

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

14th January 2021

Thursday of First Week of Ordinary Time

Forty-third Thursday of Isolation

Sign on at: saintjohnpoulton@gmail.com

Parish Website: www.stjohnspoulton.org.uk

Second Year of Publication – Third Lockdown

Letter to the Hebrews

*O that today you would listen to his voice!
'Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah in the desert
when your fathers put me to the test;
when they tried me,
though they saw my work,*

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.

Notes from Fr Peter:

Lockdown III: We have had a letter from the Bishop to clarify situations concerning church opening for worship. The governmental guidelines have not changed. However the letter makes clear that it is up to the individual parish priest to decide whether it is safe to continue opening. It is also clear that some parish stewards have asked to stop doing this at the moment.

I have looked again at our parish procedures and can see nothing wrong with these at all – though it is true that some people have made the decision not to come to Mass at the moment which is fine. No Steward has asked to be relieved of their ministry – but if you do please speak to me.

A copy of the letter is attached to this edition of the Virus Times.

If you have symptoms please do not come to church.

Mass during the week:

Saturday	6.00pm	Vigil Mass at St John's
Tuesday	9.30am	St John's
Wednesday	9.30am	St Martin's
Thursday	9.30am	St John's
Friday	9.30am	St John's
Saturday	6.00pm	Vigil Mass at St John's

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

Psalm 94(95):6-11

O that today you would listen to his voice! 'Harden not your hearts.'

*Come in; let us bow and bend low;
let us kneel before the God who made us:
for he is our God and we
the people who belong to his pasture,
the flock that is led by his hand.*

O that today you would listen to his voice! 'Harden not your hearts.'

*O that today you would listen to his voice!
'Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah in the desert
when your fathers put me to the test;
when they tried me, though they saw my work.*

O that today you would listen to his voice! 'Harden not your hearts.'

*For forty years I was wearied of these people
and I said: "Their hearts are astray,
these people do not know my ways."
Then I took an oath in my anger:
"Never shall they enter my rest."*

O that today you would listen to his voice! 'Harden not your hearts.'

Hebrews 3:7-14

The Holy Spirit says: If only you would listen to him today; do not harden your hearts, as happened in the Rebellion, on the Day of Temptation in the wilderness, when your ancestors challenged me and tested me, though they had seen what I could do for forty years. That was why I was angry with that generation and said: How unreliable these people who refuse to grasp my ways! And so, in anger, I swore that not one would reach the place of rest I had for them. Take care, brothers, that there is not in any one of your community a wicked mind, so unbelieving as to turn away from the living God. Every day, as long as this 'today' lasts, keep encouraging one another so that none of you is hardened by the lure of sin, because we shall remain co-heirs with Christ only if we keep a grasp on our first confidence right to the end.

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: 'If you want to' he said 'you can cure me.' Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured. Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him, 'Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery.' The man went away, but then started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around would come to him.

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

It caused a slight surprise this morning when we had the proclamation of Psalm 94 before the first reading (Despite this being announced). But if you read the psalm first you will notice how it leads to the passage from the letter to the Hebrews.

The early Christians who were receiving this letter, possibly in Rome at the start of the persecution due to Nero, (after the Fire of 64AD) were worried and panicking – with understanding. The author is reminding these people of the need to trust in what God had promised them in Jesus by reminding them of those people who failed to trust God after the time of Exodus in the desert. Those early Christians – especially the convert Jews – would recognise the words and events mentioned - in the way we can as we read the psalm.

It can remind us of the practicalities of our present day, and how easily it can be to lose our connections to our Faith through lack of contact amongst each other. Like us, those early Christians in Rome would have been used to meeting together to share the Eucharist, prayer and social support. It is a good message to help us keep each other in mind at this time and hear the writer of the letter encouraging us to trust in our Faith in Jesus.

If there is one thing we have come to realise over the past year with regard to our Faith is that, whilst we miss the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist together, the support in Faith from each other is absolutely vital – we miss each other's joint prayer and support in being physically together sharing faith.

It is interesting that, at the beginning of the baptism of a child, the parents are asked:

"What do you ask of God's Church for 'N' (your child)?"

According to our present liturgy the response expected from parents is: "Baptism"

(You would be surprised at the number of parents who aren't quite sure why they are here and have to scratch about on the card to find an answer!)

