



OUR LADY OF GRACE PRESTWICH

'Stay with us, Lord, on our journey'

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4th SUNDAY IN LENT: Mothering Sunday

22 MARCH 2020

My dear Parishioners,

These are extraordinary days. For the first time since the parish began, there will be no public Masses from this week until further notice.

Here is part of a letter from the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, so many aspects of our lives must change. This includes the ways in which we publicly express our faith. It is very clear that, following official advice and in order to keep each other safe, save lives and support the NHS, at this time we must not gather for public acts of worship in our churches. This will begin from Friday evening, 20th March 2020, until further notice.

Our churches will remain open. They are not closing. They will be a focal point of prayer, where you will find solace and strength. In visiting our churches at this time, we will observe with great care the practices of hygiene and the guidance on social distancing.

However, the celebration of Mass, Sunday by Sunday and day by day, will take place without a public congregation.

Knowing that the Mass is being celebrated; joining in spiritually in that celebration; watching the

live-streaming of the Mass; following its prayers at home; making an act of spiritual communion: this is how we share in the Sacrifice of Christ in these days. These are the ways in which we will sanctify Sunday, and indeed every day.

We want everyone to understand that in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed. This is, without doubt, the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the 'serious reason' why this obligation does not apply at this time...

The second vital aspect of these challenging times is our care for each other. There are so many ways in which we are to do this: being attentive to the needs of our neighbour, especially the elderly and vulnerable; contributing to our local food banks; volunteering for charitable initiatives and organisations; simply keeping in touch by all the means open to us.

During these disturbing and threatening times, the rhythm of the prayer of the Church will continue. Please play your part in it. The effort of daily kindness and mutual support for all will continue and increase. Please play your part in this too. For

your commitment to this, we thank you.

*"The Lord is my shepherd,
There is nothing I shall want."*

May God bless us all.

Bishop John Arnold adds:

This letter calls on us all to make changes in our routine and that may seem very unwelcome and uncomfortable. Perhaps we can learn to take the restrictions of this present time and create a positive response to help ourselves and others. Let us take time to look at our own personal spirituality and make time for focussed prayer, perhaps with the reading of spiritual books or meditating on verses of the scriptures.

Looking out to others, let's be sure to see what practical actions we might be able to offer to help family, friends and next-door neighbours who might be isolated. The phone call to see how they are or offering to shop for them.

During these weeks, there will be plenty of resources on the diocesan website, together with link to online celebrations of Mass.

*Stay with us, Lord, on our journey
+John*

**How will we react to this news?
Will we grumble and simply**

shut up shop? Or will we take this as an opportunity to find new ways of living and celebrating our faith?

Even though we can't be physically present at Holy Mass we can, and should, still keep Sunday holy.

How? We can take part in a 'livestreamed' Mass. Dozens of churches in England and Ireland already broadcast their Masses daily by this means. You can find Mass at most hours of the day by following this link:
<https://www.churchservices.tv/whats-on-now>

EWTN relays daily Mass at 12 noon, 6.00 pm and 11.00 pm as well as many programmes of interest. EWTN can be accessed from the internet and by satellite TV. If you have Sky, you will find EWTN on 588.

The National Shrine of **Our Lady at Walsingham** will continue its full liturgical programme, available to all on www.walsingham.org.uk

Pray the Rosary: proved to be a powerful prayer in many worrying times in the past.

Other guidance from the Bishops:

Baptisms, Confirmations, First Communions must all be deferred until a time that allows for families and friends to gather safely within our churches.

Marriages must be deferred or attendance kept to the immediate family.

Funerals should take place at the graveside or at a crematorium. Arrangements should be made for a Mass to be celebrated later when congregations are allowed to gather.

What about here? Our Lady of Grace church will be open every day for private prayer

from 10.00 am until 8.00 pm. Papers and printed aids to prayer will be found on the tables as you enter.

I will be **in the confessional** each Saturday 11.30-12.30 and 6.00-6.45 for those requesting the sacrament of reconciliation.

Unless they ask otherwise, I will also take **Holy Communion** as usual each Friday to those on the **sick lists**. Do not hesitate to call me if someone is badly ill.

Sacramental programme meetings are suspended. So too **tea rotas**. No **piety stall** until public Masses return.

Can you help?

This is a typical email received this week:

I just wanted to say that if you hear of anyone in the parish who needs anything, I'm more than happy to lend a helping hand during these unsettling times.

Offers extend to shopping, dog-walking, collecting prescriptions, in fact anything that people need who are in isolation or struggling in any way.

We need to hear from any such people who would appreciate a helping hand. And we need to compile a list of those who will volunteer to help.

First, if you are in need, or know someone who is, Catholic or not, **please let us know** either by phone or email or letter.

Likewise, if you are willing to help, please **do the same**.

Bury Food Bank, Sister Joan reminds us of the need for such things as cereals, tinned soups and stew, pasta, rice and pasta sauce, tinned meat or fish, beans and vegetables and fruit, long life milk or

natural fruit juices. These may be left at the presbytery.

Gift Aid, Boxes of envelopes for the offertory collection scheme, for the new tax year starting on 6 April, are available for collection **in church** on a table near the sacristy.

Light a candle. At 7.00pm this Sunday, we are urged to light a candle in the windows of our homes as a visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ, our source and hope in prayer. All the Christian Churches in this country are taking part in this ecumenical gesture for Mothering Sunday.

Our Lady's Dowry

Next Sunday, we will take part in the nationwide re-dedication of England as the 'Dowry of Mary'. It is very important for us to place ourselves under the protection and guidance of Christ through Mary, our Mother. A form of dedication for you to use at home is enclosed with this letter.

Pope Francis said last week: "I am thinking of families who are cooped up." While lamenting the seriousness of the virus, the Holy Father looked on the bright side: "It's a beautiful opportunity to creatively rediscover affection... May the Lord help you to discover new ways, new expressions of love, of living together in this new situation."

Regular updates: for these, check the parish website. I would hope to keep you informed by writing a Newsletter every week or so. **If you would like to receive this by email, just send me your email address.**

I commend you all to the protection of our patron, Our Lady of Grace. Keep well! With love and blessing,
Fr Allen