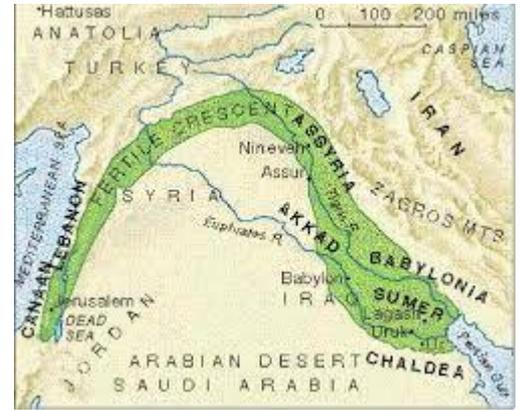


St John the Evangelist, Poulton

26th June 2020

Friday of the 12th week of Ordinary Time
(Fourteenth Friday of Isolation)

Sign on at: saintjohnpoulton@gmail.com



Thanks to those who replied to my last scripture reflection with your own thoughts – if you want to be taken off the email list, or know anyone who may appreciate the contact, please let me know – or print it for a neighbour. (If you have only just started to receive these daily reflections it is because I have only just found your address, sorry) Thanks. Fr Peter.

Note from Fr Peter:

A full list of Deanery church opening (which have been sent to me) are below

Thanks to our first team (chronologically) of stewards who worked hard in the midday sun to welcome those coming for prayer yesterday. When you hear rumours of churches opening for “worship” please remember that this will still involve distancing (even at half the distance) and sanitizing rules so it will be small numbers. We have to await guidance from the bishops regarding how to deal with this – which will be awkward. (Catholic guidance seems to be always stricter than others!)

(Daily Scripture is available from www.universalis.com)

2 Kings 24:1-12

In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with his whole army to attack Jerusalem; he pitched camp in front of the city and threw up earthworks round it. The city lay under siege till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. In the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, when famine was raging in the city and there was no food for the populace, a breach was made in the city wall. At once, the king made his escape under cover of dark, with all the fighting men, by way of the gate between the two walls, which is near the king's garden – the Chaldaeans had surrounded the city – and made his way towards the Arabah. The Chaldaean troops pursued the king and caught up with him in the plains of Jericho, where all his troops deserted. The Chaldaeans captured the king and took him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence on him. He had the sons of Zedekiah slaughtered before his eyes, then put out Zedekiah's eyes and, loading him with chains, carried him off to Babylon.

In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month – it was in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon – Nebuzaradan, commander of the guard, an officer of the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. He burned down the Temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses in Jerusalem. The Chaldaean troops who accompanied the commander of the guard demolished the walls surrounding Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan, commander of the guard, deported the remainder of the population left behind in the city, the deserters who had gone over to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the common people. The commander of the guard left some of the humbler country people as vineyard workers and ploughmen.

Psalms 136

*O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!
By the rivers of Babylon
there we sat and wept,
remembering Zion;
on the poplars that grew there
we hung up our harps.
O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!
For it was there that they asked us,
our captors, for songs,
our oppressors, for joy.
'Sing to us,' they said,
'one of Zion's songs.'
O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!
O how could we sing
the song of the Lord
on alien soil?
If I forget you, Jerusalem,*

“The Rivers of Babylon”

Those of us of a certain age will remember well this song which gets stuck in your mind and lasts all day! (turn up the Bass!)

It is Psalm 136 and carries many of the themes of today's reading

[Sing along here - Click](#)

The comments are worth reading!

*let my right hand wither!
O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!
O let my tongue
cleave to my mouth
if I remember you not,
if I prize not Jerusalem
above all my joys!*

(What is God saying to you as you hear his Word here?)

Before we look, with great reverence, at this great disaster in the history of the Israelite people let us look at the timings. King Zedekiah, we saw yesterday, was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar as a 'safe pair of hands' to look after the city of Jerusalem and those left behind as he took the more valuable people to Exile in Babylon. Today we find that nine years have past before Nebuchadnezzar returns to lay siege to the city – it was bound to happen but how did those people spend those nine years, and with what hope?

