



Dear parishioners,

In our regular email, this week we reflect on the upcoming feasts of the liturgical year, and we have some requests for your help as well.

The Ascension of the Lord

This coming Thursday, 21st May, is the Solemnity of the Ascension. Forty days after Easter, Jesus returns to His heavenly Father – meanwhile, the Church below begins nine days of prayer (a ‘novena’) to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The painting I have chosen to illustrate the Ascension is by the artist Benvenuto Tisi (known as ‘Garofalo’), who worked in Ferrara in northern Italy in the 16th Century. It is a beautiful painting – however, I don’t feel that any artist (including Garafalo) has quite done justice to this event. This is not, I think, from any lack of talent as much as the inherent difficulties of depicting the Ascension. After all, this event involves Jesus entry *into heaven*, and heaven is a place (or better, a state of being) of which we on earth necessarily have no experience. Therefore, it is very hard for artists to depict it successfully (to my own mind, the artist who gives the best depiction of what heaven might be like is Fra Angelico – but he is a beatified saint himself, so he has a distinct advantage...). The best we can say of heaven is that it will surpass our greatest hopes – in the beautiful words of St Paul, *‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived - these things God has prepared for those who love him’* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

However, while we might find it difficult to imagine heaven, we should be in no doubt that heaven is indeed our true homeland, the place where we are called to be. When Jesus returns to His Father, and enters heaven, he does so in our human nature, so that where He has gone, we can also hope to go. He is, as the Letter to the Hebrews calls Him, ‘the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’, who leads the way and encourages us to follow Him. So, we are called to heaven, where our true happiness lies – but we can only get there if we live good and holy lives, which will make us fit to share the company of God and all His saints. To do this, we need the help of the Holy Spirit. This leads us to reflect on the importance of Pentecost – and that will be our subject for next week’s newsletter...

PLEASE NOTE: Since the Feast of the Ascension is, in normal circumstances, a Holyday of Obligation, we will live-stream two Masses from the church that day: one at 9.30 am and one at 6.00 pm

An easing of lockdown...

At the time of writing, the government has just started easing the lockdown under which we have all now been living for nearly two months. It is necessarily a complicated process, and there may be setbacks along

the way – however, we can begin to see a return to some sort of parish life, although it will no doubt be very different from what we were used, for some time to come. At present, the government is talking about churches opening for (limited) services in July. However, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have also mentioned the possibility of churches opening for private prayer before that date – although no details have yet been given. Rest assured we will open Holy Ghost again as soon as it is safe to do so – and we will use this weekly email to keep you all informed as more information becomes available.

A request for help (1) – Getting the most from on-line Masses

Going to Mass used to involve a change in our surroundings and maybe also in our clothes. Such outward changes, although physical rather than spiritual, helped us organise our thoughts for what we were about to experience. Watching the Mass in our living rooms, being live streamed on YouTube, deprives us of this opportunity to prepare and risks the Mass becoming another weekly TV show. It must be particularly difficult to engage smaller children successfully! To help overcome this, it would be great if we could exchange ideas as to how parishioners are approaching this situation – do you light candles, or have a crucifix in front of the TV; do you read the Readings before Mass and discuss them as a family; do you ring a bell at the consecration? We invite you to share the details of how you strive to preserve the mystery and dignity of the Mass whilst watching it in your homes so that we can share these ideas with other parishioners. You can email Fr Richard directly at

richardwhinder@rcaos.org.uk

A request for help (2) – web site developer

For many years we have been blessed with having our web site managed by a parishioner. Sadly, for personal and professional reasons, Sally needs to step down and we need to appoint a new web site professional to look after the parish web site. With money being restricted in the current climate, we are looking ideally at a professional web site developer within the parish who would be prepared to take on the work on a pro bono basis. If you are interested, please send your contact details to Fr Richard (richardwhinder@rcaos.org.uk). At this stage, we really want to ascertain whether there are people in the parish with the required skills and experience. If there are people who express an interest, we will then send the job specifications and arrange a time for an interview (most likely via Zoom) in the next few weeks.

Parish JustGiving page

In response to several queries – please be assured that any money you donate via the parish JustGiving page goes directly to help your parish, in the same way that your Sunday offertory collection would normally do.

With our continued prayers and blessing,

Fr Richard and Fr Tom

