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# Hopes are raised for our churches to reopen in July

Greg Watts

Churches in England could reopen in July when the Government hopes to move to phase two of easing the Coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

Public Masses have been suspended in Britain since 21st March. A couple of days later, the Government ordered the closure of all religious buildings, even for private prayer.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said that places of worship, along with leisure and hospitality businesses, could open after 4th July. However, churches would only be open for individual prayer, not for public Masses.

This is dependent, however, on the Government's five test being met: protecting the NHS's ability to cope; seeing a sustained and consistent fall in deaths rates; data showing a decrease in rates of infection; having sufficient PPE and testing available; and confidence that easing current restrictions won't risk a second peak and overwhelm the NHS.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, who is part of a Government Coronavirus task force for faith groups, has urged the Government to consider the effects of closing the churches and prohibiting public Masses on Catholics.

"People have been distanced from their sacraments. They have been able to follow Mass every day and hundreds of thousands of people have joined in online. But every single one of them wants to be able to receive Holy Communion," he said in an interview on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme.

In a letter addressed to Cardinal Vincent Nichols and all the Catholic bishops of England and Wales, 19 influential Catholics, including former Prime Minister Tony Blair, Lord Alton of Liverpool, and former MP Anne Widdecombe, have asked for churches to be reopened, so Catholic can pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

Archbishop John said: "The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is continuing to work with our Government to enable our churches to be opened as soon as possible for private, individual prayer. The



Fr Doug Bull pictured celebrating a live-streamed Mass at St John Fisher in Bexley. See page 6

Bishops' Conference has also prepared information which will assist with the opening of church buildings for private prayer."

He added that churches will have to be well supervised and will need a team of volunteers wearing face masks and gloves to manage the process.

"There will need to be the facility for socially distanced queuing to enter the church

building. Hand sanitisation will probably need to be available on entrance and exit. The entrance and exit to the church building may need to be by different routes."

As well as this, floor and seating space will need to be properly marked out, and social distancing will need to be in force. Holy water will not be available; visits might have to be limited to a period of time; it might not be possible to

visit every part of the church, or to light candles or venerate statues and images; and cleaning and hygiene regimes will need to be in place.

"It is very important to understand that churches will only be allowed to open if the parish can demonstrate that it can put the necessary measures in place

"Any parish which cannot do this, for whatever reasons, is not obliged to open. At this first stage, opening will be a matter for local determination with full support from the archdiocese for any parish that cannot manage to put in place the requirements necessary."

Many churches in Northern Ireland have reopened for individual prayer, while public Masses are now being celebrated again in churches in a number of countries, including Germany, Spain, France and Italy. Pope Francis celebrated Mass at a

side chapel in St Peter's Basilica to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of St John Paul II.

Catholic author Joanna Bogle said: "One thing that could work well is to simply go to a church and pray at the outdoor shrine.

"Most churches in the diocese have a cross, grotto, or statue at the door or in the front garden. If people see another person there, they will keep the required distance, just as we do at shops, post office, etc.

"Having churches closed, when Pret a Manger is open, sends such a bleak message. Today, I enjoyed a latte at Pret, and it was a great boost to morale. Everyone obeyed the social-distancing rules.

"Any church could easily get volunteers (probably too many!) to ensure that the rules were kept. We must get our churches open!"

**"Having churches closed, when Pret a Manger is open, sends such a bleak message. Any church could easily get volunteers (probably too many!) to ensure that social distancing rules are kept. We must get our churches open!"**

# Keep calm: God will find a way for us to carry on

Bishop Paul Hendricks

In 1939, shortly before the start of the Second World War, the Ministry of Information produced three posters, intended to raise morale. Two of them were approved for distribution and were shown in shop windows and railway platforms up and down the country. They read, "Freedom is in peril. Defend it with all your might" and "Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution will bring us victory."

A third poster was printed, but held in reserve to be used in the event of a major crisis or an invasion. In the end, it was never used, and only a few copies survived.

One of them was discovered just over 60 years later, by the owner of Barter Books, in Alnwick, a small town about 40 miles north of Newcastle. He found it in the bottom of a box of books and his wife liked it so much they had it framed.

It became so popular with the customers that the shop began to sell copies. Over the years, the words of the poster caught the imagination of people all over the world and you can see it almost everywhere.

You've seen the words yourself: "Keep Calm and Carry On."

All this came to mind, when thinking how we've adjusted to the lockdown which came into effect around the middle of March. Back in February, we could never have imagined life changing so suddenly and so completely. Now, we've managed to adjust to it – not permanently, but at least for the time being. After all, what can you do? Nothing really, except to "Keep Calm and Carry On."

There have been various times in my life, when I've realised with some surprise, that I'd got used to a situation that would previously have been impossible to imagine.

I felt this many years ago, when I was walking across St Peter's Square, a week or two after I'd arrived in Rome to begin my studies for the priesthood. "Here I am," I thought, "living in this uniquely historic city, learning to speak Italian from scratch, preparing to study subjects I know nothing about, in preparation for a future that is



(to me) largely unknown."

In those days, I'd never heard of "Keep Calm and Carry On" – but that would certainly have fitted the situation.

It's something we're all doing now, but the uncertainties about our future don't make it any easier. We can see the way ahead to a certain extent and we're already discussing ways in which we can return to some sort of normality.

For instance, we're already making preparations for the time when our churches will be able to reopen – under strictly controlled conditions. And I'll

certainly be glad when I can visit my family again, rather than just video conferencing with them.

There are various things we can look forward to with some confidence, even though we don't know how long we will have to wait. "Keep Calm and Carry On" can help us along, until then.

But ultimately we need something more. We can't place all our trust in a vague optimism and a hope that things will work out eventually. When the people of Israel were invaded and taken off to exile, their hopes in earthly power and security were shattered.

Exiled away from their homeland, they had to learn to trust in God alone. This is a lesson we have to learn again and again, throughout history. Whatever the future may bring and however our life may change, God will still be there and we can always trust in him.



The Pilgrim is now online, making it possible to read all the editions since it was launched in 2011.

To view it, visit the diocesan website and click on a link on the left hand side of the page.

Guides on prayer by the diocesan Spirituality Commission can be found at

[www.southwarkdsc.org.uk/ways-into-prayer](http://www.southwarkdsc.org.uk/ways-into-prayer)

## Mind your language

John Lawson

With so many people desperately looking to fill their hours during this lockdown, can I suggest that as well as reading lots and lots of books and binge-watching many, many box sets, we work at saving ourselves from a terribly terribly serious malady that has afflicted our nation.

Andrew Marr, poor chap, is awfully awfully stricken with this dreadful dreadful virus. He starts the week on Radio 4 trying to go just a minute without saying "very very" and "really really", and failing miserably. I have complained to the BBC, but they regard him as a super super broadcaster, apparently above reproach from catty vocabulary detectives.

I have never doubted Marr's brilliance, but I do think this verbal sprite is beginning to mar his performances. Last Monday morning was my last with St Andrew, I can bear it no longer. Welcome to the seventh circle of the Cliché Inferno reserved for those who commit violence against our language.

Mark Twain once lambasted the use of "very" in written discourse: "Every time one is tempted to use 'very', replace it with damn; your editor will then cross it out and your writing will be as it should be."

I am neither very traumatised or very devastated about this, nor am I very very angry, I'm simply anguished. How often does Twain's grave agitate over the speeches and tweets of Donald Trump, for whom everything is either "very very bad" or "very very good".

Listening to sports commentaries is painful nowadays as we hear not only that the "boy's done very very good there" but we are also informed that "Man United's got a massive massive game coming next week and so they'll need to be highly highly focused."

English teachers will soon realise that most of their adverb and adjectives lists are pointless when their students usually make do with either very very or really really. I hope that English teachers in the UK will respond as assertively as their USA counterparts are doing against the use of "like" and "kindalike".

When I taught in Florida, I waged war on the overuse of "awesome" to describe everything from a donut to the Sistine Chapel. "Basically" also joined my banned words list. Students abstaining from the use of double adjectives, basically and awesome were rewarded with an extra-credit grade at the end of the semester; such incentives usually work wonders.

I wasn't 100% successful, but my success rate was somewhere in the 80% region. It was worth the effort to make my students sound more articulate than they were before I challenged them to flush their potty mouths.

If we don't act soon, we will witness the sad demise of superior alternatives for very very good such as terrific, marvellous, wonderful, superb or brilliant.

If you are a teacher, perhaps you can highlight this blight on our linguistic landscape to your students? How about putting a charity jar in the office which would receive 5p fines for every 'very very' etc, uttered during the week.

Parents, treat your children to something nice if they can go a week without using these weak expressions. Is there an articulate Greta out there looking to find fame and fortune in campaigning for a cleaner, crisper communication environment?

I hope so, because your country really really needs you to help rid us of this terrible terrible virus which is making many many Brits sound imbecilic.

• John Lawson is the author of *The Successful (Less Stressful) Student*, written under the pseudonym Coach L.

