

Bulletin 9 - 5th Sunday of Easter 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sister,

This weekend sees the start of our 8th week in Lockdown. I don't know about you, but I'm getting a little tired of all the things I can't now do. Chiefly is not being able to say Mass with you, I have continued to say Mass daily for you and for your intentions, but it's not the same, when I make my Holy Communion I'm aware of you and 1.8 Billion Catholics who are unable to make Communion at this time.

This Sunday evening the Prime Minister is due to address the nation, and to explain the "Road Map" for coming out of lockdown. I was so pleased when I heard that, but then the media, in particular the newspapers, hyped up what they thought would happen, so that people believed them and were in danger of jumping the gun especially on a sunny bank holiday weekend! So my hopes were dashed somewhat we shall just have to wait and see.

Once the road map is published and we all know how the strict measures will be eased we can all plan for the future. This is something that Deacon Michael and I hope to do later on this week. We hope to be able to introduce a phased resumption of public worship and parish life, whilst putting in place practices that we continue to keep us all safe.

Until then Our Holy Father Pope Francis has called for all of us to have a day of fast and prayer this Thursday: "Pope Francis made the following appeal on Wednesday: "As prayer is a universal value, I have accepted the proposal of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity so that on Thursday May 14th believers of all religions unite spiritually in a Day of Prayer and Fasting and Works of Charity, to implore God to help humanity overcome the coronavirus pandemic. Remember: May 14, all believers together, believers of different traditions, to pray, fast, and do works of charity." Please join in this initiative in whatever ways you can.

Thursday 14th May is also the Feast Day of St. Corona, though she is outranked by St. Matthias. St. Corona was martyred in AD177 when she was just 16. She is not the namesake for the virus. The Latin word 'corona' means 'crown', an indication that the young saint had achieved the 'crown of eternal life' because of the steadfastness of her faith. The connection with the coronaviruses, named because of their crown-like structure, is just a coincidence. Over the centuries, St Corona was often prayed to by people seeking her help in times of trouble, be it heavy storms or livestock disease.

It is interesting that the day of fasting and prayer, and St. Corona's feast day should occur when the longed for "light in the end of the tunnel" appears in sight. A prayer to Our Lady written for this time by Pope Francis can be found further down in this Bulletin. Also please find below this week's Gospel reflection written this week by Deacon Michael.

With every Blessing

Fr. John Corbyn

Gospel Reflection

The start of 2020 has been the first time in most adult lives when we have asked, 'What the point is of our being here?' Getting through the day without being bothered by the question of life itself is a challenge.

It can take all our time and energy merely to cope with what each day brings; we are happy to leave questions about life to the philosophers. However, now is the time when we are forced to pause because something has happened to throw our routine into question: sickness and death from an unknown and currently uncontrollable human source. We realise how the plans we thought so important have begun to look insubstantial against the reality of loss. Yes. It's our turn, not some remote part of the world we may not really worry about although I am sure, we will consider third world situations differently in the future. Our whole future and the lives of future generations will never be the same but will rest on what we learn about the precepts of subsidiarity and solidarity from this horrific experience.

Profound loss always makes us question our own direction in life, and in today's Gospel John shows that now is no different from the disciples' time. Jesus is giving his final instructions before leaving his close followers for the last time. He tells them, 'Do not be afraid', because he is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's Kingdom, and that in time he will return to take them with him to that new home. 'This is lesson that applies today an important principal of our faith.'

What Jesus does not do is to give the disciples a theology handbook and answer all their questions about God. That's a tough one as we might wish that he had, but clearly this was not his way. There are no maps into the future with specific roots clearly defined. Jesus simply points to himself and says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.' Then crucially, 'If you know me, you know my Father too'. Just as the disciples who at Jesus's departure were left without pre-prepared answers, we too have to learn to work together to find a way forward to appreciate, acknowledge and embrace our fellow humans so we can face our future together. What is certain is that Jesus is with us and wants our efforts to be successful. To succeed we need to meet Jesus halfway by opening our minds and hearts to God who cannot live in us without love as we cannot live without loving him.

Today's Gospel will not be comfortable reading for everyone as it is usually heard at funeral services. I have heard countless interpretations of John's beautifully written words in Chapter 14, and inevitably a time will come for us all when we realise just how frail are these shrouds of clay we live in and the planet we inhabit are. And that a time will come for us to be born again into a new life, one of eternal happiness in heaven dwelling in that very room Jesus in God has prepared for us.