In a great picture of how to attack great cities – the historical information is amazing, isn't it? – the attacking army makes it's presence felt by pitching camp in front of the city and with earth works - and waits. Now you can't resist comparing this siege to a lockdown – not fully, unlike us they are starving. This frightening situation lasted for eighteen months we are told! *(If you are asking how they managed without water then look up 'Hezekiah's Tunnel', built some years before for such situations by this King. It is an amazing feat and, if you visit Jerusalem you can walk down it (Not for the claustrophobic!))*

King Zedekiah and his royal group tried to escape but..... and ultimately Nebuchadnezzar entered the city, burned down the Temple and deported most of the people to Babylon to join the first wave. However, some were left to look after the land and the vineyards – remember this, it's significant. And so the book of Kings ends sadly with what looks like the end of a great people, culture and faith.

(Spoiler Alert: In case you were wondering: this is not the Temple Jesus visited and spoke about – When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem (whole great story) they rebuilt on some of the remains – but the second Temple was built on a huge scale by Herod the Great (Why would he do this for the Jews?) starting in 37BC and completed in 4AD – this is Jesus' Temple, and how new looking and news worthy would that have been for the people who heard Jesus speaking?!!)

What has this got to do with us as Christians? (some people, even Catholics, ask why we bother with the Old Testament as we have a New one!)

The Temple, for the Israelites, was the place where God is present in the world. There was only one Temple in the world and it is where God has his foot, or finger, in our world. The destruction of the Temple was not just a disaster for a culture, it was the severing of the umbilical cord joining God's life to his people – and it made Jerusalem Holy. Then God's people are distributed about the local lands and cultures. It could not be worse for these people and could have been the end.

The Psalm today indicates how difficult the Israelites found it to pray, to deal with their God, to know who they were, in a land outside Jerusalem and separated from the Temple. They sang their songs and their hymns together in exile – but the captors liked their songs and so

they “hung up their harps” in defiance when asked to sing for entertainment! They doubted whether they should sing separated from the land God had given them. Where they separated from God himself in this place?

If the Exodus from Egypt was the highpoint of the Israelite’s trust in God who gave them a Land of Promise, then the Exile is their darkest hour – it is remembered by the Jews to this day. However, this awful time is a point of their development and God’s revelation of a new way of him being present through his people. How the people of Israel grew in faith through this period of their history is remembered and peppered through the rest of the Jewish history and, often, faith practice.

This period allowed the Israelites to realise that God did not only have a home in Jerusalem, but in his Holy People. An example of this development is evident in the wide range of Jewish religious practice today. The second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD and there has not been a Temple in Jerusalem since. Separate from the politics of Jerusalem and the Middle East the Jewish people have continued to be ‘remnants’ in all parts of the world and remained ‘God’s people’ without the immediate need for a Temple. Most religious Jews today would not want to build another Temple in Jerusalem, even if it was possible. The understanding of their relationship with God has developed through God working with them. (It is true that there is a small but growing group of Ultra Orthodox Jews who are, at this moment, planning to build a new Temple when they can, as they see it as vital to God’s salvation)

The Exile is a great growing time for God’s people. But now paint, with a wide brush, the picture of Jesus’s understanding of where God is leading us. Jesus used the Temple – but he also had some strong things to say about it and it’s priestly politics. Jesus seems to continue the learning from the Exile in that he spoke of his people as his presence. Of course Jesus himself replaces the Temple as God’s ‘foot’ on the earth – but the Holy Spirit of Pentecost called his Church to be his presence in the world forever. At the death of Jesus, John’s Gospel tells us: “The veil of the Temple was torn in two!”

And so to our “mini Exile” in lockdown. As for the Israelites, so for us, this should be a time of pondering, learning and growth in our faith in who we are as God’s people. Being Exiles from our church buildings and each other and some of our religious cultural practices has been painful. But growth is always painful (ask you tomato plant, or a younger teenager!). The world around us is warning us that we cannot return to the past – in faith terms this is probably true also. But more importantly, lets make sure we use the opportunities we have been given by God to learn new ways to appreciate his presence and grow in understanding and prayer. To many who watch us, Catholics can be defined as “those who go to Mass on Sunday” – the absence of our gathering for the “Eucharist” (our “Thankyou”) has been painful on many levels – but I hope this period has confirmed, for us at least, that our definition of ourselves much, much, much more than just this.