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Area bishops  
Kent

The Kent pastoral area is awaiting the appointment of a new bishop. In the meantime, matters concerning it should be directed to its episcopal vicar, Canon John O'Toole.  
01732 845486  
[johntoole@rcaos.org.uk](mailto:johntoole@rcaos.org.uk)

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# Where to participate in Mass online

The following parishes in the diocese of Southwark broadcast Mass via a livestream on the internet.  
To access them, visit the parish web site or [www.mcnmedia.tv](http://www.mcnmedia.tv), [www.churchservices.tv](http://www.churchservices.tv), or [www.catholicstv.org](http://www.catholicstv.org).

## South-east London

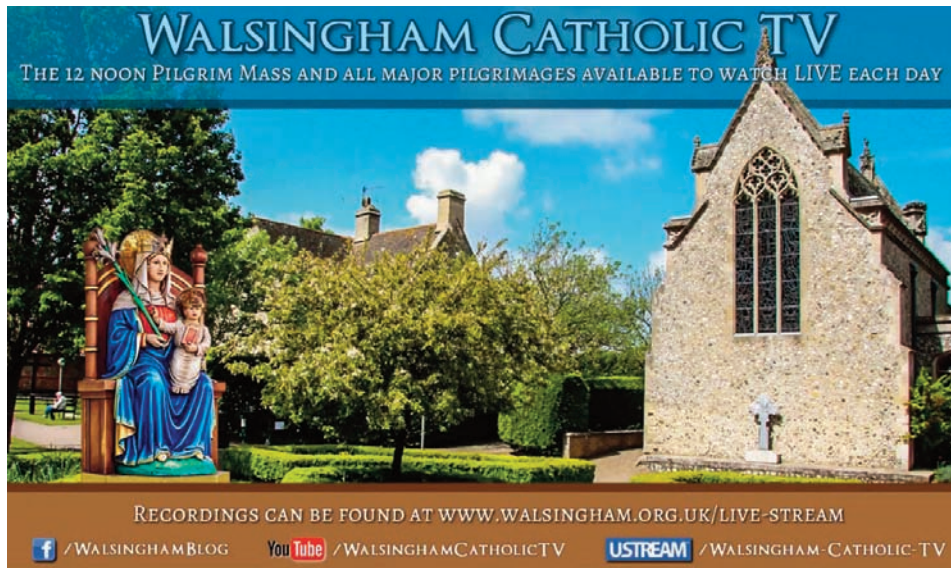
Beckenham: St Edmund of Canterbury  
Borough: Most Precious Blood  
Brixton Hill: Corpus Christi  
Bromley: St Joseph  
Camberwell: Sacred Heart  
Catford: Holy Cross  
Eltham: Christ Church  
Erith: Our Lady of the Angles  
Forest Hill: St William of York  
Kidbrooke: St John Fisher  
Lewisham: St Saviour  
Sidcup: St Lawrence  
Pollards Hill: St Michael  
Sydenham Kirkdale: Church of the Resurrection  
Woolwich: St Peter

## South-west London

Balham: Holy Ghost  
Battersea: Salesian chapel  
Carshalton: Holy Cross  
Carshalton Beeches: St Margaret of Scotland  
Clapham: St Mary  
Clapham Park: St Bede  
Coulston: St Aidan  
Croydon West: Our Lady of Reparation  
East Sheen: Our Lady Queen of Peace  
Ham: St Thomas Aquinas  
Morden: St Theresa of the Child Jesus  
New Malden: St Joseph  
Streatham: The English Martyrs  
Tooting Bec: St Anselm  
Waddon: St Dominic  
Wimbledon: Sacred Heart

## Kent

Ashford: St Teresa of Avila  
Bearstead: St Peter  
Dartford: St Anselm  
Dartford: St Vincent  
Dover: St Paul  
Folkestone: Our Lady Help of Christians  
Gravesend: St John the Evangelist  
Maidstone: St Francis  
Mongeham and Sandwich: Our Lady, St John and St Andrew  
Pembury: St Anselm  
Petts Wood: St James the Great  
Rochester: St John Fisher



Sittingbourne: The Sacred Heart of Jesus  
Walderslade: St Simon Stock  
Westerham: St John the Baptist

## Walsingham

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham is streaming Mass each day at 9.30 am, 12 Noon and 6pm (Latin) alongside the Divine Office, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, spiritual reading, talks, etc.  
See [www.walsingham.org.uk](http://www.walsingham.org.uk)

## Live-streamed Masses in other languages and from other countries

Filipino: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0gEpyPtbsAeDldsULmo4rA>  
Ghana: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRsgTp9r3pO43sg48fQyOPw/videos>  
India (Goa): <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz7jxJODQdFhWmnt-7IASWQ>  
Italian: <http://twitch.tv/scalabrinilondon>  
Nigeria: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1zLU18Goqg>  
Polish: <https://aberdeen-pl.rcda.scot/msza-online/>  
Portuguese: <http://twitch.tv/scalabrinilondon>  
Spanish: visit [www.churchservices.tv](http://www.churchservices.tv)  
Syro-Malabar: <https://holyfamily.rcda.scot/syro-malabar-mass/>  
Vietnam: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Catholicsaigon/posts/>

## The Vatican

Daily Mass from the chapel at Casa Santa Marta with Pope Francis.  
[www.youtube.com/channel/UCxIsefyl9g9A5SGWA4FvGIA/videos](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxIsefyl9g9A5SGWA4FvGIA/videos)

## The Holy Land

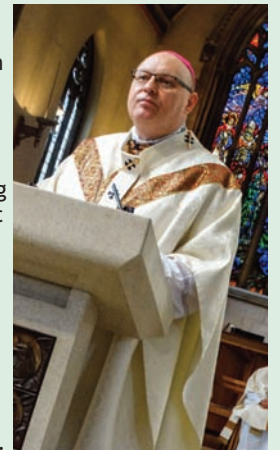
The Christian Media Centre, based in Jerusalem and Nazareth, also provides live streaming, as well as current updates about the situation in the Holy Land.  
See [www.cmc-terrasanta.org/en](http://www.cmc-terrasanta.org/en)

## Cathedral Mass for keyworkers and families

Archbishop John will celebrate Mass at St George's Cathedral on 2nd July for keyworkers and their families.

The Mass, which is one of a number being celebrated in Catholic cathedrals across the country during the current crisis, will be livestreamed on YouTube.

To participate in the Mass, visit: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmLIFN3u3rc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmLIFN3u3rc).



## Mental Health Awareness Week

Bishop Paul Mason, lead bishop for healthcare and mental health, has warned that the Covid-19 crisis might trigger mental health issues.

"This year's Mental Health Awareness week feels more important than ever as we find ourselves faced with a global health crisis which will, undoubtedly, have an enormous impact on the mental health of many people," he commented.

"For those who are struggling with mental health, especially during this challenging time, I assure you of my prayers, and urge you to seek the safe and non-judgemental help which is available."

## Talking heads

Southwark Spirituality Commission has produced a series of "talking heads" videos about people's experience of lockdown.

Among those featured are Fr Doug Bull, parish priest of St John Fisher in Bexley, Dr Mark Nash, director of the Centre for Catholic Formation, and Trudy Kilcullen, a parishioner of the Church of the Apostles in Swanley.

The videos can be viewed on the Southwark diocese Twitter account and on Facebook.

## RIP, Fr Edmund

It is with deep regret that we announce the passing of Fr Edmund Hartley.

Fr Edmund died at the presbytery of St Joseph's in Folkestone, where he served as parish priest from 1983 until 2016.

## The Pilgrim suspended

Because of the continued closure of churches as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the archdiocese has decided to suspend the production of *The Pilgrim*. We hope to return very soon with our usual mix of news, features, and columnists.



# Maidstone boy inspired by Captain Tom

A seven-year-old Maidstone boy has raised more than £1,750 for the NHS after running 60 laps of his garden for 20 days on the trot.

Jacob Skelton, who attends St Francis Catholic Primary School in Maidstone, raised the money after being inspired by Captain Tom Moore, the 100-year-old former British Army officer who has walked laps in his garden during the Covid-19 crisis in aid of NHS Charities Together.

Jacob's challenge has become a family affair with either his mum or dad running 20 laps of their lawn three times a day with their son, who even dressed up in his favourite Spider-Man costume one day.

Jacob's mum Jane, said: "We were home schooling and it isn't easy. I told Jacob about Captain Tom because I thought he was quite an interesting man and about the millions he raised for the NHS.

"He just jumped up and said 'I can do that', I need to beat Captain Tom."



Jacob - in full Spider-Man costume - sets off on one of his 60 laps of the garden. He has raised more than £1,750 for charity

# There's online help to support your faith

Despite the closure of churches during the current public health crisis, there are many resources online to help to you in your faith. Below is a selection covering liturgy, the Bible, prayer, Catholic TV and radio, and much more.

Some include apps that can be downloaded to your mobile phone.

■ **The Catholic Church**  
Pope Francis  
[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem  
[www.lpj.org](http://www.lpj.org)

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
[www.cbcew.org.uk](http://www.cbcew.org.uk)

The Bishops' Conference has produced a downloadable prayer sheet for spiritual communion when participating in Mass online.

■ **Southwark archdiocese**  
[www.rcsouthwark.co.uk](http://www.rcsouthwark.co.uk)

The archdiocese will be sharing daily readings, Gospel passages and reflections on the diocesan Facebook page and highlighting various resources, opportunities and news about life in the diocese on Twitter and Instagram.

