

The Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary Bexhill-on-Sea

St Mary Magdalene's, Town Centre & St Martha's, Little Common

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The Solemnity of Pentecost (31/5/2020)

Dear Brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we draw the Easter Season to a close, I wanted to write to you and wish you every blessing for the celebration of Pentecost. This traditional prayer seems very apt at this time: ***'Come, Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth'***.

Both Fr Rajesh and I are well, and grateful to those who have sent their greetings and prayers over the past ten weeks. Please be assured that we have been praying for you and celebrating the Holy Mass for all People of the Parish, and for the intentions you have requested. Thank you to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who have been keeping in regular contact with the housebound and for all parishioners who do so much, often unseen, to look out for the community.

In one aspect, the slower pace has enabled us to focus on *'being'* priests, rather than *'doing'* priestly things, giving us a chance to concentrate on prayer, personally and for the parish. This has enabled us to celebrate additional Masses, especially for the Holy Souls, those in most need of God's mercy. Many Masses have been *'Live Streamed'* on Facebook and uploaded afterwards to You Tube. There is also a weekly *'Liturgy of the Word for Children'*, exploring the Sunday readings.

This is a new area for many priests, and you will have noticed that it has *'progressed'* over the weeks. It has been a strange experience of *'saying'* Mass to a camera, but I am energised when I see people, as Facebook says, *'watching'* or more appropriately joining their prayers to the sacrifice of Calvary. I hope that you have found the resources on the Parish Facebook page useful and no doubt you have been looking in, as needed, on other virtual parishes and shrines to feed your spiritual life. My apologies if your needs are not being adequately met. Let me know!

Fr Rajesh and I know, in ordinary times, the privilege of offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass but we can only imagine what it must be like to be forced to *'fast'* from the Liturgy and the Sacraments. Perhaps, we can only say that it provides us with a deeper appreciation of those communities that do not have access to the Mass and Sacraments for months at a time and will, hopefully, heighten our anticipation for the resumption of the practice of our faith in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Despite the restrictions, we have done our best to celebrate Funerals with dignity, and please do contact us, in good time, if anyone in your family is in need of the Sacrament of the Sick. We do need to try plan ahead as we need to discuss with you appropriate precautions in order to administer it safely. At this time, we pray for those waiting the Sacraments of Initiation: *Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation*, and all these will need to be re-scheduled, a significant challenge!

Many people have asked when the Church will re-open? Please do keep an eye at the on-line newsletter on our website for updates on this. The newsletter has been a scratch affair over the past weeks as I do not currently have the support of any of the house or administrative staff who do so much to keep the parish running so smoothly. This also means that we do not have access to many of the tools needed in this digital age, including our database of parishioners.

On this note, Fr Rajesh and I keep in our prayers, all those who have been '*furloughed*', have lost their jobs or are uncertain over the future. We have, temporarily, given over St Martha's hall to the Foodbank as a storage and distribution centre, and where possible we have been using the Parish Poor Fund to help those in the most desperate need. Thus, we are grateful to parishioners who have continued to give by standing order or have set up new ones or used the Diocesan Just Giving Page. With ten weeks of no offertory and hall hire, the parish finances will be strained going forward.

Places of worship have been given a low priority in the Government's Roadmap. We have been classed as '*stage three*', meaning a date of 4th July is proposed. Initially, it is likely that this will be for private prayer, and social distancing will need to be maintained. I feel I must manage your expectations; any re-opening will be in small incremental steps and Bishop Richard acknowledged in a letter to the clergy that we might not be able to open every Church at the same time.

In his radio interview, Cardinal Nichols spoke of '*routines of supervision*', '*routines of social distancing*' and '*routines of cleanliness*'. I am waiting to be briefed more on what this means, but I infer it is not simply a case of '*opening the doors*' but carefully managing entry so we do not become a centre of secondary infection. It is likely we will need a team of volunteers to ensure these '*routines*', possibly including training as we learn new safety procedures. There may be restrictions on who may volunteer to protect the vulnerable. As soon as I know more, I will let you know.

I fear that public Masses and celebrations of the Sacraments may be further off, especially in the way that we have been used to. And so, in the meantime we entrust our Parish to our patron Our Lady of the Rosary who stands at the centre of the Church interceding for us. May our community patrons of St Mary Magdalene, St Martha and St Richard pray for us and accompany us.

With the assurance of my prayers and best wishes, Fr Simon.