



Dear parishioners,

1. This week, we keep the feast of St Agnes, Virgin and Martyr (21st January). Agnes belonged to an aristocratic Roman family and was killed for her faith about 304 AD. Agnes was very young when she died – probably 12 or 13 – and she quickly became one of the ‘heroines’ of Christian Rome. Several important churches were built in her honour, notably the church of ‘S. Agnese in Agone’, in the Piazza Navona, right in the heart of Rome. It is there that her relics remain today. The name ‘Agnes’ is similar to the Latin ‘agnus’, meaning ‘lamb’, and Agnes is often depicted (as above) carrying a lamb as her symbol, together with the palm branch of martyrdom. Each year, on the feast of St Agnes, the Pope blessed two lambs, who are then taken away to be looked after by the Benedictine nuns of St Cecilia in Trastevere. The wool from these lambs is then used to make the ‘palliums’. The pallium is a special vestment – a sort of white scarf embroidered with black crosses – given by the Pope to some of the most important bishops of the Catholic Church, as a sign of unity and friendship (the Archbishop of Southwark is one of these bishops, and if you look at photographs of Archbishop John Wilson you will see him wearing the pallium over his other vestments). St Agnes’ feast reminds us of several significant things – the importance of courage in standing up for our faith – the value God places on virginity and chastity – and the unique position held in our faith by the City of Rome, the Holy See, the guarantee of unity for all Catholics.
2. With this in mind, we should note that this week also sees the beginning of the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity (18th – 25th January). At a time when the world often seems to be growing more and more divided, it is especially important that Christians can give common witness to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray that the followers of Christ may all be one, as He himself prayed at the Last Supper, and that there may be ‘one flock, and one Shepherd’.
3. This Sunday is also ‘Peace Sunday’, when we pray for the peace of the world. At this time we are – understandably – preoccupied with the coronavirus pandemic, but it is worth remembering that in the Book of Revelation, plague, famine, war and death all ride together, and many parts of the world are still devastated by these four horsemen. For

them, COVID – 19 is only one amidst a host of troubles. So, let us pray for peace in the troubled parts of our world – but also that the richer nations may help those less fortunate, so that they may enjoy true peace: not just the absence of war, but all the conditions that make it possible for human life to flourish.

4. Lockdown continues, but churches are permitted to open and hold services. This is because the Government recognises that public worship is an essential activity for believers, and that it understands that churches are safe places. Of course, it is vital that we all continue to follow the good practices we have built up – hand sanitising, social distancing, use of face coverings and of the ‘track and trace system’, as well as proper cleaning of the church after services. We are very grateful to all of you for acting responsibly and unselfishly in this way. Our very special gratitude goes out to our stewards, whose work is now more important than ever. If you value our open churches, and the ability to come to Mass, please do consider volunteering as a steward – we need your help. You can volunteer here, <https://doodle.com/poll/hgeidsrn3ci7x2ym>. If you have any difficulty using the Doodle, or other questions, you can email us at holyghostvolunteers@gmail.com. Thank you!

With our blessing,

Fr Richard and Fr Giovanni