

# St John the Evangelist, Poulton

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020

Sunday of the 18<sup>th</sup> Week of the Year

(Twentieth Sunday of Isolation)

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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:**

Thanks to those who write in their responses to our scripture reflections – it makes it all worth while! Thanks for giving me the chance to continue my vocation to preach the Gospel!  
**We will need more stewards to have more Masses.** Please let me know if you are willing.  
Thanks to those who have volunteered – but we need more to move forward

(Daily Scripture is available from [www.universalis.com](http://www.universalis.com))

**Isaiah 55:1-3**

*Thus says the Lord:  
Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty;  
though you have no money, come!  
Buy corn without money, and eat,  
and, at no cost, wine and milk.  
Why spend money on what is not bread,  
your wages on what fails to satisfy?  
Listen, listen to me, and you will have good things to eat  
and rich food to enjoy.  
Pay attention, come to me;  
listen, and your soul will live.  
With you I will make an everlasting covenant  
out of the favours promised to David.*

**Psalms 144(145):8-9,15-18**

*The Lord is kind and full of compassion,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.  
How good is the Lord to all,  
compassionate to all his creatures.*

*The eyes of all creatures look to you  
and you give them their food in due time.  
You open wide your hand,  
grant the desires of all who live.*

*The Lord is just in all his ways  
and loving in all his deeds.  
He is close to all who call him,  
who call on him from their hearts.*

**Matthew 14:13-21**

*When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.*

*When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' 'Bring them here to me' he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then*

*he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining; twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.*

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

I know this is Matthew's Gospel, but St John doesn't use the term 'miracle' but calls such events 'signs'. In the four Gospels there are a number of slightly different 'feedings' and they each share a core sign, but a series of particular meanings, too. So.... When reading this Gospel, in response to Isaiah's reading and the Psalm it is worth asking ourselves:

If this event is 'the answer' – what was 'the question'? (Or 'what is this event a sign of?')

But first let us remember Isaiah. 'Second Isaiah' was building on the original Isaiah and his warnings before the Exile – but this new prophet was with the people in Exile encouraging them, firstly, not to believe that God has forgotten them. The reality is that many of the people had done very well out of Babylon (Remember the King took the fit, the skilled, the women and children back to his country) as many were appreciated, and eventually married, owned land and had occupations. Through Isaiah God had promised the people would return to the 'Land of Promise' and God would give them great food, a constant banquet, milk and honey flowing freely – satisfying food. But why did they need this, as many were doing well without God's help, thank you? Isaiah is urging the people to look for finer and free food at the banquet which God had provided for them as they changed the world with him. (It is, of course, a difficult choice for people with families and jobs to make – many in our own time have similar very difficult choices to make from those working in morally difficult work, to refugees)

As we have said, there are a number of 'feedings' in the Gospels and so we need to look at the time, the place and what is happening to be able to hear what Jesus might be saying to us. There are two things in today's Gospel worth noting – both connected with what has happened before: The death of John the Baptist. This has happened sometime earlier and the story had obviously become part of their lives, as it has ours. However the news is that the Jesus community had gained knowledge that Herod was concentrating on the new leadership – he had Jesus in his sights as he could see the similarities between them (John basically trained Jesus in his methods). Firstly it is evident that Jesus (and the others) are deeply disturbed by this event – it is a shock, not only because John was vital to the development of the 'Jesus movement', but also because it has repercussions for themselves. There is a heightened danger to their lives – and Jesus is now seen as the leader of this Jewish development in thought. Secondly: The writer is helping us connect the great feast of Herod's birthday with the food Jesus offers to 'satisfy' his people.

The great 'extra' in this particular telling of the feeding of 5000 (men) is that when the people are hungry and the disciples come to Jesus to 'do something' he throws the ball back to them!

*"give them something to eat yourselves."*

This is a very important thing for us to hear as Church. God does not 'do things for us' but wants to 'do things along with us' – it is a development through the Old Testament and is central to Jesus' teaching. The disciples go off, and return (No little boy here notice) to bring

to Jesus all they could find: *‘All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.’* (Seven items, notice!). Then some lovely words: *‘Bring them here to me’*. Jesus then says the blessing – that doesn’t mean he blesses fish and bread (It’s not a magic trick, remember) but he *“raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing”* – he blesses his Father. It is his Father who will take this situation in hand. (He would probably use “the blessing” used on the Sabbath with bread – as we do with bread “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation.....”)

What the Father does is to fulfil Jesus’ work: he does not take our contribution away and produce magic out of our neglect. Neither does he want us to despair when the task seems beyond us. All God demands is that we bring to his son all that we can give or achieve – he says: *‘Bring it here to me’* and then provides the rest. (Scan your mind to other events and words in the Gospels and you will find the same). How easy it is for us to despair, give in and then expect God to do something himself! (its all we ask for our children isn’t it?)

We need to remind ourselves often that ‘All we can give is enough’ –

We cannot, of course, get away from the Eucharistic overtones in all these ‘feeding’ passages and the need to ‘Bless God’ in all that we attempt. We notice, always, the outrageous generosity of God in that there is always more left over than there was in the beginning! (I always wonder what they did with it and where they got the baskets from? – fish sandwiches for the rest of the week? Feed the sea gulls? Please, NO!). The point for Matthew is that the people had as much as they wanted – they were ‘satisfied’ (Not over stuffed as at Herod’s feast!). ‘Satisfied’ is an important theme for Matthew – earlier, in the ‘sermon on the Mount’, whilst Jesus is outlining his teaching, Matthew has him saying:

“Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right:  
They shall be satisfied”

I wonder what we expect God to do for us –

If we remembered he wants to work with us we might be more ready to take what we can, offer it to him, and ask him to provide what we can’t give, or even imagine?