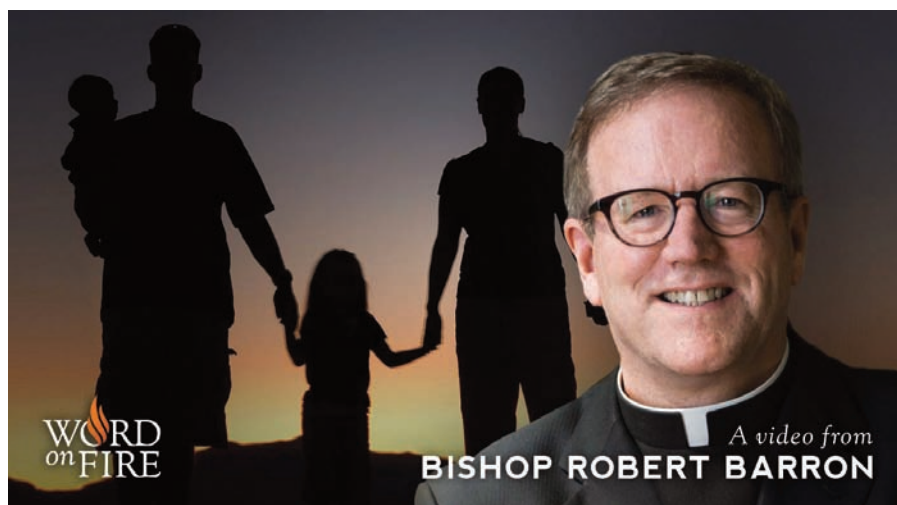
You may also like to visit our YouTube page to revisit some homilies from various services throughout the past year.

■ **Radio**  
[www.heavensroadfm.com](http://www.heavensroadfm.com) (broadcasting from St John's Seminary, Womersley).  
[www.premier.org.uk](http://www.premier.org.uk) (ecumenical station in London).  
[www.spiritradio.ie](http://www.spiritradio.ie) (ecumenical station in Ireland).  
[en.radiovaticana.va](http://en.radiovaticana.va) (broadcasting from the Vatican in 47 languages)  
[www.bustedhalo.com](http://www.bustedhalo.com) (USA)

■ **TV**  
[www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com) (USA).  
[www.relevantradio.com](http://www.relevantradio.com) (USA).  
[www.saltandlighttv.org](http://www.saltandlighttv.org) (USA)  
[www.catholicstv.org](http://www.catholicstv.org) (USA)

■ **The Bible, liturgy and catechesis**  
**The God Who Speaks**  
[www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/the-god-who-speaks](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/the-god-who-speaks)  
**The Bible Society** (resources for Catholics)  
[www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/word-on-the-go/](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/word-on-the-go/)

The late Raymond E. Brown, leading



Catholic biblical scholar  
[www.raymondebrownss.weebly.com](http://www.raymondebrownss.weebly.com)

Crossroads Initiative, evangelisation  
[www.crossroadsinitiative.com](http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com)

Franciscan Media  
[info.franciscanmedia.org](http://info.franciscanmedia.org)

Scott Hahn, popular Catholic author  
[www.scotthahn.com](http://www.scotthahn.com)

Liturgy office of the Bishops' Conference  
[www.liturgyoffice.org.uk](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk)

Centre for Catholic Formation  
[www.cfctootingbec.org.uk](http://www.cfctootingbec.org.uk)

Catholic Charismatic Renewal  
[www.ccr.org.uk](http://www.ccr.org.uk)

Southwark Catholic Youth Service  
[www.facebook.com/scys.uk/](http://www.facebook.com/scys.uk/)

Lifeteen for young Catholics  
[www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com)

■ **Prayer**  
**Lectio Divina.**  
[www.lectio-divina.org](http://www.lectio-divina.org)

Daily prayers for Lent  
[www.lentinisolation.com](http://www.lentinisolation.com)

Bible readings, Bible resources, prayers during Lent, and saints of the day.  
[www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org)

Alone Together  
[www.alonetogether.org.uk](http://www.alonetogether.org.uk)

Southwark Spirituality Commission  
[www.southwarkdsc.org.uk](http://www.southwarkdsc.org.uk)

Pray the rosary online with people around the world.  
[www.comepraytherosary.org](http://www.comepraytherosary.org)

Pray the Divine Office each day.  
[www.universalis.com](http://www.universalis.com)

A daily prayer podcast from Jesuit Media Initiatives featuring readings and music.  
[www.pray-as-you-go.org](http://www.pray-as-you-go.org)

Tyburn Convent  
Live streamed perpetual adoration with the nuns at Tyburn convent  
<https://adoration.tyburnconvent.org.uk>

A range of resources, including online videos, podcasts, homilies, and daily Mass at 12.15pm (GMT) from Bishop Robert Barron's chapel.  
[www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org)

The Taize community are broadcasting Evening Prayer live each day at 7.30 pm (GMT) on its Facebook page:  
[www.facebook.com/taize/](http://www.facebook.com/taize/)  
[www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr)

Live streaming of the Divine Office in Latin from the monks of the Abbey of Barroux in France.  
[www.barroux.org](http://www.barroux.org)

A Catholic social network of prayer around the world. [www.hozana.org](http://www.hozana.org)

Daily prayers and reflections from the Irish Jesuits. [www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)



## Port chaplain to the rescue

Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) port chaplain to the Medway and Dover, John Fogarty, came to the rescue of the crew of a ship in Northfleet who needed to contact their families.

John provided 17 SIM cards to the seafarers, who had been at sea for 40 days. The cards were delivered to the ship using a bucket and rope, observing all social distancing measures and the necessary precautions.

John is also visiting his team of volunteer ship visitors to offer support. "I'm meeting with a ship visitor at home each week, as this is the least I can do for our faithful volunteers who serve our people of the sea so well."

Among those he visited was John Rutland, who has been looking after operations in Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey for over ten years.

"He told me he is looking forward to getting back to normal and to start working on updating the seafarers' room in Sheerness Docks.

## Marriage courses go online

The Marriage and Family Life team of Southwark diocese is running a number of courses online.

On 6th June and 4th July, from 10 am - 1 pm, married couples can take part in the "Building a better marriage" course.

A course to help parents with developing the faith of their children will also be running.

In addition, marriage preparation courses will take place online, on 13th June, 27th June, 18th July, and 25th July.

For more information, visit [www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/marriage](http://www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/marriage).

## Videos for young people

Southwark Catholic Youth Service has produced a series of short videos called "Christ is Alive."

The videos were produced before the lockdown, and feature discussions with sixth form students from St Gregory's RC School in Tunbridge Wells.

The young people discuss some of the key themes from 'Christus Vivit', Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation to young people in 2018.

The series consists of six two-minute videos, each with questions for reflection and supporting resources. The videos can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/southwarkcatholicyouthservice](http://www.youtube.com/southwarkcatholicyouthservice).



The Benedictine sisters at Minster Abbey, near Ramsgate, have been making scrubs for staff at their local hospice and hospital

## NHS prayer buddies needed

A prayer buddy ministry is being set up by the Southwark diocesan head of hospital chaplains.

The scheme is intended to support those working on the front-line that are dealing directly with the current pandemic.

Every hospital chaplaincy within Southwark is invited to ask NHS staff to add their first name and job title to a list, which will be held by the hospital chaplain.

Parishioners are needed who are prepared to be committed prayer buddies, holding a member of NHS

staff and their intentions in prayer on a daily basis.

Parishioners will receive the first name, job title and general hospital location of an NHS worker, while the NHS worker will receive their first name, parish name and parish area.

Rebekah O'Keeffe, a catechist who works within the diocese, will pair people up as prayer buddies.

If you would like to accompany an NHS worker in prayer, email: [rebekah.okeeffe@gmail.com](mailto:rebekah.okeeffe@gmail.com) with your name and parish details (name and area only).



# We need good stories

In his message to mark the 54th World Communications Day, Pope Francis spoke about the import role telling stories has in our lives. This is an edited version.

I would like to devote this year's Message to the theme of storytelling, because I believe that, so as not to lose our bearings, we need to make our own the truth contained in good stories.

Stories that build up, not tear down; stories that help us rediscover our roots and the strength needed to move forward together. Amid the cacophony of voices and messages that surround us, we need a human story that can speak of ourselves and of the beauty all around us. A narrative that can regard our world and its happenings with a tender gaze. A narrative that can tell us that we are part of a living and interconnected tapestry. A narrative that can reveal the interweaving of the threads that connect us to one another.

## Weaving stories

Human beings are storytellers. From childhood we hunger for stories, just as we hunger for food. Stories influence our lives, whether as fairy tales, novels, films, songs, news, even if we do not always realise it. Often we decide what is right or wrong based on characters and stories we have made our own. Stories leave their mark on us; they shape our convictions and behaviour. They can help us understand and communicate who we are.

