

TO CONTACT THE PARISH/FATHER NEIL

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Sunday 27th December 2020 – The Holy Family

Please see second sheet/page regarding the closure of our two churches (except for funerals) from Christmas Day through January (unless the situation improves) due to the pandemic. Please contact Fr.Neil if you would like to access the church for private prayer or for the Sacrament of Confession. The situation will be kept under review. Please pray for those increasing number of parishioners with the virus or having to self-isolate and those families who have lost loved ones in this pandemic. We continue to pray that through these sufferings and trials the Lord will bring us through to Resurrection and a New Pentecost. (**For online, streamed, Mass** in the Diocese, please see the websites of the Cathedral, Mumbles, Town Hill, Dunvant, Haverfordwest, amongst others).

Sheila Manning (RIP) Please remember Sheila in your prayers who died after a short illness, and her friends and family at this time. Sheila's Funeral Mass will take place here in St.Joseph's on Wednesday 30th December. *Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, And let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace. Amen.*

Laurence Macpherson-Jones (RIP). Please remember Laurence in your prayers and the family at this time. Laurence's Funeral Mass will take place here at St.Joseph's on Thursday 31st December. *Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, And let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.*

Michael O'Hea (RIP) Please remember Mike in your prayers. Funeral arrangements to be announced. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, And let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.

A Coronavirus Prayer. " Lord Jesus Christ, You travelled through towns and villages ' curing every disease and illness'. At Your command, the sick were made well. Come now to our aid, in the midst of this global pandemic, and send down Your blessing and healing upon us and protect our healthcare workers. Bring us through to Resurrection and a New Pentecost. For Thy Name's sake. Amen".

The Parish S.V.P Group/St.Joseph's Community Support Group/Legion of Mary (and others). We are very grateful to all those who have kept in contact by phone and helped out with shopping and in other ways, often behind the scene and unknown to others, since the beginning of the first lockdown in March. **THANK YOU TO YOU ALL! N.B. If you are still self-isolating – this help is still available.**

CORONAVIRUS VACCINES Whereas, previously, the Bishops of England & Wales suggested that Catholics could not conscientiously object to the use of a vaccine derived from aborted fetuses (!) – they have now issued a new statement saying that the use of an abortion-derived Covid vaccine is, instead, a matter of the "prudent judgement of conscience" for Catholics, "**many may in good conscience judge that they will accept such a vaccine, some may in good conscience judge that they will not**". The Bishops have received clarification from the UK Government that some institutions have been using cell lines derived from abortions even though that cell line may extend back over many years. The Government has given assurances that no new foetal tissue is being obtained. The **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** vaccine involves the HEK-293 cell line modified from tissue taken from the kidney of an unborn child in 1972. You may or may not have moral objections to the use of this vaccine and you may or may not have concerns about the safety of this vaccine, **please therefore respect the fact that your neighbour may "in good conscience" have an opinion different to your own** and may choose or not choose to avail themselves of the vaccine. **PLEASE NOTE** It is understood that **the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccines are not derived from foetal material but have a different source " as they are mRNA based vaccines".

Pastoral Visits Please note that Fr.Neil is happy to call if you are continuing to self-isolate at home but would appreciate a visit. However - wearing masks and observing social distancing - this must be at your own risk (!). Except for emergencies, Fr.Neil will not call uninvited during the pandemic. **Please note: At present, the Sacrament of Reconciliation – by arrangement**

Many Thanks to Chris and Babs, (St.Joseph's) and to Bella (St.John Kemble) for the beautiful flower arrangements and to all those who helped decorate the church for Christmas, and also to all our regular church cleaners and helpers to whom we are most grateful for all the faithful, unseen, work going on behind the scenes every week during the year. God bless you all!

