

## TO CONTACT THE PARISH/FATHER NEIL

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Parish Website – [www.catholicchurchneath.org.uk](http://www.catholicchurchneath.org.uk)

### THE RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES IN WALES

Dear Friends,

The Archbishop has announced that, over the next few weeks, here in Wales, we can begin to carefully prepare for the re-opening of our churches for the public celebration of Mass. This presents us with considerable challenges which will have to be met before we can qualify for the necessary Health & Safety Certificate which will allow us to re-open St. Joseph's and St. John Kemble. Both churches will have to be properly cordoned, seating places marked, masks made available ( gloves for readers ), alcohol-based sanitising gel, entrance/exits marked etc. Stewards must be available to direct worshippers, and the church must be thoroughly cleaned before/after Mass. All this requires a **large team** of volunteers (i) to prepare the church (ii) to steward (iii) to clean - and it would be nice to be overwhelmed (!) with volunteers, so that the responsibility does not fall on just a few members of the congregation. So please phone the presbytery (i) to volunteer (ii) to indicate at what Mass you will be present (iii) and in what ways you are willing to help. THANK YOU!

It will be important when we re-open for Mass that, sensitively observing all the necessary regulations, the church is made to feel as welcoming and prayerful as possible so that our thoughts are concentrated on the celebration of Mass rather than on all the tapes, signs and markings around us! Understandably, there will be many who feel reluctant to begin attending Mass – out of concern for themselves and concern for others – **and no one should come to church if you may be showing signs of the virus**. The obligation to attend Mass remains suspended and no one is under any pressure to attend Mass until you feel comfortable to do so. You must continue to take seriously the health risks we all still face whilst the coronavirus is still present in the community. In the first instance, all celebrations of Mass will be said Masses ( no hymns ), no Offertory, no Sharing of the Peace – and further guidelines to follow. Churches in the Diocese will re-open on different dates, on different weeks, depending on the satisfactory completion of all the necessary precautions and receiving the required Health & Safety Certificate.

I anticipate that we shall re-open for the celebration of Mass on the weekend of the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> August, allowing us time to make all the necessary arrangements and to finish off the painting/refurbishment of the entrance/foyer ( at St. Joseph's ). **PLEASE KEEP OUR SITUATION IN YOUR PRAYERS** as we look forward, with great joy, to meeting one another again ( observing social distance! ) as we gather as God's People/ the Body of Christ in the celebration of Holy Mass.

**The St. Joseph's Community Support Group.** If you need help with shopping, collecting prescriptions etc please contact Fr. Neil or Siobhan (07811931971) **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!** We hope to continue to keep in contact by post with all parishioners over seventy, and to send out a last posting to all parishioners in the next two weeks with full detail/guidance regarding the re-opening of St. Joseph's and St. John Kemble. Otherwise, the Newsletter will continue to appear ( God willing and health permitting ) on the Parish Website each week. If you are aware of other parishioners who may not otherwise be aware of the help being offered by the St. Joseph's Support Group, please pass this information on to them. **MANY THANKS** to all our volunteers for helping those in need at this difficult and challenging time. Thank you to Siobhan for co-ordinating the Community Support Group, and to our SVP Group and Legion of Mary for keeping in contact with parishioners by phone

**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 Neath Food Bank** – has a request for specific food items, which can be left at Tesco Neath Abbey ( the collection point is by the café ) especially they need tinned fruit 400g, teabags – 80s, dried pasta 500gms, UHT milk 1L, breakfast cereals but NOT beans or sugar! Many thanks for your help and generosity.

**Eira Hanson (RIP)** Please remember Eira in your prayers ( and the family ). Eira's Funeral Service takes place at Margam Crematorium next Wednesday at 10-30 a.m. *Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace.*

**Parish Collections.** **MANY THANKS** to all who have continued to donate to the Church over recent weeks through cash gifts, cheques, parish envelopes and standing orders with the bank. **WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL.** For those who have asked – for donations and Standing Orders – the details of our (St. Joseph's ) bank account are – Branch Code 54-10-19 – Account Number 01520296 – ( Diocese of Menevia Neath Parish ) Nat West, 35 Green Street, Neath, SA11 1DB.