SUNDAY AUGUST 2, 2020

*“The Kingdom of Heaven is the opposite of the superfluous things that the world offers, the opposite of a dull life: it is a treasure that renews life every day and leads it to extend towards wider horizons. Indeed, those who have found this treasure have a creative and inquisitive heart, which does not repeat but rather invents, tracing and setting out on new paths which lead us to love God, to love others, and to truly love ourselves. The sign of those who walk this path of the Kingdom is creativity, always trying to do more. And creativity is what takes life and gives life, and gives, and gives, and gives... It always looks for many other ways to give life. Jesus, Who is the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value, cannot but inspire joy, all the joy of the world: the joy of discovering a meaning in life, the joy of committing oneself to the adventure of holiness.”*

Pope Francis

ANGELUS, JULY 26, 2020

## **PARISH NOTICES:**

- **Working towards opening church for Mass**

You will have heard that the government has given permission for places of worship to open – but with strict guidance and under the supervision of the Bishop and the Parish Priest. The two most important messages are that vulnerable people must stay safe at home, and that distancing will affect numbers and how we celebrate the Eucharist. This is not easy – and we need everyone’s cooperation.

Before we look at a way forward for our parish could I mention that we need to have two trained, and not vulnerable, stewards to be present at each celebration. This our starting point to move forward. We have to start with the same practices we have had at the “private prayer” opening demands which you may be familiar with. If you feel you could help us to extend our availability for Mass please come this week to see what being a steward entails.

I have met with our existing six stewards who volunteered to run the ‘private prayer’ openings and we agreed that we have to move forwards slowly so that we stay healthy and friendly. One of the difficulties will be that our church can only hold 30 people from different households in the congregation within the safety guidelines – though, of course, people from the same household can sit together. This will mean that if we have the allotted number of congregation the stewards will have to, gently, turn others away – this is counter cultural for us, but is for health reasons so please do not take this personally!

Many vulnerable people, those living with people who are vulnerable and families have already suggested that they feel this is a little soon for them to feel safe with a larger mixed group in church – and this is understandable. (It is to give our understanding to such people that I am happy to take our time in opening) We are not beginning with Sunday Masses to ensure people do not mistake ‘opening for Mass’ as ‘back to normal’!

As we already have the stewards who are willing to be present we will celebrate Mass this week on Tuesday and Thursday morning at 9.30am at St John’s.

For the sake of those who work we would like to move towards Mass the following week on Wednesday evening at 7pm – but this will depend on having volunteers to steward.

*Please remember: The bishops are keen to remind us that “the obligation to celebrate Mass on Sunday remains suspended”. (It is easy for us to have become accustomed to distancing in the outside world – but fall into what life was in inside church – be careful!)*

Finally please remember that the Bishops can suspend the Sunday Obligation as this is a ‘law of the Church’ – they cannot suspend “keep Holy the Sabbath Day’ as this is God’s law. Please ensure you continue to celebrate the Resurrection as you have been doing: by praying the scriptures, streaming etc

(‘Virus Times Scripture Reflections will continue to help us gather around the Word of God)

- **St Martin & Hilda’s open for private prayer**

Our chapel will be open for private prayer on Wednesdays from **9.30am to 12.30pm**.

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. St Chad’s are celebration the Eucharist in St Hilda’s on Wednesday at 11am – you are invited to drop in.

If you wish to offer any help please contact Joan on 07887 880497

*We could celebrate the Eucharist on Wednesdays if there was a call and some stewards.*

- **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.

- **Fleetwood Food Bank:** If you know of anyone you think has need of a parcel of food from the Food Bank please telephone 01253 774313 – they will need an address to have it delivered to.

- **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](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](mailto: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. “

### **Thoughts contributed by Virus Times' readers:**

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

**Saturday:** *This pandemic, and your response to it, has given us a rare opportunity to easily access the Word of God - and to reflect on your words too.*

*Who expected the year of the Word would look like this? Be careful what you wish for!*

*We have missed sharing the Eucharist, but our souls have been nourished! Thank you.*

**Thursday:** *I liked your Mary and Martha story yesterday and I decided that I am probably a Martha eg at Christmas my sister and I will be making the meal together but she will then disappear and return in her Christmas outfit ready to greet the guests and pop the Champagne. I meantime remain sweating over the roast potatoes and Brussel Sprouts!! (she does bring me glass ) but I know someone has to be the hostess!! I will try and stop being a martyr!!*

*I also appreciate the stories you tell about your family and your Mum and Dad (they sounded lovely) as I then think of my parents RIP. It's great you can remember your first day at school I have a school photo but that's it. My two daughters attended St John's primary school and I know they have lovely memories of their time there.*

**Thursday:** *Thanks Fr. Peter for the Virus Times. You have linked the Old and New Testament well to give us a clearer understanding of them. Your thoughts for meditating have been inspirational. Today's readings takes me back to my pottery time when my clay objects never turned out the way I hoped!! Thanks also to the kind folk who provided the appropriate music and songs for us over the last few weeks. Much appreciated.*

People being prayed for by our parish groups:

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| Bernard Hargreaves RIP   | Funeral Service at St Martin's on Thursday 6 <sup>th</sup> August & Crematorium  |
| 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.  |
| 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( <i>Not Covid-19</i> )                              | Mrs Donnelly's Mum   |
| Paul Sharrock ( <i>Not Covid-19</i> )<br>(and family: Kathryn, Mary & Rachael) | <i>Is showing continued, but slow, progress. He is eating a proper diet and having a lot of physiotherapy – which he's not enjoying! Fr Peter</i>  |
| Parents home schooling AND home job-ing  | Thank God for our parents – but, after so long, finding it difficult to fulfil their work responsibilities and 'entertain' their children under lockdown.  |
| Our Teachers   | Who are resting!!!   |