In ancient days the answer expected was "Faith" - that the parents had come to the community so that together with their support they could pass on their Faith to their child. (I think this answer has more depth, understanding and questions, what do you think?)

The question which these parents have in common, with the Hebrews under pressure in Rome, and ourselves separated by lockdown, is to ask ourselves: "how do we support our Faith in Jesus?"

The Gospel reminds us of another medical evil which, in Jesus' time, kept people separated from their families, society and practice of Faith: Leprosy. This Leper who came to Jesus 'pleaded'. His whole life was torn apart as he was separated from all that was his human and religious support. Does Jesus want to cure him?:

'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!'

Jesus told the man to do exactly what the religious and society rules said: 'get yourself certified, go home and start going to the Synagogue again'. Interestingly, though he did these practical things this was not enough – he had to tell the people he met about this Jesus in whom he had found Faith!

The outcome, for Jesus, was that he had to avoid the towns himself! Where does Jesus get his Faith support from now?

Two thousand years ago a Leper found his faith support. Not long after this some early Christians were challenged to find their faith support in the chaos of persecution. In 2021 we have the opportunity to confirm our own faith support in prayer, scripture, sharing with others in new ways – what else has become very special for us? If the question we are asked by God is 'what do you want as people who are Church?' and our answer is "Faith", then our learning will have been important during this difficult time.

THURSDAY JANUARY 14, 2021

"A journey always involves a transformation, a change. After a journey, we are no longer the same. There is always something new about those who have made a journey: they have learned new things, encountered new people and situations, and found inner strength amid the hardships and risks they met along the way. No one worships the Lord without first experiencing the interior growth that comes from embarking on a journey."

Pope Francis

HOMILY JANUARY 6, 2021

PARISH NOTICES:

COVID 19 Security - When you come to Mass:

Now that we have been allowed to move from private prayer to being able to celebrate Mass together please remember to do so safely. We have been asked to ensure Government and Church rules which might seem intrusive but they are designed to remind us to be careful and, above all, to keep distances. Please help us with this by being careful.

- ✓ Government guidelines demand that all the congregation (except those with exemption certificates) wear mouth and nose masks in church
 - ✓ Please maintain a 2m distance as you approach and enter church and be guided by the stewards.
 - ✓ Please note there is a 'one way' system – entering church by the left hand door.
 - ✓ Please sanitise your hands as you enter church
 - ✓ You will be invited to leave your name and contact detail for 'Track & Tracing' in case of need.
 - ✓ If you wish to wear a face mask you may do this – but please bring your own.
 - ✓ To minimise movement in church Stewards will direct you to fill the benches from the front. You will probably not be able to go in your 'usual' bench but that will give you a new perspective!
 - ✓ Please remove your mask just before approaching for Holy Communion and then replace afterwards.
 - ✓ You will receive instructions for coming forward for Holy Communion. But please respect distancing (don't bunch), move for Communion using the one-way system, please stretch out your arms fully as you request Holy Communion, you will not be invited to speak "Amen" before receiving Holy Communion. These will need to be kept in mind at first and we do need to remember they, though not the best liturgy, are about distancing and staying well.
 - ✓ Holy Communion must be received only on the hand. (No gloves, please)
 - ✓ Please sanitise your hands as you leave church by the other door than the one you entered.
 - ✓ As you leave church please move away from the door and remember to distance yourselves if you speak to other people.
 - ✓ There is a basket at the back of church for your offertory donations – thank you.
 - ✓ There are weekly bulletins at the back of church with other information.
 - ✓ Please do greet other people outside church – but remember to distance yourself and do not meet in groups that are obviously more than six.
- Thanks to our small, but keen, band of stewards, without whom we could not open our church. Please speak to them if you would like to help with this.

- **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: www.wyre.gov.uk/coronavirus. 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. "

Thoughts contributed by Virus Times readers:

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

Thursday: On Tuesday you wrote that *"the relief of ordinary time helps us put the richness of what we have learned over the Advent & Christmas scriptures into every day practice."*

I was struck when I read of the flight into Egypt that Joseph was told: "take the Child with you". Did he really need to be told this! ? Perhaps the evangelist was reminding us that as we leave the Christmas story we too must "take the Child" with us to remind ourselves that he was born of a woman; that he had to learn how to live in his world and understand it; how to deal with bereavement, challenge and fatigue; and especially how to pray in desperate times "take this chalice from me" and to cry out: " My God why have you deserted me?" Indeed, one like us in every way ...and hence compassionate.

