

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

23rd June 2021

Wednesday of the Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time

Sixty-fifth Wednesday of Isolation

Telephone: 01253 893184

Sign on at: saintjohnpoulton@gmail.com

Parish Website: www.stjohnspoulton.org.uk

*'To your descendants I give this land,
from the wadi of Egypt
to the Great River,
the river Euphrates.'*

Mass during the week:

Saturday – 12 th Sunday of Year	6.00pm - Sunday Vigil Mass St John's
Tuesday -	9.30am – Mass at St John's
Wednesday -	9.30am – Mass at St Martin's
Thursday -	9.30am – Mass at St John's
Friday –	9.30am – Mass at St John's
Saturday – 13 th Sunday of Year	6.00pm - Sunday Vigil Mass St John's

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

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

It happened that the word of the Lord was spoken to Abram in a vision, 'Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great.'

'My Lord,' Abram replied 'what do you intend to give me? I go childless...'. Then Abram said, 'See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir.' And then this word of the Lord was spoken to him, 'He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be of your own flesh and blood.' Then taking him outside he said, 'Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants' he told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who counted this as making him justified.

'I am the Lord' he said to him 'who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to make you heir to this land.' 'My Lord,' Abram replied 'how am I to know that I shall inherit it?' He said to him, 'Get me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon.' He brought him all these, cut them in half and put half on one side and half facing it on the other; but the birds he did not cut in half. Birds of prey came down on the carcasses but Abram drove them off.

Now as the sun was setting Abram fell into a deep sleep, and terror seized him. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, there appeared a smoking furnace and a firebrand that went between the halves. That day the Lord made a Covenant with Abram in these terms:

*'To your descendants I give this land,
from the wadi of Egypt to the Great River,
the river Euphrates.'*

Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves. You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, a sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I repeat, you will be able to tell them by their fruits.'

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

It is becoming clear now that this section of the book of Genesis is introducing God's need to make a Covenant with his people. This is a message which begins with Abram and reaches its highpoint in the New Covenant God makes with us in his son, Jesus' death and resurrection.

Today's passage introduces us to the first Covenant with Abram and underlines some essential details.

Firstly God invites Abram to declare what he would like out of this working agreement – what is his greatest need. Abram's greatest concern, together with many others we will meet in the Old Testament, is that he and his wife Sarai have no children to live for and pass on their life's work to. God discusses this issue and makes promises to Abram.

And so our first reflection on the Word of God today could be: 'what is our life about, and what would be our deepest concern in life?' We could put this before God as part of this joint Covenant we have

with God. (You could spend some time with this – it is worth noting that Abram’s concern is not just his own personal need, but with his whole family, land and animals; and the future.

A very important message we find in this passage is that Abram is chosen by God as he is – he is not yet circumcised or made part of God’s special people as this happens later. Unlike the myths of other civilisations God does not set a task for Abram and, when he has successfully completed it, give Abram the gift of this Covenant. When God chooses - that is enough. God makes the first move and does not wait for this person to prove themselves! The gift is free – grace.

We will see this same relationship between Jesus and the people he forgives. He does not test people in the Gospel before finding them ‘good enough’ to be forgiven – he forgives first and then sends them away, healed.

Even in the Christian Church there is the tendency to assume we have to do something good for God so that he will be nice to us! I wonder why we find it difficult to accept the great God loving us first? People often say: ‘What have we done to deserve a lovely day like this?’ – the answer is: nothing! It is a gift from God!

A group of us had a long conversation after Mass this morning about how horrible the sacrifice section of this passage is! Yes! But, again the idea of sacrifice in the Old testament very quickly deteriorated into a pagan idea of ‘wasting our goods to keep God sweet’. Notice that this passage’s sacrifice is instigated by God – and set on fire by him, also. The sign value of this sacrifice belongs strictly to God.

The Covenant relationship between God and his people involves both side of the agreement, and it failed in various ways throughout the centuries. But, as we can see, the agreement begins with God and the generosity remains with God. It is much more about God’s giving and nothing at all about humanity buying God’s love!

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2021

“Today we can ask ourselves: what are the winds that beat against my life? What are the waves that hinder my navigation, and put my spiritual life, my family life, even my psychic life in danger? Let us say all this to Jesus; let us tell Him everything. He wants this; He wants us to grab hold of Him to find shelter from the unexpected waves of life.”

Pope Francis

ANGELUS JUNE 20, 2021

PARISH NOTICES:

21st June COVID Changes:

the only real liturgical change is that wedding ceremonies can go beyond the 30 cap to match the present daily Mass and funeral limit based on social distancing. I presume there will be no further loosening until 19th July.

17th May Changes in Church service COVID Safety:

Mass: Not much change unless you miss bidding prayers and offertory processions – I think we will leave Mass as it is and see what the June day brings! (I hope the stewards can provide for us until then – their welcome ministry is great!

Funerals: The number at funerals increases to the Guide number set by the size of the individual church (If you hear people speaking of this please let them know that the rule is NOT: ‘you can have as many as you want!’) Practically, here, I will demand that people get permission from the family (who I will speak to before as usual) otherwise we could have too many people arriving to be safe!

Baptisms: Have legal limit now of 30 people – one Baptism at a time and not within Mass. Please invite families to contact me if they wish to arrange a baptism date. Now that we can have 6 people in the house we can also provide Baptism preparation for parents again.

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.)

Saturday:

Thank you.
I do try to like Paul, but never quite succeed,
I always feel that, if I were in his company,
I would heave a sigh of relief and relax when he left.

Friday:

You mentioned "New Start with Jesus" this morning. I can't remember a lot of detail about it, but know that I was very impressed with what was happening. One memory is of going, as part of a group, into Cardinal Allen School and mingling in small groups with the students, who were very welcoming and open in their approach to discussion. It really felt as though something great was beginning and I was so hopeful. Then, after Bishop Brewer's untimely death, I think it was mainly scuppered by finance (and the "new broom " approach). I really grieved about that.

I seem to remember prayer cards being issued before any other action was taken and I feel that this was very important. The two articles from the Tablet are interesting and informative, and give me the same sense of anticipation which I had with "New Start". There is such a lot to pray for; how to get a truly representative group, who will proceed at the right pace, for one. Is this something that the housebound people could be involved in? There is such an untapped source there, and they could be such an important part of the foundation of "synodality" in our parish and diocese. Like an

iceberg we will only see the part of the whole that goes on view at actual meetings, but there needs to be so much more unseen supporting mass.

Thursday: Funny you should mention mantillas - I found mine the other day, when turning a drawer out. I always carried it in my bag, just in case. I would offer to wear it as a demonstration, but couldn't cope with it along with a mask and hearing aids!

People being prayed for by our parish groups:

Maureen Brown is in hospital	Please keep her in your prayers, thanks.
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>

As we seem to be moving out of lockdown, are there some things we have learned and must not forget?

How we missed people, our loved ones and their touch	
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