



Dear Parishioners,

Once again, we send you this 'newsletter' as a way of communicating while we cannot meet face to face.

1. Holy Week.

This Sunday is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. Normally, our Masses this weekend would begin with the joyful blessing and procession of palms. This year, we will be deprived of that lovely ceremony. Likewise, we cannot celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday, kiss the Cross on Good Friday or gather round the Easter Fire on the evening of Holy Saturday. It will indeed be a Holy Week unlike any of those we have known before. At the same time, in these difficult days, it may be that we can experience the drama of Holy Week – the contrasts between good and evil, light and darkness – in a new and deeper way.

When we read the Gospel accounts of Holy Week, it is noticeable how 'fear' is a recurring theme. On Maundy Thursday, when Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, His disciples all run away, out of fear. The following day, Good Friday, St Peter denies the Lord three times, again out of fear. Even Christ Himself, in the Agony in the Garden, experiences something of this terrible dread, when He is confronted by the horrible reality of sin, and realises that He can only overcome it by sacrificing His own life on the Cross.

But while fear is indeed a powerful factor in Holy Week, the good news is that Christ's Resurrection casts out fear and replaces it with hope. When the women come to Jesus' tomb, very early on Easter Sunday, they are met by angels. 'Do not be afraid', they are told – and they are entrusted with the message that Jesus has risen, and that the power of sin and death has been broken. The message slowly spreads – to St Peter and St John, to the eleven Apostles, and wider, to the whole community of disciples. And, as it spreads, the news of the Resurrection brings joy, strengthens faith and gives the believers new meaning and purpose.

We live in strange and frightening days. The virus now troubling the world is frightening in part because it cannot be seen – though its consequences are very real. We are naturally anxious for family and loved ones – especially since often we cannot be physically close to them. For many, there are financial worries as a result of this emergency, as well as the concerns about health and life.

In this situation, let us try to entrust our lives, with faith, to Jesus. He shared our human nature, knows our human fears. On Good Friday, He suffered, died and was buried. But, on the third day, Easter Sunday, He rose again from the dead – and since that time, life has never been the same again.

In Jesus' passion, death and Resurrection, we have the final and definitive proof of God's love for us – an infinite and unconditional love which nothing has the power to overcome – not even death itself. That love is at the heart of all we believe and are as Christians – and that love can sustain and support us through the difficult days we are living in.

This year, we cannot celebrate the ceremonies of Holy Week together as a community – but these ceremonies (in a simpler form) will still be celebrated. We hope many of you will be able to watch them as they are live streamed from Holy Ghost. Even more importantly, unite yourself to these ceremonies in your heart and soul, and entrust yourself to Christ, our crucified and risen Saviour. Amidst all the challenges and fears of this time, we know that He, certainly, will never let us down.

2. Pope Francis' Prayer to Our Lady, 'Health of the Sick'

Many of you will have watched the very moving service from St Peter's Square last Friday, when Pope Francis prayed for all those effected by the pandemic, and gave the world the blessing 'urbi et orbi'. The Pope has also written this prayer, which it would be good for all of us to pray regularly at this time:

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith. You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need. We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us: He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

