



Dear parishioners,

Once again, we offer some spiritual and practical points for the present time.

Queen of Heaven – Health of the Sick

During the Easter Season, it is traditional to sing the Easter antiphon to Our Lady, entitled ‘Regina Caeli’ (‘Queen of Heaven’). The words are as follows:

Regina caeli, laetare, alleluia.

Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia.

Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia.

Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia.

Which in English reads as:

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia.

Has risen, as he said, alleluia.

Pray for us to God, alleluia.

This song – the ‘Regina Caeli’ is very old, no one knows for sure how old. One tradition associates it with St Gregory the Great, who was Pope from 590 till 604. The story goes that during St Gregory’s pontificate, Rome was troubled by the plague, as it often was in the Middle Ages. The Pope responded by ordering a penitential procession to go through the streets of Rome, carrying an image of Our Lady (perhaps the image known as ‘Salus Populi Romani’ - ‘Health of the Roman People’ - which is said to have been brought to Rome from Constantinople during St Gregory’s reign. This is one of the most beloved icons in Rome – and was the one used at Pope Francis’ recent vigil, held in a deserted and rain-swept St Peter’s Square). The procession was led by St Gregory himself, and wound its way through the streets of the City, the people singing hymns and litanies, asking Our Lady to intercede for them, and bring the plague to an end. At last, as the procession was crossing the Tiber, they heard angelic voices, singing the praises of Our Lady, using the first three lines of the ‘Regina Caeli’. The Pope promptly added the fourth line (‘Pray for us to God...’), and from that time the plague ceased.

The picture above is a medieval illustration of the scene – the Pope, leading the procession, looks up to heaven, where he hears the angels singing. Below is another image of Our Lady, ‘Queen of Heaven’, by the Renaissance artist, Sandro Botticelli.

Its very likely that the story given above is no more than a pious legend. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that Our Lady has been invoked as a protector and intercessor since the earliest times of our faith – and we should ask her to help and pray for us in the current crisis we are living through.

Nowadays (quite rightly) we do not immediately see plague or pestilence as punishment from God, as people were wont to do in earlier times. Nevertheless, the pandemic affecting us all does have a spiritual dimension – it forces us to reassess our own priorities in life, to acknowledge our vulnerability, and our dependence upon God. As Christians, the present time is a reminder of our duty to pray – not just for ourselves and our loved ones, but for all those who are sick, or have died – for those anxious or mourning – for those caring for the sick, or working to provide us with food, and the other necessities of life. We ought to pray too for our government and leaders, who have the unenviable task of making the right decisions to safeguard the country and gradually lead us back to normality. As we pray, we should certainly invoke the aid of Our Lady, as so many generations of Christians have done before us, knowing her to be – as her titles proclaim her – ‘comforter of the afflicted’ and ‘health of the sick’.

Hospital chaplaincy

Archbishop John Wilson has asked us to remind our parishioners that Catholic chaplains continue their ministry at all the major hospitals, including St George’s in Tooting. The chaplains can visit the sick and administer the Sacrament of Anointing to those in need of it – **including those who are sick from the coronavirus**. So, if you do know of people who are in hospital and need to see a priest, please do let us know. You can just contact Fr Richard or Fr Tom (by phone or email) and we can pass on your message to the chaplains – this is the best way of ensuring that those who need a priest do get to see one. Please pray for our chaplains, who continue their ministry in these difficult and dangerous circumstances.

Live-stream Masses and ‘JustGiving’ account

In response to questions received – there is daily Mass at Holy Ghost, Monday to Friday at 9.30 am, Saturday 10.00 am and on Sundays at 11.00 am and 6.00 pm. These Masses are all live-streamed on our YouTube channel (and are also available for a few days afterwards). To watch them, just go to the parish website, and follow the link at the top of the homepage – it will just take you a couple of clicks to get to Mass!

If you would like to continue your financial support of the parish – for which we are truly grateful – this can also be done simply, using our new ‘JustGiving’ account. Again, there is a link on the homepage of the parish website (scroll to the bottom of the page). Your contributions help us in continuing to meet our costs during the present crisis.

All our parishioners are remembered at daily Mass, and in our prayers. Please pray for us too.

Best wishes,

Fr Richard and Fr Tom