(Thanks to those of you who have appreciated this time to visit sacred scripture in a way we might not have done in the past – it’s a pleasure – its my job so thanks for letting me do it)

PARISH NOTICES:

- *To date the Fylde coast has seen 1,819 COVID-positive patients with 18 patients currently being treated as inpatients. As of 5pm on **June 19th**, the Trust had reported 223 deaths. A total of 408 patients from across the Fylde coast have been discharged.*
- **Re-opening of St John's Church for private prayer**
St John's will be open from 11.00am to 1.00pm on Wednesdays and Saturdays from next week with the agreed arrangements and a limited number of people – great thanks to Cath Morgan and our volunteer stewards.
Please note that, if you come you will have to declare you are not in a vulnerable sector of society and that you have no flu-like symptoms. Please remember all the descriptions below are for the safety of OTHERS as well as you.
 - Due to the 2 metre distancing there will be a maximum number entering at any time and individuals must enter and sit apart ("Households" can stay together)
 - There will be an indicated "One way" route around church to the exit.
 - Parish Stewards will guide you to hand sanitiser and benches
 - Benches will be sanitised after each use.
 - There will be no books provided – please bring your own prayer aids.
 - We are not allowed to provide toilet facilities.
 - We are not allowed anything which is openly "devotional" (gatherings of people, shared prayer, etc) or items which can be touched (relics, votive candles etc)
 - If you wish to wear a mask please provide your own.
 - If you have flu-like symptoms, or are in a "vulnerable" category please stay at home.

Thanks to those who have registered their interest to volunteer – or apologised.

If you volunteered but did not attend Friday's training session please telephone Fr Peter.

- **St Martin & Hilda's open for private prayer**
Our chapel will be open for private prayer on Wednesdays from **9.30am to 12.30pm** from next week. Great thanks to Joan Swan for organising this under the safeguarding guidelines of the Church of England and the responsibility of the Vicar of St Chad's.
If you wish to offer any help please contact Joan on 07887 880497
- **Know any parishioners housebound or who may need contacting?** - At the start of this lockdown a number of parishioners offered to find a way of being help to those parishioners who are in need or just housebound. Many people are in contact with the parish through this email or the WhatsApp group, but you may think of some who are not getting parish contacts – but they may get family support and food. If you have suggestions please email their names and addresses to the parish address and we can get parishioners to drop a message in to them. Thanks.
- **Local COVID19 Helplines** *(Official message from our Parish Organisers)*
The Wyre Council have a dedicated helpline for COVID19 isolation support. If you are struggling to get essential items, or need help, please ring 01253 891000 and select OPTION 7 when prompted. Alternatively, if you have access to the internet, you can fill in the online request for help here: https://www.wyre.gov.uk/forms/form/257/en/coronavirus_isolation_support_form

There is also another local network being organised by the Methodist Church - called POULTONCAN. The helpline there is 01253 670800 between 8am and 10pm, 7 days a week.

We have a group of parish volunteers who are going to be working with the council to respond to requests. If anyone would like to offer help, please email Jenny at jennifer.hillman.sutcliffe@gmail.com or telephone on 07568502749.
- **Parish WhatsApp Group:** Emily Halliwell (as part of the above group) has set up a closed parish WhatsApp account. I have finally been beaten into joining but am a bit of a WhatsApp virgin as yet!

