



30th April 2020

Dear Junior Parishioners,

This is your parish priest here. I have been wondering how you have all been getting on.

When I was very young, I remember sitting on the floor at home while my parents sat in the sofa and discussed something called the 'overdraught'. Luckily, I was too young to know what an overdraught was, so I remained quite happy and carefree. At present, your parents may be worried about all sorts of things to do with the Covid crisis; there's the worry of getting unwell, and there is the worry of all the things to do with their work; as you may know, some parents can work from home, but others can't. Just as your parents always say to you 'Everything is going to be alright' whenever you are worried or fearful or anxious, now is your big chance to say the same thing to them. Everything is going to be alright: first of all, because no matter what lies ahead, we are all surrounded by people we love and who love us. This is important. Remember some of those people may be under strain right now, so make sure they know that you love them.

Everything is going to be alright, because we believe in God who is love; things like lockdown come to test us, and life is full of tests, and the one thing we are tested on is our ability to love the people we are with. People can get a bit stroppy at times, and they can hurt each others' feelings, but let us remember to love each other and to make sure everyone around us has what they need.

Everything is going to be alright, because God put hope in our hearts and we have been told in the Bible that hope does not disappoint us. On Good Friday the followers of Jesus were all very disappointed and discouraged; but when He rose from the tomb their spirits rose with Him.

Right now we are all at home, far more than we would normally be, and I am sure you miss your friends, and your grandparents and other family members who do not live with you. You can of course speak to them on the phone or by Skype or some other means, but it is not the same. But we will see each other again and we hope soon.

Right now it is clear that the virus is going away, though this takes time. But things are headed in the right direction.

You might find you are missing school. This may be a surprise to you! When you go back to school, having missed it, it will remind us all how important education is. Lots of children the world over can't go to school, even though they would love to learn things; but they have to work, or look after sick family members, or their parents cannot afford the fees. How lucky we are to have schools that anyone can go to! And great teachers to teach us! When I look back on my schooldays, I think of all the great teachers I had and wish I could thank them. So, let us thank them NOW. As you know

our Church has had to close, ordered by the government, and we have been happy to do this, as they have explained why we needed to do it. When things are explained to us, we are always happier to do them than when things are not explained properly. This is a huge disappointment to those children preparing for baptism (some of these are babies, so their families are disappointed, but two are children of school age who were very much hoping to be baptised at Easter). Also disappointed are all those who should be doing their First Holy Communion. This will take place but we are not quite sure when. The same is true of Confirmation. And of course, the weddings we had planned are now all up in the air as well, sadly.

Things will eventually get back to normal. The Church will reopen, Mass will be in public again, and we will all see each other again. In the meantime, the Bishop has asked me and all the priests to keep on saying Mass every day and stream it. You may have seen this. It is important, because it shows that the parish is being prayed for every day. You are all invited to join in this from home.

I know that your teachers have been giving you work to do, and I don't want to give you 'work', but here are a few suggestions for you in case you feel at a loose end and want something to do.

- • Take down your Bible and read it. Perhaps you have a beautifully illustrated Bible specially for children. Start with the story of Jonah. Then go on to the story of Daniel in the Lions' Den. Then perhaps read the stories of the Acts of the Apostles that tell us what the Apostles did after Jesus had risen from the dead.
- • Have you got a simple prayer book? Look up the prayers everyone should know and try and learn them off by heart. Get the grown ups at home to test you. Start small and work your way up: the Glory be, the Hail Mary, the Our Father, the Gloria, the Creed. Make it your challenge to learn all these off by heart.
- • Have you got a set of Rosary beads? Look up the Mysteries of the Rosary (in a prayer book or online) and try and say one mystery a day and think of the event it describes as you say it.
- • Do an internet research project, if you can, on one of the following saints: Pier Giorgio Frassati; Carlo Acutis; Padre Pio (also known as Pius of Pietralcina); Saint Bernadette; Saint Josephine Bakhita. (These are just suggestions, you can find others.) You can, when lockdown is over, share your discoveries with the parish, and we can put them up where people can see them. It does not have to involve a lot of writing, just as much as you feel you can do.
- • Finally, every day, do not forget to pray for your parents, your family, your friends, your city, your country, and the world in which we live, adults and children everywhere!

I very much hope to see you again soon!

With every best wish,

Fr Alexander.



30th April 2020.

Dear Parishioners,

I know that many of you do not have computers, and while I have been trying to phone many of you, and have bumped into many of you on my daily Boris walk, I thought if I wrote this, and published it online, kind people could print it off and put it through your letterbox. There are quite a few things I would like to talk about, and I will put them under separate headings.

First, parish building news. We have had the Church floor sanded and revarnished, and it looks very good. It was thought a good idea to get this done while the Church was closed and disruption would be minimised. Many thanks to the bench movers! The process cost a great deal of money, thanks to the labour involved and the varnish being very expensive, but it makes a huge difference and should last for years. (It was also a good thing to be providing employment to Roy and James, our sanders and varnishers.) We have changed the arrangement of the benches a little. Some of the shorter ones have been transferred to the Blessed Sacrament chapel; this means that there is a little more leg room in the body of the church as one row has been removed on each side of the aisle. The some of the red chairs are now down the side aisles, and the plastic bucket chairs have been removed to the Hall. We plan to give away some of the now superfluous plastic chairs in the hall. Talking of which, we are still going ahead with the Hall refurbishment, and the architect is working on his plans. We really cannot leave the Hall as it is, and to cancel the project would mean the loss of the fees we have already paid. This brings us to the next matter...

