

TO CONTACT THE PARISH/FATHER NEIL

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THE RE-OPENING OF ST.JOSEPH'S AND ST.JOHN KEMBLE

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 1st/2nd 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.

Please note – as of today (18th) we are still looking for further volunteers to help steward at Mass and to help clean the church (which must be done after each celebration of Mass). Please phone the presbytery if you are able to help. Thank you.

Parish Letter – following the previous series of letters/homilies which have been sent out to all those who are on the new (data protected) parish register, a closing letter will be sent out in the next ten days with full details of the necessary precautions to be observed when attending the celebration of Mass from the 1st/2nd August. No doubt it will all feel rather strange to begin with but, hopefully, we shall fall into the new way of doing things whilst looking forward to the day when all these (rather intrusive) precautions can be finished with. Please pray that we may offer a worthy celebration of Holy Mass within these necessary restrictions.

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!** . 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.

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 Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 19th July 2020 – St. Matthew 13 v 24 – 43

In our Gospel today, Jesus continues to teach the crowds by means of parables. The central theme of the parables of Jesus is that of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God has broken into the world through the Person and the Ministry of Jesus – “if I by the finger of God cast out devils then the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (St. Matthew 12 v 28) – and the parables suggest to us (if we have “ears to hear”) the nature of the Kingdom of God and how we are to recognise (by their behaviour) those who are members of that Kingdom.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus suggests that there is a “hiddenness” to the Kingdom of God. The Word of God is like a seed, and that seed may not at first be apparent but as it grows, nourished by the grace of God and our obedience to that grace, so it begins to flourish and becomes more apparent until (in the lives of the saints) it can be said, “ it is no longer I who live but Christ Who lives in me” (Galatians 2 v 20). Our Blessed Lady is so conformed to the life of Christ her Son that she reflects and magnifies only the glory and the radiance of her Divine Son – “my soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour” (St. Luke 1 v 46).

However, for all the saints, “we feebly struggle, they in glory shine”, and it may not be clear (and we are not to judge) who is in “a state of grace” and who is not; who is progressing in grace and who is falling back, and we must resist the temptation (often felt to be a “righteous zeal”) to “weed out the darnel” (v28), a prerogative (that Jesus makes clear in this parable) which belongs to God alone, and Who will exercise that judgement on the Last Day, when our expectations may be overthrown because it is not those who say “ ‘Lord, Lord’ who shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven but those who do the will of my Father in heaven” (St. Matthew 7 v 21), and “men will come from east and west and from north and south and sit at table in the Kingdom of God and you yourselves turned out” (St. Luke 13 v 28f). There are those outside of the Church who will be brought in and those within the Church who will say, “ ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name – and do mighty works in your name’ and then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me you evildoers’ ” (7 v 23/24). St. John says, of the antichrists who precede the coming of the Antichrist, “they went out from us but they were not of us, for if they had been of us they would have continued with us” (1 John 2 v 19).

Though we are saved by faith, love is greater than faith (1 Cor. 13 v 13), for faith is the means whereby we access that which is greater than faith, which is love itself. Therefore it is those who love who “are born of God and know God” (1 John 4 v 7) thus manifesting a latent, if not explicit, faith whereas “ if a man says he has faith but has not works – can his faith save him?” (James 2 v 14), so that even “Rachel the harlot” was justified by her works (2 v 25) which was the evidence of a faith/obedience which (presumably) was not explicit.

So we must not hasten to pass judgement on one another (“there, but for the grace of God, go I”) whilst acknowledging that there will indeed be a time of judgement, in which God “has given all judgement to the Son” (St. John 5 v22), “and has given Him authority to execute judgement because He is the Son of Man” (v 27) This is the “harvesting” to which Jesus refers in our Gospel today (13 v 41), therefore the writer to the Hebrews cautions us, “take care, lest there be in any of you an unbelieving spirit leading you to fall away from the living God”(Hebrews 3 v 12), “for we share in Christ if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end” (v 14). There must be no presumption. “Therefore while the promise of entering His rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it” (4 v 1). In the race that is set before us, “you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised” (10 v 36). Even St. Paul admits that he himself might finally be disqualified if he fails to exercise the necessary self-control which every athlete must exercise if he hopes to cross the finishing line (1 Cor. 9 v 24 – 27). “For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of God. So each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14 v 10 – 12). Jesus knows who belongs to Him both within the Church and outside of the Church – “therefore, let no one pass judgement on another but rather decide never to be a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another” (v 13).

When we see another has fallen our instinct should be to help them up because when we ourselves fall, do we find it helpful to be condemned by others? We know we are fallen and, if we have disappointed others, much more have we disappointed ourselves. How wonderful, when we have fallen, to have a hand to help us up. How grateful we are and that sense of thanksgiving is part of our transformation and restoration. “ Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and Knows God” (1 John 4 v 7). May God grant to us this compassionate love and concern for each other! Come Holy Spirit!