



A TURNING POINT IN LIFE



From Fr Stuart

Saturday 21 March 2020

My dear sisters and brothers,

'I can do all things through him who strengthens me' (Philippians 4:13)

Today is the autumn equinox – the days when the numbers of daylight and night-time hours are in balance. The timing is exquisite because the world seems horribly out of balance at the moment with the rapid spread of cases of the COVID19 virus and the accompanying disruption and dislocation to our regular life.

In this time, like no other I have experienced in my life, I sense we are being called to deeper trust in the providence of God and to deepen the life and vocation of the Christian community. We do this at the grass roots level – in the parish community of faith as well as in the broader institutional framework of the church. God is working his purpose out, as the old nineteenth century hymn puts it, and we need to do this together.

Much is spoken about social distancing but it has the potential to convey more than is intended. I liked the meme I saw this last week which can be rendered:

Social distancing

- Physical distancing
- Social solidarity

We need each other more than ever.

WHY SUSPEND LITURGIES AND ACTIVITIES?

It seems a contradiction for me to say we need to do this together and each other more than ever and then suspend the gathering of faithful Christians.

Why have we done this?

As I wrote yesterday, it is after much prayer, thought, advice from wardens, lay people, medically qualified persons, colleagues and observing official advices and directives that I came to that decision.

Each priest has the 'cure of souls' of the parish in which they are placed to serve God. It was my considered opinion that we needed to suspend liturgical, including the regular Masses, and other activities for the meantime effective immediately for the good health and wellbeing of us all.

It guts me to do it – as I know many of you will be devastated and have an aching hole in your heart being unable to attend Mass.

First, I share a perspective from a negative starting point. We would be affected even more deeply if any one of us were to unintentionally infect another person at a church gathering. This is entirely possible due to the highly contagious nature of this novel virus. So, for the time being, we are being prudent and cautious *for the safety and love of our fellow sisters and brothers* and doing our bit for the entire community. These things – such as physical distancing do work.



Second, let that aching hole in us be an earnest and daily prayer for an end to this virus and the reassembling of the faithful in the holy place – Saint Mark's.

WHAT TO DO IN THE MEANTIME? A SABBATICAL TIME

We are going to embark on a unique time in this pandemic – it is nothing like any of us have experienced. I think I am right in saying that the last global pandemic of this scale was the influenza pandemic after the First World War.

I would like us to think of this time as a sabbatical or retreat from the normal and the expected. Looked at in this way we start to unleash creative ideas of what it means to be a community of the followers of Jesus Christ and how we express that.

We are not without resources to do this.

One of the replies to my post on Facebook was how are people going to get through without the Eucharist and the Sacrament?

Good question – but our reception of the sacrament for all these years does not have a use-by date – it is still working for our transformation in us – working out our salvation in us. It is also important to be nourished by the notion that we as the baptised people of Christ are his people even in our physical separation. Nothing can ever take that away.

Now for some initial practical steps which I explored with the Parish Council last Monday and with others through this past week.

PRAYER AND RESOURCES

We need to pray for each other, the world, those who hold positions of responsibility and leadership, all those caring for the sick, and all those who are researching the virus to treat it and all who are working to ameliorate its devastating effects on individuals and communities. We need to do this daily.

Over the course of these weeks – and probably months – if we listen to the experts – I will provide us with ideas and ways to pray.

But in these first weeks we need to do the following basics.

CONNECTIVITY:

A – WEEKLY HABITS – SUNDAYS AT 9.30 AM

The first thing is to maintain a regularity of habit. Although we won't be able to attend church together, the Parish Council thought it would be helpful if we all set aside 10-15 minutes every Sunday to prayer together – at 9.30 am – though we will be separated by distance. I will provide us with a form of Morning Prayer for this.

To aid in these devotions I have purchased candles for you use. (I braved the maze that is IKEA for these!) The simple ritual lighting of these candles will unite us in prayer and in the truth that we are followers of the Jesus Christ – the Light of World in whom there is no darkness at all. His light will shine on the darkest parts of this difficult time.



B – CHURCH OPEN FOR PRAYER

It is our intent to open the church for prayer so that you may visit and pray – alone and being mindful of appropriate distances that are recommended between other human beings at present – and importantly – to pick up your candle!

