

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

15th January 2021

Friday of First Week of Ordinary Time

Forty-third Friday of Isolation

Sign on at: saintjohnpoulton@gmail.com

Parish Website: www.stjohnspoulton.org.uk

Second Year of Publication – Third Lockdown

Letter to the Hebrews

"We have never seen anything like this."

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: 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)

Hebrews 4:1-5,11

Be careful: the promise of reaching the place of rest that God had for the Israelites still holds good, and none of you must think that he has come too late for it. We received the Good News exactly as they did; but hearing the message did them no good because they did not share the faith of those who listened. We, however, who have faith, shall reach a place of rest, as in the text: And so, in anger, I swore that not one would reach the place of rest I had for them. God's work was undoubtedly all finished at the beginning of the world; as one text says, referring to the seventh day: After all his work God rested on the seventh day. The text we are considering says: They shall not reach the place of rest I had for them. We must therefore do everything we can to reach this place of rest, or some of you might copy this example of disobedience and be lost.

Mark 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum, word went round that he was back; and so many people collected that there was no room left, even in front of the door. He was preaching the word to them when some people came bringing him a paralytic carried by four men, but as the crowd made it impossible to get the man to him, they stripped the roof over the place where Jesus was; and when they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'My child, your sins are forgiven.' Now some scribes were sitting there, and they thought to themselves, 'How can this man talk like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God?' Jesus, inwardly aware that this was what they were thinking, said to them, 'Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' – he turned to the paralytic – 'I order you: get up, pick up your stretcher, and go off home.' And the man got up, picked up his stretcher at once and walked out in front of everyone, so that they were all astounded and praised God saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'

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

I remember a man I knew years ago called George who, when I took him Holy Communion, regularly asked with a wheezy, weak voice: "Do you think there's breath in Heaven, Father?" I mention this because of the way we can tend to speak of those who have died as "being at rest" (etc). Most people, I like George, wish for 'more breath', 'new legs', and, ultimately, 'my life back'. Because of this usage we can think of "reaching the place of rest" as something to do with death – rather than a sign of 'completion' or 'satisfaction'. I noticed that the Eucharistic prayer this morning prayed for those who had died with the words: "Admit them to rejoice in the light of your face, and in the resurrection give them the fullness of life". These are very active images and I'm happy that those I have known are actively praying and working with us, and for us, rather than "resting peacefully".

So what is this “rest” which the author of the letter to the Hebrews is saying we have not come too late for?

We need to remember, again and again, that the people who were receiving this letter were obviously brought up as Jews. The themes and the phrases will make immediate sense to them from their culture – much more than they may strike us at first. There are two connections which would be made:

Firstly that, in the first story of creation in Genesis, on the last day God rests. But when the people had been led through the desert by Moses, and eventually were led across the Jordan into the ‘Land of Promise’ by Joshua, the time of rest did not come. The whole Exodus story, and certainly the history of life in the new land, was by no means perfect or totally successful.

Secondly, the name ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ are the same in Hebrew and Greek – but not in English. (If they were the same we might think this would be confusing – but actually, it means we miss out on the sign-value). The author of the letter is pointing out to the Jewish converts to Christianity that ‘Joshua’ failed to lead God’s people to the ‘promise rest’ but the new ‘Jesus’ has achieved it – and this promised rest is still available to the readers and to us.

To a people which is undergoing the threat, and then reality, of persecution the writer is insisting that Jesus is the real thing (which Moses and Joshua couldn’t achieve).

It may seem obvious to us that this Jesus is the real thing – but we are also challenged as to what we expect him to do for us. Many people are happy to honour Jesus as a Rabbi, a teacher, a moral leader, someone to keep in an insurance box for the future. But here we are being invited to re-visit who Jesus is for us and how we can speak to others of what he has achieved for me.

I love this Gospel passage as it shows how people are affected by our faith in Jesus if we act or speak in ways which witness to who Jesus is to us. When Jesus arrives back loads of people had gathered to hear him – why? But, despite this story seeming to be about a paralysed man, it is actually about four blokes who thought the man would gain from meeting Jesus with other locals. (I’m not convinced the paralysed man really wanted to be carried through the streets and suspended from the ceiling!). Although the ‘faith’ element seemed to come from the four men Jesus only speaks to the paralysed man! However the picture of Jesus we gain is of the Jesus who knew what ‘life in the land of promise’ should be like for this man. We are not told what happened to the man after this event, but we can only imagine that ‘the artist previously known as *the paralytic*’ would be glad not to have any more time to rest on his bed, but would live with a restfulness of knowing he is part of Jesus’ new world.

FRIDAY JANUARY 15, 2021

"With the passage of time, life's trials and difficulties – experienced in faith – help to purify our hearts, making them humbler and thus more and more open to God. Even our sins, the awareness of being sinners, of experiencing such bad things. "But I did this... I did...": if you approach it with faith and repentance, with contrition, it will help you to grow."

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>