We are not just the only beings who need clothing to cover our vulnerability (cf. Gen 3: 21); we are also the only ones who need to be "clothed" with stories to protect our lives. We weave not only clothing, but also stories: indeed, the human capacity to "weave" (Latin *texere*) gives us not only the word textile but also text. The stories of different ages all have a common "loom": the thread of their narrative involves "heroes", including everyday heroes, who in following a dream confront difficult situations and combat evil, driven by a force that makes them courageous, the force of love. By immersing ourselves in stories, we can find reasons to heroically face the challenges of life.

Human beings are storytellers because we are engaged in a process of constant growth, discovering ourselves and becoming enriched in the tapestry of the days of our life. Yet since the very beginning, our story has been threatened: evil snakes its way through history.

## Not all stories are good stories

How many stories serve to lull us, convincing us that to be happy we continually need to gain, possess and consume. We may not even realise how greedy we have become for chatter and gossip, or how much violence and falsehood we are consuming. Often on communication platforms, instead of constructive stories which serve to strengthen social ties and the cultural fabric, we find destructive and provocative stories that wear down and break the fragile threads binding us together as a society. By patching together bits of unverified information, repeating banal and deceptively persuasive arguments, sending strident and

hateful messages, we do not help to weave human history, but instead strip others of their dignity.

## The story of stories

Sacred scripture is a "story of stories". How many events, peoples and individuals it sets before us! It shows us from the very beginning a God who is both creator and narrator. Indeed, God speaks his word and things come into existence (cf. Gen 1). As narrator, God calls things into life, culminating in the creation of man and woman as his free dialogue partners, who make history alongside him. In one of the Psalms, the creature tells the creator: "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ... My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth" (139:13-15).

We are not born complete, but need to be constantly "woven", "knitted together". Life is given to us as an invitation to continue to weave the "wonderful" mystery that we are.

The Bible is thus the great love story between God and humanity. At its centre stands Jesus, whose own story brings to fulfilment both God's love for us and our love for God. Henceforth, in every generation, men and women are called to commit to memory the most significant episodes of this story of stories, those that best communicate its meaning.

Jesus spoke of God not with abstract concepts, but with parables, brief stories taken from everyday life. At this point life becomes story and then, for the listener, story becomes life: the story becomes part of the life of those who listen to it, and it changes them.

## An ever-renewed story

The history of Christ is not a legacy from the past; it is our story, and always timely. It shows us that God was so deeply concerned for mankind, for our flesh and history, to the point that he became man, flesh and history. It also tells us that no human stories are insignificant or paltry. Since God became story, every human story is, in a certain sense, a divine story. In the history of every person, the Father sees again the story of his Son who came down to earth. Every human story has an irrepressible dignity. Consequently, humanity deserves stories that are worthy of it, worthy of that dizzying and fascinating height to which Jesus elevated it.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, every story, even the most forgotten one, even the one that seems to be written with the most crooked lines, can become inspired, can be reborn as a masterpiece and become an appendix to the Gospel. Like the *Confessions of Augustine*, or *A Pilgrim's Journey of Ignatius*, or *The Story of a Soul of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus*. Like countless other stories, which have admirably scripted the encounter between

God's freedom and that of man.

## A story that renews us

With the gaze of the great storyteller - the only one who has the ultimate point of view - we can then approach the other characters, our brothers and sisters, who are with us as actors in today's story. For no one is an extra on the world stage, and everyone's story is open to possible change. Even when we tell of evil, we can learn to leave room for redemption; in the midst of evil, we can also recognise the working of goodness and give it space.

So it is not a matter of simply telling stories as such, or of advertising ourselves, but rather of remembering who and what we are in God's eyes, bearing witness to what the Spirit writes in our hearts and revealing to everyone that his or her story contains marvellous things.



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# 'Listen, my son'

Rule of St Benedict

[www.buckfast.org.uk/vocation](http://www.buckfast.org.uk/vocation)  
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Buckfast Abbey

God calls to us constantly, longing to guide those who yearn for life and desire to see good days into the way of peace. The Rule of Saint Benedict helps us to hear God's voice, in the Holy Scriptures, in the sacred liturgy and in our brothers in community. If you are a single man longing to live your Catholic faith in a way which brings great joy as it demands the best of you, consider whether God is calling you to be a Benedictine monk at Buckfast Abbey.

Please reach out to us, and we will do all we can to help you.

# A parish in lockdown

Fr Douglas Bull reveals what parish life has been like through the Covid-19 pandemic

When lockdown occurred I was, like many others, taken aback. Cut off from everyone, I felt bereaved in many ways.

One of the good things about our parish of St John Fisher in Bexley is that we do much in collaboration. The downside of that is that there are many tasks regularly undertaken that I don't have the first clue about how to manage - or I didn't have!

I felt like the bereaved husband or wife saying in exasperation 'but he/she always looked after that side of things'. There was a very steep learning curve for me, especially when the parish secretary was furloughed.

Without meeting regularly, communication was going to be at the heart of all our efforts to celebrate our relationship with God and with each other. We would need to unite people, even if only in a virtual way. We would need to offer help wherever necessary, to celebrate community with each other and communion with the Lord. This formed a formidable agenda.

I quickly discovered that our internet was not going to be strong enough to do live streaming. We opted therefore to record the Sunday Mass and upload it to YouTube, so that anyone can access it via the link on our website. This has proved to be popular not just within the parish but beyond, with hundreds of viewings.

A parishioner with a background in broadcasting organises all this and his gift of time and talent has been immense during this time. We are blessed. He also looks after the website on which he has been building up a virtual gathering of everyone in our hall for coffee after Mass!

At first I think we all found the virtual Sunday Parish Mass a strange experience, but we are getting used to it. It actually takes a lot more concentration to say the Mass well, without the warmth of parishioners responding, and I look forward to the day when we all get together again for our Sunday Mass.

The Easter services were particularly difficult to celebrate alone, but were much appreciated. People felt as involved in the liturgy as they could be and as much in their own church as they could, as evidenced by comments about the flowers, the new vestments and banners that we have acquired and about the overall look of the sanctuary.

We have now added recordings of hymns and parish readers send in recordings so that they can exercise their ministry and add dignity and interest to the liturgy. A virtual choir is also gathering. The Sunday Mass remains at the centre of our parish, thank God, and thanks to our website!

Communication with parishioners beyond the Sunday Mass has been a challenge. Putting together an up-to-date database was one of the priorities for the year, but alas as yet, it has not been done. I did have access to many 'phone numbers and email addresses, though.

During the first week I was able to cobble together a long list of parishioners who agreed to receive mailings and I undertook to mail



them twice a week. They receive a newsletter at the weekend and a reflection that I call "Fr Doug's Ramblings" in the middle of the week. Beyond that, the news and views reach many others via the telephone and also doorstep deliveries undertaken by volunteers. We use existing networks, too, to maintain our parish community.

I celebrate Mass privately each day on behalf of the parishioners and engage in prayer between 5.30pm and 6.30pm. These times are published so that many join in a spiritual communion with the Lord, with me and with each other.

Sadly, there have been more funerals than normal. These are very difficult events. Without the usual number of meetings to talk

and to plan the funeral service, it feels like my hands are tied behind my back.

At the crematorium, there can't be more than ten people present and the usual consolation of people's physical support is absent. The family's grief is not matched by the outpouring of love that is usually there. I hope that as soon as we can, we return to church and at least celebrate a memorial Mass with the level of dignity that we have been previously used to. Two weddings and several baptisms, first Holy Communion and Confirmation are all on hold.

As for me, while the parish activities and my wider ministry have kept me busy, the main thing has been to allow the Lord to speak to me and to offer Him the chance to

speak through me.

In facing the possibility of contracting the virus and even facing the possibility of suffering its severe effects, serious questions get asked about one's relationship with God. I can only say that when those questions did get asked the Lord was there to answer them.

The physical limitations imposed by lockdown have, with the help of increased control over the use of one's time, served to give a greater freedom to the inner spiritual life and while I don't feel that I have been on retreat, I do feel as if I have been living my own brand of monastic life.

Meal times have taken a particular prominence each day. My daily walk has enabled me to closely observe this year's wonderful Spring like I never have done before. It has been a great consolation and indeed, inspiration.

As we begin to consider coming out of lockdown I feel a little anxious, but I can't wait to feel again the warmth of other people and even enjoy the ill-discipline of speaking at the same time as others, which you can't do in the digital meetings that we've had to get used to!

There will be many positives about the experience that we will need to identify and carry forward, starting with the kindness that so many have shown to their neighbours. We will also need to go back to the question that prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan which was: "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29) Maybe the pandemic will help us live in more solidarity with our worldwide family.

In the midst of all of this, we salute the brave NHS workers, others working on the frontline and those undertaking key roles in society to make sure we are all safe, fed and watered. I do hope that after this is all over we will remember and cherish more closely all those who at this time are considered "essential workers". We will remain in their debt.



Fr Douglas celebrates a lonely Mass in his parish church

# The hospital chaplain who caught Covid-19

Key workers remain at great threat of contracting coronavirus, and none are more at risk than the teams of chaplains diligently working in hospitals across the country. Rev Gerald Watkins reveals how his life was turned upside down after he caught the virus - while also acknowledging how it benefitted his faith

As I slowly recover from the Covid-19 infection, I reflect that working as the site team lead chaplain at the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital in Margate, visiting and supporting patients, I have very much "talked the talk" - but now I have finally won my street credentials, having "walked the walk" alongside my NHS colleagues and patients by contracting the virus.

