

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

22nd July 2021

Thursday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Sixty-ninth Thursday of Isolation

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*'But happy are your eyes because they see,
your ears because they hear!'*

Mass during the week:

Saturday – 16 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 – 17 th Sunday of Year	6.00pm - Sunday Vigil Mass St John's
Sunday	9.00am – Sunday Morning Mass at St Martin's 11.00am- Sunday Morning Mass at St John's

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

Post Lockdown Preamble: This 'Virus times' regular scripture reflection on the daily Mass readings was intended to fit the 'Mass & social gap' during COVID and also help us to use the time to learn to read scripture thus to hear God's Word. Thanks to those who regularly contribute or thank me for the reflections. It was meant to stop abruptly when we all returned to full churches after Lockdown – as we can see from Moses' experience of God (below) God's insistence that we look forwards, not backwards, continues to trip us up! It also leads us forward to new life and hope (we may need to use scripture to remind us of God's hope?)

Could I ask you to ponder two things:

1. I was thinking of stopping the Virus Times at the end of this week. It does take time to compose, but it does great things for my spiritual development, and hopefully yours, too! What are your suggestions?
2. Could you send me a paragraph describing how helpful this scriptural reflection has been for you (and other issues related to the 'Virus Times') – I would like to put them together for other people to read to help them, also (this would be anonymous!) Even if you don't send your thoughts to me – please do the exercise for yourself.

Thanks to those who have sent in messages.

Exodus 19:1-2,9-11,16-20

Three months after they came out of the land of Egypt, on that day the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sinai. From Rephidim they set out again; and when they reached the wilderness of Sinai, there in the wilderness they pitched their camp; there facing the mountain Israel pitched camp.

The Lord said to Moses, 'I am coming to you in a dense cloud so that the people may hear when I speak to you and may trust you always.' And Moses took the people's reply back to the Lord.

The Lord said to Moses, 'Go to the people and tell them to prepare themselves today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothing and hold themselves in readiness for the third day, because on the third day the Lord will descend on the mountain of Sinai in the sight of all the people.'

Now at daybreak on the third day there were peals of thunder on the mountain and lightning flashes, a dense cloud, and a loud trumpet blast, and inside the camp all the people trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the bottom of the mountain. The mountain of Sinai was entirely wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended on it in the form of fire. Like smoke from a furnace the smoke went up, and the whole mountain shook violently. Louder and louder grew the sound of the trumpet. Moses spoke, and God answered him with peals of thunder. The Lord came down on the mountain of Sinai, on the mountain top, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain; and Moses went up.

Matthew 13:10-17

The disciples went up to Jesus and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?' 'Because' he replied, 'the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to you, but they are not revealed to them. For anyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. The reason I talk to them in parables

is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. So in their case this prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled:

*You will listen and listen again, but not understand,
see and see again, but not perceive.
For the heart of this nation has grown coarse,
their ears are dull of hearing, and they have shut their eyes,
for fear they should see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their heart,
and be converted
and be healed by me.*

'But happy are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! I tell you solemnly, many prophets and holy men longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'

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

In the Gospel today we hear Jesus answer a question as to why he will only speak to the crowds in parables. His answer indicates that they have to learn to 'see' and 'hear' before he can speak directly to them – 'see' and 'hear' him. To sum up what Jesus is speaking of would be too much for the crowd to understand and so he has to help them learn. It is a bit like reading a 'who dun it' – you could always just read the last chapter to find out 'who dun it' but that probably wouldn't tell you why, how, when etc! A similar learning is happening to the Israelites as they approach the desert.

The first learning today is that these people are 'on the way'. They are pilgrims moving from something to somewhere!

Today we are faced with the question: 'where are they moving to?'