Today's Gospel is most certainly not exclusively for Catholics. It is certain that Jesus's grace touches the hearts and minds of peoples from all races, religions and nationalities, making them all able to share in his promise of a home in heaven. He says it in today's readings, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'; in doing so Jesus expands God's love, hope and saving grace to the entire world.

Jesus accompanies each of us on our daily journey walking alongside us. He watches over us as the Good Shepherd who leads and sustains us each and every step of the way. The truth about our relationship with God is that it always has the potential to grow, to renew itself, to bring forth new life. A person's religion may become stale, they may stray from the path, but faith is never dead.

We might ask ourselves, when the ban is lifted, 'Will there be anyone in our Churches who still has faith and can see beyond their grief or simply be thankful to God for their healthy existence?' I for one shout at the top of my voice, 'YES!' More will come to Mass than we have ever seen before both physically and in spirit if they are confined in their homes. We will reunite as God's family, for he created us and enabled us to see, enjoy and appreciate truth and beauty, and has given us each a share in his love and life eternal.

Now is the time to focus on mercy, not just in the sense of forgiveness as it means much more than that. When we think of the works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to bury the dead, none of this entails forgiveness. Everyone can receive mercy, in Latin, 'Misericordiae' which means 'The heart going out towards the one in need'. It's about giving your heart - the totality of who you are, of what you feel, of what is good in you every person in need. It might be for those caring for the sick, fighting the virus, dying or bereaved, elderly, lonely or housebound, ALL need our mercy and prayers which really are the most beautiful and divine gift of God. We can each reach out in order to expand this free gift from God and in doing so create a richer dimension for humanity of compassion and love.

Christ talking to his disciples at this, the last supper, knew he would be resurrected. He knew that he would overcome death which would cease to exist. He confirms that we will be reborn to the joy of eternal life in heaven. His words are the words of his Father and it is consoling and abundantly clear that from the very moment of each of our conceptions Jesus in God has prepared a room for us in heaven. What a beautiful and comforting thought.

Some of you may recall my homily regarding the AIDS pandemic in Nigeria and a very special grandmother. Let's revisit this encounter as it perhaps shows us one merciful way forward. Fr Celestine told me of a grandmother in his parish who made a journey of 25 miles on foot to attend Sunday Mass. She had nothing of material means but like the rest of the community had a tremendous unmovable faith in God, plus the eleven grandchildren who accompanied her to Sunday Mass. The children's parents had all been taken by AIDS and Fr Celestine who was concerned at her plight asked her how she was surviving. Her response was at the same time both humbling and joyful. She said, 'I thank God for everything that has happened to me Father, my own children are in heaven at peace with the Lord. And me, why I am so privileged to enjoy the lives of every one of their eleven children as we grow older together.' She was, 'to use Celestine's words', truly joyful in the predicament the Lord had sent her. A lesson to us all? Yes. Now we realise it was not a remote story, 'far removed from our daily existence, but something that is the reality of life today.' Let us all try to maintain her amazing resilience and extraordinary level of faith in everything the Lord sent her seeing God's joy above all.

One important thing we can all participate in is an Act of Spiritual Communion - rather than physical Communion and this takes place during the live streaming of Mass. No matter what your day is like, Jesus can help make it better, or at least more bearable, if you ask him for His help and guidance in prayers such as this one, composed by St. Alphonsus Liguori in the 18th century:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

Thank you to, Fr D McBride for the inspiration.
Deacon Michael

MASS INTENTIONS

Sun 10 th	Easter 5	People of the Parish
Mon 11 th	feria of Easter	Norah Green (RIP)
Tue 12 th	St. John Houghton	Tess Hogan (RIP)
Wed 13 th	St Erconwald	Jennifer Ryan (RIP)
Thu 14 th	St. Matthias	End to Pandemic
Fri 15 th	feria of Easter	Jo Gallagher (INT)
Sat 16 th	feria of Easter	Isabel MacDermott (RIP)
Sun 17 th	Easter 6	People of the Parish

PRAYER OF POPE FRANCIS TO OUR LADY IN THIS TIME OF PANDEMIC

'We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God.' In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our mother, and seek refuge under your protection. Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes toward us amid this pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment. Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of Mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust. Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency, and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health. Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern are trying to help and support everyone. Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus. Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life and may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity.

Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future. Beloved Mother, help us realize that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer. Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course. To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary.
Amen.

