

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

5th May 2021

Fifth Wednesday of Easter

Fifty-eighth Wednesday of Isolation

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*It is to the glory of my Father
that you should bear much fruit,
and then you will be my disciples.'*

Mass during the week:

Saturday –	6.00pm	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	St John's

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

Acts 15:1-6

Some men came down from Judaea and taught the brothers, 'Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses you cannot be saved.' This led to disagreement, and after Paul and Barnabas had had a long argument with these men it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders.

All the members of the church saw them off, and as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria they told how the pagans had been converted, and this news was received with the greatest satisfaction by the brothers. When they arrived in Jerusalem they were welcomed by the church and by the apostles and elders, and gave an account of all that God had done with them.

But certain members of the Pharisees' party who had become believers objected, insisting that the pagans should be circumcised and instructed to keep the Law of Moses. The apostles and elders met to look into the matter.

John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples:

*I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in me that bears no fruit
he cuts away,
and every branch that does bear fruit
he prunes to make it bear even more.
You are pruned already,
by means of the word that I have spoken to you.
Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,
but must remain part of the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me.
I am the vine,
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me, with me in him,
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me you can do nothing.
Anyone who does not remain in me
is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers;
these branches are collected and thrown on the fire,
and they are burnt.
If you remain in me
and my words remain in you,
you may ask what you will
and you shall get it.
It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit,
and then you will be my disciples.'*

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

Today we begin an important development in the early Church which is a good example of the clash between those who are 'comfortable' with their Faith and those who are aware of what God is doing with them -we saw this yesterday, also.

Paul and Barnabas, and the other disciples in far away countries, are becoming very aware that Jesus' order to 'God out to the whole world' was bearing much fruit for the people they were meeting. Many people who were interested in the Good News the disciples were sharing were not from a Jewish tradition. This development will have thrown up many natural questions, even for Paul and Barnabas, but when the 'hard core' of 'comfortable Convert Jews' brought in a declaration against these gentile Christians the issue becomes an important one:

'Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses you cannot be saved.'

"Saved"! This is strong stuff which may have been Jewish teaching but it is not anywhere near Jesus' teaching about his Father. Of course it does highlight the argument Jesus had between 'Law' and 'Love', especially with the Pharisees.

This issue was immediately seen by Paul's disciples, not to mention the convert Gentiles, as a misunderstanding of what God was doing with them. The Jews in Jerusalem had already made the Christian Jews unwelcome in their synagogues and killed Stephen, but now even convert Jews were expressing their 'comfortable' faith picture and wanted Gentile converts to Christ become Jews first. You do pick up an atmosphere of generosity towards the Gentiles in this passage coming from the disciples of Jesus in these far away places.

What happens now is a sign of what it means to be Church:

Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders.

Even there we see that convert Pharisees object!

What happens next is probably the most serious development and re-direction our Church has ever seen in 2000 years! The method has become the basis for the way the Church has moved forward as a body ever since and it is called by many the 'Council of Jerusalem' – the first Ecumenical Council of the Church.

We will read the next episode tomorrow – but do 'read ahead' if you wish. Please keep an eye on how radical was the suggestion outlined and how those present allowed themselves to listen to 'God working among them' rather than use a pharisaical and comfortable reliance on a safe 'what we have always done' outlook. How can we open ourselves to what God is doing amongst us and trust God?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 2021

"We should all have the humility of certain elderly people who, in church, perhaps because their hearing is no longer acute, recite quietly the prayers they learned as children, filling the nave with whispers. That prayer does not disturb the silence, but testifies their fidelity to the duty of prayer, practised throughout their lives without fail. These practitioners of humble prayer are often the great intercessors in parishes: they are the oaks that from year to year spread their branches to offer shade to the greatest number of people. Only God knows when and how much their hearts have been united to those prayers they recited: surely these people too had to face nights and moments of emptiness. But one can always remain faithful to vocal prayer. It is like an anchor: one can hold on to the rope and remain, faithful, come what may."

Pope Francis

GENERAL AUDIENCE APRIL 21, 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.)

Sunday:

Thank you.

I like the idea that, once Paul had gone, the churches heaved a sigh of relief that they were now left in peace!

And I suppose, in a way, the bishops are leaving us in peace - but that's not exactly their job description, is it? (What is their job description)

We have had a few deaths at English Martyrs' recently. Ken Binks, who died yesterday could very well have been nicknamed Barnabas as, in spite of advanced age, he made every effort to encourage and support wherever and whenever he could. Many of us are quite confident that, if at all possible, he will be there to give us a helping hand into Heaven, when the time comes.

Wednesday:

Read recently: *"An American preacher, Eugene Walsh, once finished off his sermon with the remarkable words, "Jesus only promised two things: Your life has meaning and you're going to live forever. If you get a better offer, take it!"*

Sunday:

So much to ponder! We refer to family as “our own flesh and blood” and so they are. They have our genes, we have given them life, we have shared our lives with them and we hope our values. You may also remember the TV programme entitled “You are what you eat”.

St Augustine commenting on John Ch. 6 writes: *"If you receive the Eucharist well, you are what you eat. Since you are the Body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery which you receive. As you come to communion, you hear the words 'The Body of Christ' and you answer 'Amen'. Be, therefore, members of Christ that your 'Amen' may be true. Be what you see. Receive what you already are."*

For the first thousand years of the Church, the baptised were called the True Body and the consecrated bread and wine was called the Mystical Body. How did this become flipped? As you write: The ‘off top of the head’ answer goes nowhere near the whole answer.

Saturday:

Understanding the signs: Food for thought:

I had a friend who used to do a lot of serious thinking. In speaking of him I would say that “he chews things over.” We also speak of someone “munching” an apple meaning that the person eats steadily and often audibly. When Jesus is responding to the question: “How can this fellow give us his flesh to eat?” John, writing in Greek, uses a very physical word which is best translated as “munch” or “chew”. And so, in this accurate translation, Jesus’ words are: “The one who chews (munches) my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”.

When we share in the Eucharist and “eat this bread and drink this cup” we are indicating our readiness to ponder deeply (“chew on”) the meaning and significance of this act of communion which makes us one, not only with the one we claim as Lord, but also one with each other, his true body called to his mission: “My food, he said, is to do the will of the one who sent me”.

Is our food to be anything less?

People being prayed for by our parish groups:

Len Rawcliffe RIP	Len’s Requiem Mass will be at St John’s on 14 th May. <i>COVID restriction: For an invitation please speak to the family.</i>
Maroulla RIP	Maroulla’s family thanks you for your prayer. The Requiem Mass will be at St Martin’s Chapel on Wednesday 5 th May at 2.30pm <i>(admittance by invitation of the family)</i>
Peter Brownwood	Who is worried about his health – but progressing 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.

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

Our School Staff	
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>