So far in the story there has been a lot of mention of this 'God of the Israelites' – mainly from Moses and Aaron. The people have been pleased to obey God speaking through Moses if it meant that they could escape from slavery but now, three months into the journey, their experience of God needed to develop and be strengthened. As we see God made himself visible to some degree to help the people know he is with them. Tomorrow we will see a different degree of experience which God allows Moses, because he has a different level of relationship with God - it is very similar to what Jesus was saying in the Gospel.

The message is slowly becoming clear that the pilgrimage is to God. This band of people is on a long pilgrimage, a long training course, to have a relationship with God himself. We will see along the way that this learning and understanding, this closeness of relationship, is stronger and less strong at various times and when faced with events which challenge their trust in God.

The second Vatican Council stressed that the Church, ourselves, is a 'pilgrim people', a people on the road to being God's people and trusting him. For us, as for the Israelites, our pilgrimage ends when we have a relationship with God – and this has glorious points and difficulties along the way!

The second message for us is that, though the people moved a certain degree up the mountain, and Moses will go further, in fact God chooses to 'come down' a great further for these meetings to happen! One of the continual events of the Old Testament is that God comes to his people first! It is not about going up to God (The example of the Tower of Babel shows what happens if humanity tried to make the first move!)

The ultimate example, of course, of God coming down to his people is in the incarnation of God. God chooses, in his son Jesus, to come down from on high to walk by the side of his people and share their humanity. This reality has changed our picture of God and what he is about – or it would, if we could learn to believe it and appreciate what it means for us!

We must not lose sight of the unlikely nature of the incarnation of God in Jesus – how does it change our understanding of God from those people who regard this as outrageous?

THURSDAY, JULY 22, 2021

“Let us beware, brothers and sisters, of efficiency, let us put a halt to the frantic running around dictated by our agendas. Let us learn how to take a break, to turn off the mobile phone, to contemplate nature, to regenerate ourselves in dialogue with God.”

Pope Francis

ANGELUS JULY 18, 2021

PARISH NOTICES:

Message from our Hospital Chaplains: [Coronavirus Update - Dr Jim Gardner, Medical Director - YouTube](#) and I would encourage you to watch it, because I was struck by some of the words he used: ‘Rapid’, ‘Alarming’ and ‘strikingly rapid’ are not words he bands around easily. *(This You Tube message is worth watching!)*

COVID response in Church from 19th July

You will appreciate that our image of opening churches to return to a previous practice cannot happen as we may have hoped – we need to keep in mind the fast increasing virus spread and also helping those who are afraid to feel safe in church. As the Prime Minister urged, so the bishops of England, together, have repeated, that we need to progress with caution.

Our own Bishop has said, particularly:

“Although most legal restrictions relating to the Covid pandemic are ending on Monday 19th July, a degree of caution is still needed where a large number of people gather in enclosed spaces, which of course, includes our churches.

Not only is the delta variant of the virus still spreading rapidly, it is also the case that those with suppressed immune systems still need a degree of additional protection against the virus.

Whilst in broader society, there may well be those who will welcome 19th July with a complete abandonment of anti-Covid measures, we owe it to others to be prudent in what we do in our churches at this time.”

Our moving forward “with caution”!

From Monday we can open churches without the distancing we have become used to – though individuals may still choose to celebrate their ‘Sunday’ Mass on another day when there may be less people (Thanks to many who have chosen this response over the last year – if you are hesitant at meeting with others this may be a way forward, still).

Our bishop had advised that *“Face coverings should still be worn by all those coming to a church service”*. Please wear a mask when walking to Holy Communion.

We will still have to be part of the ‘Track and Trace’ system by either using the telephone QR codes (available in churches) or the sign-in details sheet. (This seems to be ending in August nationally?)

Please continue to sanitise your hands when entering and exiting church.

Congregational singing is a recognised way of easily spreading the virus and so we will not introduce this until we are more confident – and don’t need masks.

We do not need to clean benches unless there are two services on the same day – though surfaces such as door handles should be wiped down.

We have been asked not to reintroduce Holy Water, a physical sign of peace, communion under both kinds.

