

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

23rd July 2021

Friday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Sixty-ninth Friday of Isolation

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*'I am the Lord your God
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery*

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. I will make the recent ones available soon (anonymously)

Exodus 20:1-17

God spoke all these words. He said, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no gods except me.

'You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons, and the great-grandsons of those who hate me; but I show kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

'You shall not utter the name of the Lord your God to misuse it, for the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it.

'Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath for the Lord your God. You shall do no work that day, neither you nor your son nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals nor the stranger who lives with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that these hold, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it sacred.

'Honour your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God has given to you.

'You shall not kill.

'You shall not commit adultery.

'You shall not steal.

'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

'You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his.'

Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are to hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the man who received the seed on the edge of the path. The one who received it on patches of rock is the man who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But he has no root in him, he does not last; let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, and he falls away at once. The one who received the seed in thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this world and the lure of riches choke the word and so he produces nothing. And the one who received the seed in rich soil is the man who hears the word and understands it; he is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

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

If you spend some time looking back you will find that, at home, we had certain rules – sometimes about safety, sometimes about respect and sometimes just a reflection of 'our family values'. Here are some I can remember – please add your own:

- Don't go near the fire
- Play nicely
- Don't take sweets off strangers
- Don't buy chewing gum (It's dirty)

People at Mass this morning added others:

- Don't go upstairs empty-handed
- Don't put too much soap in the washing-up bowl

And for the adult men in the house:

- Don't leave the washing-up water in the sink when you've finished!

The rules we had as children were the beginning of a life-long-learning of what it means to be a social human being – and in a Catholic Christian household: a Jesus social human being. We started with a fairly obvious and growing list of guidelines, fit for our age and knowledge, and moved on further. We even, eventually, had the chance to ask why and begin to understand the reason for some of these 'rules'. Throughout our lives we learn new areas of respect for others which we may have taken for granted most our lives – just look at how many situations we are faced with which, only a few years ago, we may not have considered: How we respect, and use words which do not offend, 'people of colour', 'people who are different', 'people with disabilities', 'sexual orientation', 'women', 'people with Faith', etc. Our learning the sensitivities of Justice charity and mercy which are pointed to by God, goes on throughout our lives – unless we think we have got it all.

The Israelites are, we heard yesterday, three months into their freedom pilgrimage. They have escaped from slavery, but they have not 'arrived' as yet – they are a people 'on the way'.

'Pilgrimage' is not just a period between 'leaving' and 'arriving'. It is an important time and place in itself. The Christian tradition of pilgrimage has been important in itself as we hear in the likes of the 'Canterbury Tales' and hearing people speaking of their journey from home to Rome, Jerusalem, Lourdes, etc. Often the journey has been more memorable than the event itself! In many ways the modern way of getting on a plane (after enduring the airport hell) and landing two hours later in the next airport has taken away the important preparation and sharing which should happen on the way!

It only struck me this morning that the Israelites had no idea how long their 'pilgrimage' would last for – even though we know, and we know where they arrived finally, we should be amazed that the journey took so long! We should ask 'what was this pilgrimage for?'

Let us remember that this people had been aware that they were the people of a particular God – but, because of their situation, they did not know God well at this stage. When asked if they wanted their

God to free them from slavery in Egypt and promise them a new land they definitely voted: 'YES'. But here, after three months, what was happening?

As we will see as this period opens up God uses this time to achieve two things:

Firstly that this group of previous slaves will be formed into a people.

Secondly that God would use the time to reveal himself to this people: not just in cloud and powerful lightening as we saw yesterday, but also in his gentle call to welcome the poor, the foreigner, the widow and orphan.

This period in the desert was the training of a rebel group to become a people, but to be a people who understood and took on themselves the image of their God. This would take some time. Today we see God's first revelation – the Ten Commandments. It is a basic list of learning to start will things which will not come as a shock to them. These are not the end of God's revelation of himself, but the start (Just as we Christians recognise these commandments as 'not the end' of Jesus teaching which is built on God's teaching in the desert) History has allowed different Christian groups to name the 'ten' differently from one another – but the Jews have always made the first commandment:

*'I am the Lord your God
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery'*

The commandments are not first about the rules – but about our relationship with God!

We will see that the Israelite's learning was, almost, a 'two steps forward and one step back' process of learning – but they were getting there. We will see this development in the chapters ahead.

Yesterday we celebrated our school's year six moving on to their future in another school. One of the most evident realities was that these people had developed from individual children to a group of young people who had responded to all the learning which had allowed them to develop – we heard that the kitchen staff at their residential experience in the previous week had commented at their kindness and good manners!

As Catholic Christians we are, whatever our age, still on our pilgrimage to God. God is still putting before us both who he is and how he wishes us to reflect him in the world – and our world is very different from the one we entered when we left primary school! If it is different we continually need to know what God is asking of us in our time which is now. (Not 'in my day' if we are still alive)

How easy it is to look back and think now is then. Deacon Bill was saying this morning that some people he was speaking to some people recently who couldn't understand this call to 'return to normal' after COVID – as, they said, 'we didn't like normal then!' How can we learn 'What is God asking of us today?' Maybe that's why it took the Israelites 40 years to know God and look forwards?

FRIDAY, JULY 23, 2021

"God's style is to draw near, compassion and tenderness... Only a heart that does not allow itself to be taken over by hastiness is capable of being moved; that is, of not allowing itself to be caught up in itself and by things to do, and is aware of others, of their wounds, their needs. Compassion is born from contemplation."

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.

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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