

Dear Friends,

I wanted to write to you again about a few matters and to give a word of encouragement to each of you in these times. Although we are living through difficult days, I am sure that Our Lord will bring about good from all of this if we continue to trust Him and ask Him, as the Apostles did, 'Lord increase our faith!'

My aim is to write to you once a week and try to contain in the email all the news. I know that people can get an information overload if too many e-mails ping into their inboxes each day, so I will limit it to once per week.

Firstly, I wanted to assure each one of you that I am praying for you all each day, and especially as I celebrate Holy Mass each day for your intentions. Unfortunately, I heard the news a couple of days ago that my parents and two of their friends all contracted the virus, but they are recovering well. Please say prayer for them. If you hear of any parishioners falling ill with the virus, please let me know so that I can remember them particularly at Mass each day by name.

Closure of churches

As I'm sure all of you now know, following a couple of days when we were getting into a new rhythm of coming to church to pray privately whilst there are no public Masses, both of our churches must now remain closed until further notice and parishioners can no longer visit for private prayers. My thanks to those who came along during those couple of days; it was good to see a steady stream of individuals who were all respectful of the prayerful atmosphere and also of the need to keep physical distances from one another. Now we must keep our prayer lives strong in a different way by making our homes places of prayer. The Bishop has suggested that we encourage our parishioners to designate a part of their homes as a place for prayer and devotion, and I think this is a good initiative. If you can't spare a whole room to use as a chapel, why not create a corner of a room, perhaps with an image of Our Lady or one of the Saints and with a crucifix, where you can retreat to spend some time each day with Our Lord? During these days, when many of us are confined and have more time on our hands than usual, this could become an opportunity for us to strengthen our spiritual lives with regular devotions and reading so that when we do get back into the routine of normal life, we have established good habits over these weeks.

Sacrament of Confession

The Bishop has also written asking us not to offer the Sacrament of Confession at this time, in order to protect the vulnerable. He has asked us to publish the recent comments on this of Pope Francis, who encourages us to make an Act of Contrition and resolve at the same time to go to Confession as soon as it becomes possible again. I reproduce what the Bishop wrote to us below:

In light of the government directive on staying at home, the message issued yesterday about Confessions must now be revised. If a person asks for the Sacrament of Reconciliation please advise them that, for their own safety and yours, this will not be possible at this time. Please make them aware of the statement by Pope Francis which is included below:

“I know that many of you go to confession before Easter ... many will say to me: ‘But Father I cannot leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me How can I do that unless I find a priest?’ Do what the catechism says. It is very clear. If you don’t find a priest to go to confession, speak to God. He is your Father. Tell Him the truth: ‘Lord, I did this and this and this. Pardon me.’ Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise Him, ‘afterward I will go to confession.’ You will return to God’s grace immediately. You yourself can draw near, as the catechism teaches us, to God’s forgiveness, without having a priest at hand.”

Visits to the Sick and Housebound

At the moment, the Priests have been asked not to make home visits to parishioners who are housebound, and not to administer Holy Communion to anyone. If a person is dying and needs anointing, unless the person has already received the Sacrament of the Sick in the last few weeks, the Priest can visit them under strict guidelines and administer the Sacrament of the Sick. If you know any parishioners who are housebound, please consider phoning them just to check they are alright and to alleviate any loneliness they might be feeling in these days.

Live Streaming of Masses

I know that many parishioners are participating in Mass as best they can by livestreaming Masses over the internet. There are many sites which you can find through the Salford Diocesan website, but we have a local Parish in the Deanery, Good Shepherd Parish, Pendle, which is live streaming Mass each day from the church of Sacred Heart, Colne. Weekday Masses are at 10am and Sunday Mass at 9.30am. If you were looking for a local Mass, why not access the website at www.goodshepherdpendle.org.uk Monsignor Wilkinson, the Parish Priest, has also added a page to his website on which he will publish my letters to you so that people can access them whilst our own Parish website is still in development.

Rededication of England as Our Lady's Dowry

Many parishioners have been using the booklet, '33 Days to Morning Glory' to consecrate themselves to Jesus through Mary, in preparation for the rededication of the country to Our Lady on 29th March. The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham has produced resources and prayers to be used on the day, as well as a live stream of the ceremonies at Walsingham, all of which can be accessed at the following places: www.behold2020.com and also www.lentinisolation.com

Parish Weekly Collection

I know many parishioners will be anxious about their income in the weeks ahead, and the economic impact of the crisis. Speaking to brother priests from around the Diocese, we are also conscious that parishes are likely to struggle with the loss of regular income gained through weekly collections. These weekly collections taken at the Sunday Masses are our bread and butter when it comes to keeping the church running. One of our parishioners contacted me recently to ask if it would be possible to encourage as many parishioners as possible to set up standing orders through their banks so that in the weeks and months

ahead, the Parish is still able to receive the financial support needed for all of our outgoings. If you are able to set up through your bank a regular standing order, no matter how small the amount, it would give the Parish more security financially. I am most grateful to those parishioners who already have a standing order. The details of the Parish account are as follows:

Name of Account: SRCDTR ST ANNE AND ST JOSEPH

Account Number: 50972819

Sort Code: 20-55-34

If you are able to set up a standing order, could I ask you to notify Siobhan by email that you have done so for purposes of accounting.

With assurances of my prayers and uniting myself spiritually to each one of you in the Mass each day,

Father Simon Stamp
Parish Priest of St Anne and St Joseph, Accrington
Rural Dean of St John Vianney Deanery