Driveway Appeal Many thanks for the further donation to the Parish Funds/Driveway Appeal of £1,000 and & £100. All donations gratefully received. We now have **£3,800** in the Driveway Fund. **Many thanks.**

SUSPENSION OF HOLY MASS

In the early days of the pandemic when travel was banned to countries with an infection rate of 20/100,000 and infection rates in Neath Port Talbot rose to 30-40/100,000, it seemed incredible that some suburbs of Madrid had infection rates of 1,000/100,000! Over the last week the infection rate in Neath Port Talbot has steadily risen from 836/100,000 to 1,008/100,000. Although Mark Drakeford, the First Minister, has allowed that public worship may continue, the Welsh Government has, at the same time, stressed the extreme seriousness of the situation and recommended that no one gathers in groups of more than six and otherwise to stay at home. For this reason, several churches in the Diocese (with the understanding of Archbishop George) chose to suspend the public celebration of Mass from last weekend (20th December) and I have reluctantly come to the same conclusion that although we have, and retain, the freedom to publically celebrate Mass, the health risks are now so serious, that it would be wise and prudent for us to suspend the celebration of Mass at St.Joseph's and St.John Kemble, until there is a significant reduction in the infection rate in Neath Port Talbot, and therefore the public celebration of Mass will be suspended in St.Joseph's and St.John Kemble from after Christmas Day and throughout the month of January (except for funerals) with the hope, and the prayer, that we may be able to resume the celebration of Mass on the weekend of the 6th/7th February, ready to enter into the Season of Lent on Ash Wednesday (17th February). It was in Lent of this year that we first went into lockdown and I think that none of us then imagined that nearly a year later, far from the situation being very much better, the situation is very much worse, although we have had the good news that large scale vaccination programmes may soon help us to substantially reduce the infection rate of the virus, even if we may yet have to accept that the coronavirus may continue to be a part of our national life and consciousness until well into 2021 and probably into the following year(s) as well.

The prevalence of disease (plague) and death is manifestly an opportunity to bring ourselves before God and to re-examine our priorities and our values. Life is slipping away! Every day the sands of time are slipping through our fingers and the time to amend our lives, the time for repentance and conversion, grows shorter. We remember the words of the Psalmist, " teach me to number my days, that we may get wisdom of heart " (Psalm 90 v 12). May we get wisdom through this pandemic! – and pray that by means of this "scourging" the Holy Spirit will refine us as through fire, remake us and re-mould us, as clay made malleable in the hands of the Master Potter and Craftsman for His praise and glory (Is.45 v 9; Romans 9 v 20f). How sad it would be if we were to emerge from this pandemic unchanged, boastful of our own cleverness in defeating the virus (until the next one), instead of humbling ourselves in contrition beneath the power of nature and the hand of God.

I propose therefore that the month of January should be a special time of prayer for us – a time of "retreat" and recollection. On Divine Mercy Sunday I blessed our two parishes of Neath and Glynneath with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament from the steps of St.Joseph's (and for many months, by God's grace we were little touched by the pandemic) and I propose to do the same this Sunday, the Feast of the Holy Family at 3 o'clock ("Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for us") and, once again; I invite you to join me in your homes (at 3p.m.) in praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our two parishes in healing and a new Pentecost, by praying the Rosary (the third of the Glorious Mysteries – The Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost – Jesus "Who baptises the Church in the Holy Spirit"), or the Divine Mercy Prayers (" For the sake of His Sorrowful Passion have mercy on us and on the whole world"), or other prayers, and to continue through the month of January to pray that the pandemic may have the positive effects in our lives for which God precisely allows us, from time to time, to experience breaking and melting and re-moulding so that, being made more malleable, He may remake us as instruments more finely tuned to His Glory, that we may come to know " what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the Saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe, according to the working of His great might which He accomplished in Christ when He raised Him from the dead – and made Him the Head over all things, for the Church, which is His Body, the Fullness of Him Who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1 v 17 – 23).

With my prayers that God may grant us a holy time of prayer, of authentic repentance, of genuine conversion and of new life in the Holy Spirit in the days ahead as we continue to pray for Resurrection and a New Pentecost in the life of the Church. Come, Holy Spirit! Come, Lord Jesus! (Fr.Neil - Christmas Day 2020)