

PARISH LETTER – 17TH MAY 2020

According to recent government statements, it seems possible that places of worship may be allowed to re-open from the beginning of July but only if there continues to be a steady decline in the number of coronavirus infections and a diminishing death rate.

In gradually coming out of the lockdown, Cardinal Vincent Nichols has suggested that the churches first be allowed to open for private prayer and devotions and then, later, for the public celebration of Mass and the other sacraments. If this happens, social distancing will still need to be observed, and care taken to clean surfaces, wash hands etc. This means that, if St. Joseph's and St. John Kemble are to re-open for individual private prayer, **volunteers will be needed** to officiate and ensure that all reasonable precautions are properly observed. I suggest two volunteers for each two-hour slot, opening the church (St. Joseph's) from 10-00 am to 4-00 pm on certain weekdays and on Sundays. (Similar arrangements to be made at St. John Kemble). Depending on the number of volunteers (working in pairs), it will then be possible to announce in advance (through the newsletter/parish website – and word of mouth!) at what times the church will be open for prayer in the week ahead.

It may yet be a few weeks before this can happen but if you (and one other) are willing to volunteer for a two-hour slot, please let Fr. Neil have your names as soon as possible.

In the meantime, and by way of reminder, from a practical and pastoral point of view, Fr. Neil – following guidelines – is restricting his pastoral visits to visiting (by agreement) those who are terminally ill, or seriously ill and other exceptional cases. However, on request and observing the social distancing rules, and at your own chosen risk, Fr. Neil will respond positively to any request for a meeting or pastoral visit should you desire it.

Although we have an "obligation" to worship God – from the very fact that God is God and our Creator – and to do so not just privately but in families, tribes and nations, yet it is much to be hoped that Christians, and Catholics in particular, do not meet together to worship God (and to celebrate Holy Mass) merely to fulfil a reasoned and just obligation (that every creature owes to God) but out of a **desire and longing** to worship God and thus (also) to fulfil the deepest purpose, need and well-being of our own existence. How sad if a Catholic attends Mass only as an obligation without that longing and desire to meet with God where He has promised to meet us – in His Word and in His Sacraments. It is the difference between visiting an elderly parent out of a (proper) sense of obligation, and visiting parents out of a love and longing to see them, to be with them, to offer help and to enjoy their company. Those who remember (and were brought up on) the old "Penny Catechism" will easily recall the opening two articles – 1. "Who made you?". God made me. 2. "Why did God make you?". God made me to know Him, love Him and serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next.

Let us pray that "absence" has indeed made "the heart grow fonder" and that our desire and hunger for God has only but deepened during this long sleep of the Church and that our withdrawal from the public celebration of Mass has intensified our hunger for both Word and Sacrament.

How we can (now) empathise with the words of the Psalmist! –

"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go to God's House!', And now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!" (Psalm 122/123).

"O God, You are my God, for You I long, for You my soul is thirsting. To gaze on You in the Sanctuary! To behold Your Strength and Your Glory!" (Psalm 62/63)

How glad we shall be on that day, to enter once more, "the courts of the Living God"! - *"How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yea faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the Living God" (Psalm 84/85).*

In God's good providence, may our tears be turned into joy (Psalm 126 v 5f) and may the Risen Jesus pour out the Holy Spirit upon us in a New Pentecost. Keep the Faith!

"Renew Your wonders in this our day, as by a New Pentecost. Grant to Your Church that, being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of blessed Peter, she may advance the reign of our Divine Saviour, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Come Holy Spirit, in Your power and might to renew the face of the earth. Amen" (Prayer of Pope Saint John XXX111)