## The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020 – St. Matthew 13 v 1 – 23

In our Gospel today St. Matthew tells us that Jesus taught the crowd by telling them many things in parables. St. Matthew, Mark and Luke make clear that Jesus taught the crowd almost exclusively through the use of analogy in the form of parables, using the everyday events of domestic and agricultural life to illustrate the truths which apply in the spiritual life. St. Matthew states that, "indeed, He said nothing to them without a parable" (13 v 34). For St. Matthew this is further evidence that the Life and Teaching of Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophesy – ( as we have already seen, this is a significant theme and characteristic of St. Matthew's understanding of Jesus throughout his Gospel ) – " This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, ' I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter words which have been hidden since the foundation of the world'. " ( 13 v 34/35; Psalm 78 v 2 ).

In private, however, Jesus taught the disciples the meaning of the parables – " but privately, to His own disciples, He explained everything " ( St. Mark 4 v 34 ). The Gospels contain only a few of these private interpretations given to the disciples by Jesus, otherwise ( like the crowd ) we must pray for discernment in seeking to understand the central point of each parable. It seems then that the parables, like the Person of Jesus Himself, both reveal truth and veil the truth ( " veiled in Flesh, the Godhead see" ) so that to understand what Jesus is saying, and to understand Jesus Himself, requires from us a willingness to understand ( a desire to understand, an openness to responding appropriately to what we understand ) so that in responding to what we *do* understand ( what is " revealed" to us ) we may go deeper in our understanding of Jesus. For those who do not have this thirst and hunger, they " shall indeed hear but never understand " which, again, St. Matthew sees as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophesy ( 13 v 14; Isaiah 6 v 9-10 ).

How is it that the scribes and the pharisees ( and others ) did not respond to the parables of Jesus, whereas "tax-collectors and sinners" did respond? The answer is in today's Parable of the Sower. The same seed ( the same Teaching of Jesus ) is generously scattered over different types of soil, to those in different circumstances, different characters with different character flaws – and our character flaws affect our response. Those who look upon their lives and see failings and lost opportunities, imperfections and brokenness are turning over the soil, exposing what was hidden to the light, and so are open to receiving ( and longing for ) new life, the life of grace; others however refuse to acknowledge their failings, refuse to confess, and thus they harden their hearts ( the soil of their lives ) with self-righteousness and self-importance so that the Word of God is not able to penetrate their hearts, unable to cut " like a two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit" (Hebrews 4 v 12 ), unable to plough and furrow the ground, unable to break up the ground – no prayer to, "break me, melt me, mould me, fill me! Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me!"

In this Year of God's Word/the Year of the God Who Speaks, this parable addresses itself to us with particular force and resonance. Are we open to receiving God's Word? Or have we hardened ourselves and made ourselves immune to the "same old story"? - Have we become over-familiar with Holy things? Over familiar with the beauty of the world which *speaks to us* of God's grace and proclaim His glory. ( We ask God also to speak to us through His *creation* - in this Year of the God Who Speaks - for, " the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaim His handiwork" Psalm 19 v 1 ). In our pilgrimage through life, do we look upon the provision of divine grace as, "nothing at all but this same manna" ( Numbers 11 v 6 )?

As we reflect on this Parable of the Sower, let us pray for broken soil, receptive to God's Word, remembering that, "*a broken, contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise*" ( Psalm 51 v 17 ), "*the Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit*" ( Psalm 34 v 18 ), "*He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick*" (St. Matthew 12 v 20; Isaiah 42 v 3 ). As ( God willing ) our churches will soon re-open for the public celebration of Mass, may we return with a hunger and longing to meet Jesus in Word and Sacrament, to meet Him, once again, in our fellow believers in the Body of Christ, the Church, and may the "famine" that we have endured ( through this lockdown ) awaken within us a greater love, a deeper longing to "know Him and the power of His Resurrection" ( Phil. 3 v 10 ) so that receiving the Word of God in furrowed soil, we may hear that word and understand it ( v 23 ) and ( watered by showers of heavenly blessings in a new Pentecost ) we may yield a spiritual harvest ( 13 v 23 ) in the months ahead. "Speak Lord! for Thy servant heareth" ( 1 Samuel 3 v 9 ) Lord, send down Your Light and Your Truth! (Psalm 42 v 3 ). Come, Holy Spirit! Renew the face of the earth!