

1 When Pope John Paul celebrated Mass in Manchester in 1982, he wore a vestment embroidered on the back with the following square of 25 letters:

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R O T A S
O P E R A
T E N E T
A R E P O
S A T O R
    
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2 The word “ROTAS” can be read across the top line, down from the top-left, backwards along the bottom line, and upwards from the bottom right-hand corner. The same can be done with the other words.

3 The words are Latin. The five words can be translated: “*Arepo, the sower, guides the wheels carefully!*” It seems a strange message for the Pope to be wearing on his clothing during his visit to Manchester!

4 It is, in fact, a secret Christian sign. Just 4 years before the Pope’s Visit, a vase with these words on it was unearthed in Manchester. The vase dates back to about 180AD, showing that there were Christians living in the area at that early time.

5 What is the Latin for the two words that start the Lord’s prayer (i.e. “Our Father”)?

6 “*Pater noster*” are the words that start the prayer in Latin, which was the main language for people at the time of the Roman Empire.

7 In the 25-letter word square we could cross off the 11 letters of the two words “*Pater noster*”. We are left with 14 letters.

8 Let’s try crossing out the letters of “*Pater noster*” once again. We find that we are short of a letter “N”, and we have two A’s left over, and two O’s. How might we write down “*Pater noster*” twice, using the letter only once?

9 We could write the words “*Pater noster*” across the page and then down the page if we use the single letter “N” for both sets of words. The words now appear in the shape of a cross - itself a Christian symbol.

10 Where are the letters “A” and “O” sometimes seen together?

11 “A” and “O” are two letters sometimes found on candles or vestments or on the front of an altar. In those places they usually appear as Greek capital letters: “alpha” and “omega” - and . They are the first and last letters of the alphabet in Greek, which was another language spoken in the Roman Empire. Christians knew of references in the New Testament to Jesus as “*the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.*” Our four spare letters - two A’s and two O’s, we can place at the ends of each arm of the cross we have made from the words “*Pater noster*”.

12 It was in the summer of 1978, during excavation work in Manchester city centre, that part of a two-handed Roman vase was found, bearing the 25-letter square. The vase was dated to 180-190AD. This means that there were Christians living in northern England only 150 years after the death and Resurrection of Jesus!


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      A
      P
      A
      T
      E
      R
A P A T E R N O S T E R O
      O
      S
      T
      E
      R
      O
    
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13 *Let us pray:*


God our Father,
if I could trace back
through the last two thousand years,
marking out routes
from Jesus himself
and then through people
whose faith has touched others
and so reached me,
I would be astounded
by the individuals I would encounter.
I give thanks, Father,
for all those people
over two thousand years
who have inspired others
and played their part
in passing on
to generation after generation
the living heritage of their faith.
Especially I give thanks
for those who have lived their faith
through difficulties
and hardship and persecution.
I pray, Father, that I may grow
in your faith and love
through good times and bad.
Amen.





 *Can tease out what the Latin might be for "Our Father" by reference to "paternal" grandparents being the parents of one's father.*

 *The words O and A and A and O are found in verse 5 of the Christmas carol. "Unto us is born a Son". "I am the Alpha and the Omega" can be found in Revelation (Apocalypse) 21⁶, and also Rev 1⁴⁻⁸ and 22¹³. The words can be understood to mean that Jesus is present with us at the beginning and throughout and at the end of our day/work/life - he is always with us. The Greek letters Α and Ω may be seen on the Paschal candle used at Easter and seen at baptisms and funerals.*

 *The 25-letter cryptogram had previously been found (and deciphered) in six places around the world. It was found on a wall in Pompeii that was covered by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius on 24 August in 79A.D. It was also found on a tile at Budapest on the River Danube; on a scrap of leather in Saxony, Germany; at Dura Europos, a caravan-city on the River Euphrates on the border of the Roman and Parthian Empires. In 1868 it was discovered scratched on the wall of a 3rd Century Roman house at Cirencester, near Gloucester.*

 *The discovery in Deansgate, Manchester, places Christians there (180-190AD) less than 100 years after St John's Gospel was written (about 95AD). It is also significant that the vase points to the presence of Christians in northern England over 100 years before the death of the country's earliest Christian martyr, St Alban, about 305AD (which, in turn, was nearly 300 years before the arrival of St Augustine in 597).*

 *With it being illegal in the Roman Empire of that time to be a Christian, it could be useful having secret signs such as this which would only be recognisable by other Christians. People who were not Christian would simply see it as an amusing word-square whose words could be read in different directions.*

 Follow me; For to those who love God;
O Lord, all the world

This is an excerpt from the page of this date in
'Praying Each Day of the Year',
a 3-volume book
by Nicholas Hutchinson, FSC.

For details:

<http://www.matthew-james.co.uk/>

Could make use of a search engine
to research this topic further.

This material is part of
the prayer and education website
of the De La Salle Brothers
in Great Britain:
www.prayingeachday.org