(18:11\)](#):

Here you see the wider range and maybe you ask those questions, but it's the fruit of good thoughtfulness and reflection.

Bishop Michael Burbidge [\(18:19\)](#):

No, that's for sure. There's always pastoral exceptions where someone can request an exception due to circumstances like you just described.

Tom Shakely [\(18:31\)](#):

Well, Bishop, tomorrow you're going to have a very happy, happy moment. On March 21st Friday, Bishop Burbidge will celebrate mass and dedicate a new altar at the St. Francis de Sales Chapel over at Bishop Ireton High School in Alexandria. This is a pretty amazing milestone. I think this is just yet another of the chapel renovations at our high schools that you've overseen?

Bishop Michael Burbidge [\(18:53\)](#):

Right. Yeah, absolutely. This will confirm that all four of our Catholic high schools have a beautiful, sacred, prominent chapel that makes it clear to everyone, this is the center of our school. The way these all four high schools and have built and renovated their chapels, make that very clear here at this school, our faith, the Lord is at the center of all that we have done. Ireton is another example of a beautiful renovation project, that is very visible, very sacred, very inviting. I mean, I'm sure the students will really be drawn just to spend a few times with our Lord. It's the imitation because of the beauty of this chapel

and where it's located, will be a great invitation I think. Dedication of an altar is one of the most beautiful ceremonies in the church because we're preparing the altar for the holy sacrifice, right?

Tom Shakely ([20:09](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([20:09](#)):

It's being prepared for the sacrifice of Christ, celebrating his death and resurrection, the one who promised to be with us always. From that table, we receive him, we receive the Lord himself, the precious body and blood of Jesus. It's really beautiful. I congratulate everyone at Ireton. It's a lot of hard work, any building project.

Tom Shakely ([20:34](#)):

A few years, right?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([20:34](#)):

Yeah. I know that they and the alumni are going to be very proud. Thanks to all those who also supported financially this very, very beautiful initiative.

Tom Shakely ([20:50](#)):

I think there's also something too, if you think back to your days as a student, the power of a few faithful students, making that time to go into the chapel to pray.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([21:01](#)):

Right.

Tom Shakely ([21:03](#)):

Certainly I'm thinking back to my own days where I would see suddenly someone's faith was far more on fire than I was, and kind of realizing that, saying like, "What are they doing in there?"

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([21:14](#)):

Yeah.

Tom Shakely ([21:14](#)):

That becomes itself a little bit of a spiritual draw to say, "Well, hey, I want what they have."

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([21:21](#)):

No, that's true, Tom. That is true. I am very inspired. I love visiting our high schools and grade schools, but our high schools. Whenever I'm there and walk by the chapel, I don't think I ever see it empty.

Tom Shakely ([21:36](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([21:36](#)):

I always think someone's there, student, faculty member. I'm like, "Wow, this is beautiful." It reminds us who we are.

Tom Shakely ([21:45](#)):

Well, Bishop, we continue to journey through this Jubilee year, this Holy Year of Hope. We are going to be featuring very soon some of our first messages from our Holy Year of Hope Hotline, which we'll put in the show notes if you want to leave a message there. We're going to start featuring audio messages that people share, reasons for their hope in everyday life, both the grandest reasons you can imagine, life-changing things, but also just the beautiful things of the everyday that we're hearing from folks. Stay tuned for more on that.

([22:15](#)):

In the meantime, we've got a kind of a unique question from the faithful for you today, Bishop. We've heard from a number of people, so this isn't a particular question that we received, but kind of an amalgamation of very similar questions. Basically the question is this, we're living through a time of uncertainty, especially a lot of people here in the Washington DC, Northern Virginia, Southern Maryland area, who have had connections maybe to government or to non-profits, or to agencies in some way may be affected by things like President Trump's Department of Government Efficiency and cuts that are happening with programs and things. There's a lot of uncertainty, a lot of instability for people, as some of them are having to make big career and life decisions. We're wondering how to navigate. What would you recommend for them?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([23:03](#)):

Yeah. We certainly acknowledge that those struggles are very real. I would probably say all of us are sharing such struggles in one way, one form or another. Come in the form, like you mentioned, job loss, illness, grief, spiritual doubts, being confused with God's plan in my life, "Why is he asking this of me?" It's very real. As you mentioned there, it can be overwhelming. Don't be discouraged if you find yourself asking, "Where is God in all of this?" Please remember, our God is faithful. Our God promised to always be near, never to abandon us. He's faithful to that promise. Even in the midst of chaos, in the midst of doubt and uncertainty, God is present. Even though we may not see the path ahead, we can be assured that if we're united to Christ, it's the path that's going to lead to glory. We get a glimpse of the glory here on Earth, and we wait the fullness of glory in heaven.

([24:21](#)):

That's what the Jubilee Year of Hope is all about. That's our hope. It's a hope rooted in Christ, a hope that never fades or disappoints. Jesus himself speaks the words for Matthew, "I'm with you always," even to the end of the age, he does not abandon us. He is carrying us through them. I guess just a word of encouragement. As I speak these words, encouraging myself and others, do not lose heart. Cling to Christ, he knows your pain. He'll lead you through it. He will give you the strength that you need. Just think about the times, maybe he has done that for you throughout your life. Think back to some times where you thought you would never go through or a cross you had you never thought you'd be able to carry, but you did, because God is faithful to his promise. Look back on those.

([25:13](#)):

Sometimes I think the Lord says to us, "You recall all the times I've helped you, why do you think I won't do this now," and he will. Just yesterday we celebrated a beautiful solemnity of Saint Joseph. He was very doubtful hearing that call that God was given to him. He was fearful, but he ultimately said yes. Turn to the saints, turn to Mary, turn to Joseph. They were overwhelmed with the call. They received

what God was asking of them, what was happening in their lives. They're there to help us, not only through their example, but through their prayer. Let's trust God's promises. We have a God who's loving and faithful.

Tom Shakely ([26:00](#)):

Thank you so much, Bishop. Any final thoughts for us today?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([26:03](#)):

No, thank you. Tom. We covered a number of topics, and I just pray for all of our parishioners, all those listening, that this Lent continues to be a sacred time in your life, that you continue to renew those promises you made on Ash Wednesday and sometimes they need to be renewed. Stay the course, stay on the path. Continue to rely on those time tested principles of prayer and fasting and almsgiving, and continue to open your heart to the Lenten blessings that God wants to bestow upon you. Cling to him, walk humbly with your God.

([26:43](#)):

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