

St John the Evangelist, Poulton

24th July 2021

Saturday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Sixty-ninth Saturday of Isolation

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*First collect the darnel
and tie it in bundles to be burnt,
then gather the wheat into my barn."*

Mass during the week:

Saturday – <u>17th Sunday of Year</u>	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
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 – <u>18th Sunday of Year</u>	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! It has been suggested that we follow Moses and end the Virus Times when Moses dies (I like Mount Nebo!) – this sounds sensible. Joshua is commissioned by God to continue Moses work on Saturday of the 18th week of ordinary time which seems a time to aim for. It also give readers two weeks to plan what they will do to keep the scriptures before them after the Virus Times leaves us. Thanks.
2. Could you send me a paragraph or so 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 24:3-8

Moses went and told the people all the commands of the Lord and all the ordinances. In answer, all the people said with one voice, 'We will observe all the commands that the Lord has decreed.' Moses put all the commands of the Lord into writing, and early next morning he built an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve standing-stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he directed certain young Israelites to offer holocausts and to immolate bullocks to the Lord as communion sacrifices. Half of the blood Moses took up and put into basins, the other half he cast on the altar. And taking the Book of the Covenant he read it to the listening people, and they said, 'We will observe all that the Lord has decreed; we will obey.' Then Moses took the blood and cast it towards the people. This ' he said 'is the blood of the Covenant that the Lord has made with you, containing all these rules.'

Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus put another parable before the crowds: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, the darnel appeared as well. The owner's servants went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" "Some enemy has done this" he answered. And the servants said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn."

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

Following on from what we talked about yesterday we see in today's passage a definite feel that it is not just the 'Moses & God Show now! The people want to know what God is saying and doing, Moses makes situations available for them to be involved.

We also need to keep in mind that God did not just give Moses the Tablets of Stone to share with the people. He also gave him a whole list of rules which we may call 'messages of mercy' which he wanted his people to live by. They are, if you like, practical examples of what living the Ten Commandments may look like in their lives. They run from examples of what 'worshipping the one God' is not, community celebrations and festivals to remember who they are, and social rules which are about looking after the poor and the needy in people. These are often about how they celebrate being themselves – but are also how they have to deal with people outside their group. (Sound like the 'Pilgrim Church'?). It fills out our understanding of the story if you read the chapters before today's passage (chapter 21 to 24). Here a few just to remind us that this group of people was learning, on the journey, how to be 'God's people':

22:²¹ *"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.*

²² *"Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. ²³ If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. ²⁴ My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.*

²⁵ *"If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. ²⁶ If you take your neighbour's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, ²⁷ because that cloak is the only covering your neighbour has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.*

23 *"Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.*

² *"Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, ³ and do not show favouritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.*

⁴ *"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. ⁵ If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.*

⁶ *"Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. ⁷ Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.*

⁸ *"Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent.*

⁹ *"Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.*

The lessons, on this Pilgrimage, have begun in earnest!

But human beings need to mark their achievements: Olympic medals, educational certificates, leaving school ceremonies (Which in our case involve reflecting on where God has been), outwardly declared marriage promises, and religious ceremonies which declare who we are gathered together and where God is in our community.

In the culture of Moses and his people they sacrifice a prized animal:

*“Then he directed certain young Israelites
to offer holocausts and
to immolate bullocks to the Lord
as communion sacrifices.”*

This is a bit gory, but stick with it! (It is worth remembering the origin of the word ‘communion’: ‘com’ means ‘with’, ‘union’ means ‘together’ – it is not just a ‘Moses & God event’ any more, but the whole community) This sacrifice is a communal action which allows the people’s words to be transferred into some action to be a sign that they ‘mean what they say’:

*In answer, all the people said with one voice,
‘We will observe all the commands that the Lord has decreed.’*

But a sacrifice: with the blood being shared with the people after the Covenant offered by God had been read, and the people again declared:

‘We will observe all that the Lord has decreed; we will obey.’

Half the blood of the animal is thrown on the altar of God – the other half is ‘chucked at the people’ (sorry, but you can’t get round the animation of this!) It is a solemn sacrificial sign of an agreement between God and his whole people – it is memorable and serious. Moses reminds the people:

*This’ he said
‘is the blood of the Covenant that the Lord has made with you (notice: not ‘with me’),
containing all these rules.’*

Let us stay here for the time being – covered on bull’s blood, in a hot desert with nowhere to wash!

But whilst we do we may well notice that the idea of ‘sacrifice’, ‘covenant’ and ‘communion’ will spring up again throughout the Old Testament – but also in the New Testament, on the lips of Jesus and St Paul and each day in our Church practice. The same meaning applies.

SATURDAY, JULY 24, 2021

“If we learn to truly rest, we become capable of true compassion; if we cultivate a contemplative outlook, we will carry out our activities without that rapacious attitude of those who want to possess and consume everything; if we stay in touch with the Lord and do not anesthetise the deepest part of ourselves, the things to do will not have the power to cause us to get winded or devour us. We need – listen to this – we need an “ecology of the heart”, that is made up of rest, contemplation and compassion. Let us take advantage of the summer time for this! It will help us quite a bit.”

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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