Having enjoyed good health throughout my life, to be struck down with an illness is very humbling as you live through the aches and pains and the spiritual darkness that walks alongside you.

It was during a visit to a "non-infected Covid ward" that I believe I contracted the virus. Although dressed in PPE - mask, apron and gloves - as a precaution, I engaged with a nurse and felt a distinct "hit" at the back of my throat. I knew that I had caught something. That night I was very poorly, taking deep breaths and very restless.

The following day, I received an email to advise me that the patients on that ward had now been infected with Covid-19 - my initial reaction to being "hit" seemed to be correct.

Self isolating, within 48 hours I had a Covid-19 test and within a few days, my result was negative! But by now I had come out in a rash over my back and had developed thrush, my body ached and pained. There is no cure, so all I could do was self isolate for 14 days. Thankfully my breathing eased.

For me the worst part of this illness was being absent from the front line in the hospital; not to be able to stand in solidarity with my colleagues was painful.

During this period of isolation, my faith was sustained by others, in particular I must give thanks to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in Deal and Sturry who frequently called to offer support and compassion. Together with calls from local priests Canon John O'Toole, calls and practical support from my brothers, I distinctly felt valued and cared for.

The challenge of faith came in the form of fidelity to prayer! Feeling constantly tired, the desire to pray wavered, though I never doubted God's presence, my night prayer would simply consist of a review of the day's events, thankfulness for everything and an acknowledgment that God had provided for me. That is profound, we rely on him, we take nothing for granted.

As the days went by, it never crossed my mind that I might die - is this self delusion or pride? Rather, I felt that this was a God-given opportunity for reflection and perhaps preparation for his own mysterious ways?

After 14 days of self isolation my wife Tina and I safely emerged, more considerate to each other's needs and anxieties, more acutely aware of the wonder of creation and simply knowing that we are not in charge, that ultimately we are invited through pain and sorrow to stretch out our hands and place them into the hand of God.

Here in the spiritual darkness that accompanied me, the compassion, prayers and strength of others has been immense and, dare I say, that the virus itself is a blessing, causing one to take time out and reflect on my pastoral approach to patients and staff.

All chaplains' formations are unique. No two chaplains employ the same approach to healthcare. Chaplains of different denominations and a different emphasis in faith bring that formation into their care for the sick and the dying - a unique environment that will challenge the chaplain to seek and present an authentic Christian response to the situation that confronts him.

There are simply no textbook answers - the demands can be awesome. In all of this we simply rely on the wisdom and grace of God to minister to others. The sick, the dying and their families hold close to our every word.

With respect to the current coronavirus pandemic, my personal experience has been challenging. Recently, for operational reasons, I was asked to take care of chaplaincy at the William Harvey Hospital in Ashford. Although not a stranger to the hospital, I had to immediately establish a good working relationship with staff as all the regular chaplaincy volunteers were asked to stay at home, leaving just myself.

Having visited the wards and introduced

**"Regular visits to wards visiting the sick and, on occasions, the dying are positively appreciated by staff, as the sick may be socially isolated and need extra support, while the dying and their families are so grateful to have a chaplain with them and accompanying them through their crisis..."**



myself, the next task was to be visible and make regular visits to A&E and the wards, working alongside staff and engaging with patients and the public. Chaplaincy has to be seen to be credible.

A regular visit to A&E reception, normally packed with members of the public, would now be deserted, with perhaps one or two people present. Similarly, a behind-the-scenes visit to an A&E normally packed with patients might reveal perhaps half a dozen patients being treated for routine accidents. But it is here that chaplaincy is seen to be engaging and supporting.

Regular visits to wards visiting the sick and, on occasions, the dying are positively appreciated by staff, as the sick may be socially isolated and need extra support, while the dying and their families are so grateful to have a chaplain with them and accompanying them through their crisis.

Strikingly I am not as busy for end of life patients as "pre-Covid". Given the high death rate in hospitals, this decline in calls for the chaplain may seem at first glance rather mysterious - but on analysis I would conclude that the chaplain in pre-Covid times would be regularly called in response to the family needs as they sought spiritual support for both patient and themselves.

Now, with Covid-19 patients isolated from family, that dynamic is missing and in only a few cases am I called to the bedside. However, there are many cases where the patient is Catholic and the family, knowing the importance of the anointing of the sick,

do call the chaplain, who then liaises with the local Catholic priest.

Our priests are simply some of the unrecognised heroes who share the front line with staff and who come forward willingly and quietly for our patients.

We owe them a great deal, as the following words of thanks, recently received, highlight:

*All the family would like to thank you for your kindness in visiting Mum. We know that she really appreciated your time when she was at her lowest. In these strange and challenging times the work that you and your colleagues are doing is of huge importance and comfort to families at a very frightening and vulnerable time.*

And then we have to care for our staff and the public. Among the many initiatives by the East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust for care of staff, I was asked to provide daily counselling time in the chapel.

I am not a trained counsellor. All I have to offer is an experienced compassionate listening ear, supplemented by years of pastoral care. While you cannot fix the problem you can absorb the pain and anguish and seek to relieve the anxiety of staff before they leave the chapel - and that comes at an immense cost!

In all these situations the chaplain is expected to be all things to all men and yet underneath, there is a frail, perhaps insecure person who relies totally on the grace of God to see him through the crisis.

Perhaps if we view ourselves as strong and confident, then we delude not only ourselves but the most important person in the room - the patient. For this reason, having contracted the virus has been a blessing. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, "We are not human beings having a Spiritual Journey. But rather, spiritual beings having a Human Journey."

# My parish: St Anselm's, Tooting Bec

**John Pontifex**

"We are the church by the crossroads, a place of sanctuary, a step or two away from the busy streets of London."

With these words - or something very close to them - Canon William Hebborn, the parish priest of St Anselm's, welcomed me inside.

Nearly a decade after I moved into the parish and starting going to St Anselm's, writing this article provides a great opportunity to celebrate the life of a wonderfully vibrant parish where welcome and hospitality are recurring themes.

And, for those who pass along the busy A24 at Tooting Bec and see the large red-brick church facing the tube station, here's your chance to find out what the parish is like.

Founded in 1909, the parish's early decades were recently brought back to life in the St Anselm's publication *A Parish in Wartime*, which celebrated the lives of the parish war dead, names and life stories which were at risk of being lost forever.

Replacing a former Methodist church found to be unsafe, the current St Anselm's was opened in 1933. Having successfully withstood the Blitz, the church continues to stand strong against the relentless traffic outside and the rumble of the tube trains below.

And, while the interior is indeed an oasis of calm in a busy world, the church is the focal point of a vast array of activities which meet the spiritual needs of a beautifully rich and diverse community dedicated to the service of God and neighbour.

Only the fifth parish priest in St Anselm's long history, Canon William - Fr Will - has, over 22 years of ministry at St Anselm's, built up a community where everyone is enabled to encounter the living God who dwells in our midst - in the Sacramental life of the Church and in each person we meet.



With a Sunday Mass attendance of well over 1,000, St Anselm's falls within the top 10 per cent largest parishes in the Archdiocese of Southwark.

Ministering to such a large community is efficiently enabled by parish administrator Martine Mercer, the worthy recipient of the *Fidelis Servientor* award bestowed by Archbishop Peter Smith.

The priests of the parish work closely with three deacons to fulfil the considerable pastoral needs of a diverse community. Every year, St Anselm's has more than 50 Baptisms; nearly 60 receive their First Holy Communion and almost the same number are confirmed.

Sacramental initiation is supported by as many as 90 catechists. These figures bear

witness to the close relations between the church and the nearby St Anselm's Catholic Primary School.

Parish catechetical co-ordinator Tom Gately leads an RCIA programme; and every year at Easter we welcome people into the Church for the first time, as well as others returning to the practice of the faith after a gap of a number years, in some cases, decades.

Parish retreats make up an important part of the spiritual development of parishioners, drawing on programmes inspired by the likes of St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius Loyola, St John Henry Cardinal Newman and other pivotal players celebrated by the American Catholic evangelist Bishop Robert Barron.

The liturgical life of the parish is

enriched by musicians of every age and ability who help us all praise God in fitting fashion. Reverence and service are the watchwords of St Anselm's 50 or more altar servers who bring solemnity and dignity to our services, especially in the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ - the Eucharist.

For the parish men's group, the highlight of the year comes in November when at least 80 of their number stir up their culinary skills at the Christmas pudding night, each walking away with two sumptuous puds!

Another focus is on the environment, and St Anselm's has registered for Cafod's Live Simply award as part of the parish's response to the climate emergency.

'Amid the gloom over the number of people identifying as Christian... the diversity and scale of parish life at St Anselm's tells a very different story'

Support for persecuted Christians is a priority too; within three years, the parish raised more than £35,000 for Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need's support for Syria and the work of Aleppo's Sister Annie Demerjian.

The sacred and inalienable rights of the unborn child are defended with courage, compassion and clarity by the parish's pro-life group, and responding to Our Lord's call to feed the hungry, 'Caring Kitchen' provides for those in urgent need, as does 'Soup and Sandwich' and the parish's St Vincent de Paul group.