Wednesday: *I think that gifts say something about both the giver and the recipient. In a way it shows how the giver values the recipient, and it also shows the recipient how the giver sees him, and whether much thought has gone into the gift. When the Magi found the baby in lowly surroundings, they could easily have held back the expensive gifts as being "unsuitable" - but they knew that the gifts were eminently suitable.*

The East does seem to value wisdom more than property, where we in the West seem to reverse that view. It is good that both aspects of Christmas have been joined, but if I could only have one, I would plump for the Eastern view.

People being prayed for by our parish groups:

Peter Brownwood	Who is worried about his health – but progressing well.
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.
Paul Sharrock (Not Covid-19) (and family: Kathryn, Mary & Rachael)	<i>Paul has arrived back at his unit from the general hospital. It is much easier to communicate with the special unit and they appreciate how important contact with family is for people in such situations. Kathryn was allowed to visit Paul yesterday – he was tired but good – though they had to sit 2 metres apart (Have you measured that?) Things are looking up, now – and he is has not got COVID – Thank you, God. Thanks for your prayers so far - Please continue to pray for them. Fr Peter</i>

'Thank You, God' - Do we have any news to thank God for - as well as other people we are praying for?

Our School Staff	<i>Who have broken up for a holiday – and other teachers.</i>
Clare and Pete Cobb's glorious music	<i>they have sung us through Covid; it's been a joy – and still is!</i>
For all our Faith-filled Parishioners with whom we share our weekday Masses.	<i>It's so supportive to be in the presence of others.</i>
To scientists working on a COVID help	<i>Well done for breakthroughs</i>

Canon Paul Embery
St. Mary's Presbytery
Victoria Road
Ulverston
LA12 0BY
14 January 2021

Dear Father,

UPDATE ON PUBLIC WORSHIP

As promised, I write with an update regarding public worship in our diocese. At this time, I am not aware of how the Directors of Public Health for the Lancashire area have responded to representations from faith groups following their request that all public services should cease in places of worship across the Lancashire county and unitary authority areas from Thursday evening 7th January.

A number of you provided some feedback on the decision of our, and other dioceses in the north west, to leave the matter in the hands of individual parish priests. As you can imagine, there were differing opinions. Some priests also reported that the matter was, in effect, taken out of their hands because stewards decided that they would not be attending church for the foreseeable future, given what they had seen reported in the media.

Earlier this week the government's Places of Worship Task Force met. This group is comprised of representatives from faith communities, Public Health England (PHE) and H.M. Government. The main points (edited for the purposes of this letter) which C.B.C.E.W. has reported-back are:

1. Health professionals' research to date indicates that the new virus variant is as well controlled by social distancing and mitigations as the old. Further studies are taking place for a more concrete verification on this matter.
2. At this moment in time, the government has no intention of closing of places of worship.
3. Government asks that each place of worship should re-evaluate their own local situation and examine all factors that could affect the good Covid-security demonstrated by places of worship so far.
4. The length of exposure time for an act of worship is critical and should be minimised – anything that is not necessary should be omitted.
5. Those who have gathered for worship should not mingle before or after the service outside of the place of worship. They should disperse immediately.
6. All non-essential worship should be postponed or cancelled.
7. Officials noted that keeping Covid-secure places of worship open for public worship adds no extra burden to the NHS and provides recognised benefits for the community.
8. The Task Force emphasised that the role of the Local Authority is one of enforcement of closure in particular circumstances on the basis of evidence of lack of Covid-security.
9. PHE will conduct an exercise in mapping exposure risks from different venues across the country for better data.

The government's Places of Worship Guidance was updated on 11th January 2021, and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december>

Although it is not immediately apparent from the text of the government's guidance of 11th January, C.B.C.E.W. notes that the following activity is regarded as one that should not take place at the present time in a place of worship: *"Baptisms or other ceremonies which mark significant life cycle moments but which do not take place as an established part of normal communal worship."* Weddings should only take place in exceptional circumstances.

As previously stated, no parish priest is required to lead a service or to open church at this time if he feels that it is not prudent to do so - either for his, or others', benefit. The Faithful are also dispensed from the Sunday Obligation.

Therefore, unless any further guidance to the contrary is issued, the advice for our diocese remains that each parish priest should make a considered decision regarding public worship in his church(es).

Yours sincerely,

Canon Paul Embery V.G.