The church will be open this week at the times we had scheduled it to be open for Mass but without a celebration of the Mass. These are:

Tuesday – 12 noon – 1 pm

Wednesday – 10.00 am – 11.00 am

Thursday – 7.00 am – 8.00 am

We will feel the loss of the Mass keenly I know – but it is the patterns we are familiar with at present. In addition I will open the church on Saturday morning next, 28 March.

Saturday – 9.30 am – 12.30 pm

C – THE ANGELUS

The incarnation is central to our identity as Christians – God became human flesh to show us how much God loves us and how to be authentically human.

So the Angelus will be rung at those times above and at midday during this time. I invite you to pause and pray it with me.

D – MEMORISED PRAYER

At times like this it is good to draw on our memorised prayer – especially at those times when we find it difficult to find the words.

These are – to start – the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Glory be – these can nourish the soul.

D – FINANCIAL VIABILITY

The Parish Council expressed a concern that without regular concerns our income to fund the ongoing work of the parish may suffer.

They have asked me to suggest that this is a good time to set up a direct transfer to the parish bank account to assist in safeguarding the future. It may well be that you may also suffer some financial difficulty at this time – so you may need to tailor this to meet all those personal obligations to survive and flourish.

The parish banking details are:

| | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| ANZ Bank | Fitzroy Branch |
| BSB: | 013—275 |
| ACCT NO: | 0070—86265 |
| ACCOUNT NAME: | Church Wardens Account |

If you would like more information, talk to Gary Simmons.

E – INNOVATIVE WAYS TO CONNECT

We have begun a discussion about other innovative ways to connect and foster the life of the parish community. We will be refining ways via the website and other means over the next week or so.

One of the well-used places is Facebook and Kate Cherry posts there regularly for us where we communicate with our wider network.



I will be making some videos to ponder thought and prayer over this time and putting them there.

But there are many other ways which we are exploring such as Zoom and Skype. We are working on how to use these most effectively and will communicate these to you regularly.

What of those who do not have these resources? Well there are the more customary ways to interact such as the phone, letter and, assuming it is safe to do so, visits.

We will keep talking and working on all this.

F – COMMUNITY IDEAS

These are just some ideas to keep connected.

This is all new and I don't believe we need it all up and running immediately. Share your ideas or questions. With the abundance of skill and creativity in the parish I know that we will make the very best of this sabbatical to enrich our lives – individually, community wise and with a deeper and resilient faith in the one who brings order out of chaos and light into the darkness.

GRATITUDE AND OPPORTUNITIES

Thank you to those who have written to me or phoned or responded on Facebook over the past twenty four hours. I am touched and strengthened by your kind thoughts and prayers.

Above all, this illustrates the goodness of Christ that is within each one of you.

Part of our vocation in these days is to share those thoughts and struggles and your faith with each other.

In closing I want to share this with you. David Brooks, who is a correspondent with the New York Times, has spent time recently reading about pandemics in history. He was puzzled that there were few stories of the influenza pandemic of 1918-19 in contrast to the many stories of war experiences. He concluded that often pandemics bring out the worst in human behaviour and that following this there is embarrassment and shame about what was done.

Let this not be our experience this pandemic.

Let us use this opportunity to show what it means to be a Christian. Some of these things are to be people of prayer at home and everywhere – not only in church. It is to see the human person as sacred and indispensable. It is to help and share and not hoard or ignore. It is to earnestly to seek ways to cast our fear and replace it with hope. It is to see others from our own vulnerability to share in their vulnerabilities. In all these things – and there will be many more ways we will not only get through this all together but we will deepen our faith and shine ever more brightly as God's loved ones.

Peace, strength, safety, and wellness to you all, in this sacred sabbatical.

Stuart



PRAYER FOR SUNDAY 22 MARCH

This form of prayer is based on Lauds for the Fourth Sunday in Lent – the form used for many years at Saint Mark's.

THE ANGELUS

The angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary,
and she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed are you amongst women and blessed is
the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

**Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.**

Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

Be it unto me according to your word.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed are you amongst women and blessed is
the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

**Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.**

And the Word was made flesh.

