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Newsletter

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17th 2020

My dear parishioners at St. Mary's and St. Paul's,

As we begin the sixth week of Eastertide our thoughts turn to the great Solemnity of the Ascension which the church celebrates this Thursday. In normal times we would be gathering together to celebrate the eucharist, for this lovely feast is one of the few remaining holydays of obligation. I am very sorry that you will not be with me. Please know that you and your families will be in my thoughts and prayers as I offer Mass without your immediate presence.

The Solemnity of the Ascension of Jesus is about his presence here and now; the following words, written by Pope Benedict for this feast describe this presence of Jesus in a very thoughtful way:

“What does the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord mean for us? It does not mean that the Lord has departed to some place far from people and the world. Christ's Ascension is not a journey into space towards the most remote stars: for basically, the planets, like the earth, are also made of physical elements.

Christ's ascension means that he no longer belongs to the world of corruption and death that conditions our life. It means that he belongs entirely to God. He, the eternal Son, led our human existence into God's presence, taking with him flesh and blood in a transfigured form. The human being finds room in God; through Christ, the human being was introduced into the very life of God.

And since God embraces and sustains the entire cosmos, the Ascension of the Lord means that Christ has not departed from us, but that he is now, thanks to his being with the Father, close to each one of us forever. Each one of us can be on intimate terms with him, each can call upon him. The Lord is always within hearing. We can inwardly draw away from him. We can live turning our backs on him. But he always waits for us and is always close to us.

Pope Benedict XVI

I hope you finds these words from Pope Benedict helpful, especially those who are feeling isolated from family and friends. In these lockdown days when I am celebrating the Eucharist without you, I have found myself drawn to make the same prayer, namely, that the grace of Christ would come to each one of us as we need it for today.

As a parish priest I am very aware that we are all at different stages of life, some just beginning their journey in the sacredness of the mother's womb, others full of life and vigour and wanting to get on with things, others who are falling in love and wanting to get married and build a family together, others becoming grandparents for the first time, others facing the challenge of illness in mind or body and still others who have made their final journey to the Lord. One of the great privileges of the Catholic priesthood is being present to people on life's journey.

Over the years I have come to see that we need different graces at different stages of life, sometimes courage and perseverance, sometimes acceptance and forgiveness, sometimes energy and strength, sometimes quietness and reflection.

Wherever we are on this journey, Pope Benedict suggests that each one of us can be on intimate terms with Jesus who is always within hearing. In this sense we are never alone. Even though we cannot be together this Thursday to celebrate the Ascension, let us be one in spirit and draw close to Jesus and in a quiet moment of prayer ask for whatever grace we need at this time and the grace to journey through this pandemic together.

Father O'Brien

Let me share with you the names of those who have died during these weeks when we have been unable to gather for Mass:

John Boyce
James Donnelly,
Mary Teresa Lees,
Silvio (Steve) Ferri,
Tess McMahon,
Helen Brown,
Margaret McCluskey,
James McDougall,
John Henderson,
Tom O'Brien,
James McMenemy,
Frances Murphy,
Brian Porteous,
Susan McAteer,
Margaret Boyd,
Julia (Sheila) O'Neill
Stephen Mann

I know you will remember these men and women in your prayers and also their families, who said farewell to a loved one in the most difficult of circumstances. It is painful not to have the beauty of the Requiem Mass in the church and the comfort and strength that comes from the good presence of family and friends and neighbours.

A word about SCIAF and finances at St. Mary's and St. Paul's

I know from speaking with some people on the phone and from letters in the post that many of you are concerned about SCIAF and the bringing back of the WEE BOX. We were all moved by the distressing account of what some women and girls (and probably some boys too) are having to deal with in some parts of our world. The details of the suffering inflicted on some of the women were too shocking to read out loud at public Mass when so many young children are present.

The focus of the appeal this year was to provide funds for trauma counselling and to help these women and children build a new life, one based on personal safety and dignity of life. It was also good to know that the UK Government had pledged to double all donations made before May 10th 2020.

I too shared your concern that we went into Lockdown before we could take up the annual SCIAF collection or receive back the WEE BOXES. Somehow the poorest always seem to suffer the most when tragedy strikes. I decided to look back at what we sent last year and in light of that sent £2,500 from our parish funds in time for the May 10th deadline, so that it would be doubled to £5,000 by the UK Government. Like so many I feel grateful to the Government for making this commitment and of course it is a sign to us that others notice the good work being carried out by SCIAF.

There will be an opportunity in the future for us to take up our collection and to return our WEE BOXES. In the meantime, even though these are very challenging times for us all, let us not forget the poorest people in our world. They deserve our love and support. As Pope Francis likes to remind us, *'they are our brothers and sisters.'*

Also, some people have been asking how they might make their usual donations, which will support the upkeep of our parish during these unusual times. I will make some suggestions in next week's newsletter.

In the meantime thank you for your many kindnesses and your concern, especially for those in our world who have so little. Keep looking after one another. I know these are difficult times for so many.

St. Mary and St. Paul pray for us and guide us in our responses to this challenging time.