As well as fulfilling their duties at Mass, extraordinary ministers work alongside the priests and the deacons of the parish to ensure spiritual outreach to the sick and housebound - and St Anselm's Primary School proudly leads the way at the parish's senior citizen Christmas party.

For all ages, the parish shop in the courtyard brings together the choicest selection of antiques with the perfect religious gift for every occasion - cards, statues, books, music, holy medals and rosaries galore. The shop provides a vial opportunity to develop a sense of community within the parish.

Amid the doom and gloom over the decline in people identifying as Christians in the UK, the diversity and scale of parish life at St Anselm's tells a very different story about the state of the Church today.

## Food has power to uplift us when we cannot be together

**Lucy Russell**

Much of Jesus' teaching happens while he is sharing a meal. He eats with tax collectors (Luke 6:29), feeds the five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21), he gives us the Eucharist (Luke 22:19) and his mandate (John 13:34) during his Last Supper.

On 14th June our parish, probably like yours, should have been celebrating with the first communicants and their families. The communion breakfast we prepare at St Thomas' in Deal is served to those making their first Holy Communion, but all the parish share bacon and sausage rolls and a cake iced with the names of the communicants.

The communicants each receive the piece of cake with their name on, and the rest is cut and offered to the parishioners with their coffee. Spiritual and physical nourishment comes together in our celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi.

How true, therefore, were Cardinal Vincent Nichols' words on

the Today programme on 14th May: "in these last weeks we have been creative, we've been faithful...[but] people have been distanced from their sacraments, they have been able to follow Mass every day and hundreds and thousands of people have joined in online, but every single one of them wants to be able to receive Holy Communion. It's a fast for us, it's quite a painful fast and that's true for other faiths... think of the patterns of Ramadan and the sacrifice that the Muslim community is making by never meeting outside their families during Ramadan and at the end for the big feast..."

BBC Broadcaster George Alagiah has reflected on this theme of sharing food and togetherness recently, too: "Of all the lockdown restrictions, the shared experience of eating together is the one I miss most. This goes back a long way to a childhood in which food, the making of it and the sharing of it, played such a central part in our

lives... when we plunged our childish fingers into a bowl of curry and rice, [my mother] was offering more than nourishment, she was binding our family together..."

In his reflection, George spoke of his resentment at the coronavirus keeping him apart from his loved ones: "This coronavirus has turned things upside down; we feel threatened and we want to come together, but know we've had to stay apart."

But even if we can't physically share a meal at the moment, food can still help to nourish us body and soul. In an interview on BBC Radio 4's *The World at One* programme at the beginning of April, Prue Leith talked about the importance of cooking and baking to lift the spirits. "I've always said cooking can save the world," she said.

The beginning of the lockdown saw supermarket shelves empty and flour became particularly difficult to come by, especially bread flour. "It's not just about necessity," said



Prue, "...people need to do something uplifting."

There is a connection between food and mood. Baking is therapeutic, but what we choose to eat also makes a difference to not only our physical wellbeing but to our mental health. There is

information about how to manage your mood with food on Mind's website, at [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood/).

One of the things that has brought me the most joy in the past month has been the invitation from my line manager to set six baking challenges for the students at St Edmund's in Dover. Their favourite has been the Greggs-style cheese and bacon wrap.

Mine is the rainbow cookie. I love the rainbows in everybody's windows, a symbol of thanks to our carers and a reminder of God's promise never to flood the whole earth again. I made mine from a shortbread recipe from BBC Good Food [www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/shortbread\\_1290](http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/shortbread_1290), rolling the mixture into 30g balls and then slightly flattening them before placing on a greased baking tray and studding with M&M's - after having eaten all the brown ones!



# Understanding the Old Testament

## Father Ashley Beck

If you ask people what they think of the Bible, or how much of it they have actually read, it's not hard to identify things which people find difficult or simply boring.

In an earlier piece I mentioned the book of Leviticus; but for many the parts of the Old Testament which often fail to excite the reader, at least these days, are the books which we call "historical": Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings (in older Catholic Bibles these four are 1 - 4 Kings), 1 and 2 Chronicles (in older Catholic Bibles 1 and 2 Paralipomena) Ezra, Nehemiah, (called 1 and 2 Esdras in older Catholic Bibles) and 1 and 2 Maccabees (not found in most Catholic Bibles because they are not in the Hebrew Bible).

The first seven I have listed are sometimes called the "deuteronomistic history" because they are seen to follow on from the book of Deuteronomy (which I looked at two months ago) and are formed by the same tradition and authors.

These rather basic notes might already have turned you off because of their complexity. As before, if you don't have a decent modern Catholic Bible I would urge you to



buy Fr Henry Wansbrough's new Revised New Jerusalem Bible or Fr Nick King's 2013 The Bible, both of which have very readable and up-to-date explanatory notes and introductions.

The deuteronomistic history books outline a basic history of the people of Israel, divided after the death of Solomon (10th century BC) into the separate and rival kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and run parallel to the books of the prophets which we looked at last month.

There's a lot of emphasis on kings and their battles with neighbouring nations, including large and

powerful empires, one of which eventually destroys both kingdoms and the city of Jerusalem. This is portrayed, as with the prophets, as punishment for idolatry and unfaithfulness to the Law of Moses.

The books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah tell basically part of the same history in parallel, but from the standpoint of those who were responsible for the worship in the Jerusalem Temple, the priests. The books of Maccabees are from a much later period (2nd century BC) and recount the rebellion against the Greek Seleucid empire led by Judas Maccabeus.

Much of this is hard work. We might be familiar with some stories from the history which have caught people's imagination (though this is probably less true for Catholics than other Christians) - for example Joshua and the walls of Jericho, the powerful story of Ruth, Samson and Delilah, the boy Samuel, David and Goliath, David and Jonathan, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and Elijah and the prophets of Baal. However, by and large much of this history is not something we know very well. But there are ways in which it can become much more interesting.

On the face of it the writer of the deuteronomistic history, the largest and most wide-ranging historical account in the Old Testament, while pointing out endless infidelities on the part of the people, nevertheless affirms those whom he sees to be the "good guys" - particularly David (apart from his sin in relation to Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11 -12) and his son Solomon (until the end of his reign).

But some have pointed out that the real picture behind the text is much more negative. The American radical Jesuit Dan Berrigan, frequently arrested and imprisoned during his long life and ministry for

anti-war actions, wrote a few years ago a book about these kings - David, Solomon and his successors (*The Kings and Their Gods: The Pathology of Power*).

Fr Berrigan really makes the scriptures come alive - drawing on hard-headed history about oppression and drawing parallels with contemporary American military power, and writing often in a rich, poetic style.

On Berrigan's reading the real message of the history of the kings is much more daunting and challenging than we thought: these warlords are not the instruments of the true God. There's a lot of falsehood around, and this is what we saw the prophets condemn when we considered them last month.

This shows that if we take the trouble the Bible always has the capacity to surprise us, to make us sit and think; even if we seem simply to be reading about endless battles and how many people were killed.

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## Life in lockdown on the isle of Sheppey

### Mary van Dyke

Lockdown on Sheppey, while creating havoc in our lives, has only served to prove we are indeed "the centre of the Universe", as our parish priest, Canon Frank Moran, puts it.

This same canon is totally convinced that the Holy Spirit recognises "no boundaries" and can't measure "social distancing, so in spirit we can still do everything we did before Covid-19 shadowed our lives.

The most obvious changes during lockdown are the white lines which are set to rule us wherever two or three of us are gathered. They dominate supermarkets, chemists and GP surgeries, but not in the small shops on our high street in Sheerness because they are all shut.

While out for your essential shopping trip you see the empty car parks and few people on the streets. There are orderly queues between the lines as people wait to access stores, with some shoppers wearing masks.

The closure of schools is a key part of this new life, but despite that there are no children in the shops at all, or so few as to be unnoticeable. It's the same on the beach and promenade, normally favourite places for children in the holidays. But lockdown exercise is limited to the promenade. This is no good to children who like to go down and throw stones in the water. Coastguards are patrolling the promenades and enforcing the "stay at home" message.

The children miss their friends. X-boxes, FaceTime and mobiles are good for a while, but no substitute for being together. And the other big problem is home schooling. By all reports it either works well or causes chaos. The majority of children think no school, no lessons!

However, there are positive aspects to lockdown: the heartwarming way people now smile as they pass, at the prescribed two metres apart; and the thoughtfulness as they approach an elderly person and cross the road so that they don't have to.

Or the young man in the supermarket

St Henry and St Elizabeth church in Sheerness



queue noticing an elderly lady behind him and asking if she knew there was a special time for her when she wouldn't need to queue? Yes, she did but her husband is disabled, and she can't get out any earlier.

The young man looked at the line of people ahead of them and said, "You shouldn't need to wait. Come with me." He walked her along the queue, saying, "Just giving this lady some help." Not one voice was raised in protest. This guardian angel led her into the shop and "crowd control" took over and promised the young man she would be accompanied all the way round, prioritised at the checkout and walked back to her car.

Thursday evenings at 8pm sees us outside the front door, clapping for the NHS and carers. Neighbours wave and call to each other. One street has a trumpeter who comes out and plays while the neighbours clap.