Second, parish finances. Right now the usual collection is not coming in, but many thanks to you who have put donations through the door, and who continue to donate via standing order. At the same time, not much is going out, as we have cancelled all the supplies that we usually have delivered, such as candles, wine and stationery; we also have no heating and lighting bill to worry about. In keeping with the practice of the diocese, the parish has reserves of £200,000, which is supposed to guard us against unforeseen disaster. Well, Covid comes under that designation, I would think, so we can always draw on that in the future. Some of you have asked, and I can assure you that the diocese has made adequate financial provision for its priests at this time. Parish staff have been placed on furlough, so we benefit from the government scheme in that regard (priests are not covered by this as they are not employed by the diocese.) Our employees are being paid as usual, and 80% of this is being met by the government.

Thirdly, our sacramental programme. This is all suspended until such a time as we can resume parish activities. The Bishop will allow us to conduct Confirmations in the parish with the parish priest conferring the sacrament, when this is possible. As soon as people are allowed to meet again, we shall resume baptisms and we shall resume the First Holy Communion programme. But until we know when that is, we cannot fix any dates.

Fourthly, the diocese has asked all priests to say Mass every day, so the parishioners know that their priest is praying for them, and though the church is closed everyone can be assured that, as the hymn says, 'the voice of prayer is never silent'. Here we have had and will continue to have Mass every day at 10am, the Regina Caeli at noon with a scriptural reflection, and Adoration with Rosary and Benediction at 7pm. You are invited to join in these devotions spiritually. We all know that this is not ideal but it is better than nothing. At the same time, being deprived of the usual liturgical life of the Church should perhaps underline for us the central importance of the sacraments, especially Holy Communion in the Holy Mass, and Confession. Certain tyrannical governments in the twentieth century have closed churches and forbidden the sacraments out of hostility to the faith, such as the Soviet Union (which closed every Catholic church in the country bar three) and Mexico (do read Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* for a superb description of this) and Republican Spain. Today the tyrannical regime in Saudi Arabia means that there is only one Church in the entire country (in the Italian embassy) to cater for the needs of numerous Catholic foreign workers. Our deprivation of the sacraments is nothing compared to these examples; but may our love of the sacraments equal that of those who were allowed to receive Holy Communion and go to Confession after a long struggle to be allowed to do so in freedom! So, the first lesson of lockdown should be this: as soon as we are released, let us celebrate the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion with renewed fervour and devotion.

Fifthly, another lesson of lockdown is the realisation that we can make our own homes not prisons but domestic churches. Our diocesan patron, Saint Philip Howard knew the meaning of lockdown, imprisoned in the Tower for ten years. He wrote on his cell wall – and it is still there – *Quanto plus afflictiones pro Christo in hoc saeculo, tanto plus gloriae cum Christo in futuro* ("the more affliction [we endure] for Christ in this world, the more glory [we shall obtain] with Christ in the next"). While stuck at home let us rediscover the Rosary (something that can be said anywhere, anytime), let us rediscover our Bibles, and let us rediscover our Missals which have the readings in for Sundays, and in the case of Daily Missals, every day. If you have a hymn book, some of the hymns make great material for meditation and prayer. If you have the internet, let us discover the huge amount of Catholic stuff online. Let us try to make progress in private prayer.

Sixthly, there has been endless comment about the Covid crisis in all media, all the time. I am not going to add to this, except to say that we must exercise caution and be

rational in processing what we are told. This is serious, but it is not Armageddon, and some of the stories circulating are irresponsible. Let us be reassured by faith in God, and by hope in Him. We have been through worse! Many of our parishioners are familiar with countries where famine is a reality, and where civil disturbance, even civil war, is a sad fact. We are fortunate indeed to live in a well-organised country, even if the Covid crisis has put our structures under strain. Panic helps no one. So let us encourage each other with faith and hope and charity.

Seventhly, some of our parishioners have died in recent weeks, but they were all ill for a long period beforehand, and they did not die of Covid. They all received the sacrament of the Sick, I am glad to say. In addition, I have conducted the funerals of several people from elsewhere in the city, all of whom have been of advanced years, or very advanced years. Please pray for the repose of their souls and for their families. I have told them all that when the Church reopens we will have a Requiem Mass for those who have had funerals celebrated under the current restrictions. All the bereaved were touched by my assurance that the parishioners of Saint Peter's would be praying for them. So please, back me up on this one!

Eighthly, and perhaps finally, let us remember the power of prayer and let us pray for all those who are affected by the current crisis. Naturally we think of all those who have died, all those who are unwell, and all those caring for them, but let us not forget all those who are suffering as a result of the lockdown: those ill from other diseases, those in difficult or impossible domestic situations, those who are mentally fragile, the depressed and the sorrowful. Let us also remember the millions of people throughout the world who have lost their livelihood. Perhaps the month of May will see a gradual return to normality; let us pray that this may be so, and let us commend all God's people to the care of Our Lady, Comforter of the Afflicted and Health of the Sick, whose month May is.

Finally, and I do mean finally, people have asked me, and I am well. I hope you are too. I hope that lockdown, which is not of itself a good experience, may be turned to good for all of us!

With every best wish to you all, Fr Alexander.