Emily says: "My number is 07969643648 if you want to be added just reply with your mobile number or text me. "

- **Local Bakery Offer:** Jane and Andrew Neal, who are always so generous to us by offering bread and cakes at parish social events, are offering delivered bakery goods to those who are in isolation or ill. However they also offer a "click-and -collect" service (You can stop outside the shop in Cleveleys) for those who have transport. You can order on line at neals-familybakery.co.uk
- Lancashire and South Cumbria website for current details on Hospitals & Corana Virus <https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/coronavirus>

**Opening Times of churches
within our Deanery:**

St John's, Poulton will be open:
Wednesdays 11.00am – 1.00pm
Saturdays 11.00am – 1.00pm

Ss Hilda & Martin's Chapel:
Wednesdays 9.30am – 12.30pm

St Wulstan's Fleetwood: will be open:
10.00am -12.00noon on
Monday, Wednesday and Friday
14.00pm -18.00pm on
Tuesday and Thursday

St. Teresas Cleveleys: will be open:
Saturdays 10 am - 12 noon
Wednesdays 10 am - 12 noon

Sacred Heart, Thornton
Fridays 11am-12noon
Sundays 11am-12noon

St Mary's, Fleetwood: (No information)

English Martyrs', Hardhorn:
Not opening for Private Prayer

Thoughts contributed by Virus Times' readers:

(A few of anonymous responses from these Virus Times Reflections from our parishioners: Thanks to contributors.)

Thank you. Even in the heat you turn out good stuff!

Just to share this thought: " I have found the Book of the Law in the Temple of the Lord". Why had no one come across it before - after all it was and is the foundational document of the Jewish people's belief - was it locked away, forgotten. What was going on in the temple in terms of worship/ sacrifice which had become so disconnected to their scriptures? Empty ritual? It certainly did not seem to be connected to the covenant relationship that was so precious to Abraham and Moses.

And so we reflect on the Word of God today in our Church. Historically, it was locked away from the people for over three hundred years - in the church building and the preserve of those in our church who 'knew best' what was good for us. Its foundational importance had become lost in rituals and behaviours, expectations and practices which were very distant from the New Covenant relationship that Jesus invites us to enter into freely. A Covenant as you so rightly draw attention to in his blood (in Jewish and therefore in Jesus' understanding: "in his life"). Jesus has given his life freely: No one takes (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord (John 10:18.) and he offers a liberating invitation to each of us to accept what he offers. It is a relationship in him that makes us sons and daughters of a loving God with all the rights and privileges that comes this. The only condition is that we believe in him and what has been achieved by him for all of us.

Thank God for Vatican II, but how far we have to go before our foundational book becomes central to our Christian lives.

Wow! what a wonderful thoughtsharing a Feast in memory/celebration of both branches of Christianity.....but as to who we approach.....a direct approach to Rome ?

What a powerful message from the tiny picture from w/e.....Building closed -Church Open ,loved it

The thing that 'jumped out at me' from today's (Sunday) readings was the talk of child sacrifice. There is so much of that going on today, both by abortion and neglect, usually because of the "me" culture.

People being prayed for by our parish groups:

Maureen Brown	Maureen was taken into Victoria after a couple of 'incident'. She slept well last night, has had a 'clear' and is speaking better today. I am sure she will appreciate our prayers. I have sent your love to her.
Various Older People we worry about	Whilst we are enjoying the promise of loosening lockdown we still have concerns for relations and friends who have signs of Covid-19 and who have been taken to Hospital. Please pray for these people – and for those we don't know as well.
Louie aged 13	The neighbour of a parishioner who has Leukaemia who is having a sudden set back. Prayer, please
From Jayne Clark	Could I please ask that our parishioners pray for all the staff in children's social care who are still working to safeguard children in our area and around the country. It never ceases to amaze me how hard they work generally, despite the abuse that they often are subjected to, but more so currently given the extra risk that they are putting themselves under to visit the vulnerable.
Maureen O'Connell & Family(Not Covid-19)	Mrs Donnelly's Mum
Paul Sharrock (Not Covid-19) (and family: Kathryn, Mary & Rachael)	Your prayer of healing for Paul is remarkable –Paul has now been moved to a specialised rehabilitation hospital where more serious physiotherapy can be offered and better connection with his family which has been very painful during lockdown. Please remember his wife & family at this time. <i>Fr Peter</i>
Parents home schooling AND home job-ing	Thank God for our parents
Our Teachers	Who are at school or preparing work for our children
Hugh (Not Covid-19)	The brother of Emma, a friend of mine (Fr Peter), who has been found to have cancer only recently. He has three young children. Prayers Please