With these changes in place I propose to begin the Sunday Masses from next week, though we will need help to encourage people to feel safe and realise that they are not turning clock back to February 2020! Masks etc will be signs to us all.

“Welcomers” – because of the need to sign in, and because our stewards have done such an amazing job over the last year, we need some people to be ‘on duty’ before Mass to help people who have not been the church for a while. Could I ask our weekday Stewards to continue to welcome? We will need Steward / welcomers at the Sunday Masses to volunteer if we are to continue to be available for Mass. Volunteers please.

St Martin’s Sunday Mass: Because of the need to ventilate and sanitise for the 11am service I have offered to St Hilda’s that we will move our Mass to 9.00am to help them prepare for their service. (please pass this on)

St John’s Sunday Mass: will begin at 11.00am

Churches can be left open for private prayer and visits from 19th July with sanitiser available – thanks be to God!

Some local ‘opening up issues’:

Mass Stewards:

Thanks to our Mass stewards who have done an amazing job over the last year keeping us safe and welcoming us to Mass. As I mention we will need welcomers for the coming weeks but if any of the stewards wish to step down please let me know.

We do need people for Sunday Masses – if you could contact me over the week that would be good!

Ministers of Holy Communion, of the Word and of Welcomer.

I will put a list up on the notice board next week for people to sign up to take on these ministries on Sunday. If you were on the last list please do sign here – if you have questions please ask.

Those with movement issues

At Mass at the weekend especially, if you wish to sit through Mass and avoid worrying people kneeling behind you there are chairs at the front of St John's which will be helpful. It will also help with Communion. Thank you.

Baptism / Funerals / Weddings:

The new COVID safety requirements from the 19th July declares that the number of people in the church is lifted – they do warn of numbers which are greater than the building can take.

Church guidance suggests baptisms are to involve only one child for the present.

- **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

The story of Moses and the Burning Bush included in this week's reading reminded me of a passage in one of Gerry Hughes' books. He reminded his readers of trying to see God in all things from the seemingly insignificant to the most profound. He includes the phrase "Every bush is burningif only we have eyes to see"

Wednesday

(Updated) Here we are again. It seems that the scriptures keep hammering it home - Abraham, Jacob/Israel and now Moses. To become disciple depends on two things: an encounter in some form with the living God; and secondly, the preparedness to respond: "Here I am Lord". This encounter is there for all to experience and it can come in many forms and at different times in our lives. We need to be attentive to these moments of grace. (Look at the successful and the unsuccessful invitations that Jesus is seen to make to people in the gospels). The call can appear to be a daunting prospect. But the commitment is always followed by the reassuring words: "I will be with you". This promise is from a faithful God who never takes back his word. In Paul's words - "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me". Why then do I find it so difficult to respond wholeheartedly and without reservation to the invitation of Jesus to "Come follow me"?

Tuesday

I thought the last sentence from Pope Francis was so apposite to almost everything we experience in our so called enlightened world. The clarity of those few words is outstanding. The whole paragraph seems incredibly relevant to many of the prejudices and social attitudes as witnessed this week... flag waving, nationalism running wild and old rigid racism, yes Francis, although not talking directly about the English condition shows yet again that our core beliefs are perhaps the only way to assuage moments of hysteria. His insight, and that of his advisors, ought to be compulsive reading for our leading secular lights.

Sunday

I wonder what today's spiritual equivalent of staff and sandals would be? Why did they have to be told to take them?

Thursday

We know the story of Joseph from both sides, so to speak, but he only knew his side and Judah's words were the first time that he knew how his loss had affected his father, no wonder he broke down in tears.

People being prayed for by our parish groups:

Alan Clews, who asks for your prayers	Alan is in a nursing home across the water.
Maureen Brown is poorly	Maureen is at home and progressing well (15.07.2021). Please keep her in your prayers, thanks.
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?

Peter Brownwood	<i>Peter has completed his treatment and has been given the "all clear". Thanks for your prayers and support</i>
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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