

THE CORONAVIRUS

The Suspension of ALL Parish Masses

Just two weeks ago I suggested that, because of the Coronavirus outbreak, our celebrations of Holy Week and Easter would have to be greatly simplified. As you will by now already be aware, because of the deteriorating situation and deepening public health concerns, the Bishops of England and Wales have announced that all public celebrations of Mass in England and Wales will be suspended from Friday 20th March.

Thus **ALL PARISH MASSES ARE SUSPENDED** until further notice. However the church will be open for private prayer and devotions from 10 – 12 on Sunday morning and arrangements will be made for St. Joseph's to be open at other times during the week for private prayer and for the Sacrament of Confession – further details will follow. Priests will continue the private celebration of Mass, which, as always, is an Offering on behalf of the whole Church, and will be offered in the coming days especially for the alleviation of the present pandemic.

Holy Week and Easter services from St. Peter's in Rome, will be available via the internet, and Sunday Masses will be streamed live from a number of Catholic Churches from this weekend.

St. Joseph's Community Support Group – on What's app.

We are hoping to quickly establish a large group of volunteers – and in Glynneath – to be members of this Community Support Group to offer help to those who are self-isolated.

If you are willing to be a member of this Support Group please send your mobile phone number – for What's app – to Siobhan Fitchett on 07811931971. Siobhan has kindly agreed to co-ordinate the Support Group to match up volunteers to those who need help. If you need help with shopping, collecting prescriptions etc, please contact Siobhan or Fr. Neil on 01639 643323. Also please continue your contacts with the SVP and the Legion of Mary who will also continue to offer help, as far as possible, as well as through the Parish Support Group.

Fr. Neil will also contact all those, aged 70 and older, who completed the Parish Registration Data Protection Forms last year to advise them of this Parish Community Support Group.

If you are aware of other parishioners in need of help who may not otherwise be aware of the help being offered by the St. Joseph's Community Support Group, please pass on this information to them.

Last Rites

Priests – whilst they continue to show no symptoms of the Coronavirus – will be able to administer the Last Rites to those who are seriously ill but otherwise to visit only those who are seriously ill – by agreement / request – to enable the ministry of the parish priest to continue for the maximum period of time until contracting the coronavirus, when he also will have to self-isolate from others. For this reason, general pastoral visiting and taking the Blessed Sacrament to the Sick and Housebound will also be suspended so as to reduce the possibility of passing on the coronavirus.

It may happen that priests will be forbidden, by law, from accessing certain hospital wards during this pandemic, therefore you may wish to make arrangements for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation whilst you are able to do so.

The Parish Hall The Parish Hall will remain closed until further notice.

The Sunday Collection

Please remember the parish finances – standing orders, direct debits and other bills will still have to be paid during the course of the pandemic.

A Final Reflection

No doubt we are living through sombre and sobering times. These times have fallen upon us in the Season of Lent – a time of repentance, a time of conversion, a time of renewal. We must pray that this present pestilence will be, by God's grace, a great encouragement to repentance.

Of course we know of great plagues in previous centuries, and we know that in the Last Days of the Earth there will also be great plagues, and famines and earthquakes – perhaps we are in those days now, or at least at the beginning of those days. Who knows? The Apostles asked Jesus, 'when will these things take place?', and Jesus replied, 'Of that day and of that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son – but only the Father. Therefore take heed, watch and pray! – for you do not know when the time will come.'

But we may safely say that every famine anticipates those famines of the Last Day, and every earthquake anticipates those great earthquakes of the Last Day, and every pestilence anticipates those plagues of the Last Day – and they prepare us, and warn us, and encourage us, to begin that repentance now. Death may take us suddenly – even in our everyday experience of life. How gracious of God, therefore, in this present pestilence, to help us toward that repentance.

Over the past few years we have been praying in St. Joseph's and in St. John Kemble for the gift of repentance, for the grace of repentance – and for a New Pentecost. If the present pestilence leads us to a deeper repentance, a deeper reflection on life, a deeper longing for spiritual realities, then we must pray that this purging of the nation and of the world, may also be a purging of the Church – a return to basics, the importance of a clean conscience before God, the importance of Confession, the importance of charity and almsgiving.

We are passing away. We are leaving this world. We are passing through. Let us pray that this present pestilence restores us to a proper perspective of life – restores us to a proper sense of values, so that if death should come for us, we are ready. No! Not, 'if' death comes to us but 'when' death comes for us, we shall be ready – or, at least, in the habit of making ourselves ready, through a daily surrender, a daily repentance, a daily consecration. Some of us may not survive this pandemic. That is a sobering thought – and ought not to be dismissed. Thankfully, children and young people seem to be largely immune from the more serious consequences of the pandemic. For this we must thank God. But we who are older must be sober as is appropriate to maturing years. We are not children. We have already known the loss of loved ones. We know the pattern of life. It's decline – and often it's sudden end. So, in the days ahead, let us be examples of repentance, examples of faith – and if these days ahead should be the beginning of the end of days, then by our example may we be witnesses to the world that we are not looking to the grave – but to the skies because, says Jesus, 'when you see these things begin to take place – look up and raise your heads! because your Redemption is drawing near!' (Luke 21 v 28).

May God grant to us, in this Season of Lent a deep repentance, and may the coming Kingdom of God – when Christ appears in glory – break upon us now in a New Pentecost and a pandemic of grace and mercy flowing in torrents of Divine Mercy from the Sacred Heart of Jesus to Whom be glory now and forever. Amen!