

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

7th May 2021

Fifth Friday of Easter

Fifty-eighth Friday of Isolation

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*You did not choose me:
no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you
to go out and to bear fruit,
fruit that will last;*

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 15:22-31

The apostles and elders decided to choose delegates to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; the whole church concurred with this. They chose Judas known as Barsabbas and Silas, both leading men in the brotherhood, and gave them this letter to take with them:

'The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of pagan birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We hear that some of our members have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds. They acted without any authority from us; and so we have decided unanimously to elect delegates and to send them to you with Barnabas and Paul, men we highly respect who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are sending you Judas and Silas, who will confirm by word of mouth what we have written in this letter. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols; from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell.'

The party left and went down to Antioch, where they summoned the whole community and delivered the letter. The community read it and were delighted with the encouragement it gave them.

John 15:12-17

Jesus said to his disciples:

'This is my commandment:

love one another,

as I have loved you.

A man can have no greater love

than to lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends,

if you do what I command you.

I shall not call you servants any more,

because a servant does not know

his master's business;

I call you friends,

because I have made known to you

everything I have learnt from my Father.

You did not choose me:

no, I chose you;

and I commissioned you

to go out and to bear fruit,

fruit that will last;

and then the Father will give you

anything you ask him in my name.

What I command you is to love one another.'

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

I received a letter from the NHS yesterday after completing a task invited of 'people of a certain age'. It read: "Your result showed that **no further tests are needed at this time.**" Now, this may not be a great issue in the larger picture of life, but such messages do make you walk much taller, don't they? Imagine what a different reply might do to our spirit!

The great emotional outcome of today's passage is:

*"The party left and went down to Antioch,
where they summoned the whole community and delivered the letter.
The community read it and **were delighted with the encouragement it gave them.**"*

Imagine what would have happened to those people if they had had a different reply from 'the Church'!?

There are a few messages in this passage, but the main one is that Jesus came to share Good News – not bad. He welcomed all sorts of people during his ministry and, in doing so, gave them uplift, acceptance and, yes, encouragement. Have a quick flick through your Gospel memory for these people: Prostitutes and sinners; Roman soldiers; the man looking after the pigs; the woman at the well; the woman about to be stoned for admitting adultery; the repentant thief on the cross; those who crucified him; etc, etc.

And we remember that Jesus continually reminded those bothering to listen that he had come, like the doctor, not for the well but for the sick. We see in this passage a group of people who represent Church at the highest level and who recognised that they were sent by Jesus to those outside the Church – the Church was not there to make it's members feel better. I bet this group got some serious backlash from some areas, even within the Church, for this decision!

The letter the Elders of the Church sent to those 'brothers of pagan birth in Antioch' (is this 'politically correct' or just accurate?) also includes a recognition of failure from within the whole body of those who call themselves Church. The apology for 'some of our members having disturbed you' is not delivered simply as a socially acceptable approach to them, but an announcement that the Church of Jesus must not disturb people or make demands which unsettle people! To prove to the potential Gentile Disciples, and to any existing disciples watching, they then promise to send respected delegates from Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas so that there would be no misunderstanding of how serious this development was!!!

This was the full authority of the Church listening to what the Church was doing on the ground, measuring it against the 'Great Tradition', calling on the Spirit of God and then proclaiming to the whole world, both in letter and delegates, what God is doing with them. Without any one of these parts they would not be acting as Church.

The outcome was, remember, 'delight' and 'encouragement'. Being Church is not continual 'delight' and 'encouragement' or 'plastic jolliness', of course, but the scriptures refer to 'joy' as a visible and emotional gift of the Spirit of God. The alternative is a grumpy and closed Church which does not suggest the 'freedom of the children of God' but an organisation which is a club simply for its members.

*It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves
not to saddle you with any burden
beyond these essentials*

"Lord, save us, your Church, from 'saddling others with burdens'"

If you want to know about the permanent 'essentials' I suggest we read the Gospel passage for today again.

FRIDAY, MAY 7, 2021

"We join together in prayer with all the sanctuaries spread throughout the whole world, with the faithful, and with all persons of good will, to entrust into the hands of our Holy Mother the whole human race, sorely tried by this period of pandemic. Every day of this month of May we will entrust to You, Mother of Mercy, the many people who have been touched by the virus and continue to suffer its consequences; from our deceased brothers and sisters, to families who experience the pain and uncertainty of tomorrow; from the sick to doctors, scientists, nurses, engaged in the front line in this battle; from volunteers to all professionals who have given their precious service in favor of others; from people in mourning and grief to those who, with a simple smile and a good word, brought comfort to those in need; from those – especially women – who have suffered violence at home due to forced closure, to those who wish to resume the pace of daily life with enthusiasm. Mother of Help, welcome us under your mantle and protect us, support us in the hour of trial and kindle the light of hope for the future in our hearts."

Pope Francis

Gregorian Chapel - St. Peter's Basilica - May 1, 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.)

Wednesday: "The place of 'Peter' in the Church (or we might say 'the Pope')
is not to magically come up with the answer from God – or from any other place"

Sometimes we may feel that the power of the Spirit found in the early church has somehow faded. Yet in our own lifetime we have witnessed an astonishing intervention of the Holy Spirit that is as equally life changing for the church. Pope John XXIII prayed in 1962 for a New Pentecost. Vatican II was the result. It dealt with very contentious issues as some very conservative Cardinals and Curia, based in Rome, sought to impose its will on the rest of the Church. John XXIII, listening to wise, pastoral voices that were open to the Spirit and in contact with the realities of people's lives, rejected the legalistic and dead approach advocated by powerful voices in Rome and set the church in a new direction equally as profound as that brought about by the first council in Jerusalem. All God's people are invited by this Council to live *Life in the Spirit* to the full. What does this mean?

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.

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>
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>