



Life at Holy Ghost during this time of the Coronavirus outbreak

Here we outline some of the changes forced on all of us by the present situation. It is our hope to update you regularly, on a week by week basis, so that we can maintain some form of contact during this difficult period.

1. Suspension of Public Worship

Firstly, by decree of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, all public worship is suspended as of this Friday, 20 March. This means there will be no public Masses at Holy Ghost (or any other church) on Sundays or weekdays. It is, however, our intention to keep the church open for private prayer, and, hopefully, to maintain our usual period of Eucharistic Adoration on Fridays. This will depend on enough people signing up to pray before the Blessed Sacrament during the day. Since those over 70 are now asked to remain at home and self-isolate, we very much encourage younger members of the parish to sign up for Eucharistic Adoration if they can! It is our intention that Adoration will take place in the main church (not the Lady Chapel) to allow proper space for 'social distancing'.

Meanwhile, Fr Richard and Fr Tom will continue to say Mass privately and will be praying for all of you (if you wish, you can still request a Mass to be said for your intentions – but, please note, these Masses will be said without a congregation for the foreseeable future).

Fr Richard will be saying his Mass in the Presbytery, as he is now self-isolating, since he has one of those underlying health conditions for which this is recommended. Under current guidance, he is still allowed out for occasional walks, for exercise. If you see him out and about, do give him a friendly wave – but please don't be offended if he doesn't stop to talk!

The Sacrament of Confession will remain available on Saturdays, 10.30 am – 11.00 am and Fr Frank will also hear Confessions, as usual, on Thursday, 2.30 pm – 4.30 pm.

2. Maintaining our spiritual life

Although we may not have our usual access to Mass at this time, it is important to maintain our spiritual life as best we can. We are hoping it may be possible to 'live stream' Masses from Holy Ghost and we will let you know right away if this becomes a reality. There are also other places you can watch live celebrations of the Mass – for some examples see www.churchservices.tv

We should also make 'Spiritual Communions' regularly, now that we cannot receive the Eucharist sacramentally. The background of this devotion was given in our last email. Here is a simple Act of Spiritual Communion:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

Likewise, if we cannot easily get to Confession, we should make an Examination of Conscience every day, and an Act of Contrition before going to bed (this is an excellent practice at all times). Here is a simple Act of Contrition:

Oh my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace, I will not sin again. Amen.

Another thing we would like to recommend is praying the Rosary together as a family. This might seem idealistic – especially with fractious children and frayed nerves! But it can be done with realism. It is not necessary for the whole family to pray the whole Rosary every time (although this would be wonderful) – perhaps just two members of the family pray only one decade together? Every little counts. An old saying has it: ‘The family that prays together stays together’ – this will be true, in very many ways, during the present difficult period.

3. Practical Help

We have a group of volunteers that can offer help with shopping and other practical needs, or if you just need someone to talk to during this difficult time of isolation. If you need help (or know of someone who does) – or if you could offer help to others - please do not hesitate to call Claudia Salazar on 07794044727 or email her at claudiasalazar@nhs.net

4. Pastoral Letter

Our Archbishop, John Wilson, is keen for us to know that we remain in his thoughts and prayers during these days.

5. Financial support

While the human cost of this pandemic is paramount, we know it will also have an enormous economic impact. Many of you will have financial worries, and some people will endure real hardship as a result of the current crisis. Obviously, it will also be difficult for the parish – with no Sunday Mass, there will be no regular collection coming in, but our costs remain (such as staff salaries and utility bills). At this time, therefore, we are particularly grateful to those who have taken out standing orders – we hope you will be able to maintain them and so help tide us over this difficult period. If you do not have a standing order, but would consider taking one out at this time, please email the Parish Office (balham@rcaos.org.uk), and we can send you a standing order form.

6. Final thoughts

These are strange, difficult and sometimes frightening times for all of us. It is made all the harder when we are deprived of the opportunity to attend Sunday Mass and gather as a community. However, we must all do our best to continue to grow in faith, hope and love. We are now in the season of Lent, and will soon celebrate Holy Week. Then, we will remember how truly terrible events (the Passion and Death of Jesus) led eventually to Resurrection and New Life. We must trust that, with God’s help, a better future can soon be achieved for all of us. In the meantime, let us support on another with our prayers.

With our blessing and best wishes,

Fr Richard and Fr Tom