But for me and many others the hardest thing is the closure of our churches. The feeling of loss is overwhelming. Many follow a streamed Mass online but it's not the same

as Mass in our own church, with our own priest, deacon and our church family.

Here at St Henry and St Elizabeth in Sheerness we are very fortunate. Canon Frank promised he will celebrate Masses and services at the times they would normally be. He has added a holy hour from Monday to Friday at 3pm and invited us all to join in with him from home.

The now annual "Rosary on the Coast" has been cancelled. Here we had Rosary and Benediction on the beach outside the church.

It is the saddest moment of every day to think of Canon Frank celebrating Mass alone in our beautiful Pugin church. I personally abandoned the streamed Masses and go to our beloved church, so that at least in spirit Canon Frank will have a congregation.

But good has also come out of this sad lockdown. We are finding that as a church family we are even closer than before the ban. Regular phone calls are made to the sick, the disabled and elderly of our parish, and emails and texts are proving their worth.

Canon Frank even sends out newsletters as usual, which are made available on email, or "doorstep delivered", remembering that not everyone has internet access.

Normally, Good Friday would have seen a walk of witness from our church to Bunny Bank, a couple of miles from the church, with adults taking turns carrying a full size cross while Munchkins (first Holy Communion class children) carry a smaller one. Whole families, babies in buggies, dogs, all walk to the hill to place the large cross with two smaller crosses, one walked from a Church of England church and one from the prison, carried by prisoners. We would end with a short Ecumenical service followed by Hot Cross Buns.

Sadly, that walk had to be abandoned. The children's First Holy Communion day cannot happen. The class of 13 children and families are very upset, but the children are still learning via WhatsApp and email, and some wonderful work has come back especially over the Easter period.

Canon Frank made videos of the church each day of the Triduum, showing the stripped altar after the Maundy Thursday Mass, covered statues on Good Friday, the paschal candle before and after the vigil Mass. He made a beautiful video on Easter Sunday evening with the setting sun shining through the rose window onto the beautiful altar at the back.

As Canon Frank said: "The Light of the World shining a light into our world, bringing us hope in the midst of our troubles."

Canon Frank is the Catholic chaplain to one of our three local prisons, but lockdown has deprived him of that. We also lose the prisoner who comes to help with work around our two churches. He can no longer go to hospital, care homes. But his paperwork is benefitting!

Meantime, we carry on, not as before, but in faith and trust that we will come through this and having learnt our lesson, hopefully be able to meet again soon in God's house.

# The Last Supper at Brixton prison tells own story of life's struggles

**John Bateson**

One of the good things to have come out of lockdown are the virtual online shows that museums, galleries and theatres have been offering us.

The National Theatre, for example, have been digging deep into its film archives of live performances and given us, among others, *Treasure Island*, *Twelfth Night* and, most recently, a riveting performance of *Frankenstein*, with others on the way.

That sense of busyness that we're so used to living with in the city has dropped away and for some people, watching shows that they had always wanted to see but couldn't because of lack of time or money has been a real treat.

But the pandemic has certainly put a curb on those normal everyday activities we happily engaged in before lockdown was imposed. People and places we visited without a second thought are for the time being out of bounds.

On Saturday mornings, for example, I would trot off up Brixton Hill to the prison, where it was my privilege to be part of a small team of volunteers who helped out at the Mass in the prison chapel. About 25 prisoners, mostly young men, would attend, with music usually provided by volunteers from Corpus Christi parish in Brixton.

After the service Deacon Joseph, the prison chaplain, would invite us to stay for tea and coffee, served in a small windowless room above the chapel. This was a time of sharing with volunteers.

And the half or dozen or so prisoners that Deacon Joseph always invited very quickly became an important part of my week. There would be a real buzz about the place as we gathered, sitting around the table with our drinks, and Deacon Joseph inviting each of us in turn to say something about our week.

I was really quite startled how powerful such a simple thing as listening to people talk about the highs and lows of their past week could be. The stories that some of the prisoners brought to the table could be grim and humorous at the same time, but they nearly always moved me in ways I just wasn't expecting.

They didn't always make for comfortable listening; there was pain in these stories, which reflected the struggles that some of these young men were going through. I could never dismiss the

fact that they had committed crimes, some of them serious, and that people had been hurt as a result.

But hearing these stories reminded me that life's journey is far from straight forward and doesn't always go the way we had wanted or planned. We make wrong decisions, things get messy and all too easily we end up on the wrong side of the fence.

The feelings these stories generated must have stayed with me, because they became the inspiration for a painting that I eventually entitled *The Last Supper in Brixton Prison*. The first idea was to simply paint a picture of us sitting around the table as a group, but gradually it began to take on a life of its own, as pictures do sometimes, with more people appearing, but when the figure of Jesus found his way into the piece I knew this was going to be *The Last Supper*.

People will say the Last Supper took place in an upper room in Jerusalem, and not in a prison. That is very true, but one of the joys of painting is being able to reinterpret events and put them into a modern day context, as many artists down through the years have done so effectively.

The best known picture of the subject is Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, an image that has fascinated people down through the ages, for all sorts of reasons. This picture was originally painted for a convent in Milan back in the 15th century, but despite restoration it has not fared particularly well.

The colours and images have faded and going back to this picture didn't provide a great deal of inspiration to begin with. But then, out of the stone and plaster,

something began to emerge and I saw things in the picture that had escaped me at first.

It wasn't the perfection of the piece that grabbed me but its untidiness. If we ever imagined the Last Supper to be a solemn occasion at which the disciples sat in an orderly fashion watching while Jesus spoke, then this picture shows us

otherwise.

Here are the disciples, an assortment of characters, pointing and gesturing, pushing and shoving, keen to get their points across. I imagine it was a lively event with a good number of raised voices, but there, at the centre of it all, is the figure of Jesus himself.

The picture took me back to our

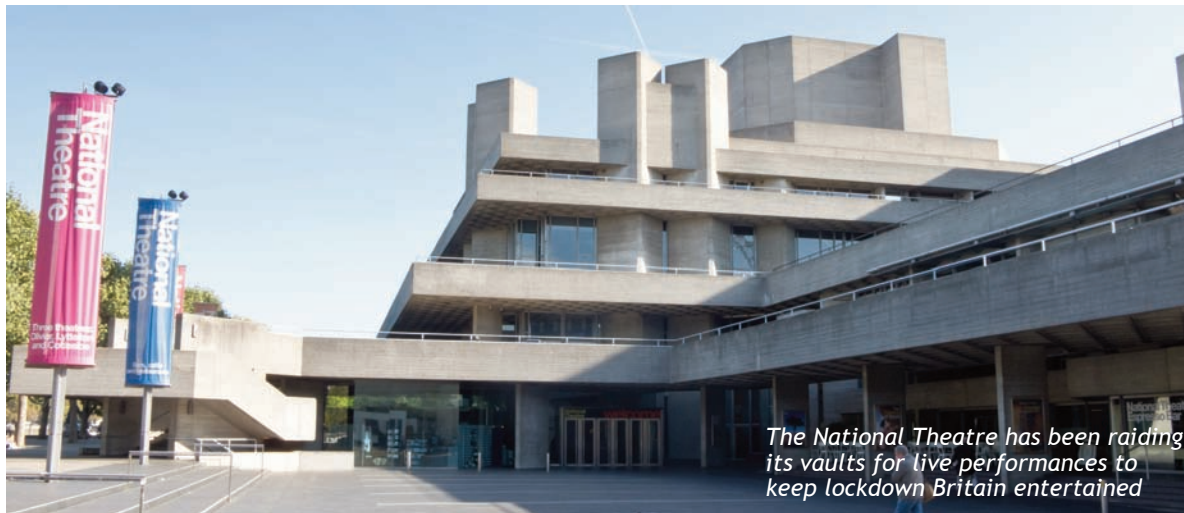
weekly gathering as we sat in that upper room above the chapel in Brixton prison. Like the disciples in Leonardo's painting, each of us who gathers around the table is making their own journey.

That journey is not always straightforward, more often than not we end up getting lost somewhere along the road and need help to find our way back again. Our stories, just like those of the young prisoners who join us, can be messy. We may not have to live behind bars but that doesn't mean we aren't sometimes held captive by our all too human frailties.

I completed *The Last Supper in Brixton Prison* just as Easter was about to begin and we all went into lockdown. I realise, looking at the finished item, that painting this picture has helped me make sense of some of the struggles that all of us, prisoners or not, go through each day. Like the disciples, we too are an assortment of characters who stumble and fall and then rise again, but it is good to know that wherever we are on the journey, the arms of Jesus remain open.



*The Last Supper, by John Bateson*



*The National Theatre has been raiding its vaults for live performances to keep lockdown Britain entertained*

# Staff and students rise to Covid-19 challenges

Camilla Crampton, deputy principal for character education and wellbeing curriculum at Christ the King Sixth Forms, explains how the college is supporting students through the Covid-19 crisis.

Across the country, teaching staff are working hard to create engaging virtual lessons so that their students can keep up with work at this difficult time.

At Christ the King Sixth Forms (CTK) in Lewisham, Sidcup and Brockley staff have overnight risen to the challenge of moving to new ways of working and coming up with innovative ways to communicate with and inspire students.