And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed are you amongst women and blessed is
the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

**Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.**

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

**That we may be made worthy of the promises
of Christ.**

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace
into our hearts, that as we have known the
incarnation of your Son, Jesus Christ, by the
message of an angel, + so by his cross and
passion we may be brought to the glory of his
resurrection, for he is one with you and the Holy
Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

INTRODUCTION

+ O Lord, open our lips.

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Make me a clean heart, O God.

And renew a right spirit within me.

We do not live on bread alone.

**But on every word that comes from the mouth
of God.**

O come, let us sing to the Lord; *

let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving
and be glad in him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God *

and a great king above all gods.

We do not live on bread alone.

**But on every word that comes from the mouth
of God.**

Come, let us worship and bow down *
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For he is our God; *

we are the people of his pasture and the sheep
of his hand.



Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; *
as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

**We do not live on bread alone.
But on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**

Blessed are you, God of compassion and mercy,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
In the darkness of our sin,
your light breaks forth like the dawn
and your healing springs up for deliverance.
As we rejoice in the gift of your saving help,
sustain us with your bountiful Spirit and open
our lips to sing your praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

PSALMODY

Lent 4 I will bless the Lord all my life;
in your name I will lift up my hands.

O God, you are my God, for you I long; *
for you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you *
like a dry, weary land without water.

**So I gaze on you in the sanctuary *
to see your strength and your glory.
For your love is better than life, *
my lips will speak your praise.**

So I will bless you all my life, *

in your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul shall be filled as with a banquet, *
my mouth shall praise you with joy.

**On my bed I remember you. *
On you I muse through the night
for you have been my help; *
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice.**

My soul clings to you; *
your right hand holds me fast.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, * and to the Holy Spirit.

**As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, * world without end.
Amen.**

Lent 4 **I will bless the Lord all my life;
in your name I will lift up my hands.**

Lent 4 Sing and praise God for ever.
Sing and praise God for ever.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, *
his mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning; *
great is your faithfulness.

**'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, *
'therefore I will hope in him.'
The Lord is good to those who wait for him, *
to the soul that seeks him.**

It is good that we should wait quietly *
for the salvation of the Lord.
For the Lord will not reject for ever; *



though he cause grief, he will have compassion. **and to remember his holy covenant.**

According to the abundance of his steadfast love; *

For he does not willingly grieve or afflict anyone.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, * and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, * world without end. Amen.

Lent 4 **Sing and praise God for ever.**

SCRIPTURE READING

Read the gospel of the day: John 9:1-41

Fr Stuart will post some thoughts about the gospel on Facebook

BENEDICTUS

Lent 4 **Once you were in darkness, but now you are light in Christ Jesus. Hosanna in the highest'.**

✝ Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel: who has come to his people and set them free.

The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour: born of the house of his servant David.

Through the holy prophets, God promised of old:

to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us.

To show mercy to our forebears:

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:

to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear:

holy and righteous before him, all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of God, the Most High:

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.

To give his people knowledge of salvation: by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God: the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death:

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Lent 4 **Once you were in darkness, but now you are light in Christ Jesus. Hosanna in the highest'.**



INTERCESSIONS

Let us glorify God for his wealth of goodness
—and pray through Jesus Christ, who is always
living to intercede for us

Inflame our hearts with your love.

God of mercy, help us to enrich this day with
deeds of kindness;
—let all people know by our actions that we are
one.

Inflame our hearts with your love.

At the time of the flood you saved Noah through
the ark;
—grant salvation through water to those
preparing for baptism.

Inflame our hearts with your love.

May we never live by bread alone;
—give us life by every word you speak.

Inflame our hearts with your love.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours, now and for ever.**

Amen.

COLLECTS

*A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus
from the Church of England*

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us
from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

Lord our God, your Son so loved the world
that he gave himself up to death for our sake.
Strengthen us by your grace
and gives us a heart
willing to live by that same love.
We make our prayer through
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Lord be with you,
and also with you.

The Lord bless us, ✚ and keep us from all evil,
and bring us to everlasting life. **Amen.**

Let us stay here in the peace of Christ,
thanks be to God.