Valuing staff is enshrined in the CTK mission statement and the health and wellbeing of CTK is key. At this times of crisis, staff wellbeing is crucial and a great deal has gone into supporting the CTK community remotely.

Executive principal Shireen Razy explained: "Our chaplaincy team is at the core of our sixth forms and throughout this crisis our community has become stronger.

"The wellbeing of staff and students is at the heart of everything we do, and we have tried to find innovative ways to ensure staff and students remain a connected and supported throughout this crisis."

Sharing the word of God is a vital way to uphold the Catholic mission and to give comfort to staff and students. Helping ensure there is some routine in our daily life is so important, so at 8.30 am each day the CTK chaplaincy team, led by Javier Elderfield, sends out a student 'thought for the day', with a spiritual message to uplift and

"Prayer is an important way for staff and students to find hope and comfort, and students and staff come together to pray, reflect and sing at this time, helping to give a sense of routine and normality..."

support students.

The daily staff reflection is focused on messages for staff to help them through this time. At 12 noon each day a virtual prayer group

takes place, led by the chaplaincy team, using Microsoft teams. Prayer is an important way for staff and students to find hope and comfort, and students and staff come together to pray, reflect and sing at this time, helping to give a sense of routine and normality.

Taking forward more innovative opportunities, CTK has been working with CTK choir director Natalie Christian-John, who has been recording uplifting videos to share with students. These have proved very popular with both students and staff, who can view the gospel messages and songs online. The sixth forms gospel choirs would normally meet weekly and perform at different events both internally and externally, and this is a way for staff and students to continue to enjoy the uplifting power of song.

The chaplaincy is also working on innovative ways to engage staff and students remotely, such as asking students to send uplifting video content, like dancing or playing an instrument. These videos are shared with local care homes to lift the spirits of the staff and patients.

A 'talking heads' initiative has been set up, where interviews with guest speakers take place and are shared with staff. The inaugural guest was David Wells, catechist, teacher and author, who regularly speaks at conferences throughout the world.

The college's INSET day went ahead as normal on the first day of summer term, using MS Teams. Staff prayer and reflection are an important part of CTK INSET and the chaplaincy team engaged staff remotely in prayer, reflection, spirituality and wellbeing.

Working with charities has always been a big part of sixth form life for our students and supporting charity has never been more vital in these times of crises. When it became apparent there was a shortage of



PPE kit, ready to go over to the NHS staff working on the frontline

PPE, CTK donated 200 science goggles and 600 pairs of disposable gloves to University Hospital, Lewisham, along with food for the staff.

Donations were also made to other local charities, including the St Vincent de Paul Society. CTK started a Just Giving link to raise money for three local charities that have been hit hard by the coronavirus. The money raised will be donated to Bexley and Greenwich Hospice, Refuge Charity and Lewisham Foodbank. A target of £1,000 was set and was exceeded in only a week (currently the figure

stands at £1,148).

CTK students have wanted to get behind the NHS at this difficult time. Matthew Miller and Hannah Danso have both signed up as NHS volunteers. Our students wrote heartfelt messages of support for the NHS and submitted them via [www.thanksamillion.co.uk](http://www.thanksamillion.co.uk), where the messages are directed to local hospitals.

Students were thrilled to get messages of thanks back from University Hospital, Lewisham. A selection of their messages can be found on the CTK Twitter feed at @ctksfc.



A banner outside CTK in Sidcup

## Liturgical calendar - June

In line with Government regulations, all diocesan events for June have been cancelled. However, the liturgical calendar for the month is:

- 1: Mary, Mother of the Church
- 3: Ss Charles Lwanga and Companions, Martyrs
- 4: Our Lord Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest
- 5: St Boniface, Bishop, Martyr
- 7: The Most Holy Trinity
- 11: St Barnabas, Apostle
- 13: St Anthony of Padua, Priest, Doctor of the Church
- 14: Corpus Christi
- 19: Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
- 20: Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 22: Ss John Fisher, Bishop, and Thomas More, Martyrs
- 24: The Nativity of John the Baptist
- 28: St Peter and Paul, Apostles



St Bede the Venerable

If you have an event, e-mail details to us at [pilgrim@rcaos.org.uk](mailto:pilgrim@rcaos.org.uk)



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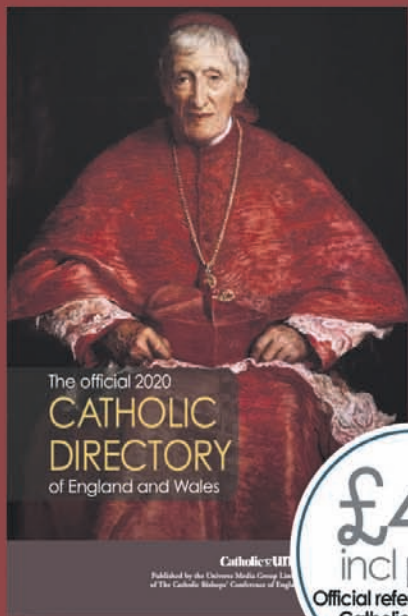
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# Our churches have been shut before - but the Lord Jesus was always with us

## Fr Innocent Abonyi

A search through history revealed to me that this is not the first time that Catholic churches have been shut and services cancelled due to public health challenges.

In 1575, when plague hit Milan, the then Archbishop St Charles Borromeo ordered the closure of churches, although he had altars built outside churches so that people could still participate in the Mass from the windows of their houses while the priests celebrated from the *al fresco* altars.

If online streaming or You Tube had been available then, St Charles would have used them. The Church was still standing after that pandemic.

The second occasion was between 1918 and 1920 when the Spanish Flu broke out; it affected around 500 million people all over the world and about fifty million were killed by this devastating flu.

During this time, churches and schools were all closed. This was the era of colonialism, and because people travelled extensively, the virus was taken to the colonies with very destructive effects on the culture and on peoples' lives.

In Igboland in Nigeria, where I come from, prior to the Spanish Flu, women were returned home to their father's or ancestral homes for burial after death. But the administration had to forcefully stop that practice because it was found that people caught the flu and died while conveying the body of those deceased ladies.

In the place of the corpse, a trunk of plantain and a cow were sent back to the birth family of the deceased. Today, a stop over of the funeral train is made to those families without offering any gift or replacement.

Adapting to the closure of Our Lady of the Rosary in Brixton has been a huge challenge for both parishioners and friends, who love their church so much.

Crises elicits decisions. We had to pause and pivot and plan how to minister and save our church and community through this crisis. We had to set up You Tube, Zoom and Facebook systems for Mass and devotions, for catechesis and, indeed, for all sorts of meetings.

For instance, although we did not gather in the church for the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, nor keep watch late night at the altar of repose, we held an online Mass. Parishioners participated and said their prayers in the privacy of their homes.

Good Friday offered empty pews,



Our Lady of the Rosary in Brixton

silent space and loneliness. At the Easter vigil Mass there was no fire kindled outdoors, no paschal candle, no singing voices and no flickering lights. Rather, just as the early Christians did when they gathered in homes to break bread (Eucharist), share the Word and offer petitions, we shared our joys and sent Easter messages, revisiting our baptismal vocations, focusing on the domestic Church, praying for the sick and dead of this pandemic, praying for one another and hoping for an end to this lockdown.

I can imagine parents answering countless questions from young children on why we cross ourselves or sing. Although Easter was solitary for many people, it was marked by having in mind the sick and the dead and the huge sacrifices made by the NHS, the Government, the chaplains, the volunteers and all in the medical and emergency services.

We have had night prayer every Monday, Wednesday and Friday during this pandemic. We had also had lines of people calling at the presbytery door seeking help and support, with some asking for food or money.

We only offered what we can afford. Luckily we had some sizable donations of food items before the pandemic and we have used it to help some of those calling at our door, just like other priests and parishes are doing.

We emphasised the need for regular communication so as to find out how people are doing. The response of parishioners to common solidarity and mutual support has been epic.

Finally, we have stayed constantly mindful of the 'saints next door': the doctors, nurses, chaplains, volunteers, charity workers, the media, our Government, all

performing their duty so that this crisis can cease and that our society can continue to function.

In the opening words of his *Urbi et Orbi* (for the city and the world), a solitary Pope Francis said: "For weeks, it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets, and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void; we feel it in the air, we notice it in people's gestures, their glances give them away. Like the disciples, we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm."

The Holy Father said that we were all in the same boat and were called to row together, each in need of comportsing the other. As a Church and as a parish, Our Lady of the Rosary Church is trying to row together with the rest of the Church and humanity through active mutual support and prayers, through compassion and sharing of love.

We are aware that our lives as a parish may be fundamentally altered at the end of our experience. We may resume and follow familiar patterns, but we may come to them as changed people. We pray not to lose our sense of God, sense of the Church and sense of community in the stones and bushes of the hedge-row.

We pray to have sustained and very deepened senses of agape love and our need for God and for each other at the end of all this chaos. For now, I suspect that we are called to discern how we are being renewed and reformed to be ever more the community of disciples that Jesus envisioned.

Jesus is bigger than the coronavirus, and the Gospel is not contained or constrained by quarantine.